

Remnant Life Church
April 30, 2023
Paul:
Apostle of the Heart Set Free
Pt 1
Philippians 3:7-11

When you think of the Apostle Paul, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

- Is it his first mention under the name Saul at the stoning of Stephen?
- Or is it his zeal for persecuting early Christians, the followers of The Way?
- Is it his conversion experience on the road to Damascus?
- Or is it the fact that he is the author of nearly one half of the NT?

There are also those who look at Paul today with a bit of skepticism and concern

- Paul has been labeled a sexist
- A hot-head
- Difficult to work with
- Someone who held a grudge, unwilling to forgive
- And while I think some of these would be justified others not so much when you are willing to consider and recognize the context of his writings

Who was Paul?

- The majority of what we know of him comes from **Acts 7-28** as well the autobiographical verses of his letters to the churches of Asia-Minor

READ – Phil 3:7-11

Background

- Paul was born between 5 and 10 AD, a Jew in a family of Pharisees (**Acts 23:6**)
 - He was of the tribe of Benjamin (**Phil 3:5**)
 - From the town of Tarsus in Cilicia (**Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3**)
 - Tarsus is located today, as it was in Paul's day, about 12 miles north of the Mediterranean Sea coast line in south-central Turkey within the modern-day province of Merçin
 - It was a center of commerce and learning and served as an important stop on the trades routes of the day
 - This important town embraced both the Hellenistic (Greek) culture as well as Roman law and politics
 - It was not only the birthplace of Paul
 - But Antony met Cleopatra for the first time aboard her ship in the port of Tarsus
 - And Alexander the Great recuperated from an illness in the town
 - It is possible that his parents named him Saul after the first king of Israel who was also from the tribe of Benjamin (**I Sam 11:15; Acts 13:21**)
 - Saul was the Hebrew Benjamite name with Paul being the Roman variation

- Paul was a very educated man having received, what today would be considered, an Ivy-League education
 - Because his parents were both religious and knowledgeable Paul was taught the Law or Moses, the writings of the Prophets, as well as how to speak, read and write both Hebrew and Aramaic in addition to his native Greek. ([Acts 21:40](#); [22:2-3](#); [Gal 1:14](#); [Phil 3:5-6](#))
 - And because his parents were Jewish merchants brought to Tarsus to promote business, they were given Roman citizenship which would have been passed on to any children born to them
 - This means that Paul held a dual citizenship for both Tarsus and Rome
 - That would prove very valuable to Paul in his missionary travels throughout the Roman provinces especially when he was being arrested and brought to trial ([Acts 16:37](#); [22:25-29](#); [23:37](#))
- Paul learned the craft of tent making, possibly from his father ([Acts 18:3](#))
 - Although he may have chosen to learn that particular skill as a means of self-support as was the custom of those in rabbinical training at the time
 - Tarsus was well known for the weaving of goat's hair cloth into tents, sails, awnings and cloaks
 - It was this skill that enabled Paul to, at times, financially support himself during his missionary work
- Although Paul was born in Tarsus, he writes in [Acts 22:3](#) that he was brought up in Jerusalem and studied under the teaching of Gamaliel of the Hillel school
 - In all likelihood his parents sent him to Jerusalem sometime in his teen years to begin his formal rabbinical studies
 - Gamaliel is yet proof again of the quality of Paul's upbringing and God's preparation
 - He was one of the most influential and respected teachers of the day
 - Tradition says that he was the grandson of the school's founder
 - He was an important member of the Sanhedrin during the early days of Jesus' disciple's ministry
 - And it was he who stood before the Sanhedrin and called for caution in dealing with Peter and John likely saving their lives ([Acts 5:27-40](#))
 - We know that Paul, in his studies, began to advance beyond any of the other students
 - It was likely during this time that Paul's fervency for the traditions of his faith began to take hold
 - This is what would bring him at odds with the teaching of Jesus and put him on the course that would see him become Saul the feared and infamous persecutor of Christians
 - Of course, all of that would change when, on one of his trips to arrest Christians, he would come in direct contact, with the risen savior, Jesus Christ

- Paul's life paralleled Jesus' life and ministry for many years but they never met or came face-to-face.
 - Paul was about 10 years younger than Jesus, and while he was in Jerusalem studying the Torah and the prophets, Jesus was a carpenter in Nazareth until the age of 30
 - Jesus would soon gather the men who would become his 12 disciples and men that Paul would also come to work with later as a part of his early ministry and conversion
 - But that time was yet to come
 - In the meantime, a young disciple and follower of Jesus by the name of Stephen would be arrested, tried by the members of local synagogues including the one in Cilicia, Paul's hometown, and they would execute him for his faith (**Acts 7**)
 - Stephen became the first martyr for the cause of Christ and a young man was present to hear Stephen's defense
 - It was a majestic biblical historical account
 - And it made such an impression on Saul, later called Paul, that he would use much of what Stephen said when he spoke to the Jewish leader in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (**Acts 13:16-41**)
- Paul's conversion story is well-known within most churches today
 - It has been preached as a backdrop to the life-changing power of Jesus' death and resurrection
 - It has also been used to help us see that NO ONE is too far gone to be saved
 - Paul was the least likely of anyone in that day to become a follower of the movement he was previously so committed to helping stamp out
 - And so, when Paul first began preaching the name of Jesus many were taken aback that such a transformation had taken place and could be genuine (**Acts 9:20-21**)
 - And Paul would continue to speak of Jesus, planting churches for the next 30 years or so all throughout Asia-Minor and Europe until his death, like Stephen, a martyr for the cause of Christ

What I want us to realize in this introduction is that God prepares us perfectly for the call He gives us and it is always at the exact right time... consider this as we close this first part

- In **Romans 1:14** Paul says that he is obliged or indebted to the Greeks and the non-Greeks (called barbarians in the NKJV)
- Paul did owe a great deal to the Greeks but it was all put in place by the hand of God
 - Under Philip the Macedon, the Greek states were united. After his assassination in 336 BC, his son Alexander, only twenty years of age, set out to rule the world.
 - He conquered Persia in 334, then Babylon and Syria, Arabia and Egypt. With his armies came the Greek language, culture, art, and philosophy.
- Rome and its Caesars took up where the Greek conquerors left off.
 - Rome extended the empire from the Caspian Sea to the Atlantic, from Britain to the Nile, as far east as the Euphrates.
 - What would this mean to Paul and the spread of Christianity?

- It meant relative peace and safety.
- There were Roman governors in every province and Paul's Roman citizenship saved his life on more than one occasion.
- From end to end of the empire ran the Roman roads. Meaning travel was easier and took less time although travelers were often in danger of robbers.
- The whole world was joined under one law and authority
- Before this time the world was not ready to receive the missionary message of the gospel.
 - Now, by a common language and in the safety and protection of the Romans, Paul could take to all the world the message of redemption.

There are many others who experienced similar preparations for what God had in store for them

- Consider Abraham, Noah, Joseph, Moses, and David
 - In the case of Moses that time of preparation was 8 decades
- As I have shared with you in the past, Moses lived to be 120 years old
 - Those years were divided equally into 3 segments of 40
 - His first 40 years were spent living with and learning from the most advanced scientific and cultural nation of the time, the Egyptians
 - The second 40 were in the wilderness of Midian as a shepherd, husband, and father
 - Both of those time periods, those 80 years, were the training and preparations stages of Moses' life in order for him to then lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt to Canaan for the last 40 years of his life

Paul's knowledge of the Word, his personality, his stubborn and fierce commitment all were factors in his becoming the first great missionary and author of nearly half of the NT books

- What is God preparing you for right now?
- If you are not exactly where you want to be right now do not despise this time
 - Instead, seek God's direction and ask Him to teach you all that you need for right now
 - You are in a time of learning and preparation
- How could I know that?
 - Because God has a plan and a use for each of His children
 - If you are a child of God He has a plan and a purpose for your life

What is God preparing you for right now?

You may not have any idea and so it is in faith that you live every day, desiring and to do your very best wherever God has you, for as long as He has you there.

His ways are always perfect, His timing flawless, and His love for you everlasting.