

“Here I Am Lord”

Introduction

Last Lord’s Day we experienced the amazing encounter that Saul had with the Risen Lord. Saul was immediately changed; he was changed from being one who hated Jesus and His followers to one who would love Jesus and His followers. We also observed last week that all this took place, as it were, against Saul’s will. In other words, he was traveling to Damascus to kill more Christians, not to start preaching the Gospel of Christ. It was by the miraculous grace of Christ that Saul was changed into a child of God and Saul could take no credit for his salvation.

Today, there are various ideas about how to change our society for the better. Humanistic and secular authorities tell us that society can be improved by various human efforts and means. Governments think they can change society for the better by throwing money at its problems, but history shows this does not work. Our society, as well as the world, is under the influence of the evil one. So, it is no wonder our society now calls good as evil and evil as good. As those saved by Christ, we understand that nothing, absolutely nothing will aid society, remove the corruption, improve that state of its people except the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Governments are powerless to change people’s sinful hearts, only Christ does this.

The Bible has a very accurate assessment of the human heart, it is an assessment very different from that of the world. Mankind is wicked and sinful, not because of some outward reality like a poor childhood or unresolved conflicts or as

many today consider themselves victims of a world they have no control over. Man is evil from the womb and there is not a thing he can do change this, as the prophet of God explains, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.” (Jeremiah 13:23) The Bible is very clear that there is nothing within man’s power to fix himself of his sin problem. Four chapters later the Jeremiah writes, ⁹ “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ¹⁰ ‘I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.’” (Jeremiah 17:9-10) The fruit of mankind’s deeds is eternity in hell, only Jesus satisfies the righteous judgement of God by His sacrifice.

Human beings are not born good, as many claim and then become polluted by the outward influences of the world but the truth is people are evil on the inside from the very beginning. Because of Adam’s sin every person is born with Adam’s sin nature from day one. When the Bible uses the term the “heart is deceitful” it means the very core of the person lives in deceit; who a person is at his or her very essence possesses a sin problem. As the prophet Isaiah, said so simply of the fallen condition of mankind, ⁵ “Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. ⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.” (Isaiah 1:5-6) Society or individuals cannot heal their “sores and raw wounds” of sin. Christ is the only way to be eternally and spiritually healed.

Our society preaches mankind is basically good and yet as I speak there are 31 countries in the world involved in war with millions of people suffering. There are 49 countries and 850 million people experiencing famine. 1/3 of the world and 43% of the USA is experiencing drought. The world governments think they can

address all these problems but in Matthew chapter 24 Jesus tells us, “See that no one leads you astray.⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.” (Matthew 24:4-8) God has warned the world and given us enough of His plan for history and redemption that we are aware it is unfolding all around the world and yet, God tells us that leaders of governments and industry, we observe, are as, “Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him.” (Proverbs 27:22) Man is so connected to sin and folly that you could, as it were, crush him with in a mortar with a pestle and you could separate him from everything he is except his sin. A person cannot be separated from sin by any method known to man.

The other thing I want us to understand is the pursuit of knowledge and the increase of knowledge does not lead to salvation. It took approximately a thousand years for knowledge to double after creation. By 1900 knowledge was doubling every 100 years. Today knowledge is doubling every 12 hours but this does not equate to wisdom. For the world knowledge leads to more ways to be corrupt and to sin. Paul wrote, “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.⁶ For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened

with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷ **always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.**” (2 Timothy 3:1-7) What Paul wrote 2000 years ago about the “**last days**” pretty much describes America in a nutshell.

So then, how is it that one who is sinful can be cleaned, forgiven, reformed, and taught spiritual truths? Can the Ethiopian change his skin color or a leopard his spots? No! There is nothing a person can do to save himself, there is nothing a society can do to create an alternate truth or peace and harmony among its people. Yet, Jesus commands His followers are to have a righteousness that exceeds that of the ones who strive so hard to be righteous, namely, in Paul’s time the Scribes and Pharisees. How is it possible to change from a sinner to a person who loves Jesus and hates sin if we cannot and society cannot do it?

Paul gives us the answer in his second letter to the church in Corinth, ¹⁷ **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.** ¹⁸ **All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;** ¹⁹ **that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.** ²⁰ **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.** ²¹ **For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) When Jesus first saved me, I clung to this passage. I had not been a good person or husband or father – to me this was a miracle of God and I was grieved by who I had been and eternally thankful for what God had done for me through Jesus Christ and I am sure this is how Saul thought of Jesus saving him.

So, the key truth we learn from today's passage and from observing our own salvation by God's grace and in addition what history teaches and by observing what is transpiring in the world is this; only Jesus Christ can change an enemy of God and an enemy of Christ's Church into a redeemed and faithful disciple that lives for God's glory. Jesus is the answer to each person and to the sin of the world.

Pray

Ananias Given An Unlikely Command (vs. 10-14)

Who was Ananias? Many scholars believe he was the pastor of the church in Damascus. Theologians say he was a significant leader within that congregation, all I know he was a faithful disciple of Jesus. If, in fact, he was the pastor, he was one who would have been on Saul's hit list. In other words, he was one of the people Saul of Tarsus was coming to Damascus for. Reading at verse 10, "Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.'" ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.'"

Luke simply reports that he was a disciple. Is not it a wonderful thing to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus? I am so thankful God chose me, aren't you? As disciples one is to live as a follower or a learner emulating one's master. As disciple we are learning how to pattern our lives after Jesus' life. The Lord speaks to Ananias through a vision and he answers the Lord, "Here I am, Lord". We have heard these word before; Jacob in Genesis 31, Moses in Exodus 3, Samuel in 1

Samuel chapter 3, Isaiah several times in his Book – so, Ananias answers likewise as a reluctant and then willing servant of the Lord.

However first, when Ananias hears what the Lord want of him – he suddenly is reluctant just like the prophets of the Old Testament. Ananias could not imagine why the Lord would want anything to do with this enemy of God and His church, a man known for his violence against the people of the “the Way”. But like Ananias, we too, can be short-sighted and not understand what God is doing. As His children and His servants and His slaves we are to be obedient and should not question God – for He is the Creator of the universe and we are not. Yet, God shows patience with Ananias. Reading at verse 13, [“But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.’”](#) God has patience because this is a reasonable response and a sincere question. Just like Abraham asking God a series of questions to save the righteous that lived in Sodom in Genesis 18. Abraham began asking God to save the city for the sake of 50 and works his way down to 10 and knowing he had to rescue Lot. God was patient because Abraham was sincere in seeking to understand God.

Have you ever felt a bit of fear or reluctance when God has called you to do a certain task? We have probably felt apprehension and even unworthiness at times when we have sensed God’s leading. We might immediately think of Moses and the burning bush. Remember what Moses told God, he gave excuses based on feeling unworthy. The people would not believe him, I am not a good public speaker, God listens patiently and when Moses finishes God commanded Moses to go and trust Him and things will work out as He has ordained.

Beloved, we can learn a lot from these examples in the Bible. Ananias is a man I would like to sit down with sometime over coffee and have him tell me the story in more detail. I could learn a lot from a person like this. I struggle relating to people who seem to have it all together all the time and are never afraid or reluctant. Having worked in Muslim countries I can understand Ananias hesitation. It would be like God telling me to the Mosque in Lahore, the largest Mosque in the world and coming before the Iman and telling him of Christ and his need to surrender to Jesus. If God had commanded me to do that, it would have caused some hesitation in me.

God had work to do and Saul was the one He had chosen to do it. But before God could use Saul to be the Apostle preaching Christ, He had to make Saul a disciple of His Son, like Ananias. I can understand Ananias' pause and question for this was not the work of men but of God.

Ananias Given Insight By The Lord (vs. 15-16)

The Lord Jesus tells His disciple Ananias to “Go” and then very mercifully tells him why he must go. Reading at verse 15, ¹⁵“But the Lord said to *Ananias*, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’” Notice the reason Jesus gives Ananias, Saul “is a chosen instrument of mine.” The terminology of election is significant here. We know from the Scriptures that God elects people to salvation. Luke often uses phrases like this referring to God's choice of a person for salvation.

Just as God chose Israel, even with all its faults, in Acts chapter 13 we read, “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it.” (Acts

13:17) God chose Israel, underserving and He chose the persecutor Saul. Here in verse 15 of chapter 9 Luke records Jesus' words referring not so much to God's choice of Paul for salvation, although we know that to be the case, but His choice for Paul to accomplish a certain task. God had chosen Israel and they failed. God chose and called Saul to be the Apostle that will **"carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."** Saul will become Paul to fulfill God's calling to take the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. Paul would not fail. God let Ananias know why He was calling Saul to salvation and he most likely related to what God said about Saul, that in order to accomplish this mammoth task God set before Saul, there would suffering involved.

Notice also that God was relying on the faithfulness of another chosen disciple, namely, the reluctant Ananias. God chooses people for salvation and He chooses people for certain jobs and ministries. Both '*choosings*' really go hand-in-hand. If God has chosen you to be saved, He has also chosen a specific task just for you. No one could carry the Gospel to the Gentiles as Saul would. God had equipped him with certain gifts and skills for that very task. God has also equipped you personally to accomplish a ministry that only you can do; in the church or community or world. The question is, are you listening to God and are you obedient to His calling?

For Saul to be transformed into Paul was a miracle of God, but for Paul to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles and especially the **"children of Israel"** would require unfathomable trials as Jesus forewarns, **For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."** (v. 16)

Notice something that might seem, at least at first, to be very strange. God chose to save Paul to fulfill a specific task for God's plan of salvation to the world,

then God chose Paul to suffer. Literally, Jesus says “Go” and prepare to suffer. The English Standard Version translation I use captures this very well. God had set a specific task for Paul and it included specific occasions of suffering which God had already set in place. Where is it that we get the idea that when we become Christians that we are free from trials and suffering? Nowhere does God ever promise us smooth sailing for the rest of our lives, in fact, the very opposite is often promised. God says the world is at war. The prince of this world, the evil one, will do everything he can to stop God’s plan for the salvation of mankind and God’s children will battle and witness for His glory until Jesus returns and places Satan under His feet. As part of God’s plan, the great persecutor of the Church Saul will very shortly become the greatly persecuted Apostle Paul. As King David wrote Paul will fulfill, “I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.” (Psalm 34:1) Paul later writes to the saints imploring them to do the same, ¹⁶ “Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19) Am I able to praise God and preach the glories of Jesus even though I am struggling to breathe? Praise be to God I can continue. Can you praise God even though you are experiencing struggles; financially or with your health or as you approach your death? Let it be so with us my beloved! May we praise God at all times!

Moses was reluctant and then obeyed, Ananias was reluctant and then obeys; God Word is for our instruction, let us learn from Scripture and obey without reluctance.

Ananias Responds In Obedience (vs. 17-19)

Now that Ananias understands, he obeys, reading at verse 17, “So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened.” Church understand - just because you may be somewhat fearful and have other emotions swirling around in your heart - by the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us, you can still do what God commands. Do not wait until you are totally prepared before you obey. I am sure Ananias was praying every step of the way. He did not go in his own strength he went in the strength and power of God. In his own ability he feared Saul, but the first thing out of his mouth when he arrived was, “Brother Saul”, is that not amazing. A couple of days before Saul was the enemy of the Church and now, he is address as “Brother Saul”. Ananias recounts the events as revealed by his Lord Jesus and then lays his hands on Saul, prays over him and Saul’s eyes are open, he regains his sight, his strength, receives the Holy Spirit and to prove his allegiance to Christ, he is baptized.

Remember what the prophet Jeremiah had said, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.” (Jeremiah 13:23) Humanly this is impossible, but as Jesus instructed Peter “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” (Luke 18:27) No amount of rehabilitation, therapy, correction, washing, or any other thing man can do – could have changed Saul the enemy of the church into Paul the greatest missionary the church ever had. It was a miracle of God’s grace, just as God saved you, a sinner, an enemy of God – it was a miracle. My beloved bask in and delight in the miracle that God has done in your life, surrender to the Holy Spirit, live for the glory of

Jesus. Ask God what needs to change in your life? Ask God what He is calling you to do for His glory and then have the courage to go. We learn, as God instructed Joshua concerning the possessing the promised land, “No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.” ^(Joshua 1:5) What is humanly impossible, God makes possible, and He will not leave us, as the writer of the Book of Hebrews reaffirmed, as a believer in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are called to ⁵“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” ^(Joshua 1:5) ⁶ So we can confidently say, ^(Quoted from Psalm 118:6) “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” ^(Hebrews 13:4-6) Only Jesus can change an enemy of God and His Church into a disciple through His Son, Jesus! So, my beloved, I plead with you this day surrender fully to God, let the Holy Spirit direct your life, seek God’s calling and obediently fulfill God’s mission of your life. Amen!

Let us spend a few moments quietly listening to God and seeking God for He is the Creator of the universe and can listen and speak to each of His millions of children all at the same time.

