

Wise Master Builder - Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles

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This morning I want us to look at the life of Paul and allow Jesus to speak into our lives from what he did in Paul's life.

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Let's read three portions of scripture that provide some highlights of Paul's life.

Acts 7:54-8:3

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

55 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

56 And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

8:1 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.

3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Acts 9:1-31

1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

4 And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

7 The men who were travelling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

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."

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."

15 But the Lord said to him, "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."

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. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"

22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,

24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,

25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.

30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Galatians 1:11-24

11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,

16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;

17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

20 (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!)

21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

22 And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

23 They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

24 And they glorified God because of me.

Paul is mentioned 158 times in the book of Acts. He wrote just under half or 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.

The 13 he wrote are in sequential order and come between Acts & Hebrews.

If you were to read Acts you will have in essence read Paul's biography by Luke and if you read from the end of Acts to the beginning of Hebrews, you will have read Paul's

auto-biography.

But, if there were one statement that would sum up Paul's life, I believe it would be found in 1 Corinthians 3:10

1 Corinthians 3:10

According to the grace of God given to me, like a **skilled (wise, expert) master builder** I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

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Paul was a **Wise Master Builder**. God built something in his life and with his life.

This morning what is it that God wants to build in your life and with your life?

Are you just floating along without any sort of direction, are you just passing the time away or are you getting direction and following this direction with God?

What is it exactly that Paul built?

1. **He built people** - he was always encouraging, persuading and challenging people to accept the work that Jesus had done on their behalf through the gospel, or to grow in the grace and mercy of Jesus through that same gospel
2. **He built churches** (not the bricks and mortar kind). He connected people to each other to live and work together in continuing to build upon what he had started
3. **He built leaders** to help carry on this work while he was alive and after he had died
4. **He built** the majority of our understanding about Jesus and the **theology of the New Covenant** or the new arrangement that God made with both Jew and Gentile. The old covenant was primarily with the Jews but the new covenant, sealed with his blood, was with all people that he is calling from every nation, tribe and tongue

How did he accomplish this building?

1) He was enlisted by Jesus

Galatians 1:15-16

But when he who had set me apart before I was born (or my mother's womb NASB) and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.

First of all Paul knew that Jesus was the one who had enlisted him - before he was even born.

Paul enlisting Jesus to get behind a mission that he had designed.

Jesus had called Paul and commissioned him. Paul was to work cooperatively with Jesus in Jesus' mission to preach him among the Gentiles and establish churches.

Do you often feel that you are trying to get Jesus to somehow get behind something you are doing or want to do - instead of getting behind what Jesus is doing?

2) Zeal for the Lord

Paul was extreme in his zeal. Originally this zeal was for the traditions of his fathers. But after Jesus commissioned him it was for the glory of God.

3) Followed a strategy from God

In the building work that Paul was engaged in it was strategic and purposeful. From Acts and his letters we see the following.

- a. Apostle to the Gentiles - he knew his calling
- b. Preached the Gospel - he knew what he was called to do
- c. Planted & established churches - he knew where and how he was to do it
- d. Set in place leadership - he knew who to enlist to help with the work
- e. Delegated authority - he knew how to share the work
- f. Encouraged young leaders - he knew the length of time the work would take
- g. Continued relationship with the churches - he knew that building something great requires more than just a once off effort but requires ongoing relationship, leadership and encouragement

4) Prepared to live sacrificially

Paul was prepared to count the cost to be involved in this building work with Jesus. He was prepared to and did live sacrificially.

Philippians 2:17

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

2 Timothy 4:6

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my Departure has come.

How many of us are prepared to sacrifice? To do things, go places, spend money and say things that will move us beyond what we are comfortable with? Sacrifice is uncomfortable.

5) Content in himself and with God's will for his life

Even in sacrifice, Paul was able to find contentment in God.

2 Corinthians 12:10

For the sake of Christ, then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Philippians 4:11

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

One of the great hallmarks of a Christian is the ability in God to be at peace in various circumstances - to be content.

6) Forgot was behind him

Philippians 3:13-14

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Great building work stops when we are not prepared to move on - to forget the past.

How many of us have been hurt or discouraged in church or elsewhere and have harboured a grudge and taken themselves out of the action - have stopped building?

We need to learn how to deal with the past (our successes, failures and hurts) because if we don't it will rob us of both our present and our future in God.

7) Finished the race and kept the faith

2 Timothy 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

And finally Paul finished the work. He didn't leave it half done. He did all that he was assigned to do.

No one remembers the horse that is first out of the barriers at the Melbourne cup - it is always the horse that finishes first.

Become good finishers.

So, what is it that Jesus wants to build in your life and with your life?

Let's just take a moment and reflect on what that might be. Try not to think about the end but rather what is it this morning that Jesus wants you to work with him on?

It may be something in you before it is something with you.

Work on that thing with him and then when that has been completed, move onto the next thing and never stop. Don't let the devil stop you. Don't let others stop you and most importantly don't let yourself stop you.