

## Sunday Morning Message

October 23, 2016

### *Looking unto Jesus and His Perfect Plan for Our Lives*

#### Congregational Reading – Acts 13:1 - 3

Text – Acts 9:1 – 19; Acts 13:1 – 3; Acts 16:1 – 12; Acts 20:16 – 38; Acts 21:1 – 14; Acts 21:26 – 36; **Acts 22:17 – 21; Acts 23:11**

Our theme for the year is Looking unto Jesus

Our theme verses are Hebrews 12:1 – 2

*“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

This year, we will be preaching messages from the 4 gospel accounts in the New Testament and we will be closely examining the life of our Lord Jesus Christ while He walked the earth, learning the principles that He teaches us, specifically looking for ways to apply His life to our own.

#### **Introduction**

This message is somewhat different from all of the previous messages that were preached in this series, Looking unto Jesus, where we have focused our attention on the teachings of Jesus exclusively from the gospel accounts. This message will be taken from the Book of Acts where we will see two rare, personal appearances of the Lord Jesus to the Apostle Paul. The fascinating about these appearances is that they occur long after Jesus has risen from the dead and ascended up into Heaven.

In this message we will survey parts of the ministry of the great Apostle, and though there are many aspects and events in his life that we could focus on, our purpose will be to see how the Lord Jesus directed Paul and revealed His plan for Paul’s life, either directly through personal appearances, or through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The application that we can make from what we learn from these passages is that God will direct us to and in His plan for our lives. He will show us what He wants us to do. Though God’s path for our lives may not always be crystal clear to us immediately, through patience, prayer, and persistence, eventually the fog will clear and we will know exactly what God wants us to do.

#### **I God’s Plan for Our Ministry Begins with Salvation**

That is, God's plan must begin with a salvation experience, at least from our perspective. God, however, has had a plan in His mind for our lives long before our salvation, and even long before our birth:

*"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." (Jeremiah 1:5)*

Paul's Salvation Story begins in Acts 9

Again, it is important to understand that long before Paul's salvation, God was orchestrating events in His life that would be used to influence him and bring him to his salvation experience, and also to equip him for ministry.

Paul was influenced by the Old Testament Scriptures that he knew so well. He was also influenced by the testimony of the martyr Steven who was put to death, under Paul's authority, simply for being a Spirit-filled Christian.

Read Acts 9:1 – 19

The Lord Jesus appeared personally to Paul on at least three different occasions that we will examine this morning. However, the Lord will most likely not appear directly to you or me. He reveals Himself to us today through His Word, and through His Holy Spirit. Paul was an Apostle, and one of the qualifications for an apostle was that He had to have seen the resurrected Lord personally. Paul did. You and I won't. We walk by faith and not by sight.

In verse 15, we see the first glimpse of God's plan for Paul. It was revealed by Jesus to Cornelius.

**Note – God will sometimes use godly Christians to reveal His plan or part of His plan for our lives.**

**II God's Plan Will Be Revealed After We Have Sufficiently Grown**

Read Acts 13:1 – 3

By the time we get to Acts 13, many years have gone by in Paul's life. He had been discipled by Barnabas. He had spent some time with the apostles at Jerusalem. He had even spent a few years in the deserts of Arabia where He could learn directly from the Lord. (Galatians 1:17)

In Acts 13, Paul is serving the Lord in Antioch. He is doing the revealed will of the Lord.

**Note – God will not show you His perfect, specific plan, unless you are faithfully performing His revealed plan.**

*"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;" (1 Timothy 1:12)*

From this passage in Acts 13, we see that God's specific plan for Paul was to send Him into Galatia in order to win many to Christ and establish churches.

### **III God's Plan Will Sometimes Be Revealed Through Closed Doors**

On Paul's second missionary journey, it was his plan to return to the churches of Galatia, which he did. But it was also his plan to go further west into Asia Minor, perhaps to Ephesus; and then later he thought he should go northeast to Bythinia. The Holy Spirit of God closed all of these doors, and eventually revealed His perfect plan to Paul.

Read Acts 16:1 – 12

### **IV God's Plan Will Often Be Hindered by Our Own Plans**

Sometimes, we become convinced that the Lord wants us to do something, because it is a "good" thing; but, we need to be very careful that the "good" thing that we want is, in fact, the actual will of God.

Here we will see that Paul thought it was God's will to go to Jerusalem to reach the Jews. He was so determined that he actually ignored the warnings of the Holy Spirit, and the clear direction of the Lord Jesus.

Read Acts 20:16 – 38; 21:1 – 14; Acts 22:17 – 21

### **V God's Original Plan Will Often Have to Be Changed or Altered Because of Our Sin**

Read Acts 23:11

Paul didn't listen to the warnings of the Holy Spirit. He didn't obey the Lord when He told Paul to get out of Jerusalem. But here, He is encouraging Paul after Paul got it wrong. Jesus said, "OK Paul, don't be discouraged – I've got another plan."

It's interesting that when God first called Paul, Jesus told Ananias that Paul would bear His name before kings. So Jesus knew Paul was going to end up here. It was because of Paul's arrest at Jerusalem that he would be able to witness to Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa. He may even have been influential to Caesar once he got to Rome. We know that some of Caesar's household were saved. (Philippians 4:22)

### **Conclusion**

- 1 Jesus has a plan for your life  
It begins with your being saved.

*"The Lord is... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)*

- 2 God's general plan for all Christians is revealed in His Word, and none of God's specific plan for your life will contradict His Word.
- 3 Your obedience to God's revealed will is pre-requisite to receiving a specific plan.
- 4 God reveals His specific plan for your life through:

Time Spent in His Word

Time Spent in Prayer

Divine Circumstances

Open doors

Closed doors

Godly Counsel

*"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."*

(Proverbs 11:14)

*"For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety."*

(Proverbs 24:6)

As believers, we need to know what God's plan is for our lives.

As a church, we need to know what God wants us to do.