

Evening Lesson. Ephesians 1.

MAY 19 1974

TEXT ACTS 9 V 6

If you take three chapters in The Acts, - 9, 22, 26, where we have a record that is synonymous, then you may give a title. The subject matter

here is in chapter 9; the narrative by St Luke of the call by grace of Saul of Tarsus. In chapters 22 and 26 we have his own spiritual testimony and experience concerning these matters. I shall endeavour this evening to place the three together so we have the corporate whole in view.

What title may we by divine wisdom give to the wondrous, remarkable, amazing work of God concerning Saul of Tarsus? This is the summary of the three portions in the three chapters in Acts; namely, it reveals and exalts God in His amazing grace. That is why I read the Lesson where I did. You will find, and this touched my spirit as I read, almost constantly the apostle in his epistles reverts to the grace of God. There are not many verses but he returns to the sweetest theme, - the amazing grace of God.

Now the summary concerning the contents of the three portions in the Acts. It reveals and exalts the Trinity in the amazing grace of God in Jehovah Jesus in what by His grace He has done for men, and in men, and through men. That is the summary. The compass takes in the whole matter; the amazing grace of God in Jesus Christ and what He has done for men; for Saul, and consequently and as a blessed sequence, what He has done for men, in men; in Saul. He could stand before the people and give a personal testimony in a few words, but a great testimony. "By the grace of God I am ~~what~~ I am." (1 Cor. 15. 10) Can we say that? "and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, - don't look at me. - but the grace of God which was with me." There it is: it covers the whole of the three chapters; what the Lord has done for elect, predestinated men by the will of God, and in and through men; through Paul. So you have a trio. I always believe in anything that is of God you will find three things. You take divine purpose, promise, performance: there is a trio, - purpose, promise, performance. I always look for three things in everything: I look for the Trinity. If you have a thing that is right you will find God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: One. The more you explore this treasure house the more you will find three things.

Let us for a brief moment go back to the wonderful truths emphasised in the chapter read. Think of it: it relates to his regeneration, and the

sovereign, efficacious work of God. He says; "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." We can stand firmly on that Rock, the will of God. That is where our hope is. See how he takes it up in chapter 8 to the Romans. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." says he in his testimony, but those souls are called according to His purpose, and you will know it. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." Lovely theme! Why? Because it means the free, loving favour of God to sinners in the gift of His only Son and all things flowing to us through His sacrifice on the cross. Grace saves the vilest of sinners.

The next point. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." This is something to stand on, - the will of God. You see the firmness and stability of the Covenant, my friends. "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us - God's great work in fixing your destiny in Jesus Christ. These are cardinal doctrines, fundamental truths translated to experience "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Do you see? This is the grand mystery of grace; He has made you accepted in the Beloved. This is grace, my friends. "In whom we have redemption through his blood." He goes right to the cross. Here it is fairest drawn in precious blood, - "the forgiveness of sins." and he goes back, - "according to the riches of his grace." It is all grace. I ask you; is this your lovely theme? There are sorrows, trials, dark days with a child of God, but you think of the joys in His salvation. We sing, (seldom, because it is high language) "The saints, unable to contain Their inward joys;" (365) It is true; you cannot contain your joy. What will give you this? Grace. "He hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." This is it.

Having given a title we have a few details in the spiritual content, - because it is the work of the Trinity, - to try to illuminate before you by the Spirit. Let us go back to the word again. "And he trembling and

astonished said". I wonder if the man had ever trembled before? I doubt it. I think he was afraid of nothing on earth. He thought he was incapable of trembling. I have heard this expression from the lips of some; "My heart is as strong as a horse. I have got nothing to fear." That day that man trembled, and you may realise this is one of the most blessed things, to know what it is to tremble before God. In fact, I would suggest to you it is one of the things that is solemnly lacking to day. There is little trembling before God. Why did he tremble? Because of the glory of that light, and 'glory' means he had reflected on him and in his heart and in the innermost recesses of his person, the majesty of the great God, and he trembled. I do not <sup>think this</sup> trembling was the trembling of black despair: it was a healthy, salutary trembling. It was acceptable because it was the fruit of the Spirit, we need this, and we know it, and we are in a good place. When we are destitute of it we are not in a good place. Trembling. I could stay on this. Take the same dear man writing later his epistle to the Church at Corinth, and in chapter <sup>a</sup> of the first epistle he says; "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." Never expect anything without this. If there is no due realisation and recognition of the majesty of God there is nothing. If there is no profound reverence there is nothing. A true trembling before the great I AM is a preparation for every blessing. I want to show you both sides. "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." "And he trembling." I wonder if any of you young friends and children know what this is, and you never mention it to any on earth? You trembled before God.

The other word is 'astonished'. How can I expound this? What does it mean to be astonished? Two things are within the scope of exposition of the term. One; he was overwhelmed with the sense of what he had seen himself to be in the light of the majesty of God. O how astonished and distressed quickened people are when glory strikes their eye and they see themselves! They are overwhelmed. But blessed be God, there is another side to it. Undoubtedly he was overwhelmed with a sense of the grace and mercy of God to a vile sinner, a persecutor, and you will be

overwhelmed. These two facets you will know,-

"Astonished and distressed,  
I turn my eyes within." (733)

You will be overwhelmed with what you see, and with the mercy, love, and goodness of God to you a sinner. So see how the two inspired terms introduce the verse, and what he then by the teaching of the Spirit graciously and acceptably uttered before the Lord.

"And he trembling and astonished said," I have tried to emphasise that he said; "LORD." Who to? To the very One he had so hated: he is now calling Him Lord. He begins by saying; "Who art thou, Lord?" and the Lord replied; "The One who is speaking to you is Jesus, whom thou persecutest. The One he completely denied, rejected and hated, and he now in profound reverence and worship addressed Jesus as LORD. This is an amazing thing. The One <sup>he</sup> hated, rejected, despised and through His people persecuted he knows is the Lord on the throne. What amazement! what solemn amazement it must have been to those who rejected and despised Him, who of the Jewish nation died in their sins; those who crucified Him; those who said; "Away with Him," when they came to their final breath and found He was their Judge! So there is an indescribable pleasure in my soul in declaring these truths to you: the erstwhile persecutor is saying in terms of worship; "LORD" and knowing He is Lord of all.

I want to look into, by the help of God, the humble, sober, gracious inquiry he made. "LORD, what wilt thou have me to do?" - as though he would say; "I have lived up to this noonday with my own will, projects, designs, ambitions, and determination to exterminate this sect. What wilt Thou have me to do?" I believe we could use this term, - by an act of grace in his soul he was enabled to surrender himself and his life to the Crucified. All was surrendered to Christ; his life, time, all. This is wonderful. Does he not bring it out in his epistle? "Ye are not your own." Did you think you were? "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19) Ye are not your own. Have you found the sweetness and solemnity and sacredness of this?

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" It will be a part of my privilege

and sacred duty to endeavour to tell you what the Lord revealed to him concerning His will as to what he should do. It would be wise to take the line of truth running through the Bible. Immediately divine grace enters your soul this will be one of your petitions and deepest exercises. "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" To demonstrate, let us take Abraham. He did not use these words; "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord said; "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." (Gen. 12.1) "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." (Gen. 11.8) "What wilt thou have me to do?" So he came from Mesopotamia to the land of promise. This is a great pillar of truth in the doctrine, teaching and work of grace that will cause you to leave your own land and set forth on pilgrimage. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Another case: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Ruth from Moab. Said Boaz to her; "It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband; and how thou has left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Why did she go? How could she leave father and mother and the land of her nativity? Because the Lord had showed her,- "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" We could cite case in all the Scriptures. Rebekah when Abraham's servant went to seek a wife for his son Isaac, and it came to this; "We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." Why? "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Do you see? There was in her soul a realisation that it was the will of God. "I will go."

Take the case of the same apostle. It seemed as if his life was steeped <sup>by grace</sup> in this, as to what the Lord would have him to do. He had no regard for suffering: it was to do what the Lord would have him do. The apostles returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch where they had

stoned Paul, "and drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. But he arose. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "Am I to flee from this region?" No; he returned: he went back to the place where they had stoned him. "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Is it your prayer? It is mine.

Another case is where "they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not." "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Immediately they went. See the result of it. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (I feel the time is short: I will take two or three things in brevity.)

See now the answer of the Lord to him. He said; "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." I say the same to you Arise, and go into the city, to Zion, to the House of God, to the Scriptures, to the Throne of Grace, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. There is no uncertainty about it. You will be told what to do. Turn your attention for a moment to Ananias, and see the great grace God gave him. The Lord appeared to him in a vision, and said,—" See how the Lord knows the street, the town, the city, the house. He knows your street "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight,-- there is a house there,-- and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus." and He gives this remarkable word; "for, behold, he prayeth. And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight." Immediately there was a degree of astonishment and amazement in the mind of Ananias. "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem." He had heard about this man and what his mission was. "And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." The Lord says, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

See the amazing grace in Ananias. He went to the street that is called Straight, to the house of Judas and asked for Saul. He laid his hands on him, - a sign of God-given authority and union. O the grace that shone! He said; "Brother Saul. There is grace sh<sup>in</sup>ing forth in Ananias. "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus," By this time Saul had begun to love the Name of Jesus: it is a touchstone. "that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." O the grace in Ananias! Just see what the Lord would have him do. In this record it says; "That thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales." What a wonderful word concerning a spiritual revelation of the glory of Christ! In chapter 22 it says; "One Ananias...came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, (a revealing and unfolding of the Lord's will) the God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth." Listen: "For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." This is followed by; "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." There are two things revealed. If we turn to chapter 26 we read; "And I said; Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose. - What?- to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." Now you have heard it. There are two things I feel I must say. There are two things I would feel for some poor soul, - baptism, and after baptism the ministry, and I do not say it lightly. I have no premeditation, but I am impressed. "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" and the heavens have revealed it. Amen.