

Remnant Life Church
August 10, 2014

**“Lessons by Paul:
Where You Come From”**
Acts 7:54-8:1; 9:1-16

- When reading the Bible there are several aspects of how it is written that, if we can recognize them, can help with our understanding.
 - Frequency in the Scripture often denotes importance
 - When something was repeated it had greater weight
 - Much like we do today
 - Who’s name do we see the most in the new testament – top 3
 - Jesus – approx.. 1275
 - Peter
 - But also Cephus and Simon
 - Total of 213
 - Paul
 - Second most (including Saul)
 - 234 times
 - Aside from Jesus, Paul was very likely the most important man of the early church and in great measure responsible for the spread of the Gospel around the world
- Who was He?
 - He was a contemporary of Jesus meaning living around the same time
 - He was roughly the same age as Jesus both being born between 6 and 4 BCE
 - Paul was a disciple of Jesus but not one of the 12 who traveled with Him in His ministry
 - They never met face-to-face but they might have been in the same place as youth
 - Paul was born in the city of Tarsus (21:39)
 - Tarsus is an ancient town dating back several thousand years even in biblical times and was one that had great influence and prevalence in the culture of the day
 - Located in south-central Turkey at the head of the Berdan River that empties about 12.5 miles into the Mediterranean
 - It had become a city of importance with culture, education and even a desired destination (Antony and Cleopatra met there for the first time)
 - It boasted a university that was, in that day, of greater renown than even the schools of learning in Athens and Alexandria
 - The only place to receive a higher level of education for the Jew was in Jerusalem
 - He was born into a solid, middle-class family

- They were of the tribe of Benjamin (**Rom 11:1**)
 - The most famous man of this tribe's history being King Saul (**I Sam. 9:21**)
 - Most likely the apostle's name-sake
 - They were an educated family as Paul was the son of a Pharisee
 - Three spiritual leadership groups in Paul's time
 - Pharisees
 - Sadducees
 - Essenes
 - Pharisees the most important group as they were the spiritual fathers of Judaism
 - A combined group of about 70 Pharisees and Sadducees made up the Sanhedrin or spiritual ruling body
 - Wanted to maintain control over the people through fear and strict laws or conduct
 - This was the group that Stephen spoke to and who stoned him to death - the first martyr. (**Acts 7**)
 - Not only born of an important Jewish tribe but also a Roman citizen (**22:27**)
 - This was a little bit more unusual in that at some point someone in his family had earned that privilege
 - Being of joint citizenship and background could have also brought with it some problems
 - Perhaps because of this Paul is sent at a young age to study in Jerusalem eventually sitting under the teaching of the great scholar Gamaliel (**22:3**)
 - It is very possible that Paul was in and around the temple at the same time as a 12 year old Boy was astounded the teacher's (perhaps even Gamaliel himself) with His knowledge and insight into the scriptures
- How then could a man of first-century privilege relate to such a wide spectrum of people to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
- He becomes so devoted, so zealous to the teachings of the law that he is appointed as an enforcer tasked with rooting out and dealing with followers of "The Way." (**9:1; I Tim. 1:13**)
- Paul had a past
 - First mention is at the stoning of Stephen (**Acts 7 & 8**)
 - Created havoc for the church (**8:3**)
 - Ravage, decimate, ruin
 - The word havoc in the original language is the visual picture of a wild boar tearing up a vineyard in search of food
 - Paul's goal was destruction
 - Threw Christian's into prison (**8:3**)
 - Hounded them to the point of death (**22:4**)
 - Voted to execute followers of Jesus (**26:10**)
 - Used torture (**26:11**)

- Persistently persecuted the church anywhere he could (**Gal. 1:13**)
- Each and every one of us in this room, and those listening to me at home, we all have a past.
 - They are all different and unique
 - They range from things that we are very proud of, to things that we are ashamed of
 - All of it is a part of who we are
 - And God will use every bit of it to His glory!
- Consider Paul
 - He was born into some means of wealth and comfort yet lived much of his adult life with little (**2 Cor. 11:27**)
 - He was educated across a wide spectrum of knowledge but never stopped pursuing his understanding of God's love and mercy
 - He claimed dual citizenship and traveled in a wide circle of circumstances
 - He was a religious zealot but came to realize his own worthlessness without Jesus (**I Cor 15:9**)
 - He was a participant in heartless acts but came to rely on the help of other people, sometimes strangers for his very survival (**Phil 4**)
- God used each and every aspect of Paul's past to accomplish His will for Paul's life
 - Paul's first encounter with Jesus was not on Paul's terms but on God's (**Acts 9**)
 - Nothing of Paul's life was wasted
 - He understood how the minds of the religious leader's worked and their goals
 - He knew Roman law allowing him access to some of the most powerful leaders of the day
 - Marcus Antonius Felix – governor of Caesarea
 - King Agrippa – grandson of Herod the Great
 - A direct appeal to Caesar
 - He knew the Jewish law through the writings of Moses and was able to debate and defend the person of Jesus Christ, that He is the Son of God, the only way to receive forgiveness for our sins and salvation.
- Your past is a part of who you are but it does not need to define you!
- Satan wants nothing more than for us to live in our past continuing to wallow in shame and guilt.
 - Bartimaeus' cloak (**Mark 10:50**)
 - If you have asked God for forgiveness only you are keeping yourself bound to those times of sin
- *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and **will** forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)*
- (Joseph speaking) *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Gen. 50:20)*

- You are forgiven, you are healed, you are loved by the Father.
 - Understand that God will use every part of you when you give every part of yourself back to Him
 - Our lives today and our future are not dependent on who and what we are but who He is and what He has done for us.
 - If you continue to pursue Him He will never desert you ([Heb 13:5](#))
 - You are of great value and purpose to the kingdom of God no matter where you have come from!