

The Journey of Paul: From Darkness to Light

Today Paul is widely regarded as one of the top ten most influential people in history. This isn't bad for a man described as "small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs...with eyebrows meeting and a nose somewhat crooked".

Though critics mocked him as "*unimpressive*", Paul found his strength in the Lord, even as he struggled with a "*thorn in the flesh*" (*II Corinthians 10:10; 12:7*). Paul was a man of action, making four long missionary journeys. His rugged toughness was blended with a warm personality that endeared him to a long list of friends.

Paul Modeled the Three Stages of a Christian's Journey:

1. The _____(Come) Stage

- a. *"You have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But...God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me."* Galatians 1:13-16.
- b. Paul needed a new direction. He was trapped in a proud, works-based legalism. Paul didn't realize that he was the "*worst of sinners*" (*I Timothy 1:16*) until he met his new master face to face (Acts 9:5). All our days, including the day we meet Jesus, have been ordained by God (Psalms 139:16). Yet, this doesn't negate the exercise of our free will to believe (Acts 16:31).
- c. Paul described the beginning of a new lifestyle in Galatians 2:20, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" Paul freely chose to "*live by the Spirit*", a lifestyle of "*love, joy, peace, patience...*" (*Galatians 5:16,22*).

2. The _____(Follow) Stage

- a. *"I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia."* Galatians 1:16-17. Like Moses, David, and Jesus, Paul was led by God into the desert and died to self. Over three years, he devoted himself to the five foundations of following Jesus (the Word, prayer, worship, fellowship, witnessing).
- b. After his desert experience, Paul would network with his fellow believers for the rest of his life. He partnered with Barnabas (Acts 13-15), and then Silas. Often other believers joined them. Paul honed his witnessing skills in Damascus, growing more and more proficient (Acts 9:20-22).

3. The _____(Serve) Stage

- a. *“Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days...later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.’” Galatians 1:18-23.*
- b. People need Jesus...more than they need nutritious food or clean water or a good education or good health care or a good job. They even need Jesus more than they need oxygen because having Jesus means living eternally!
- c. *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” Mark 16:15.* God also wants us to do good deeds for others (Galatians 6:9-10), but Jesus comes first. Our world is a mess, even though material goods are plentiful. Jesus told the woman at the well, *“Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst again.” John 4:14.*

Paul challenges us to “*shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.*” *Philippians 2:15.* Paul modeled this to the very end of his life as shown in the movie *Paul: Apostle of Christ*. He was likely beheaded in May, 68 AD, by the emperor Nero outside of Rome at a place now known as “St. Paul at the Three Fountains”.

Paul wrote in II Timothy 4:7, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*” Will you be faithful to the end of your journey?