**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Resurrection Series**

Acts of the Holy Spirit - Acts 8

 By Faith: Saul, Philip, Peter and John

October 6th, In the Year of Our Lord 2024

Pastor Matthew Diehl

(All Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.)

Sermon Audio and Texts: roundtopchurch.org / Under Member’s tab

Note: Final version of sermon is posted with possible additions.

Email questions to Pastor: rtchurch@cvctx.com

We continue our sermon series in the Acts of the Holy Spirit, in the lives of the apostles and believers, written by Luke the physician. By the way. . . “we all” need to aspire to living life under the leading of God’s Holy Spirit. . . it is not just a New Testament thing. Today, we will examine why Saul, the Pharisee, was the way he was and what changed him. I see that we all have a propensity to be Saul. I mean, we can often get too focused on some manmade religious thing and make a mountain. Remember, Luke introduced Saul in Acts 7.

**Acts 7:58** When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

**Saul’s Continued Introduction in Acts 8**

**Acts 8:1** Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And on that day a great persecution began against the **church** in Jerusalem,

and they were all **scattered** throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,

except the apostles.

 2 *Some* devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

 3 But Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house,

 and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

 4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

For the first-time readers of the New Testament, we need to note that Saul was a Pharisee who later has his named changed by the Lord to Paul (Acts 9). Paul eventually wrote thirteen letters in Greek that make up the New Testament. Changing people’s name often happened in the Biblical times. We see name changes starting with Abram to Abraham (Genesis 17:3-5) when God made a covenant with him. Jesus changes Simon’s name to Peter (Matthew 16:16) when Simon correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah. In Genesis 32:28, Jacob’s name was changed to Israel because he struggled with God. Here is a link to a list of name changes in the Bible. . . https://godwords.org/name-changes-in-the-bible/

Luke’s introduction of Saul is revealing in how God works dramatically in people’s hearts to transform them into the person He has planned. When we surrendered to the Lord, He works His saving grace into all of us. As a sign of God’s grace at work in Saul, his name was changed to Paul after he met the resurrected Jesus Christ on the road to Damacus (Acts 9). Before Saul’s epiphany, Luke reports that Saul was at the murder scene of Stephen and highlighted the fact that Saul was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. This description of Saul illustrates his heart was not right with God or his neighbor (Stephen) a fellow Jew.

In Acts 8:3, Luke reports that Saul was ravaging Christians from house to house dragging men and women off to prison. For Saul to pursue believers in Jesus with this aggressive demeanor. . . it shows his heart was angry towards Jesus and those who followed Him. Paul was persecuting his own countrymen. . . fellow Jews. This is in grave contrast to the Tora. . .of which Jesus taught in the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5:20-22). Jesus taught the Tora and said that He did not come to change the Law but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17). Jesus fulfilled the Law by being the sinless-perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. The Law was never designed to provide a sinless sacrifice. Therefore, the Law could not take away the penalty for sin (Hebrews (10). Jesus’ ministry included correcting the Jewish understanding of the Law as we read in Matthew 5.

Obviously, Saul, the most learned Pharisee who studied under Gamaliel, held false beliefs and attitudes about the Law. Paul witnessed. . . in **Acts 22:3-5**

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

 4 "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,

 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

In Matthew 5, Jesus makes six corrections in Jewish misunderstanding and application of the Law. Jesus starts each clarification with, "You have heard that the ancients were told, . . . "But I say to you” (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44).

**Matthew 5:20-22**

20 "For I say to you

that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees,

you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. **(Saul was a Pharisee)**

 21 "You have heard that the ancients were told,

'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER '

and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

 22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court;

and whoever says to his brother,

'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court;

 and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.

**Matthew 5:43-45** 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven;

**Luke 10:27** And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." (Deut. 10:12, Lev. 19:18)

**The seventh** teaching in Matthew 5 is a summation of a Believer’s ability to follow God’s commands. . . "Therefore, you are to be **perfect**, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**. (Matthew 5:48)

**Matthew 5:48** ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος **τέλειός** ἐστιν. (NA28NT)

**Strong’s # 5046 τέλειος** *teleios*

**Meaning:** having reached its end, i.e. *complete,* by ext. *perfect* **Origin:** from *5056*

**Usage:** complete(2), mature(4), more perfect(1), perfect(12).

**Notes:** 1 Lit *you shall be* a Lev 19:2; Deu 18:13; 2Co 7:1; Phi 3:12-15

**Greek Dictionary - Friberg,** *Analytical Greek Lexicon*

 **τέλειος**, **εία**, **ον** complete, perfect;

(1) with its chief component as totality, as opposed to partial or limited;

(a) of things *in full measure, undivided, complete, entire* (RO 12.2);

 substantivally τὸ τέλειον *the finish, completeness* (1C 13.10);

 I know, this verse can be easily misunderstood because no human being can be perfect. I see that this verse points to the perfection of Christ and through our faith we access His perfection. Hebrews 9:28 declares. . . so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to* sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

 We need to look at the meaning of the Greek word **τέλειος** with its 1st application to *completeness*. Jesus is prophesied to be the *Prince of Peace* in Isaiah 53:6. **Peace** in Hebrew is ***Shalom.***

**Stong’s 07965** שָׁלוֹם *shalom* )1022d( **Meaning:** *completeness, soundness, welfare, peace*

The name ***Jerusalem*** is a combination of two words (Jeru = foundation + Shalem = of peace). ***Jerusalem*** is the city that is the **foundation of Peace** where the ***Prince of Peace* (Jesus Christ)**paid the price for the sins of the world bringing an end to the enmity and strife.

**Colossians 1:19-20**

19 For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself,

having made peace through the blood of His cross;

through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Therefore, obviously God knows that we will not live a sinless life. The Bible clearly states that all people will/have sinned (Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:10, Hebrews 4:15, 9:20). While we are in our temporal life, we will always sin to some degree and when we do Jesus is faithful to forgive a repentant person.

**1 John 1:8** If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Jesus is the only sinless man who was acceptable to pay the price for our sin (2 Corinthians 5:18, Hebrews 2:17).

**Hebrew 10:11-17**

11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

 **14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.**

 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," *He then says*,

 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."

We see that the goal of our faith is to be complete, and mature through Christ. Take note. . . this is Saul’s “perfect” problem. Saul separated his zeal for his personal drive to live and enforce the letter of the Law from the love, grace, justice and mercy of God and his neighbor Stephen. Saul had become blinded. This is exactly what Jesus told the religious leaders.

**Matthew 23:23** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (Matt. 23:23 NAU)

Saul practiced the Law that was not from the heart. . .only from the letter of the Law. And even in Saul’s zeal to enforce the letter of the Law, Saul failed to keep the Law as detailed in Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12 and Leviticus 19:15-18. I see this created a bitterness in Saul much like Cain developed who murdered his brother Abel. Saul, like Cain, was in a heartless functionary relationship with God. Abel brought his “firstling” (Genesis 4:4) to God’s altar whereas Cain came to God’s altar in the course of time (Genesis 4:3). In other words, whenever Cain got around to it. Cain’s attitude built up resentment and hatred toward Abel which is exactly what happened within Saul against Stephen. This is a lesson for all of us. We Believers, due to our surrendered hearts to God must avail ourselves to God’s Holy Spirit to guard our hearts against ill feelings toward others.

Going back to the call to be perfect in Matthew 5:48, for many, this would be a non-starter to becoming a Christian. In reality, we are all flawed and have degraded ourselves due to our own personal free-will choices opposing God’s plan and commands for our lives. So, how can we make ourselves approved to God? Saul thought he was doing what God wanted him to do. . . enforcing the Law to the letter. However, we cannot obtain salvation through works (Ephesians 2:8). So, how does a person become saved, justified, approved to God? Obviously, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Enoch, and Abraham, all lived before the Law was given to Moses in about 1450 B.C. The New Testament book of Hebrews testifies to us on this eternal question. Hebrews 11:1-4, clearly witnesses that Abel was approved by God. . . because of his faith he obtained a testimony that he was righteous before God. In addition, many Old Testament people are listed in Hebrews 11, as having been approved by God by their faith.

Jesus reiterated God’s Tora Law given to Moses and commanded all of us to love God and our neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12; Leviticus 19:15-18). The Tora is the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. God instructed Moses to write down these five books during the time of the Exodus from Egypt but before the Hebrews entered the Promise Land. Leviticus 19:15-18 specifically taught that a Hebrew was not to take vengeance or hold a grudge against a fellow Hebrew. Saul, the Pharisee, and the High Priest who was overseeing Stephen’s trial did not follow their own law. In the same respect, Jesus was not afforded the legal application of the Tora law. Here is a list of eight legal violations the Jewish religious leader committed upon Jesus and violated some (5-8) upon Stephen.

 **Eight illegalities with the Sanhedrin's trial of Jesus**

(1) During a trial, members of the Sanhedrin were allowed to speak in defense of the accused but not against him, yet the high priest spoke against Jesus: "He has spoken blasphemy!"

(2) for the verdict to be valid, the trial had to be held at the Hall of the Hewn Stone inside the temple precinct, but Jesus' trial was held at the high priest's house (see Annas and Caiaphas);

(3) the trial could not be held at night, yet Jesus' trial was held at night;

**Note:** Luke writes in verses 22:66-71 that as soon as day break, they led Jesus "into their council," meaning their usual place in the temple precinct "as soon as it was day" to rubberstamp their decision from their illegal trial the night before.

(4) the trial could not be held during a great feast, yet Jesus' trial was at Passover feast;

(5) all witnesses had to be examined separately, yet when witness testimonies against Jesus didn’t match, they brought forward together "two" false witnesses;

(6) each member of the Sanhedrin had to give their verdict separately, yet they sentenced Jesus to death together;

(7) the youngest member of the Sanhedrin had to render his verdict first so as not to be influenced by the older, more powerful members, yet at Jesus' trial the high priest rendered his verdict first;

(8) if the sentence was death, a night had to elapse after the day of the verdict before the death sentence was carried out, yet Jesus was nailed to the cross within a few hours.

https://www.bibleversestudy.com/johngospel/john18-jesus-trial.htm

 **These eight violations alone, contradicted the Tora/Law that God gave of Moses.**

**Deuteronomy 6:5** "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

**Deuteronomy 10:12** "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and **love** Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

Moses’ command was transferred to Joshua before the Hebrews entered the Promise Land. God also instructed Joshua to write the same commands.

**Joshua 22:5** "Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

 Referring back to the Tora and the book of Leviticus, we read God’s commands He directed Moses to write.

**Leviticus** **19:15-18**

15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment;

you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great,

but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.

 16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people,

 and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD.

 17 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart;

you may surely reprove your neighbor,

 but shall not incur sin because of him.

 18 'You shall not take vengeance,

nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people,

but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

I have historically taught that God’s commandment to love Him is a prerequisite to loving your neighbor the way God desires. The foundation of loving God means putting His will in front of ours. God directs Moses to write in the book of Deuteronomy about 1400 years before Jesus’ ministry.

In future sermons, we will review Saul’s conversion from a legalist prosecuting Pharisee to being a servant of the resurrected Lord in Acts 9. But. . . are their Scriptures where Saul/Paul’s admitted his ungodly heart condition? Did Paul ever acknowledge his wrong-heartedness again Jesus and His followers? Here is a list of several Scripture citations recorded by Luke and Paul himself detailing Paul’s acknowledgement and confession. Remember, Luke wrote Acts, and Paul penned thirteen New Testament letters (books) of which include Galatians, Philippians and 1 Timothy.

**Galatians 1:13-14** 13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

**Act 22:3** "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

**Act 22:19** "And I said, Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.

**Act 22:20** And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.

**Act 24:14** "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;

**Act 26:9** "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

**Act 26:10** "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death, I cast my vote against them.

**Philippians 3:6** as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

**1 Timothy 1:13** even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;

 In closing, not to be have a misunderstanding. . . the love, grace, forgiveness and reconciliation from God is offered to all who surrender to Him (Romans 10:13). Substantiating a person’s heart surrender to God, they become empowered with His Holy Spirit to live in pursuit of following the commands of Jesus Christ which include His moral commands (Matthew 19:17; John 14:2, 15:10; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 1 John 2:3,4, 2:22,24, 5:2; Revelation 12:17, 14:12.

 **AMEN**