

Paul on the Road to Damascus

by Art Katz

The sermon explores the revelation of God's Gospel to Paul on the road to Damascus and its significance for apostolic ministry and the future of Israel.

Scripture: Genesis 1:3, Psalm 36:9, Zechariah 12:10, Zechariah 14:6, Acts 9:3, 1 Corinthians 15:8, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Galatians 3:23-25, 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:7

Topics: "Divine Revelation", "Transformation"

Description

Art Katz explores the transformative experience of Paul on the road to Damascus, emphasizing the divine revelation of Christ that changed Paul's life and mission. He highlights that this moment was not just a personal encounter but a foundational event for the entire apostolic faith, illustrating how God's light dispels darkness and reveals truth. Katz draws parallels between Paul's experience and the future revelation of Christ to Israel, suggesting that just as Paul was transformed, so too will Israel recognize their Messiah. The sermon underscores the necessity of acknowledging one's sin and the profound conversion that comes from encountering God's grace. Ultimately, Katz calls for believers to reflect on their own encounters with Christ and the implications for their lives and witness.

Transcript

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The Fountainhead of Paul's Gospel and the Genius of Apostolic

As an introduction to this article, I want to quote from several sources--firstly from: Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity, Markus Bockmuehl, Eerdmans, 1990, pp.134-137.

"Paul clearly dates the reception of the Gospel from the time when God "revealed His Son to me...last of all, He appeared also to me..." (See 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

"God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."(2 Corinthians 4:6).

"This apostolic revelation is constitutive, authoritative, and unrepeatable. Not even an angelic revelation from heaven can alter it...The redemptive revelation of God's righteousness in Christ and the apostolic revelation of the Gospel to Paul make up [his essential theology] as "irreplaceable, unalterable and basic to all Pauline Christianity."

"In the light of Galatians 3:23, 25, God's "sending His son becomes a revelatory event of foundational significance...God's work in Christ is the wellspring of Paul's understanding of revelation...in the saving death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ."

This explains "Paul's view of the eclipse of the Law by faith, [Christ being] both the author and enabler of that faith."

And from: Church Dogmatics 3.1, Karl Barth, pp.120, 121.

"We remember too that in the Prologue to John's gospel...the concept of light forms the signum of divine revelation...for the light created by God is implicitly what the apostolic office is explicitly-the sign and witness of God Himself at the heart of the cosmos. When He creates light, God erects this sign and ordains this witness...The call of Christians is "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9)."

Psalms 36:9 says "in Thy light we see light."

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven..." (Acts 9:3); "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me (Acts 26:13). The light that fell upon Paul, brighter than the noonday sun, was the light of Creation-a magnitude comparable to the creation of the first day after the chaos of darkness (Genesis 1:3), so now also a 'first day' of apostolic beginnings for all subsequent history and redemption! In this light Saul sees anew the Son of God, the Triune Godhead, and the Cross--all that becomes foundational and constitutive of all his seeing and apostolic proclamation. The light separates from the darkness so the necessary consequence for Saul is to be made blind to all previous seeing once construed as 'light.' We await the Day for Israel's comparable seeing in Isaiah 60--"for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

Paul himself stands as a paradigm for the whole nation of Israel. What he experienced in himself is a prototype, or pattern, that is to follow for Israel itself. "And last of all He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8). As Paul was transformed in the looking upon Jesus on the road to Damascus, so Israel nationally shall also "look upon Him whom we have pierced." In the same manner as this was "light for Saul," Israel will require a "spirit of grace and supplication." The result and response will be like that of Isaiah, "Woe is me, I am undone." And, "They shall mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem...and the land shall mourn every family apart...and their wives apart." (Zechariah 12:10-12)

David Baron writes:

"...not in a vision or a dream, but face to face, and no longer any veil to hide His glory, shall Israel in that day "look upon Him" who once came in humiliation to suffer and die, but who shall be manifested now in the glory of His Father and with the holy angels." (Commentary on Zechariah, p.446).

Just as Saul saw himself as a persecutor in the moment of his revelation, so Israel too shall see themselves as their Savior's murderer, acknowledging that:

"Both directly, by delivering Him into the hands of the Gentiles, and indirectly, on account of their sins, it was they who pierced Him...No wonder that 'in that day,' when the spirit of grace and supplication is poured upon them, and their eyes are open to behold Him, and to recognize the fearful national crime which they committed, to their own sorrow and hurt, they shall mourn over Him with "the mourning of an only one" and shall be in bitterness for Him as He is in bitterness "who mourns for his firstborn." (Baron).

"This depicts a sorrow greater than any previous sorrow...even husbands apart from their wives...because each individual man or woman will be overwhelmed with his or her own individual share in the guilt of having slain their Messiah...Let us all then look to Him for salvation, and have our gaze fixed upon Him for our sanctification, and so have no occasion to dread that awful day when "He cometh in the clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." (Revelation 1:7). (Baron).

Final Comments:

In order to obtain the deepest conversion for unregenerate men, God makes Himself their victim, submitting Himself to the hands of wicked men. He becomes the object of their unjustified hatred and loathing to the point of murder--the very thing that is calculated to reveal the truth of their condition. God's very persecutors now have the deepest grounds for the contemplation of their sin as a basis for remorse and mourning unto the profoundest conversion and priestly brokenness. Nothing less could have obtained their return to God.

This ultimate self-denial is love. God became the voluntary 'pin-cushion' for the evil barbs of men that belies their presumed righteousness and by which they might have been eternally deceived. In like measure, every true apostle of the faith must allow himself to be an object for mistrust and derision--as an only and ultimate means for the revelation of the truth of the condition of men. The apostle must bear the reproach until the Day of Judgment without seeking earlier vindication before the time.

Jesus demonstrated the Father in bearing unto death the causeless slander and hatred. In this manner, the righteousness of God is revealed from heaven for the salvation of men, but now through the chief Apostle. This is the very heart of apostleship. Its candidates are few: "Who shall go for us?" Whom shall we send?"

In the revealing of the Lord as Israel's deliverer on that apocalyptic day, darkness and light are interpenetrated by His appearing: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark" (Zechariah 14:6). Baron comments:

"It shall not be day, for the natural sources of light will be withdrawn; but it cannot be like the darkness of night, for there will be [the] resplendent light of the glory of the Lord, and the myriad of His holy angels, and of the glorified saints reflected on the earth."

"And it shall come to pass that at evening time when, in the order of nature, everything should sink into darkness--"there shall be light"...Out of the contest between light and darkness on that eventful day, light shall emerge victorious--the light of salvation breaking its way through the night of judgment...and out of their apparent chaos, beauty and order...when the glorious sun of Righteousness shall at last rise upon

them with healing in his wings, there shall be light--the light of joy of forgiveness and eternal reconciliation; the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ which shall shine upon them...then like so many Pauls, monuments of sovereign grace, they shall go forth to the dark places of the earth, rich in experience and in the knowledge of God, and from them shall flow rivers of living waters" (Commentary on Zechariah, p.501 - emphases and italics mine).

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