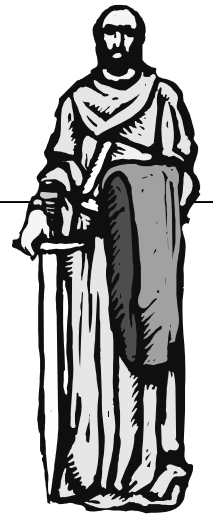


The Year of St. Paul



He was a Jew and a Roman. He was a Pharisee yet was targeted by this very group as a heretic. He preached strict observance of temple worship along with the Sadducees while joining with the Pharisees concerning Mosaic Law, belief in spirits, and a resurrection. We have to admit that in many ways St. Paul was an enigma.

He fought against the need for circumcision yet had Timothy circumcised. He was strong, determined, and in many situations uncompromising. Yet, part of his message and instruction was that of salvation for all, shown through the compassion of God, and then of all believers.

St. Paul seems at times to be a contradiction in terms, bound by skin in his humanness, and by Spirit in his becoming one with the Lord in all things.

If nothing else, St Paul is the epitome of the struggle each of us faces every day, trying to live in this world with our eyes, heart and mind set on the world that will never end — the prize at the end of the race — the crown won by Jesus Christ.

He worked even as he traveled, sustaining himself with his trade abilities. Yet he could trust — without doubt — when the money sack was empty. In one breath he could call upon the healing of Jesus for a person and, in the same instance, call down fire upon another.

He was extremely independent, relying on few, while also the best of collaborators — as shown in the many letters that exhibit the hand of another person even as St. Paul talks.

Chapter 13 (vs. 4ff) of his first letter to the Church in Corinth, describes vividly what love is meant to be all about. “Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous...pompous...inflated...or seek its own interests...” This is the same Paul who also rejected those who only talked and did not enter into the ministry of the Church, and who is known well for his run-ins with Peter, Mark, and Silas just to name a few.

ACCUSATIONS, ANOTHER JOURNEY AND DEATH IN ROME

So we come to Paul's final journey. He had planned to visit Rome and move on to Spain. His journey did not materialize as planned, and Spain was not to be seen. He was not the tour guide of this trip.

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem could not bring honest charges against Paul, leaving them with only trumped up accusations, as occurred with Jesus. The hunter became the hunted. The long and short of this final segment of St. Paul's life was that, in front of Roman proconsuls and territorial governors, Paul was proven innocent even as the Jewish leaders sought to kill him. Since

St. Paul was a Roman citizen he had the right to call for a hearing before Caesar, which he did as a last resort, again confounding the Jewish leaders.

It's important for us not to get caught up in all the names, like a “Who's Who” contest. Remain focused on the activities of this time. St. Paul's witness used in his defense actually won over many. His imprisonment and ultimate journey to Rome led to further converts. In all of this, St. Paul would first claim citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

Through it all, St. Paul never waived in his teaching — Jesus is the fulfillment of what was given through the ancient Fathers of Faith and Mosaic Law. The customs, needed in time and space, need to be examined since the life (teaching) of Jesus overcomes time and space. All things are found in fullness in Jesus Christ — nothing else.

St. Paul, this enigmatic individual, when you look at the fullness of his life, mission, and teaching, became the perfect melding of the extremes. But it wasn't his doing. We're given the full story of what St. Paul would become when the Lord took control of him (see chpt. 9 of Acts). It didn't change in ministry after that crash off a horse and his blindness. It lasted to the very end.

GOD FIRST

Year Three, Part 5

August 31, 2008

POINTS TO PONDER

1) Paul was the extreme optimist and always sought the positive over the negative. A positive attitude is required of a person if true faith and trust in the Lord, and allowance for the Lord to work within, is to be realized. *Paul was Positive* and encouraged

those who worked with him, and those who heard him, to remain positive in God's promise and God's presence.

2) We don't know when St. Paul actually died. Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, and who tells us much of what we know of St. Paul, did not feel it was of concern. Remember, Luke, is telling of salvation history through Jesus Christ and how the early Church came to grasp, profess and live this message. Paul was a messenger of that word and that way of life. The only death that matters is that of our Lord. St. Paul had reached the center of the known world — Rome — and that was sufficient to show the early Church — the Kingdom of God had now spread to include the entire empire.

3) Through the dialogue of King Agrippa and Festus, we know that St. Paul did not suffer imprisonment — or ultimately death — because of Roman law. Rather, he was suffering because of his faith in Jesus Christ.

4) The Holy Spirit is the trusted companion of St. Paul. In the latter stages of his third journey, it is the Spirit that is constantly reminding St. Paul that once returning to Jerusalem, persecution and imprisonment await him. During the cruise to Rome the Spirit guides St. Paul at all times.

NOTES

A ship that relies on the wind for its power to sail, is also vulnerable to that wind, exposed to the harshness of changing weather patterns. When the decision was made to sail to Rome, it was the wrong time of the year. Few ships ventured into the danger that brewed in the Mediterranean waters. Most would harbor through winter months. So it is not surprising that St. Paul's trek to Italy would be marked with near death experiences.

While wintering in Malta, we're told the Lord worked miracles and signs through St. Paul. When we notice how few comments are made concerning such signs in the letters of St. Paul, we are left with a couple of things to ponder.

1) This displays St. Paul's growing awareness of the life of the Spirit active in believers. We are not to rest where we are, figuring God's favors are limited.

2) Paul's mission throughout much of his life

was the preaching of Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior. He comments (as we'll see in our studies) that he was sent to preach, nothing more. Therefore, everything else was considered icing on the cake.

3) The agenda for St. Paul was changed by the harsh weather. Malta was not to have been a port-of-call. We're reminded that God's working does not fit into man's plans, and God is going to bring about good even under extreme circumstances. Paul has been preaching this for years.

St. Paul's missionary work, to the time of his death, was roughly 16 years, ending in approximately 62 AD.

PERSONAL ACCOUNTING

1. How much faith do I have in the Spirit of God directing my life? How do I have to grow?
2. What is my attitude to life? To the practice of my faith? To my relationship with God? To my relationship with others? Is it positive — life-giving, or is it filled with negativity that eliminates any sense of hope?
3. Do I allow my worldly side meld and blend with the Divine Spirit within? Or do I purposefully keep them separated?
4. As Acts ends, St. Paul has "put it all on the table for the Jews to accept or reject. They leave St. Paul divided. We're left with the impression that Gentiles will receive the Word and point to "The Way." Examining ourselves, we need to see if we indeed accept or reject ALL of the message. Paul would ask, "What are your options?" And he'd say that there is only one, "To die so as to live."