

Praise God for the Gospel

ς received by revelation (vv.11,12)

ς indestructible (vv.13-17)

ς miraculously true (vv.18-24)

In the Name of Jesus, who helps the helpless, dear fellow redeemed:

Have you ever asked yourself if it's worth to be a Christian? For most of us raised in the Christian faith, it's probably never been an issue. Christian is what you were born. Christian is how you live. But how would you feel if you helped one of the Lord's prophets as the widow of Zarephath helped Elijah, then your son died? Maybe then her question would well up from your own grief: "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" Or what about the Jewish woman at Nain who lost her husband, then her only son? On top of the grief was the destitution of a widow with no safety net of government welfare to feed her. What about Saul of Tarsus? He definitely thought Christianity was the wrong way to go since Saul believed Jesus got what he deserved on the cross as an imposter to the Jewish religion. These are just three examples from today's Scripture lessons. Two widows and one Jewish rabbi would feel little reason to **Praise God for the Gospel**.

ς received by revelation (vv.11,12)

The Gospel Paul preached did not come to him in private conversations (παρέλαβον) nor in the *formal training* (ἐδιδάχθην) he received from Gamaliel or any other Jewish teacher. Direct revelation (ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) from Christ means the absolute authority of God's own Son. Earlier (1:6-9) Paul had vehemently discounted any "*other gospel*" that could even come by way of "*an angel from heaven*." Paul could not see the rise of Islam with Mohammed's claim of an angel bringing the *Quran*. But the Holy Spirit certainly anticipated the work-righteousness of all the world's religions which like Mormonism as well would claim angelic origins. Paul will set the fact straight here. And God's gift of faith will enable the Galatian Christians to know by experience the joy of guilt-free living.

ς indestructible (vv.13-17)

Is Christianity worth it? Can we **Praise God for the Gospel**? In his earlier life, Saul of Tarsus was sure the answer was an absolute: "No!" He regarded Jesus of Nazareth as an imposter and by his own admission persecuted the "followers of the Way," the Church of Jesus Christ.

To understand how hard Saul tried to destroy the church it helps to look at a map. Saul was born in Tarsus on the northeastern coast of the Mediterranean in the Roman province of Cilicia. It must have been in his early teen years that Saul was sent by his Jewish family to study under the famous Jewish rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem. There he heard how Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified, something Saul was sure Jesus deserved. But when Jesus' followers claimed he rose from the dead and proclaimed him as the Christ of God, Saul set out to destroy this new sect as he saw it. Later he would confess: "***I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison***" (Acts 22:4 NIV84) He got letters from the Jewish Sanhedrin to arrest Christians in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains to be punished.

On the road to Damascus Saul met his match. A bright light shone from heaven, and Saul fell to the ground. What he heard shook him to the core: "***Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?***" "***Who are you, Lord?***" "***I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.***" Saul's companions saw the light

but they did not understand the voice. ***“What shall I do, Lord?” “Get up,” the Lord said, “and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.”*** (Acts 22:7–10 NIV84)

Three days he was blind, praying in anguish. Then the Lord sent a devout believer named Ananias. I’m so glad I did not receive this assignment. Go and talk to Saul? Lord, don’t you know he came here to arrest Christians? ***“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”*** (Acts 9:15f NIV 84) Like so many powerful men before and since, Saul failed to destroy the Good News of God’s Son come to save us from our sins. Christ-crucified is Christ-risen – **Indestructible**.

So is Christianity worth it? Dr. Martin Luther wrote: “When a person accepts the Word of God, the Gospel, let him think nothing else than that he in that hour comes into peril...to all his goods, his house, home, farms, and meadows, his wife, children, father, and mother, also his own life. When danger and misfortune then strike him, it will be so much easier for him, since he thinks: I knew very well before that it would happen thus.”¹ *And take they our life – goods, fame, child and wife – let these all be gone! They yet have nothing won. The kingdom ours remaineth.*

Saul learned from God’s Law and discovered by personal experience that there are consequences for doing evil. But he had been the perpetrator of what he later experienced as a Christian: There is also persecution for doing right. Jesus said, ***“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”*** (John 15:20 NIV84) So how can anyone **Praise God for the Gospel?**

ζ **miraculously true (vv.18-24)**

After his baptism in Damascus Saul tried to tell his fellow Jews that Jesus is the Christ. God kept His promises to their ancient people and sent His own Son to be the Savior of the world. But then his fellow Jews turned on him in order to kill him. His friends let him down from a window in the wall so that he could escape to Arabia. There he received revelations of heaven which the human tongue cannot describe. (2 Corinthians 12:1-4) He returned to Damascus for three years, then went up to Jerusalem to meet Peter. He still was not consulting to find out about the Gospel, because Jesus had revealed it to Paul personally. In fact, Paul’s life became a glorious testament to the Gospel’s miraculous power.

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.” And they praised God because of me.

Saul the persecutor transformed into Paul the great missionary to the Gentiles is proof that the Gospel is **miraculously true**. *God’s Word can change the most vile sinners into the Lord’s most valuable servants.* Here is room for broken hearts and healing for broken lives. Here is medicine for guilty souls that need the essential oil of God’s Holy Spirit to sooth their troubled conscience. *God’s glory is to love the worst of sinners...even me!* I remember often and rejoice to live in my own confirmation verse: ***“I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”*** (Romans 1:16) This Good News has power to not only change your life but save your soul from hell for eternity in heaven. This Good News brings God’s own peace because it is **miraculously true**.

Two widows and a rabbi – what would they say in the end? The Lord’s prophet Elijah was empowered to raise the widow’s son at Zarephath. Jesus Himself raised the only son of the widow at Nain. And what the Christians said to Saul by not buckling under his persecution is what Saul-turned-Paul said for the rest of his life as he was persecuted: *God’s love is worth more than life itself.*

Praise God for the Gospel !!! Let your life be a glorious *Amen!*

¹ Kretzmann, Paul E. *Popular Commentary*, NT I, p. 59, quoting Luther (3, 1079).
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