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The Straight Street

By DR. PAUL AUSLEY
Minister First Presbyterian Church

TEXT: "And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to a street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying...'"

It was about nineteen hundred years ago that an emotionally confused man sat in a small house on Straight Street, in the City of Damascus, wondering where to turn next. And who wouldn't be confused? The events which composed the past week of his life had been of such caliber that a change was taking place, the consequences of which were so great that the full impact could hardly be realized at his time. Let us look back over that past week, and see if we can catch some of the feeling of the situation.

Paul, acting as leader of the persecution, watched the jeering and mania stricken gang that was stoning a leader among the Christians, a man named Stephen. Paul looked on the blood spattered form of the dying Stephen and heard him offer up a simple prayer of forgiveness for those who cast the stones: "Lord do not hold this sin against them." Certainly this scene would impress even the coldest of hearts.

This same week Paul had gone to his High Priest in Jerusalem and asked for permission to go to Damascus to bind up Christians who were gaining a foothold in that city and bring them back to Jerusalem to be persecuted. The trip was without incident until the caravan was approaching Damascus. It was there that a great light shown around the group. Paul fell to the ground, and in his prostrate position he heard the voice of God condemning him for persecuting Christians.

Arising blind from the incident, he was led to the house on Straight Street where he now sat in darkness, perhaps with his head in his hands, thinking about past persecutions in which he had been involved.

The door of the house where Paul was opened and a stranger named Ananias entered. With a good deal of hesitancy Ananias examined the blind figure seated

before him. He had heard how Paul had led many of the persecutions against the movement of Christianity. Certainly such an enemy was not to be immediately trusted without some deep and sincere thought.

But Ananias had been drawn to this meeting place by a power greater than himself. After serious meditation, he placed his hands on the blind figure and said: "Paul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Then, something like scales fell from the eyes of Paul, and he regained his sight. In a dramatic moment, Paul arose, was baptized, ate some food, and was strengthened.

It was on that day that the house on Straight Street became a house of dedication. It was here that a man, receiving his sight, also received the vision of the Christian way of life and dedicated himself to this way.

"How did he dedicate himself?" you ask. We read that immediately he went into the crowded places of the city and began proclaiming that Jesus was the Son of God. His early career was dampened by those who would doubt his word saying: "Is this not the man who made havoc on the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem?" Despite all this, he continued to teach those who would listen to him about his newly dedicated life.

Being criticized and misunderstood by the crowds, the Jews also became so incensed with his complete dedication that they schemed to kill him. Their plans, however, were foiled by some of the disciples who lowered Paul over the wall of the city of Damascus in a basket.

His narrow escape led him to Jerusalem and to a meeting with the disciples, whom he found very skeptical concerning his complete dedication. From here, Paul began his teaching career which led him to pen at least ten lengthy letters to his fellow men in distant countries, challenging them to even greater Christian lives. His dedication to

teaching was so complete that he felt himself compelled to write at least four of his letters while he was in prison.

But not only did Paul dedicate himself to the life of a teacher during his stay in the house on Straight Street, but he also dedicated his life to Christian service.

Paul's dedication to the principles of Jesus of Nazareth had been complete, and nothing would suffice but that he give his all to Christian service. His dedication led him through most of the known parts of the world for the purpose of giving his life to the cause he thought greatest, and, as nearly as can be determined, his dedication probably led him to Rome and to his death.

Much has been said in recent years about Christian action, but few men have based their lives on the foundation of Christian action as strongly as did Paul. His Christian action was of a human quality that has been exceeded by no man, save Jesus himself.

To the church at Corinth, surrounded by corruption, greed, hate, and bickering, he sent a challenge of love that will live through the ages of man. To the idol worshippers of Greece, he revealed an unknown God that could do far more than all the wood and stone that man could manifest. Those who would break, beat, and stone his physical body, he challenged him with the gift of Christian Love. To low living he gave high ideals. He watered arid minds with spiritual treasure.

Yes, the house on Straight Street was a house of dedication for it was here that a man truly dedicated himself to Christian teaching, service, and action.

Every church in the world today is a veritable house on Straight Street, and can be as great as that one-time house in Damascus, if the people who compose these churches will only give them the opportunity to become such.

Certainly, if there was ever a challenge to confront the Church in any age, it is now. We have stumbled and fallen while we were short of our goal.

There is a terrific need for Christian teachers. And even though the need for Christian teachers is great, the need for sincerely dedicated Christian teachers is greater. Our world

has been content to say one thing and do another. But it is doubtful if the idea of telling other people what to do, and what should be done, is a form of teaching. Teaching is not telling, and should never be considered as such. Teaching is valueless unless it has the experience of a dedicated life behind it. Instead of blaming our failure on the fact that others are unwilling to listen, it might be well to look deeply into our situation and see if the teaching of the Christian faith is being done by lives that are sincerely dedicated to the principles they are requesting others to follow.

And then, the Christian must learn that service is an important part of the teaching of the Church. Without the element of service, religion dies. Without the element of service, the individual life is dead.

Christian action is meaningless unless this action is constructive action. As someone once said: "The most ignorant mule can kick down a barn but it takes a skilled carpenter to build one."

But to so many people, the opposite is true. Christian action has meant for some a constant fight against all things they thought were wrong, and nothing more. Purely negative.

When Paul saw the corruption and strife in Corinth, what did he do? His ability in Christian action led him to tell them of Christian love. When he saw idol worshippers in Greece, did he burn their idols? No! To do so would have incensed them to riot against him. Instead, he introduced a new God to their religion which they learned to know and love.

So it is that Christian action is not hate, but guidance. It is not fighting, but leading. It is doing whatever good can be done.

Kings Mountain Herald

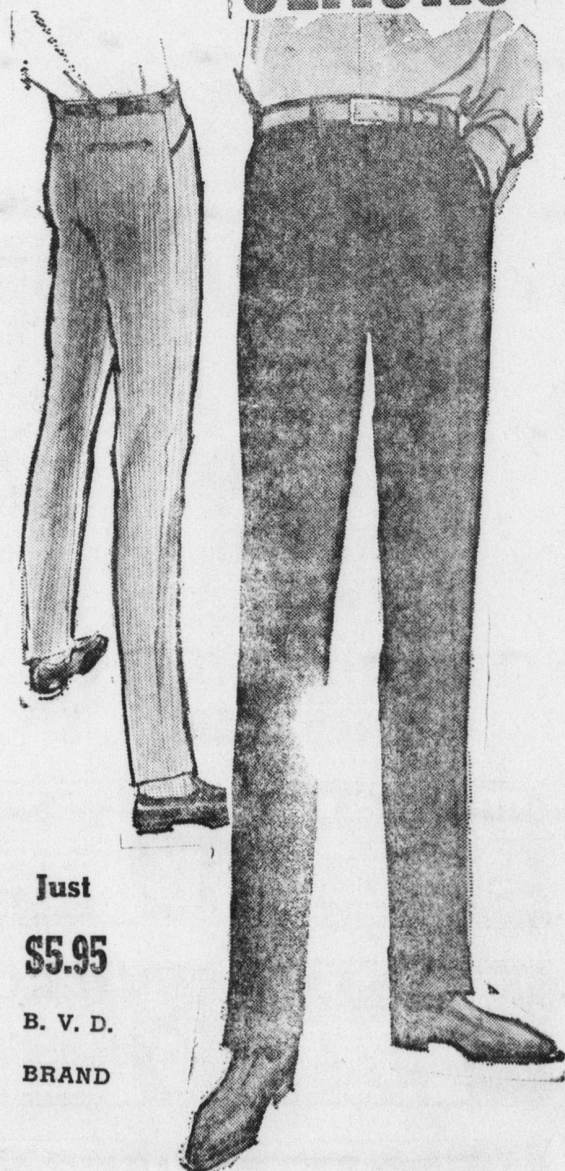
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