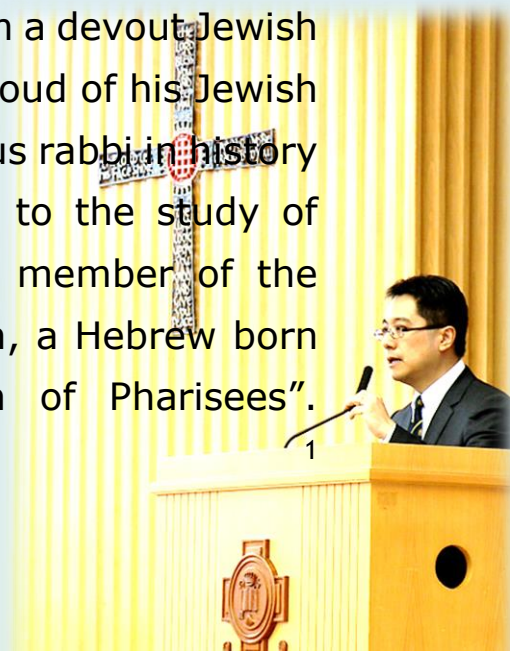


The Church celebrates the conversion of Saint Paul on January 25 every year and you have just heard the story read to you by our prefect. The Apostle Luke, a close companion of Paul in many of his missionary journeys, gave us an account of the incident in Acts of the Apostles and Paul also mentioned it in many of his letters to the early churches. What happened on the road to Damascus must have been a very important experience to Paul.

Saint Paul, though not one of the Twelve Apostles, is generally considered to be one of the most important figures in the early development of Christianity. If you go to St. Peter's Square at the Vatican City, you will notice many different statues. Saint Paul is the one carrying a sword, which perhaps refers to the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. And the one carrying a key of course is St. Peter because he was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

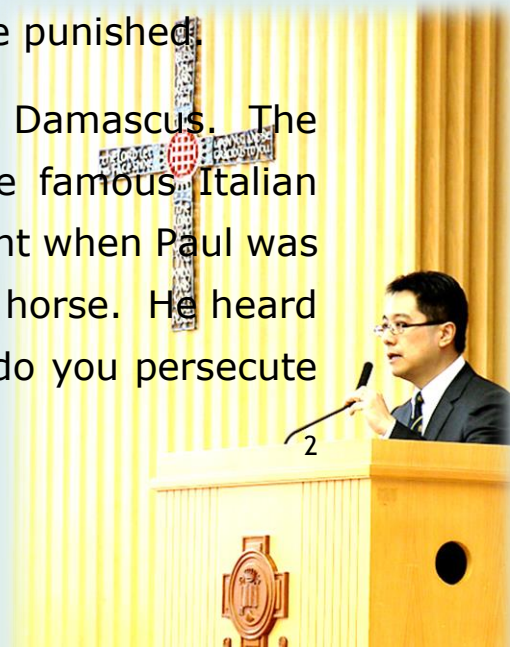
Unlike Peter, James and John who were fishermen when Jesus found them, Paul was much more educated and he had a higher social status. Paul came from a devout Jewish family in the city of Tarsus and he was proud of his Jewish tradition. He studied with the most famous rabbi in history and he devoted his life from childhood to the study of religion. Paul described himself as "a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews" and "a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees".



Pharisees as you know, are famed for their strict observation of the law of God, down to the minute detail. That is why Paul said that in terms of righteousness under the law, he was impeccable, flawless. In addition, he was also a Roman citizen by birth which carried a lot of clout because back then people were willing to pay a lot of money to become a Roman citizen for its superior status as well as for protection.

However, Paul appears at the beginning of Acts as one who was dedicated to the persecution of the early Christians. As a very traditional Pharisee and a devout Jew, Paul could not imagine that their long awaited Messiah, their Saviour could be the one put to death by crucifixion on the cross. To Paul, it was a scandal to have a crucified Christ. It was with this conviction in his own Jewish religion that he took it upon himself to stamp out the early Christian movement. He had to destroy what he took to be a heresy to Judaism. He was there when Stephen was stoned to death. In fact, the Bible recorded that Paul consented to his killing. He even undertook a mission to Damascus to bring those early Christians as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

You know what happened on the road to Damascus. The incident was beautifully captured by the famous Italian painter Caravaggio. It depicts the moment when Paul was overcome by a bright light and fell off his horse. He heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute



me?’ Paul learnt that it was Jesus talking to him and God wanted him to bring the gospel to the gentiles.

Paul was a completely changed man after that incident. We see in the rest of Acts that he had three long and arduous missionary journeys taking the Gospel to places like Cyprus, Asia Minor (modern Turkey), mainland Greece and Rome. For that, Paul was arrested, flogged, stoned, persecuted, tried and imprisoned.

What can we learn from Paul’s conversion?

First, we see the changing power of God. Paul’s conversion is dramatic but by no means exceptional. Throughout history, we see God touching and transforming the hearts of many people. The Revd. John Newton, who wrote the famous hymn “Amazing Grace”, is a case in point. In his younger days he had made his money from the slave trade as the captain of a slave ship. Yet God had changed him and that is why he wrote in the song

*Amazing Grace, how sweet it sounds,*

*That saved a wretch like me*

*I once was lost but now am found*

*Was blind but now I see*

Second, I want you to know that God has a plan for everyone. He selected Paul to take the Gospel to the gentiles. In the same way, God has a plan for you and



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me. Not everyone can be as great as the Apostle Paul because not everyone can go through what he had gone through. Yet, if we trust in Him and seek His will, we will find out what God has prepared for us. For it is written in Proverbs 3:5-6:

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight*

Mr. Dennis Yuen

Acting Principal

19.01.2015

