

God's Method of Grace

Sunday, JULY 5th, 1992

Acts 22:1-14

Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

I have for you today, a most interesting message. I want you to listen very carefully. The title of this message is: "God's Method of Grace," or I might entitle this message: "How the Lord God Saves a Sinner." If you would like to follow along in your Bible, I certainly wish you would, because I am going to be dealing with the 22nd Chapter of the Book of Acts. I really am going to deal with about ten or twelve verses to see what is taught and what the apostle Paul is saying here.

In Acts 22, these religious fellows had tried to have the apostle Paul arrested by the authorities because he was preaching the gospel. Paul gives the account of his conversion. He was a very religious, legalistic and intellectual man before he met Christ and came to know God. He's telling these fellows how the Lord saved him. He's telling them about the method of God's grace. (See what I am saying)? It is God's method of

grace and how the Lord saves sinners. Here, Paul is telling these fellows how God saved him.

You say; “Why should I be interested in that?” I will tell you why. The reason is because Paul said that his conversion is a pattern. That’s right! His conversion is a pattern for those who should hereafter; believe. In other words, this is the way God saved this man, the way God delivered this man, the way God called this man to faith and to himself. This is the way God will save you and me and deliver us if He is pleased to save us and not pass us by.

I want you to look at it carefully. Here is verse one of Acts 22, Paul addresses them; “*Men, brethren, fathers; hear me. Hear the defense that I make to you.*” He was speaking in the Hebrew tongue. It says here; “*And when he spake to them in the Hebrew tongue*”, when they heard him speak in their own native language; they realized that he was one of them, “*They kept the more silence and then he went on.*”

Here is the first point: in verse three, Paul says this; “*I am verily a man which am a Jew,*” (I am a Jew). I was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia; *I was brought up in that city at the feet of Gamaliel.*” There were just two major teachers in those days and Gamaliel was one of them. They were teachers of religion. He said, “I’m a Jew and I was brought up at the feet of this religious teacher called Gamaliel. All of you are familiar with his writings and his works. He taught me religion.” “*He taught me according to the perfect manner of the law of our fathers. I was zealous toward God.*” Now watch this, as you are this day. He really said, “*As you all are this day.*”

Listen to me; this man (Saul of Tarsus) didn’t know the Lord; he did not know God. He didn’t know Christ, but he was a Jew. People today have some kind of religion. Everybody is something. They will say; “I’m a Catholic, I’m a Protestant; I’m a Jew; I’m a Baptist; I’m a Nazarene; I’m a Pentecostal; I’m Church of Christ; I’m a Presbyterian; I’m a Quaker and I am this, that, and the other.” Everybody is something and everybody has religion.

Everybody learned it from somebody. Paul said; “I’m a Jew and I learned it from Gamaliel; the best teacher of my day.” Your religion didn’t originate with you. You learned it from somebody. You were taught it from somebody. It was either at a church, or by a preacher, or by your parents. Someone taught you, maybe even your guardians. That is what Paul is saying here; “I am a Jew and I learned the traditions, the laws and the religion of my fathers at the feet of Gamaliel.” Most people are serious in their religion. He was serious. He said; “I’m zealous; I was a Jew; I learned my traditions and laws from the best teacher of the day and I was as zealous toward God as you are.”

I was working my way to heaven. I was trying to earn salvation. I was trying to make myself accepted of God by what I did and I was serious in doing so. In fact, the next verse says, "*And I persecuted this way unto death.*" This way? What is he talking about when he says, "this way?" I will tell you what he is talking about. He is talking about the way of Christ. He's talking about the way of Sovereign grace as opposed to human works.

That is what he is talking about. He says; "I was a zealous Jew working my way to heaven by keeping the customs and traditions of my Father and I hated the way of faith. I hated the way of grace. I hated the way of mercy as opposed to human merit. I hated the way of Christ as opposed to the way of ceremony. I hated the way that gave God all the glory and left me with no glory. I hated the way of election as opposed to decision. I hated the way of Christ's righteousness and substitutionary sacrifice and precious blood as opposed to my keeping the law." "*And I persecuted this way unto death.*"

I hear people today say; "I will worship God but I'm not going to worship a Sovereign God." I hear folks say, "Well, I'll take salvation, but not the way you preach it; I will take salvation but I won't take Sovereign mercy. I'll go to heaven, but not by Christ alone."

One lady wrote to Dear Abbey one time and she said that some preacher said that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life and the only way that man can go to God. The lady said, "If that is the only way to go to heaven, then I won't go." She's saying that she would be willing to go, but not that way. She didn't want to go by the way of the cross. She didn't want to go by Christ, the blood, faith, or mercy.

This is what Paul is saying right here; "I hated that way." You would be surprised how many times in the scriptures that the way of Christ, the way of the cross, the way of grace and mercy is referred to as "*that way.*" That is what he is saying here; "*I persecuted that way.*"

Look at verse six: He got letters from the high priest and the rulers of the synagogue to go down to Damascus to kill people that were, as we call it; "*That way.*" He's talking about those "grace people." He hated them and he was going down to kill some more of them. He says in verse six; now listen; "*It came to pass as I made my journey.*" What Paul is saying here is that he was on his journey. He was comfortable; he was serious; he was content, and it was his journey. It was "*The broad road that leads to destruction.*" It was the journey of darkness. It was the journey that seemed right to him. "*There is a way that seems right to a man; the end is destruction and death.*" He said, "I made my

journey; I was comfortable and content. I'm a Jew; I'm zealous for God; I hate the way grace and I am walking my own way."

Are you familiar with some of this? This is God's method of grace. He said, "*And suddenly there shone from heaven, a great light.*" Last week I told that if you get a revelation from God, it will come from heaven. It won't come from the earth; it will come from heaven. Christ said that; He said, "*I'm from above; you are from beneath. I'm from heaven; you are from the earth.*" If you hear from God, you will hear from heaven.

Here is this man with his earthly religion, natural religion, enjoying his own journey, going his own way, doing his own thing, zealous toward God and God moved. Let me tell you something; dead will stay dead until God gives life. That's right! Darkness will stay darkness until God gives light.

The scripture says in Genesis One: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, and the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep.*" I mean darkness. There was dark-darkness. Have you ever been in a cave taking a tour and the guide will say; "We're going to turn the lights out and show you real darkness?" Have you ever done that? My friends; I have, and that is darkness. You can't see your hands up against your eyes. That darkness is what was upon the face of the deep. God said, (the tadpoles didn't get together and decided to have light); "*Let there be light.*"

Here is this religious man in his bondage, tradition and custom, hand-me-down religion. He's zealous and he hates truth. He's hating grace and hating mercy. He is going down his own journey and going down his own way. He is comfortable and content in his blindness and God said, "*Let there be light.*" That's right; there was light shone from heaven.

Paul wrote about this later in Second Corinthians. He said, "*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give us, to show us, to reveal to us, His glory in the face of Christ Jesus.*" He never thought it, sought it or bought it; God did it!

I don't know much about awakening or quickening or the conception or the regeneration sinners. I do know this; I know that no one will move until God moves. I know that no one will come until God draws him. I know that no one will seek God until God seeks him or her. There has to be light from above, there just has to be.

You'll never move toward God until God moves toward you. Christ said; *"No man can come to me except My Father which sent Me, draw him."* This man was an object of God's affection. This man was an object of God's love and this man was walking his own road and God said; "That is far enough."

He was over 40 years of age. He had been in religion all of his life. He had climbed the ladder of religion. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, one of the most notable, respected men of his day. He was intelligent, but empty. That is the way most religion is and that is the way most religionists are. They are straight as a gun barrel and just as empty. They are "dead." Dead is going to stay dead until God speaks. Darkness will remain darkness. You'll be stumbling about until God gives life.

He says, in verse 7: Something happened. God moved and he said; *"I fell upon the ground."* This man was a proud man. He was leading a band of religious crusaders into Damascus to destroy the gospel of grace and everyone that believed it. He was riding a white charger with all the decorations on his saddle, leading the pack. Here he is the next moment lying face down, blind as a bat in the dust! God "unhorsed him;" someone said. God smote him and God brought him down. God Almighty will always bring a man down before He raises him up. I'm telling you that!

God hates pride; *"Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before the fall. God resisteth the proud and gives grace to the humble."* The proud must be humbled. The righteous must be exposed for what we are. That's right! The wise must become a fool.

You may be wise in natural things, but you don't know anything about God. You might say, "Well, I think this." He says, *"Your thoughts are not My thoughts. Your ways are not My ways."* You call bitter sweet and sweet bitter. You call good bad, and bad, good. Every mouth must be stopped; every heart must be broken. *"God is nigh unto them of a broken heart. Save as such as be of a contrite spirit."*

Every good man has to become bad. That's right! God only saves sinners. *"He died for the ungodly."* Every know-it-all will know nothing. If God doesn't strip me and humble me and crush me and break me and bring me down in the dust at His feet, then God does not intend to save me. He will pass me by.

You go through this Bible and everyone whom God has saved or visited in grace; God has brought him down. Paul said, *"I'm least of the least of all the saints; I'm not worthy to be called an apostle. God came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the chief."* He is saying that he is nothing. That is not language that you hear today. The

reason it isn't the language you hear today is because folks are still over here in this proud zeal. They are trying to find acceptance with God by their deeds and works. God has never visited them. When He does; He breaks the heart. He humbles the spirit.

How did everybody talk in the Old Testament who saw God? Job said, "*Lord; I've heard of you by the hearing of the ear and now mine eyes seeth Thee; I hate myself. I put my hand over my mouth.*" Isaiah said, "*I saw the Lord and I cried, woe is me; I'm unclean; I'm a man of unclean lips; I'm cut off.*" John saw the Lord on the Isle of Patmos (even this converted disciple) and said; "*I fell at his feet as a dead man.*" I fell down!

Preachers are inviting people to come up to the front of the church. What happened to Saul is that he fell down! He didn't come up anywhere; he fell down. The voice said to me, "*Saul; why persecutest Thou Me?*" Now, watch this; "*I said, who art Thou Lord; who am I dealing with?*"

Well, he thought he knew God. He thought he was zealous toward God. Everything before was (I, I, I); now it is "*Who.*" That makes a lot of difference. He was saying, "I was a Jew; I was taught; I was zealous; I persecuted this way; I made my journey; I fell to the ground; now it is; who are you?"

Who is this Lord? Who is this who holds my destiny in His hands? Who is this that has all power in heaven and in earth? Who is this that quickens whom He will? Who is this that has all authority over all flesh? Who are you? He said; listen; "*I'm Jesus of Nazareth; I am.*" There it is again! I'm back into last weekend's message; "*I am.*" That's the first thing Christ said. Saul said; "*Who art Thou and He said, 'I am; I am that I am. I am Jesus of Nazareth.'*"

Now, you can quit talking about what you are going to do, Saul. You can quit talking about what you are going to do with Jesus. The question is; "What will He do with me; that is the question?" When God sufficiently humbles a man; he will quit bragging on what he is going to do for God and he will start asking; "*Who art Thou?*"

Here is the next question in verse 10. He says, "*Lord; what shall I do?*" This is God's method of grace. Everybody has religion. Every natural man has religion. Take a religious census sometime and you will find out that everybody has a denominational preference. Everybody has some kind of information about religion and some thoughts about God. Most of them are pretty serious. They all hate the way of grace and they are all walking their own way, and doing their own thing. That is the thing today; "It's my

rights!” When God comes along; we fall to the ground and we say, “*Who art Thou; who is this God with whom we have to do?*” *Who is this God with whom we deal? Who art Thou?*” He says; “*I am Jesus of Nazareth.*”

Then comes the question, “*What will ye have me to do?*” How long has it been since you have heard someone cry this; “What shall I do?” That is what they said at Pentecost when Peter preached. He said, “*Men and brethren; what shall we do?*” That is what the Philippian jailer said when he saw the power of God shake that jail. He said, “*What shall I do?*”

We preach today and some fellow says, “Well, I would like to have a meeting with you and ask you some questions.” What he really wants to do is to tell you what he believes. Somebody else will say; “Are you implying that I am not saved?” Someone else will say; “What makes you think that you are right and everybody else is wrong?” They argue and argue. Somebody else may say; “Well, I’ll tell you this; I’ll go to heaven but I’m not going to do this, that, and the other.” Saul finally said; “*What do you want me to do?*” You do the talking; my mouth is closed and I’m listening.”

Well, God said to him in verse 10: “*All right Saul; go to Damascus.*” Oh, my goodness! Saul thought, go to Damascus? That is where I was headed. Those people will hate me. Those people know who I am. I hated them. “Lord, why don’t you send me to Jerusalem? Well, that’s a bigger place anyway and the temple is up there. Peter, James and John are up there and they are important people.” Christ said, “*You go to Damascus.*”

Let me tell you something. God will meet a man at his point of rebellion. That is exactly right! He was going to Damascus to start with. He was going there to persecute these people and to oppose them and make fun of them. Now, God said, “*you go sit at their feet.*” You may be sitting there and saying; “Well, maybe I’m not saved but I’m not going to listen to that Mahan fellow.” It may be that you might have to. You might say; “I will tell you this; I’m not going to go where those Sovereign grace people are.” You may have to.

Old Naaman had to go to the muddy river, Jordan. Nowhere else would do. God said to Saul, “*Go to Damascus.*” The Lord will say; “Go down where those people are that you have despised and ridiculed. You even made fun of them. I’ll meet you at the point of your rebellion; you will go right there to the people that you were going to persecute and you will become one of them. You will become humbled and you will sit at their feet and sit with them and be identified with them while the world makes fun of you.” That’s

right! So, he said, "I couldn't see anything for the glory of that light. Everything else was lost and dung." *"So, being led by the hand of them with me; I came to Damascus."*

In verse 12; I want you to listen to this, *"And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of the people which dwelt there; came to me."* Did you say Ananias? You know, Saul of Tarsus is a "big fish." He is an important fellow. He's a Pharisee of Pharisees. He's a graduate of Gamaliel University. He's one of the Sanhedrin. He's a close personal friend of the high priest. Saul probably thought that it looked like the Lord would have sent at least John, James or even Peter for that matter, to talk to them. This man is somebody. No, he's just an unknown, unheard of, humble, devout believer that God sent.

If God ever brings a man down; strips him; humbles him and shuts his mouth; he will say, *"What must I do to be saved?"* God will send him a preacher. He will send him an honest preacher, a true preacher and a plain man and a simple man. He'll have a straightforward truthful gospel message and he will be listening.

Do you know what he said? Here's the message. He said, "Ananias came to Me." People are so geared to the importance of the preacher now days. The preacher is not important; it is the message. It is not who preaches there; it is what is preached there. What is the message? It doesn't matter who preaches it. *"Apollos has plowed and Paul watered. God gave the increase."* We are nothing.

Now in verse 14, He came to me and he said *"Brother Saul, The God of our fathers has chosen Thee."* That was the first thing that he said; *"The God of our fathers has chosen Thee."* You did not choose God; but He chose you. You didn't seek God; He sought you. You called on Him because He called on you.

"Tis not that I did choose thee,
Lord; that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee;
Thou hast chosen me."

He has chosen you that you should know His will. Old Saul knew His will of command; "Thou shalt not, Thou shalt not, Thou shalt , Thou shalt." Saul knew that. He studied that all of his life. He didn't know God's will of redemption. In Hebrews 10; it talks about it; *"Lo I come to do Thy will O God;"* Christ said. *"By the which will we are sanctified forever by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ."* That is His redemptive will.

“God has chosen you that you should see the Just One.” Christ is the Just One. *“He died the just for the unjust to bring us to God. He died that God may be the just and justifier.”* You are going to see the Just One, the Holy One, the Righteous One, and the One who enables God to be righteous and holy and just. He will save you and me. You are going to hear His voice. He is going to speak peace to you. He’s the only one who can.

I hear preachers shake a man’s hand and say, “Now, you are saved, brother!” How do you do that? How do you tell a person that they are saved? How do you speak peace when there is no peace? You can’t see the heart. Only God can speak peace.

He said, *“Saul; He chose you that you should know His will and see the Just One and hear His comforting Words; Thy sins be forgiven thee.”* Then, you will be His witness.

God’s method of grace is the way He meets a sinner, and saves him.