

"This is the Way"
Pastor Wally Contreras
September 13, 2020

"But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened." (Acts 9:1-19a)

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Is it important that we become more of an "inviting church" as opposed to a "welcoming church" understanding that an inviting church most also be a welcoming church? If so, why so? If not, why not?

What are some things that I need to do in order to be able to more openly and routinely invite people to come to church?

Pastor Wally said that our reality conforms to truth – that my reality is being molded by truth. Whose truth is molding my reality on a day-to-day basis and why?

Pastor Wally pointed out that we don't have a popular message because it is a huge affront to both human autonomy and self-sufficiency and Jesus warned us of that fact as well as some of the repercussions we can expect to face found in John 16:1-3 ("I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you."). Has the church in recent history tried to make the Gospel more "palatable" to the world...tried to make it less controversial or a more popular message for folks to hear? If so, how so? If not, why not?

It is about 180 miles from Jerusalem to Damascus depending on the route one takes. Pastor Wally asked the question, how much would you have to hate someone to take that long of a trip...by foot? And???

Discuss Pastor Wally's statement that I can "know" the Bible and not know God...not know Jesus.

It's interesting that Jesus gave Saul a holy "time out"...go to Damascus and wait. Parents sometimes tell wayward children to "go to your room and you just think about what you did (or said)!" We read that in Ananias' vision, Jesus pointed out that Saul "is praying." What is the lesson that I need to learn from this, if any, and why?

Pastor Wally said that God's vision for me comes with confirmation and to avoid getting ahead of Him (like putting a piece of Ikea furniture together without following the step-by-step instructions) I need to wait for His confirmation. How difficult or easy is it for me to wait on His timing and confirmation and why?

Pastor Wally said that I've been chosen for a purpose and that suffering is a part of our lot as His disciples. Is it possible that God has already given me His confirmation, but in an attempt to postpone or ignore His will which may possibly involve personal persecution, ridicule, inconvenience, or some higher degree of discomfort, I'm still sitting and waiting and asking Him for a more spectacular confirmation so I can be really, really sure that it's His will for me to do something? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Jesus said to Saul, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." But Paul (Saul) tells us in Acts 26:9-11 that he "...was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities." In other words, Saul's truth shaped his reality that what he was doing was not only justified, but that he was doing God's will. Spurgeon said in a message entitled "Mourning at the Cross": "Perhaps there was someone whom you used to persecute very violently for being a lover of the Lord. If you did so, you were persecuting Jesus, even as Saul of Tarsus did. Do not say that you never spat in his dear face, do not say that you never scourged his blessed shoulders...Even we, who have believed in Jesus, must accuse ourselves of guilt concerning our treatment of our dear Lord, as we look into his face. He has forgiven us, blessed be his dear name! He has not a word to say against us. There is nothing but love in his heart towards us; but we cannot forgive ourselves for all the wrong we have done to him. Often, we have woven a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, as the soldiers did. That silly talk, when we ought to have been proclaiming his gospel; — those doubts and fears, that wicked unbelief, when we ought to have been fully trusting him; — that love of the world, that greed of gain, when we ought to have been honoring him with our substance; all this was the weaving of thorny crowns to put on his blessed brow. Ah, yes! we may well look at him, and mourn; who among us can look at him, and not mourn? May God forgive us if we can do so!" Could Jesus rightly ask me why I've been persecuting Him by failing to proclaim the Gospel, fully trusting Him, or loving the world instead of Him as I should? Explain.

When remembering all that Saul had done to the church before his conversion on the road to Damascus, Pastor Wally said that it tells me that there is nobody so far gone that the gospel of Jesus can't reach them. How about my "Whose Your One" that God laid upon my heart? Do I believe that I have been chosen for the purpose of sharing the Gospel with that person? Explain.

What barriers has Satan thrown up to keep me from doing His will and sharing Jesus with that person?

What will keep me from inviting my "Whose Your One" to come to church with me next week?

Pastor Wally pointed out that Saul had it all, he lost it all, and what he got was so much better. In what way(s) does this describe my "road to Damascus" conversion?

Will I boldly share this with my "Whose Your One"?