

**Easter Sunday – April 16, 2017**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**  
*Pastor Charles Heup*

**1 Corinthians 15:8 (NIV)**

**... and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Christ Jesus our Savior;<sup>1</sup>

Among my Jewish friends, I was known by my Hebrew name, Saul. My Father was privileged to live in Tarsus – a city that had been designated as a free city by the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus. Free cities were allowed to set up their own laws and customs. They could also select their own civil authorities. They were also free from being subject to Roman guards. Those born in a free city (like myself) were considered Roman citizens with all their rights and privileges.<sup>2</sup> Because I was a Roman citizen, I am also known by my Latin name, Paul.<sup>3</sup>

My family was devout in its practice of the Jewish faith. I was from the tribe of Benjamin (like my namesake the first king of God's people). I was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day according to the Law of Moses.<sup>4</sup> I was educated in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the most well-known of the Jewish rabbis.<sup>5</sup> I became well versed in the Laws of the Jewish religion.<sup>6</sup> The religious school I attended provided a balanced education. Like my Father, I was a Pharisee.<sup>7</sup> I was tent-maker by trade.<sup>8</sup>

I also was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.<sup>9</sup> I assented to the stoning of Stephen the first Christian martyr and took part in the great persecution of those who believed in the resurrection of Christ. I went from house to house and dragged off men and women and put them in prison.<sup>10</sup> **When they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.** I wasn't content to wreak havoc on the church in Jerusalem so **I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.**<sup>11</sup> I received orders from the High Priest permitting me to go to Damascus so that if I found any followers of the way there – I might arrest them, men or women, and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> My actions spoke loud and clear. I saw the teaching of Christ crucified and his resurrection from the dead as a threat against my Jewish faith and beliefs. **I was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.**<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Titus 1:4 NIV

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.biblestudy.org/biblepic/tarsus-birthplace-of-apostle-paul.html>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Acts 13:9

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Philippians 3:5

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_the\\_Apostle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle)

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Acts 22:3

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Acts 23:6

<sup>8</sup> Cf. acts 18:3

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 1 Timothy 1:13

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Acts 8:1-3

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Acts 26:10-11

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Acts 9:1-3

<sup>13</sup> Acts 26:9 NIV

I had no use for a living Jesus. But – But Jesus had a use for me and appointed me to his service.<sup>14</sup> My service to Jesus began when he appeared to me as I was traveling to Damascus. Here's what I told King Agrippa about the experience when I was on trial in his court.

**About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. (14) We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' (15) "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. (16) 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. (17) I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them (18) to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'**<sup>15</sup>

And that dear brothers and sisters explains why it is that you speak of me as the Apostle Paul. An apostle is one who is sent by Christ to share his message of truth and forgiveness. I was still known as Saul among my Jewish friends, but I used my Latin name when I worked among the Gentiles.

**The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.**<sup>16</sup>

Because I saw the living and resurrected Jesus with my own eyes, I am able to remind you of the Gospel truths of your salvation just as I did when I wrote to the believers in Corinth. **What I received I [am passing] on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am.**<sup>17</sup>

And, it is by the grace of God that you are what you are. And what is that you are? Dear brothers and sisters you are forgiven! Jesus was delivered over to death and raised to life for your justification.<sup>18</sup> You have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. 1 Timothy 1:12

<sup>15</sup> Acts 26:13-18 NIV

<sup>16</sup> 1 Timothy 1:14-16 NIV

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-10 NIV

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Romans 4:25

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Romans 5:1

**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.<sup>20</sup>**

Not only are those who have faith in Jesus forgiven, they have been set free from sin. Here's how I like to explain it. **What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- because anyone who has died has been set free from sin...You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness...**<sup>21</sup>

You are forgiven, you have been set free from sin, you have called to a life of righteousness and you are a people who are able to live under God's love, grace and protection.

**He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**<sup>22</sup>

You are forgiven, you have been set free from sin, you have called to a life of righteousness and you are a people who are able to live under God's love, grace and protection, you are a people who have been given hope and future.

**Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I [suffered] even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained ... Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.**<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Romans 5:6-8 NIV

<sup>21</sup> Romans 6:1-7, 18, 22-23 NIV

<sup>22</sup> Romans 8:32-39 NIV

<sup>23</sup> 2 Timothy 2:8-13 NIV

During this life, we can gladly suffer for Jesus with the confidence that there is a crown of righteousness in store for those who long for the risen Lord's appearance.<sup>24</sup> And when we think of the life to come our Lord's resurrection provides us with hope and joy.

**Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**<sup>25</sup>

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**<sup>26</sup>

I was the last of the Lord's apostles to see the living Jesus – as I've told you it happened in a most unusual way. That's why I spoke of myself as one who was abnormally born. In his grace, the Lord gave me new life in an usual manner. Empowered by his grace I boldly proclaimed a living Savior to the nations of the world. It's been my privilege to pass along to you what I always regarded as of first importance. We have a living Savior who gave himself up for our sins and for the sins of the world. What I saw I gladly shared. May you gladly share what you have heard!

**My dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**<sup>27</sup>

There is so much more I'd love to say to you. I've said it in the Spirit inspired letters I wrote which you can find in your Bibles. I pray that you will find those words to be uplifting, encouraging, faith strengthening, and life changing.

Greet the brothers and sisters who were not here today. **Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. 25 Brothers and sisters, pray for us. ... 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.**<sup>28</sup> Amen.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. 2 Timothy 4:8

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 NIV

<sup>26</sup> Romans 15:13 NIV

<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV

<sup>28</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28 NIV