



HALF  
WITH THE HOURS  
LESSONS  
OF  
1883



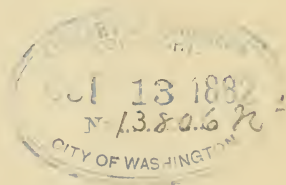
# HALF HOURS

WITH THE LESSONS OF 1883

CHAPTERS ON THE BIBLE TEXTS CHOSEN FOR  
SABBATH-SCHOOL STUDY DURING 1883

IN CONNECTION WITH

THE INTERNATIONAL LESSON SERIES



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## SAUL PREACHING CHRIST.

BY THE REV. T. D. WITHERSPOON, D. D.

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April 22.—Acts 9: 19-31.

THE current of the narrative runs so smoothly at the point where we encounter it to-day that it is very difficult to realize that there is a serious break in the continuity of its flow. And yet somewhere between the "proclamation of Christ in the synagogues" of verse 20, and the "letting down in a basket" of verse 25, the narrative is cut sheer across by a deep, broad chasm, to which the apostle laconically but significantly refers when he says (Gal 1: 17), concerning his conduct immediately after his conversion, "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I *went into Arabia*, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem."

From the manner in which this visit to Arabia is introduced in contraposition to a visit which he might have been expected to make to the college of apostles at Jerusalem, it may be safely concluded, as is now generally done, that the apostle went into the solitudes of Arabia to receive those supernatural revelations and that immediate commission from Heaven which made his ministry entirely independent of human authority. This visit to Arabia therefore separates between the work of Saul as a new convert, making public confession of Christ as his

personal Saviour, and the work of Saul, the inspired and commissioned apostle, making authoritative and official proclamation of him as the Saviour of the world.

Without undertaking to settle questions which are much in dispute as to the precise point in the narrative where the hiatus occurs, as to the place indicated by the somewhat indefinite term *Arabia*, or as to the length of time spent by the apostle in its solitudes, there are several interesting lines of thought suggested by the passage which we study to-day.

(1.) There is a public confession of Christ, an unofficial preaching of him, incumbent upon every one who is converted by his grace. As soon as one experiences the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, and comes into a comfortable hope of forgiveness and everlasting life, he is brought under the sweetest and most powerful constraint to make known the great benefits he has received. He must commend to others the Saviour whose grace has availed for him. He must unite his efforts with those of other ransomed souls in exalting the honor and extending the kingdom of the Redeemer who has bought him with his blood.

Saul is a noble example of this generous testimony for Christ. "Immediately" (Revised Version) "he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues that he is the Son of God." Notice in reference to this confession—

*First*, it was *prompt*. "Immediately" he entered upon it. There was no unnecessary hesitation, no dalliance with duty, no waiting upon frames and feelings. As soon as he had taken Jesus to be his Saviour he devoted himself immediately to the work of proclaiming him to others. Love, gratitude, joy, a desire to retrieve the wrongs of the past, a yearning to direct others to the Fountain at which his thirst had been assuaged—above

all, a desire to honor Him who had borne for him the cross and shame—led him at once to herald forth the name of Jesus.

*Second*, it was *brave*. He did not simply enter his name upon the roll of the disciples. He did not content himself with speaking privately to such of his former acquaintances or associates as he might chance to meet. He did not open some private apartment and invite the more conservative and influential Jews to come and hear his testimony; but on the Sabbath day, when the synagogues were thronged and the presence of Pharisees and doctors of the law overawed the multitude, the new disciple availed himself of the opportunity always given strangers to speak, and in the face of friend and foe made public confession of Jesus his Lord.

*Third*, it was *uncompromising*. He did not undertake to strike a balance between his own convictions and the prejudices of his hearers, as so many faint-hearted confessors now do. He did not confess Jesus as a good man, misguided perhaps in his claim of divine inspiration; or as an inspired prophet, whose declarations of a divine afflatus his followers had construed into a claim of personal deity; or as a supernatural and pre-existent being above angel or archangel, but still created and finite. In the face of prejudice and passion, despite of lowering brows, he rose to the full height of his great testimony. He "proclaimed Jesus that he is *the Son of God*."

(2.) A higher and official preaching of Christ is incumbent upon those, and those only, who are duly called, qualified and commissioned to enter upon it. This is the preaching which Saul did after his return from Arabia to Damascus. A study of his course in reference to it throws much light upon the prerequisites to the gospel ministry.



1. It must be preceded by a divine call. None may enter upon it without such vocation. The call of Saul of Tarsus was in many respects extraordinary. It took place, as he tells us (Acts 26: 16), on the highway to Damascus, when the voice from heaven addressed him, saying, "Rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister and a witness," etc. But, though the call was thus in its method extraordinary, in essence it was the same that every one must have who would enter upon this office. There must be an impression deeply wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God that it is our duty to serve him in the ministry, that thus we can best honor him and best fulfill the mission he has given us in the world—a conviction that grows stronger as it is prayerfully deliberated upon, and does not yield in prospect of the self-denials and sacrifices which such a life entails. Blessed is he in whose heart such living conviction is inwrought by the unconscious operation of the Spirit of God!

2. It must be preceded by thorough preparation. One would have supposed that Saul of Tarsus, graduate of the school of Gamaliel, a man of broad literary culture, a master of the law, an acute theologian, a ready debater, an eloquent orator, might receive his commission at once, and enter at once upon his work. But there were schools for the ancient prophets. The twelve apostles were for three years under the personal tuition of our Lord. Saul must first go into the desert solitudes of Arabia, and, like Moses in Midian and John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judæa, come under the immediate tuition of Heaven. There, in the midst of revelations of the Lord, he received what he so expressively calls "my gospel," which, as he tells us (Gal. 1: 11), "is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was

I taught it but by the revelation of Christ," so that he could say in reference to the high mysteries of Christianity, "For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." If such tuition were needful for one so thoroughly furnished by lifelong study of the Scriptures, what shall we say of those who undervalue special theological training now, and would have young converts rush with impetuosity into the solemn vows and arduous responsibilities of the ministerial office?

3. It must be preceded by orderly commission. Saul was commissioned of God to preach. The usual method of receiving a commission then, as now, was through the constituted authorities of the Church. But with the ordinary office of the preacher Saul was to unite the extraordinary office of the apostle. His commission, therefore, was made an extraordinary one. Instead of going up to Jerusalem to receive ordination at the hands of the apostles, he went into Arabia, and there received his commission immediately and supernaturally from the hands of the Lord. He could therefore subscribe himself "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God who raised him from the dead." The day of extraordinary commissions is past. No man may enter the ministry now who has not received ordination and commission by the duly constituted authorities of the Church. A divine commission is as necessary now as it was in the days of the apostles.

(3.) The matter, the manner and the effects of preaching Christ are the same in all ages. They are strikingly illustrated in the passage which we study to-day.

1. The matter or substance of all gospel preaching is the same. Saul sounds here the keynote of his whole after-ministry. Amidst the wealth and fashion of Corinth, the learning and culture of Athens, the pomp and pageant-



ry of Rome, the substance of his preaching is the same with his first confession as a new convert at Damascus. He preaches "Jesus." All other themes are absorbed in this or forgotten by reason of it. Jesus, the Joshua of the new dispensation, *the SAVIOUR OF MEN*, the Redeemer of the world,—this is the burden of his message as he goes. He preaches him, "that he is the Son of God." Upon his eternal and essential deity he bases the whole system of doctrines that he proclaims. He proves that this is very Christ. To the fact of his personal deity he adds the evidence of his divine Messiahship. He establishes his claim as God's Anointed, the great Prophet whom Moses had declared that the Lord God should raise up unto Israel, the great High Priest who should "make an end of sin and bring in an everlasting righteousness," the great "King upon the holy hill of Zion" to whom should be given "the heathen for an inheritance and the uttermost part of the earth for a possession." Christ, therefore, the anointed Prophet, revealing the Father to men; Christ, the anointed Priest, making atonement for the sin of the world; Christ, the anointed King, reigning until all enemies are subdued under his feet,—this was the substance of the apostle's preaching. This was the "Christ, and him crucified," save which he determined to know nothing even in wealthy and luxurious Corinth. This was the "Jesus and the resurrection" with which he startled the schools of philosophy and belles-lettres in Athens. This was the gospel which, as much as in him lay, he was ready to preach in Rome also. This is the gospel which every Christian minister is commissioned to preach, which every Christian layman is under obligation unofficially to teach. It is the gospel for this age and for every age. Nothing can supersede it, nothing can take its place. It will bear no admixture of

human philosophy, it will submit to no arraignment at the bar of human reason. It is the wisdom of God, it is the power of God. It, and it alone, as the experience of eighteen centuries has shown, goes down to the deep necessities of the human heart, and has power to lift man up into the life of holiness and into the light of hope.

2. The manner of all true gospel preaching is the same. Saul's ministry at Damascus and in Jerusalem affords, in these respects, a faithful representation of his methods everywhere, and an instructive example of the manner in which the minister or teacher should hold forth Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

Saul's preaching was *scriptural*. He confounded the Jews by proving from the Old-Testament Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. He made his appeal to those Scriptures as inspired of God. To their authority he and his opponents alike professed to bow. He based his conclusions not upon the speculations of reason or the deductions of logic, but upon the infallible testimony of the word of God. He who does this stands upon high vantage-ground. It is the men who are "mighty in the Scriptures" whose teaching is crowned with success.

Saul's preaching was *fearless*. He preached "boldly" both in Damascus and in Jerusalem. He did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. He did not hesitate through fear of the prejudice he might encounter or the opposition he might awaken. He did not consult the partialities or caprices of his hearers. Charged with a message, he delivered it with all gentleness and tenderness, but in all fidelity and candor. Never was such preaching needed more than now. It requires courage to deal faithfully with the consciences of impenitent sinners and worldly-minded church-members. There is

need, therefore, of "great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

Saul's preaching was *humble*. He "preached in the name of the Lord Jesus." He assumed no authority and asserted no superiority of his own. He was but the mouthpiece through whom Christ spake. The treasure was borne by him in an earthen vessel, "that the excellency of the power might be of God." He preached "not with wisdom of words, lest the cause of Christ should be made of none effect." He counted "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." He relied upon the power of Christ to make his message effectual. He ascribed the glory to Christ of whatever results were achieved.

3. The effects of all gospel preaching are the same. The apostle found in Damascus and at Jerusalem what he did everywhere else: "To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life." In every community in which the gospel is faithfully preached two classes will appear—its enemies and its friends. Where the preaching is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same results will follow with these two classes as in Damascus and Jerusalem.

With the former the enmity of the carnal heart will be aroused. When Saul proved that Jesus is the Christ, the long-promised Messiah of Israel, the Jews, instead of embracing him as their Messiah, grew furious and vented their rage upon the apostle. Unable to refute his arguments and unwilling to accept his conclusions, they gave rein to prejudice and passion, and so became confirmed in their hatred of Christ. How constantly the same process goes forward now when the gospel is preached!

This enmity of the carnal heart, aroused by opposition and inflamed by anger, will lead on to persecution. If the

Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem cannot gainsay Saul's arguments, they can at least "lay wait to kill him." Persecution is ever the resort of men who have tried nobler warfare and suffered defeat. Satan still prompts to it when his cause is put to the worse. Men persecute now with sneer and jest; and many a man quails before the world's ridicule and scorn whose courage would have borne him in stormier days to the fagot or the wheel.

But if such are the effects upon one class, very different are those upon another. Saul soon found himself surrounded by a body of disciples—"his disciples," as the Revised Version teaches us in the twenty-fifth verse. Faithful work for Christ will not be left without result. They that will put honor upon God's word shall have honor put upon their ministry. Saul not only has disciples, but disciples that love him as devotedly as his enemies hate him, and are as assiduous to shield him as his foes are to persecute him. They find means both at Damascus and in Jerusalem to show their love and their care, and to baffle the designs of their enemies and send him to a place of safety.

Finally, the fruits of faithful teaching are gathered after the teacher is gone. Saul has been "brought down to Cæsarea, and sent away to Tarsus," but the Church of God remains; and this Church, for which he has labored and prayed, and which sorely misses him now that he is gone, nevertheless "has peace, being edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, is multiplied." Be it ours to hold forth Jesus with the same fidelity and courage whilst we are upon the stage, and when, at the call of the Master, we shall pass from the scene, may we leave the Church still walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and being multiplied!