

People of Promise
Paul
607 words

An Illuminating Promise

Paul:
The Eye-Opening Apostle

Acts 26:17-18

When the apostle Paul became a Christian, his life changed in many ways. But in one fundamental way it didn't change at all: both before he met Christ and after, Paul was an opener of peoples' eyes, turning them from darkness to light. So what changed? It was Paul's understanding of darkness and light. And it wasn't until he met Christ on a dusty road to Damascus that his own eyes were opened. He received an eye-opening promise *from* God that resulted in an eye-opening ministry *for* God.

Paul was a zealot, a Pharisee, an up-and-comer in Judaism. He had studied the Old Testament under Gamaliel, the most famous Jewish teacher of his time (Acts 5:34; 22:3). He was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," faultless when it came to his legalistic observance of the law. Paul thought Judaism was the "light" and everything else was the "darkness"--especially the new-found cult that had grown up around the itinerant preacher from Nazareth named Jesus. Misguided religious and political groups were not unusual in a crossroads like Judea (21:38), but this one, the one led by Jesus, was different. Jesus' followers claimed he was the king of the Jews! Anyone who believed that was obviously in the dark, and it was Paul's job as a citizen of the light to open the eyes of the blind.

He did "all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (26:9). He put believers in prison, agreed with their death sentences, tried to force them to blaspheme, and even traveled to distant cities, from synagogue to synagogue, to track them down and persecute them (26:9-11). It was while Paul was traveling to Damascus to persecute believers that Christ appeared to him in a blinding light. He was physically blind for three days as a result (9:8-9). When his eyes were opened, he saw the error of his ways, how he had mistaken darkness for light. As a servant of Christ, he would still be opening blind eyes, but now he would be opening them in the same way that his own had been opened. Jesus told him, "I am sending you to [the Gentiles] 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 . . ." (26:17-18).

What happened to Paul has to happen to every believer in Christ at some point. Not in the same dramatic way, of course--and the promises and calling of God will be different. But the effect should be the same: To spread the good news that people can be rescued from the "dominion of darkness" and be brought into the "kingdom of light" (Col. 1:12-13). God saves us "to do good works" (Eph. 2:10), first and foremost of which is to turn those in darkness to see the great light that has dawned on them (Matt. 4:16;

28:18-20). All of God's callings have their roots in this basic ministry given to all believers.

The next time you wish God would call you to a ministry in a dramatic and specific way, think of Paul:

- Have your own eyes been opened, turning you from darkness to light?
- Are you willing to assume responsibility for turning those in darkness to the light?
- Are you asking God to help you "see" any further callings he has for your life?

Paul's conversion was extraordinary in many ways, but ordinary in this sense: every Christian should have an "eye-opening" experience of recognizing the difference between spiritual darkness and light. Without it, ministry is just the blind leading the blind.