



Rocky Mountain Spiritual Fellowship Presents

**Paul's Conversion and How He Handled
Conflicts in the Early Church**

~Harry McMullan III

Worship Service
Saturday, November 13, 2004

Pot Luck	
Welcome	John D. Hay
Reading	Maria Downing & Nick Tamm
Music/Offering	Kelly Kaveny/Dick Blodgett
Remembrance Supper	Michael Hanna
Introduction	John Hay
Guest Speaker	Harry McMullen III
Closing Prayer	Paula Thompson

Paul's Conversion and How He Handled Conflicts in the Early Church

Harry McMullan III

Central questions addressed in this talk:

1. What kind of person was Paul?
2. What was the environment that he worked in?
3. What caused Paul to dedicate himself to the service of God to the extraordinary extent that he did?

Chronology of events in the life of Paul and the early Christian Church

Acts 18:12 mentions Junius Gallio as proconsul, which is reliably believed to have been from the spring of AD 51 to the spring of AD 52. This is the point from which all other chronology must be figured. The following dates are in general agreement with those of most scholars.

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35-49	In Antioch
49	Second post-conversion visit to Jerusalem; the Apostolic Assembly
50-51	In Corinth. Wrote Epistle to the Thessalonians
52-55	In Ephesus. Period in which the other Epistles were written.
57	Third and last post-conversion visit to Jerusalem. His arrest
59	Imprisonment and house arrest in Rome
61	Martyred under Nero
68	Gospel of Mark written (UB)
70	Armies of Titus destroy Jerusalem (put on handout as per Harry's suggestion during lecture)
71	Gospel of Matthew written (UB)
82	Gospel of Luke written (UB)
90	Book of Acts written by Luke (UB)
101+	Gospel of John written (UB)

Track Notes:

01-Introduction - John Hay

Talked to Harry about giving a talk. Studying about Paul. Applause.

02-Greeting

Introduction of his wife. Laying on of hands, healing flows two ways. Thanks for inviting me. I wanted to write a book about Jesus' surroundings and times. Girl on cover of National Geographic example.

03-Introduction Of Central Questions

AD70 should be on the handout: armies of Titus destroy Jerusalem. Radically changed way Judaism functioned.

- 1) When did Paul move to Jerusalem?
- 2) What was the environment he worked in?
- 3) What caused him to dedicate himself to the extent that he did?

04-The Times of Paul

Paul is the only individual involved in the drama of Jesus's life that we know directly from his own writings.

Born in Tarsus, Hellenistic city. Many weird religions coming in from the east which did not satisfy the longings of the individual.

Hellenistic Judaism asserted independence from Judaic Judaism. Temple superseded by synagogue. Septuagint, which was in Greek, was used in services.

Hellenistic Jews did not demand that proselytes be circumcised. Orthodox Christian Jews of Jerusalem demanded circumcision and following of the dietary regulations.

05-Paul The Pharisee

Paul, who was 7 years younger than Jesus. He would have moved to Jerusalem to continue his studies at about the age of 13-15 [Jesus would have been 20-22], where he became a protegee of the great Pharisee Gamaliel, who is in the UB.

The Pharisees, who received a lot of censure from Jesus, believed that the messiah wasn't delayed in coming because the Jews did not scrupulously enough follow the law.

Paul, described in the Book of Acts as working as an agent of the high priest, must have taken Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees as a personal insult. He stood approvingly at the stoning of Stephen, and worked to disrupt the workings of the early Christians in Jerusalem and Damascus.

06-Paul and the Christian Cannon

We mostly know Paul through the Book of Acts. First half deals with Peter and the second half with Paul.

We also know Paul through his letters, 13 of which are included in the Christian cannon.

Luke wrote the Book of Acts two generations after the events he describes for the purpose of showing the Romans that Christians were no threat to Rome, that the real problem was the Jews.

Paul's letters were contemporaneous to the events they describe, and were written in order to deal with certain problems in early Christianity as those problems were occurring. Luke hadn't seen the letters of Paul, nor had the author of Revelation. Acts shows an early church in harmony.

07-Early Christian Groups

There were 3 groups contending with each other; Harry draws a parallel to the UB movement: Hebrew Christians (direct descendents of the apostles, people who knew Jesus), Hellenist Christians (evangelical, looser in their social requirements), Enthusiasts (broke into ecstatic praise during worship).

Clashes between Hellenists and Hebrews. Hebrews required circumcision and dietary restrictions. Hellenists rejected these requirements.

Hellenistic Christians were the only ones persecuted prior to 70AD. The Hebrew Christians were not persecuted in Jerusalem because they didn't challenge what was dearest to the Jews. The Hellenistic Christians were revolutionary. And Stephen was a Hellenistic Christian.

08-Conversion Of Paul

Three accounts of Paul's conversion in the NT. He describes it twice in Galatians, and it is in the Book of Acts.

Acts says that he went to Jerusalem immediately after conversion. Paul says that he went 3 years after his conversion, stayed 15 days, and didn't return again for 14 years. Harry believes this account to be compelling.

09-Two Episodes that Pertained to the Jerusalem Christians

Apostolic Assembly 49AD: Paul had been based in Antioch for 14 years. A group of orthodox Judaic Christians forced their way into the church and demanded that the gentile Christians be circumcised.

Did not reject them out of hand but sent Paul and Titus, an uncircumcised Greek Christian to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the mother church. At this time Paul had been an independent missionary for 17 years. Thanks to Paul, a compromise was brokered. Other issue again was diet: Peter went to Antioch and wouldn't eat with people.

10-Elements of Paul's Work

Acts is a catalog of the hardships Paul endured. What accounts for his being able to go through all this? And why did he refuse to have anything to do with the people who had known Jesus first hand?

He made no mention of any of the sites of Jesus' life. No comments about having seen the tomb or the crucifixion site. No mention of Jesus' parents, only that he had met Jesus' brother James. Never quoted his sayings, other than his institution of the Eucharist, which he got directly from Jesus after Jesus' death – not from the apostles. Paul said nothing about Jesus as a person.

He believed that by sending Jesus into the world God had made an end to the Jewish path of salvation through the law. Now it depended solely upon righteousness deriving from faith.

11-Central Question of the Evening

"What caused Paul to become Jesus' most fervent advocate?"

It is assumed that Paul and Jesus never met, because Paul never wrote about it. But what if the circumstances of his meeting were so devastating that he could never come to terms with it. What if he were personally involved in his arrest, trial, and/or crucifixion? The only way Paul could *not* have seen Jesus would have been if he had *not* been in Jerusalem during the time of the crucifixion.

We know he was there shortly after the crucifixion, that he had risen through the hierarchy enough to be the agent of the high priest, and he was present at the stoning of Stephen, and 2 years later he got the order from the high priest to persecute the Antioch Christians, he was probably on that ladder the whole time. He might have been in Jerusalem for 15 years by that time.

Passover would have been the most important time for Paul to have been in Jerusalem, and that was the time Jesus was crucified. As an aggressive young Pharisee, he would have wanted to be there on Palm Sunday, and when Jesus upturned the money changers tables, and when he confounded the lawyers sent out by his own group. He would have wanted to know about all this personally.

Is it unlikely that his position with the high priest would be such that he would have sent him out with the temple guards to arrest Jesus in 30AD, considering that just two years later he sent him to Damascus?

This answers the questions of

- 1) why did he have this singular commitment to Jesus while making no effort to learn anything about him from people who knew him, and
- 2) why was he so consumed with Jesus' death?

Perhaps the answer is that Paul *had* encountered Jesus in the flesh and had at least by his silence consented to his death. And perhaps the subject of Jesus' death was just too personally painful for Paul to discuss. Which would explain Paul's dedication – even more intense than Peter's after the cock crowed.

12-Questions

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Note:

Changes in blue added by me per Harry's suggestions during the lecture. Other changes may have been introduced as typos. I offer this facsimile of Harry's actual handout without warrantee.

Morgan