

"The Conversion of Saul"

Part 1

Acts 9

Introduction: Tonight in our study of the book of Acts we have come to the second most important event and chapter in this letter written by Luke. The most important chapter would be chapter 2 and the most important event would be what happened on the day of Pentecost, the birth of the church. Here in Acts 9 we find the detailed conversion of Saul who would become the famous Apostle Paul. He will be the man to carry the Gospel into the world of the Gentiles. His conversion is recorded in Acts 9, 22, and 26. This chapter before us is certainly one of great encouragement and the reason is because of who gets saved in this chapter, Saul. Saul was a terrorist who was set on destroying anyone who was a follower of Jesus Christ. God will meet him on the Damascus Road and his life will forever be changed. This is encouraging to us because this helps us to understand that there is not one person who is beyond grace. There is not one person who is so deep into sin that God cannot reach down and lift them out and use them to make a difference in this world. There are many amazing conversions in the Bible. Some we read of in the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 27:54

⁵⁴ Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Here was a small group at the cross who were saved when Jesus died. Any conversion is a miracle but humanly speaking the conversion of Saul seems to stand out above all others. The slayer of Christians came to be a Christian himself and gave his life to reach all he could with the very Gospel which he tried his best to silence. Then he would go on and write 13 New Testament books of the Bible.

I. The Meeting

Notice Acts 9:1

This verse is connected to the beginning of Acts 8.

Acts 8:1-3

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

² *And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*

³ *As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*

After Acts 8:3 we read of how the Lord was working with Philip to reach the Samaritans and then how he went to Gaza to preach to the eunuch. Now as we step into Acts 9 we see that while all of that was going on Saul was YET/STILL doing all he could to silence the Gospel.

Notice Acts 9:1-2

Saul went to the high priest to get letters that would permit him to travel to Damascus to take into custody and that were found of "THIS WAY." Rome would have allowed the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin to have authority over Jewish congregations even outside of Palestine. The leaders of the synagogues in Damascus would need to cooperate with the Sanhedrin. Saul would travel even to foreign cities to persecute believers.

Acts 26:11

¹¹ *And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, **I persecuted them even unto strange cities.***

The fact that Saul sought letters to the synagogues in Damascus gives us some interesting background. First of all Damascus was about 150 miles from Jerusalem. This was a city where there were many Jews and from this, we can understand that the Gospel had at this time traveled far from Jerusalem. The persecution was working to get the Gospel into the world. Second, we can see that the Jewish believers had not made a clean break from Judaism because they were meeting in the Jewish synagogues. Third, we can see how determined Saul was to exterminate the followers of Jesus Christ. He was willing to travel 150 miles one way to arrest them and see that they were put to death. Fourth we see that the followers of Jesus Christ were referred to as people of "THIS WAY."

Notice the words of H. A. Ironside:

"That was apparently the only name given to early Christianity: "Of this way"—and that is what Christianity is; it is a way! It is not just fire-insurance for eternity, not simply a method of saving us from eternal judgment; but it is a way of blessing, righteousness and gladness right here on earth."

I might add that it is a WAY of life.

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

When we are saved everything changes. The old man is crucified with Christ and now priorities and purpose change.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 17

¹⁴ For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

¹⁵ And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

¹⁷ Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Based upon these verses we can see that to be saved is now a NEW WAY of life.

Notice Acts 9:1 again.

Here in this verse we can get a glimpse of the hatred which Saul had for believers. Saul was "breathing out" threatenings and slaughter. Breathing is something we do all day every day. This tells us how consumed Saul was with eradicating the followers of Jesus Christ. It was what he thought about from morning until night. Saul was completely obsessed with a hatred for believers and his life at this time was given to destroying Christianity.

Application:

There is something here that we need to consider as a warning. There is within each of us the potential to get consumed or obsessed with something that would be outside the will of God. It can be getting obsessed with stuff of the world, it can be getting obsessed with retaliation on someone who has hurt you. The point we must understand is that the sin nature can get consumed with many different things and therefore we must be on guard at all times. Let us now get back to Saul. He was breathing out threatenings and slaughter. The threats which he made were not empty threats.

Acts 26:10

¹⁰ Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

How were believers killed in the Roman Empire? Notice some historical facts of the first and second century.

"The punishments meted out to Christians who admitted their religion and refused to sacrifice varied enormously. In the first and early second centuries A.D., Christians who were Roman citizens, including the apostle Paul, were executed by beheading, which was a quick and merciful end. Later in the second century, beheading was a privilege to which only the highest-ranking citizens were automatically entitled. The "lesser sort," as they were known, were subject to more violent punishments. These included being crucified, burned to death, and attacked by beasts. Being condemned to the beasts was a particularly grisly end. It meant that you and your companions would be exposed in the arena to a variety of wild and ferocious animals, such as leopards, boars, and lions, and required to fight for your lives."

Notice Acts 9:3-5

The Lord appeared unto Saul suddenly as he traveled on the Damascus Road. Saul was met by the Lord in all His glory. There has never been a conversion such as this. Notice the words of Gaebelain:

"What happened on the road to Damascus was unique. Saul's conversion is unlike any other conversion. Nor has such an event taken place since then. That it will be repeated on a larger scale in a future day is assured by the Word of Prophecy. The heavens will be opened once more. Out of the opened heavens there will again shine forth the Glory of the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. In His Glory, He will appear the second time. And when He comes in the clouds of heaven there will be still His blinded people on earth, a remnant of them, and like Saul they will behold the glorious vision. Then will be fulfilled what is written in Zechariah 12:10-14....Those who pierced Him, His own, will see Him in that day and that will mean a wonderful salvation for the whole nation, for all Israel living in that day."

This is the first time that the resurrected Lord appeared to an unbeliever.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

³ *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;*

⁴ *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

⁵ *And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:*

⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

⁷ After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

⁸ And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

It was very important that the resurrected Lord would be seen by Saul because he would become an Apostle and one of the requirements was to have been a witness of Jesus after the resurrection. Notice the words of Peter concerning a replacement for Judas.

Acts 1:22

²² Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

Let us get back to Saul on the Damascus Road. Wouldn't it be great if the Lord would appear to unbelievers like this today? Can you imagine if He would appear like this to some of the elites and the corrupt politicians? But as we considered this was a one-of-a-kind experience. However we must keep in mind who we are and what we are called to do today.

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

¹⁵ Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

We are lights today and Jesus Christ lives within each of us. When we walk in fellowship with our Lord under the control of the Spirit we too have an impact upon the unbelievers around us. God used a believer as a light in your life and mine to bring us to salvation. Saul's experience was unique because it had to be. He would be an Apostle, so Jesus had to appear to him. Today we are the only "Jesus" that people will meet on this earth. It is our responsibility to shine through our words and our works so that God can use us to reach the lost.

Notice Acts 9:4

The Lord confronted Saul concerning the persecution he was conducting on the believers. The Lord asked why he was persecuting Him. This contains a very important Truth for us.

When a believer is persecuted, it is actually persecution upon the Lord. How can this be? We are His body. Paul learned a very important Truth here and that was that when you hurt the body the Head feels the pain.

Application:

What a comfort for us to grasp. When we suffer, whether it be from persecution or sickness or anything else our Lord knows exactly what we feel because He feels it also.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

³ *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;*

⁴ *Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

⁵ *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.*

Psalm 34:17-19

¹⁷ *The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*

¹⁸ *The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

¹⁹ *Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.*

Conclusion:

In closing I will borrow the Words of David.

Psalm 23:1-3a

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

³ *He restoreth my soul:*