

Acts 9:1-19 A Radical Conversion

Today we are going to look at the most famous conversion in the History of the Church.

Conversion of Saul of Tarsus!

A) Who will become known to us as the great Apostle Paul.

B) Someone has said of the conversion of Paul the Apostle :

“Obliterate the influence of this man’s 30yrs of ministry and you sweep all churches off the face of the earth. You quench all the moral lights of the age. You give Ephesus back to Diana, Athens back to Nineveh, Paphos back to Venus, and Rome to all the gods of her pantheon and plunge the entire world once again into pagan darkness, and heathen disillusionment to which there is no moral restraint.”

C) Bible Scholars generally agree that aside from the birth, death, and Res of Jesus Christ –

1) The conversion of Saul of Tarsus ranks as the most significant event in all of Church History.

D) Without Paul we would be without 13 books of the New Testament!

1) Pretty amazing!

E) If God hadn’t chosen Saul – he would have chosen someone else to do those things –

1) but it is remarkable to consider the impact that this one man had on the history of the world.

Of all the Characters of the Bible Paul is set apart because Luke records his conversion – Three times in this one book! Acts 9, 22, 26

A) When God repeats himself we need to take notice – when God repeats himself it is for our attention.

B) Consider the conversion of Saul of Tarsus today – consider 4 things

#1 Saul the Hunter.

#2 Saul Pursued.

#3 Saul Surrendered.

#4 Saul Transformed.

#1 Saul the Hunter! Acts 9:1-2

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

A) Dr. Luke continues to use animal like terms in his description of Saul.

B) He was like an animal consumed with hunting his prey – **panting – huffing puffing –**

1) Still breathing – Threats and Murder.

Paul was enraged against the Christians

C) He is On his way with official papers to Damascus – to Hunt down believers

1) Tear apart families – throw in Prison.

Some people like to say that Christianity is a religion for weak People.

A) It is a crutch for weak pp to lean upon.

B) Let me just say this: **Not a Crutch it is the Stretcher – it is the Ambulance / hospital.**

1) People who are not just sick – people who need to be Resurrected – revived - Dead in Sin!

C) But it is not just for weak pp – Saul of Tarsus was not a weak man.

Saul was intellectual force in Israel.!

A) Listen to his description of himself – recounting his conversion

Acts 22:3 Then he said: **3** "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.

B) Trained at the feet of Gamaliel would be like being– trained by the greatest instructor at Harvard.

1) Saul of Tarsus was his best student.

Acts 26:4-5 "As the Jewish leaders are well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem. **5** If they would admit it, they know that I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of our religion." **NLT**

Galatians 1:14

14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers."

C) Saul was an intellectual giant when it came to Jewish Law!

He was also a Driven man!

A) He was a man who was willing to wield all of his religious and political influence to exterminate Christianity.

Acts 22:4-5

"I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, **5 as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished."**

Acts 22:19-21

“So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’”

B)He was in charge of Stephen’s death

Acts 26:10-11 “This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

Exceedingly enraged: To be transformed by your anger and to become a maniac. To go insane, to be mad.

A)That was Saul Angry to the point of maniacal Violence!

B)Saul was no weakling – no coward.

C) So When Saul was on his mission to Hunt down Christians – Saul discovered that he was the one being Hunted.

#2 Saul Pursued!

A)The conversion of Saul of Tarsus affirms this truth about Jesus – Jesus receives sinners.

B)Recall when the Pharisees were seeking to insult Jesus said –this man receives sinners! they never would have been seen with sinners

1)Jesus was always with them.

C)This is the greatest compliment ever – Jesus receives sinners

D) Listen if you have a concept of God that He will not receive you for what you have done- nothing is further from the truth.

1) Conversion of Saul of Tarsus affirms that!

Paul speaking of his own conversion - 1 Timothy 1:13-15 “although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man;.... but the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

A) But Jesus not only receives sinners He pursues them!

B) And at this time when Saul was filled with Maniacal rage going to Damascus to hunt down Christians – Imprison, beat, kill

1) It was in that state of maniacal rage that Jesus Pursued Saul

C) We know that the Bible says in many places such as Revelation 22:17 “ And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

D) The Bible teaches us that His arms are open wide to anyone who comes – no one will be cast out!

That is the view of Salvation from our side – is to know whoever comes, whoever believes will be received and saved.

A) But we must also see this from God’s side: His Perception is He is the one who pursues the sinner!

Aa) Saul was not Pursuing Jesus but Jesus was pursuing Saul!

B) Richard Connell, in his famous story *The Most Dangerous Game*, tells about the adventure of his hero, Sanger Rainsford, one of the world’s most celebrated big-game hunters.

Rainsford accidentally falls from his speeding yacht at night while en route to a hunting expedition along the coast of South America.

C)Rainsford discovers that the Island is inhabited by another avid hunter a Russian nobleman by the name of General Zaroff.

1)General Zaroff – reaches out to Rainsford – cleaned up – dinner – hunting –

D)I have discovered the greatest challenge – New bread of animal – reason – smart

1)Rainsford no animal can reason – oh yes – we shall see tomorrow

E)Then that Rainsford – realized he was the animal – The Hunter would be hunted.

In much the same way Saul was the Hunter – but he was being hunted by Jesus not to Destroy Him – Apprehend him – higher purpose.

A)A SANCTIFIED PURPOSE!

B)Paul was a unique vessel!

1)God is getting ready to send the gospel out to the Gentiles. – From Jerusalem to Judea.....earth

C)In His desire to reach the gentiles – God needed a Jew who is wonderfully steeped in the OT scriptures

1)But He also needs one who is familiar with the greek Culture.

D)He found both in Saul of Tarsus!

Because Saul was raised in Tarsus he was exposed to greek Culture.

A)But he was trained in Judaism to be a Pharisee.

B)He not only knew Jewish culture and was well trained in the scriptures

1)He also knew greek culture and was well trained in their writings

C) God needed someone with that expertise but he also needed someone who was a Roman citizen.

1) So he could travel freely throughout the Roman empire.

D) God got the whole package with Saul!

I am sure that some time later this all made sense to Saul – he realized God had been pursuing him all along!

A) Jesus wasn't waiting for Saul to find his way into a Bible study!

B) He was pursuing Saul even when Saul was his worst enemy.

C) This principle led one theologian to refer to God as the hound of Heaven.

Think back over your life- note how Jesus was pursuing you way before you ever started showing interest in Him!

A) C.S Lewis the night that he got saved – said “ I was the most reluctant convert in all of England. I heard the feet of the one who pursued me and I had no where else to run and there in the dorm room of my university I fell on my knees and surrendered to him there!”

B) It was Jesus who was pursuing Lewis – Lewis was a Cynic – he was the Critic of Christianity!

1) But Jesus was pursuing him!

C) Here today – you haven't given your life to Christ – He is pursuing you- loves you – wants you – On your heels

1) Apprehend your heart – Higher purpose – Sanctified purpose

D) Believers might have said of Saul – That guy will never get saved.

1) Jesus would say – no – today at Noon!

V.3 As he journeyed Suddenly a light shone –

A)Our perspective – suddenly – not from the Lord's – He was working on Saul long before this.

B)Light Shone – Blinding light Acts 26:12-13

"While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13 at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me." {hot arid desert} Brighter than sun at noon day

That word Shinning is an amazing greek word – It means to flash and to blaze. To flash all around, and envelope with light. It is striking!

A)When the Atomic bomb was dropped on Japan the flash of light from that explosion was so great that the images of pp were etched into concrete because the flash of light was so brilliant.

B)Jesus who identified himself as the Light of the world- pursued Saul of Tarsus with such intensity that the life and nature of Christ was etched into Saul.

C)What an awesome moment this was!

This proud arrogant Pharisee is knocked down

A)Jesus hasn't even said a word – yet – Knocked down blinded

B)Listen you don't want to stand before Jesus knowing him as anything more than Savior

1)You don't want to know Him as your judge!

C)But everyone will face him in one of those two capacities

1)I will either face Him as my Savior – that will be glorious – Anthony - Trish

D)Or I will face Him as my judge – that will be worse than anything that I could ever imagine!

Notice the question that Jesus asked Saul v.4 why persecuting me

**A)Persecute his Church is to persecute Jesus – hurt or sin against his Church is to sin against Jesus – every word of gossip – bitterness....
Against Christ**

B)Jesus is never separated from His body – Prostitute join Christ to that prostitute

1)Persecute – sin against – Christ

C)V. 5 Saul says Who are you – I am Jesus ... persecuting Kicking Goad!

**D)Goad was a sharp stick – metal end – Oxen
Or donkeys**

Amplified Acts 9:5 “And Saul said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting.It is dangerous and it will turn out badly for you to keep kicking[to offer vain and perilous resistance]. against the goad.”

A)Listen it is empty and a painful resistance that will turn out badly for you if you keep kicking against the Love of God!

B)Kicking against a sharp object is unreasonable and destructive.

C)God’s word is described as a Sharp sword – a Sword of love!

1)Pierce to heal – wounds to ultimately save – like a surgeons scapel

This is telling us that the work of redemption in Saul's life started long before this!

A) Stephen's sermon – Stephens Prayer – Stephens Countenance

B) Pricking at the heart of the proud arrogant Pharisee

C) Saul was fighting it – The Bible says the way of the transgressor is hard.

1) Quit fighting

Note for those who are witnessing – someone seems so hard!

A) Note Jesus was pursuing Saul for a long time and the time when he gets saved – he seems the hardest – Maniacal rage

B) Rock into a pack of dogs – the one that barks – one that got hit

1) You might think – getting worse – in reality might be getting closer – more enraged – Satan' launches a last ditch effort to hold on to them.

#3 Saul Surrendered!

V.6 Trembling and Astonished – way more attractive to God then Proud and resistant!

A) Trembling – When a sinner is truly saved can't help but tremble – realize what saved from – Fires of hell – Burn – never burn up – weeping gnashing

B) Tremble eyes opened like a Blind person – suddenly receives his sight only to discover – **standing on the edge of a cliff – 5,000 ft drop**

1) Saul trembling – what have I been doing – Persecuting Messiah

C) Also Astonished at the love of God – He pursued me ! Chose me!

Three things that Mark Paul's surrendered life!

**1st V. 5 who are you Lord? - Passion – Know Jesus – who are you
Lay aside everything – known you known by you.**

2nd V.6 What do you want me to do? – Pursuit –

A)Desire to conform his heart to the will of God!

B)Note Paul doesn't ask what can you do for me!

1)Mentality of so much of the Church today –what can God do for me

C)Understand – He can do exceedinglyask

D)But if we come to church with the mentality of what can God do for me – that is a very narrow and man centered view of Christianity

1)very ego centric

E)Christianity is meant to be Theo centric – God is to be at the head of it

1)His will not my will – Paul says –what do you want me to do?

3rd V. 6 Jesus said Arise – V.8 Then Saul arose –

A)Immediate obedience – immediate response to the will of the Lord

B)TheseThree things that made Saul so powerful!

1)His Passion was to know Christ

2) His Pursuit was to do His will – what have me to do!

3)His Practice was to respond immediately!

C)Conversion is at the heart of Christianity and Change is at the heart of conversion –

1)This singled a radical change in Saul's nature and outlook

#4 Saul's Transformation.

“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to

him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

So simple – Here I am Lord

11 So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 1st Mark -{Praying not Persecuting}

12 And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

13 Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

Ananias is giving God a little counsel –God needs our perspective right?

A)Ananias says – he is blind – why change that – great – only better if he were dead.

Lord are you sure!

B)No rebuke- God understands – simply says

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

C)2nd Mark – NEW CALLING – CHOSEN VESSEL

17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

D)3rd mark – NEW FAMILY – BROTHER SAUL –

1)Family of God would become dear to Paul – Lost everything for Christ

Every important relationship – forsook him

E)4th Mark – Baptized in the Spirit – Empowering –

1)All flesh – all self energy – now the power of God!

18 Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. {Publically identifying with Christ.}

19 So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

5th Mark seeing from a whole new perspective!