

Acts 9:1-31 Saul of Tarsus Transformed

Tonight we are going to look at one of the most Radical conversions in the History of the Church.

Conversion of Saul of Tarsus!

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

B) Bible Scholars generally agree that aside from the birth, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

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

C) Paul is responsible for writing 13 books of the New Testament! - Pretty amazing!

1) Planted many of the churches that we read about in the Bible

D) Now no doubt that if God hadn't chosen Paul – he would have called someone else

1) So those works were not contingent on Paul's conversion – but Paul was the vessel God used!

E) 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 5 things

#1 Saul the Hunter.

#2 Saul Pursued.

#3 Saul Surrendered.

#4 Saul Transformed.

#5 Saul Preaching

#6 Saul Rejected

#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 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 —

1) Still breathing panting – huffing, puffing – Threats and Murder.

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

1) Tear apart families – throw in Prison. MURDER

D) He was extremely Zealous!

But Saul was also an intellectual force in Israel!

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

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.”

Turn to Acts 22

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

C) Saul was a 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 full agreement to 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.”

So Saul of Tarsus – Smart man - A Religious Zealot –

Driven to the point of maniacal Violence.

B)But while 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!

1)they never would have been seen with sinners
Jesus was always with them.

C)This is a great compliment – Jesus receives sinners

D)Jesus came to seek and save the lost!

1)Saul despite all of his religious training and Zeal he was lost – deeply LOST

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.”

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

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.”

A)That is the view of Salvation from our side- the human side – Jesus calls – we RESPOND

B)People say: I was seeking – but long before you were seeking – God was drawing

1)God is always the one who initiates –

C)His Spirit is convicting of sin – emptiness

1)Drawing us by his Spirit

The Spirit of Christ was working on Saul of Tarsus as we will note in a moment

A)Saul armed with self righteous hatred - thought that he was on his way to Damascus to Destroy Christianity

B)In Reality – Jesus was waiting to ambush Saul with Love and win him to his side.

³ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”

Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

C)Jesus ambush – cut off at the pass!

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.

A) To flash all around, and envelope with light. It is striking!

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-

1) 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 – HOPE

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

NOTICE THAT PHRASE: It is hard to kick against the goads!

A) A goad was a sharp stick that they would use to jab a donkey to get it to move!

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

C) Stephen's sermon – Stephens Prayer – Stephens Countenance – Shone bright

1) Pricking at the heart of the proud arrogant Pharisee

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

1) Quit fighting

E) if you keep kicking against the Love of God!

1) it is empty and a painful resistance that will turn out badly for you

God's word is described as a Sharp sword – a Sword of love!

A) Pierce to heal – wounds to ultimately save – like a surgeons scalpel

B) I am sure that some time later this all made sense to Saul –

1) he realized God had been pursuing him all along!

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

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

E) 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

1) He is On your heels- Apprehend your heart – Higher purpose – Sanctified purpose

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 –

C) You sin against a child of God – you are sinning against Jesus

#3 Saul the Surrendered? – V.5, 6

⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord

said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." **6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"**

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)His Practice - Immediate obedience – immediate response to the will of the Lord

B)These Three 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 – New relationship - {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? Lord are you sure!

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

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

Paul was a unique vessel!

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

B)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.

C)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!

17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul,

3rd mark – NEW FAMILY – BROTHER SAUL –

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

Every important relationship – forsook him

"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."

E)4th Mark –NEW EMPOWERING - Baptized in the Spirit –

1)Before - 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.

#5 Saul Preaching:

20 Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" {Word was out Saul was coming and why?

But now He is preaching Jesus – the Disciples of Jesus welcome him with open arms

A)They are excited that Paul is now on their side – a believer in JESUS

B)They seem to see that Paul can be a major force to champion the cause of Christ!

C)You would think that Major revival was going to breakout in Damascus

Greg Laurie once said: "Successful ministry happens when you have the right person, in the right place, at the right time!"

22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. 23 Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. 24 But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. 25 Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.

Right guy, Right place, Wrong time!

A)God had some more that he wanted to do in Saul of Tarsus

B)I am sure that Saul is elated at this time – he realized that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah
1)Jesus personally appeared to him – called him – commissioned him

C)Lets go and take the World by Storm!!!

1)PUMPED

D)He decided to go to where this all started the religious center of ISRAEL

1)The place where the early church was birthed

E)The place that was his old stomping grounds – all his religious Pharisee friends

#6 Saul rejected

²⁶ And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

Not the warm reception he was hoping for!

A)The Christians in Jerusalem are not buying this conversion – still afraid of him

B)Enter Barnabas – Son of encouragement

1)Play a huge role in the life of Saul

²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him,

and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. ²⁹ And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, (Greek speaking Jews) ^dbut they attempted to kill him. ³⁰ When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

The believers in Jerusalem don't know what to do with Saul – stirring nest –

A) So they give him the boot – get him out of town

B) They actually brought him down to Caesarea and they sent him home to Tarsus

C) We will not hear again from Saul for 8-10 yrs

1) He fades from the pages of the story

Now Galatians 5:15-19 gives us some insight into what happened during part of that time.

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.”

So Saul goes out into the desert for an unspecified time. –

A) Arabia refers to the area to the east of Damascus.

B) Some think that he spent time in the Sinai desert, where Moses received the law.

C) What did Saul do there? We can surmise that he spent time pouring over the Scriptures that he knew so well from his upbringing,

D) But this time examining them from the **fresh light of his conversion experience** with the risen and exalted Jesus Christ.

Effective ministry is born out of intimacy!

A) Saul goes to the desert convinced that Jesus is the Messiah – comes back even more convinced

B) But He also comes **back a LOVER OF JESUS!**

C) Paul's writing concerning the Love of Christ is astounding –

1) **Resounding theme** – Christ love for Sinners/ saints

D) So we learn from this an important thing about Ministry- **Sitting at Jesus Feet**

1) **Sitting comes before Serving** – Mary/ Martha
“One thing is needed.. Chosen.. not taken

³¹ Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

Note this: God didn't need Saul of Tarsus – but he wanted to use him and use him in a big way.

A) But it would be in God's timing – God's way

There are at least four applications from all this.

1st No one is beyond God's Reach!

A) Saul of Tarsus was the last person many people would ever imagine – getting saved

B) Your life – don't stop praying

2nd God seeks to strip us of the flesh

A) God does everything possible to do away with the energy of our human flesh in order to teach us that without him we can do nothing.

B) God is going to use you – he will humble you

1) Tozer: “Whom God would use greatly, He will hurt deeply.”

C) God seeks to strip away the flesh! ‘

1) Strip away our tendency toward human ingenuity – human dependency – human strength

3rd In the service of Christ no one is indispensable.

A) We may think we are the only ones who can fill a certain hole (this will not survive without me)

B) Nothing is further from the truth –

1) God used a donkey – he can use anyone

C)If it dies because you are no longer involved it was probably more of you – than God

“When you think you are indispensable, go stick your hand in a pail of water, then pull it out and see what kind of hole is left.”

4th It takes time to build a life that is eminently usable in the program of God.

A)Do not undervalue times out of the mainstream, times to recharge or rest or become further trained.

B)Don't despise the day of small things

C)Sometimes God takes us out of the hustle and bustle to quiet our hearts – do a work IN US

1)SO HE CAN DO A GREATER WORK THRU US

D)Me Oregon