

**Acts 9:1-19 (Advance Part 4)
The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus**

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)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 the apostle would become responsible for writing **13 books** of the New Testament!

In the late 1800's in England there were two well-known and scholarly men who decided to put their heads together in an attempt to discredit Christianity and put an end to it.

**One was Sir Gilbert Hawkins;
And the other was a man named Lord Littleton.**

A)And they understood that there were essentially two events that they had to disprove.

B)They realized that the entire credibility of Christianity hinged on those two things.

C)The first was the resurrection of Jesus;
1)They realized that if the resurrection of Jesus was true then that validated the claims of the Deity of Jesus,

D)The Resurrection also validated the necessity of the sacrifice of the cross.

The second event they wanted to disprove was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus,

A)because the transformed life of Saul of Tarsus proves that Jesus is risen.

B)So Hawkins undertook the part of the study to prove the resurrection a hoax.

1)Littleton's job was to disprove the conversion Paul.

C)They were so confident that they would be able to disprove Christianity -

1)They agreed to not meet for 12 months while they did their research

D)After 12 months they would come back together to share their findings

1)And celebrate their victory in disproving the Christian faith.

But As Hawkins was doing his research He discovered that the record of the resurrection proved undeniable and credible

A)Because the historical and archaeological evidences were irrefutable.

B)And as Littleton set out to disprove the conversion of Saul of Tarsus

1)he discovered that the conversion of Saul was the result of real personal experience with the risen Jesus,

C)And that it so transformed Saul, that it literally changed the course of history.

D)So the two men finally came together after a year of doing research only to discover that they both had become Christians

E)Isn't that awesome?

The transformation of Saul of Tarsus into Paul the great apostle of the Gospel

A)is one of the greatest apologetics for the resurrection of Jesus

B)Because there is really no explanation for his transformation apart from Jesus being alive.

Of all the Characters in the NT Saul of Tarsus 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)As we 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.

D) Some people like to suggest that Christianity is for weak and simple minded people.

E) The conversion of Saul of Tarsus utterly dispels that myth

1) because Saul of Tarsus was in no way a weak man or a simple man

Saul was intellectual force in Israel!

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

Acts 22:3 He was educated at the feet of Gamaliel

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.

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.”

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. NLT

C) So 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.”

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) But When Saul was on his mission to Hunt down Christians –

C) Saul discovered that he was the one being Hunted.

#2 Saul Pursued!

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?”

We often talk about our coming to Christ - and that is the perspective from our view point

A) But from Heaven’s point of view it is always starts with God’s pursuing

B) Adam and Eve in the Garden - where are you?

C) The point of the Gospel - God sent His Son -

1) Jesus left heaven on a RESCUE MISSION

D)And Here in Acts 9 we find that Jesus was pursuing Saul even though he 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 nowhere 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

Jesus Pursuing of Saul of Tarsus -reminds us of this wonderful truth -

A)Your Past doesn’t disqualify you from the love and grace of God.

B)Jesus came to save Sinners!

C)The greater the need for grace, the greater God’s glory in bestowing it.

D)Never forget that the church’s greatest missionary was once it’s greatest enemies.

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 –

B)Jesus does not see the church as an “it,” or a building, but as “me.”

1)He has so united himself to his church that they are one and the same.

C))Important to realize There is NO separation between love for Jesus and commitment to his church.

Jesus calls the church is his “BRIDE.”

A)You can’t love Jesus and hate his bride,

B)Any more than you could tell me, Rob -you’re great, we’d like to have you over for dinner...

C)But Denise is not invited - we can’t stand her

D)I say that, because I run into people all the time these days that say they love Jesus
1)but I don’t like the church - not into Church.

Listen Jesus knows his church isn’t perfect

A)He loves his church - His Bride

B)But Pastor Rob - I have been hurt by the church - so has Jesus - still loves his bride

C)Been embarrassed by the church - so has Jesus

But Jesus has chosen to identify himself with broken people like you and me

A)Not ashamed to call you his Bros/Sisters - and he rejoices over you with Singing

B)That is my Bride- isn’t she beautiful

C)Jesus doesn’t separate himself from his bride and neither should we.

1)God will - all involved in a local church

D)So Jesus says to Saul of Tarsus - “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.

The name of Jesus was really familiar to Saul.

A)Jesus was the very name Saul hated so much. It’s the very name that Saul had persecuted.

B)Saul had lashed out against that name countless times.

1)He wanted to get people to blaspheme the name of Jesus.

C)He wanted to see the name of Jesus - eliminated from the memory of mankind around the world

D)The name of Jesus was the last thing he ever expected to hear out of Heaven.

1)because Saul believed Jesus to be dead.

E)He believed Jesus to be a mere man who died and stayed dead like any other man who was nailed to a Roman cross.

F)Everything changed that day!

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.”

A)A goad was a sharp stick they would use to prod an Ox to get it going in the right direction

B)What was the Goad that was prodding Saul’s heart - that he was kicking against?

C)Stephen’s sermon - Stephen’s prayer - Father forgive them

1)Stephen’s countenance - Shinning like the sun

I like the way that the amplified version puts the last part of that verse. It is dangerous and it will turn out badly for you to keep kicking [to offer vain and perilous resistance] against the goad.”

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

A)If you keep kicking against the Love of God!

B)Conviction of the Holy Spirit on your heart today is an indication of God’s love for you

1)He has been pursuing you

C)Stop resisting him - surrender to him today

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)Throw 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 – hitting the heart

⁶ So he, trembling and astonished, - said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

⁷ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were

opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Interesting to me that Saul was Blinded Physically

A)His physical blindness was a symbol of his spiritual blindness

B)Some people are blinded by their sin - Sin blinds, binds and leaves you grinding through life
1)Irreligious blindness -

C)Sin blinds because the Bible says that sin is pleasurable for a season - Sin is fun at first

D)Then you experience the consequences of your sin - the pain the heart ache

Some people in their blindness - rather than turning to Jesus -

A)Search for a new experience to indulge their flesh and lust - hopes this one will last

B)Vicious never ending cycle of pleasure followed by pain and misery /// They Need their eyes opened

Others suffer from what we could call a religious blindness

A)This is where you think you can be good enough to earn God’s approval;

B)if you just try hard and keep the rules good enough then God will accept you.

C)The problem with our good deeds is that they are hypocritical (covering up the actual shape of hearts)

The problem with religious blindness is this:

A)When we are performing well - keeping all the rules it fills our hearts with Pride

B)We can start thinking we are better than everyone else and deserve blessings from God

C)And when we are not performing well - our hearts are filled with condemnation

1)We think God is always mad at us - makes us want to quit - what is the use.

D)It has been said that when a man comes to the end of himself he comes to the beginning of God
1)Saul of Tarsus comes to the end of himself in this moment

#3 Saul Surrendered!

Three things that Mark Saul surrendered life!
1st V. 5 who are you Lord? - Passion – Know Jesus – who are you

A)Philippians 3 - Lay aside everything – know you known by you.

B)Saul’s whole outlook -would change from a sense of entitlement in his religion to a sense of wonder

1)Blown away by the grace of Jesus - Jesus would save him and call him - use him

C)Saul of Tarsus life is a testimony to the reality that your past does not disqualify you from usefulness

I was reminded this week of the testimony of the Slave Trader John Newton

A)After coming to Christ - Newton says his eyes were opened to how evil slave trade was.

“There is no commerce so iniquitous, so cruel, so oppressive, as the African Slave Trade of which I was involved. The slave trade was always unjustifiable; but inattention and personal interest prevented me, **for a time**, from perceiving the evil. . .

But now I am bound in conscience to take shame to myself by a public confession, which, however sincere, comes too late to prevent or repair the misery and mischief to which I have formerly been accessory.

I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I will never get over the scandal of grace that was extended toward him!”

B)Newton went on to pen that incredible Hymn “Amazing grace - Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a WRETCH like me - I once was lost but now I am found, was blind but now I see.”

C)It is interesting that in some hymnals, people have changed the words, “Wretch like me,” to “saved and strengthened me” or “saved and set me free.”

D)If you do a little research why it was changed,

1)you’ll find out it is because some churches didn’t like the concept of being wretches that needed to be saved.

2)That’s too humiliating.

I have news for you - the Bible teaches all of us are wretches - Spiritually dead - doomed.

A)You don’t need to be strengthened or improved you need to be saved and cleansed.

B)Conversion is a dual realization: I’m worse than I ever dreamed and God is more gracious than I’d ever hoped.

C)Saul of Tarsus would come to that realization - pretty quickly - Chief of sinners

1)Blown away by the Grace of Jesus.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones - “The ultimate sign of our spirituality is our amazement at the grace of God.”

D)Saul might have started out saying - Who are you Lord - like who is the one talking to me

1)He quickly moved to WHO ARE YOU LORD? - there is no one like you.

E)I am going to make it my life’s passion to explore the debts of your love and grace -

1)And tell everyone I can just how marvelous it is

The 2nd Mark of Saul’s surrender is found in V.6 in the phrase what do you want me to do?

A)Who are you - was Paul’s passion - what do you want me to do was his pursuit

B)It revealed his desire to conform his heart to the will of God.

C)Interesting that Saul would soon change his name to “Paul,” which means “small.”

D)Saul” was a strong Jewish name, the name of the first, mighty king of Israel.

E)Saul the mighty has become Paul the small.

Saul the mighty, now kneeling before God.

A)Saul, the one who seized others, now seized himself by the Lord Jesus Christ.

B)Saul, the hammer who broke others, now himself broken on the anvil of Christ.

C)Saul would discover that this pursuit of wanting to know what God wanted him to do would be an
1)ON GOING REVELATION

He would write in the book of Philippians 30years later from this moment.

A)I am still seeking to discover the reasons why Jesus apprehended me

B)Every new city every new mission was a further revelation as to what and why Jesus saved him

C)The same thing is true for you and me - each day each new encounter is an unveiling of the mystery

1)Why did Jesus save me and call me

D)That is what makes this life an adventure

The 3rd Mark of Saul being Surrendered was his immediate obedience.

A)The Lord says in V.6 "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." V.8 Then Saul arose and went

B)These three marks of Surrender would be the 3 prominent Characteristics of Saul's life for the rest of this Life

D)His desire to Know - Who Jesus was?

1)His desire to know what Jesus was calling him to and why he had apprehended him

E)And his willingness to Obey immediately when Jesus said - arise and go.

F)3 great marks of a surrendered life - that leads to a radically FRUITFUL LIFE

V.10"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

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."

At this point, Ananias is thinking, "Say what?"

A)For a minute there I thought you said, 'Saul of Tarsus.' Yeah, good one, Jesus."

B)That would be like Jesus, saying to one of you after 9-11 "I want you to go down to Brengle Terrace park

1)Guy there I want I want you to invite to church/home

C)His name is Osama bin Laden. Tall guy, turban, ZZ Top kind of beard.

1)You can't miss him."

D)Lord are you sure? - That is what Ananias is doing here: Lord are you sure about this?

1)The Right Saul?

E)Notice this: God doesn't rebuke Ananias - he understands his apprehension

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."

¹⁷And 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." ¹⁸Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

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

#4 Saul's Transformation. Note 5 things

A)1st V.11 -Behold he is praying!

B)Saul goes from persecuting Jesus to talking to Jesus -

C)Moved from religion to relationship

2nd Mark - A new Mission and Calling V.15 he is a Chosen Vessel for me, to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel

A)Paul was a unique vessel!

B)To reach Jews, gentiles and Kings - God needed a Jew who is wonderfully steeped in the OT scriptures

C)But He also needs one who is familiar with the Greek Culture.

1)He found all of that 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 of Tarsus.

3rd Mark of his transformation: Saul got a new family V.17 Brother Saul.

A)It interesting that Saul of Tarsus would loses most of his Pharisee friends and even his wife - following Jesus

B)But he would gain an even bigger family in the family of God.

C)At first the believers questioned the genuineness of His salvation

But it wouldn't be long before - He would be embraced and loved.

A)If you read the letters of Paul -13 books in the NT - one thing stands out LOUD AND CLEAR

B)HIS LOVE FOR THE CHURCH - THE BODY OF CHRIST - flaws and all.

C)Paul knew - he was flawed - Chief of sinners -

D)Knew the beauty of the church is not in its perfection - but it's perfect King and Savior

1)Who is transforming his church

The 4th Mark of Saul's transformation is He is baptized with the Holy Spirit

A)V.17 -He was filled with the Holy Spirit

B)One of the most significant traits of his life would be this: No longer a man fueled by his own passions

1)His own energy -

C)He would become a man who was empowered by God - Jesus power and strength

1)Through His grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit

The 5th and final Mark of his transformation V.18 he was baptized

A)This was radical - because this was His way of publically identifying with Jesus

B)The man who hated Jesus - the man who was an a mission to exterminate Christianity

C)Was now publically identifying himself as a follower of Jesus

D)How Amazing is that?

Close this morning by saying a couple of things to those of you here who are followers of Jesus

A)And then something to those of you whom Jesus is drawing to himself maybe for the first time

B)First to the church - followers of Jesus
Have you lost the wonder of God's grace?

C)Have you quit asking: Who, are you Lord?

Has your loss of the wonder of God's grace led you to stop praying for someone - Never get saved.

A)Listen if Jesus can save Saul of Tarsus - he can save anyone.

B)Can I encourage you to start praying like you really believe that

C)The 2nd thing I want to say to the church this morning is this:

1)When is the last time you asked Jesus - Lord what do you want me to do?

**D)Is there somewhere you want me to go?
Someone you want me to talk to?**

1)Something in my life that needs to change?

As we come to communion today:

A)It is our chance to be amazed again - that Jesus saved a wretch like us

B)Who are you -No one like you Jesus

C)Communion is also our way of publically saying Jesus - what do you want me to do

D)Yielded life - surrendered life - Cross

Now I want to speak to those of you here today that Jesus is Drawing today - maybe first time.

A)You have had Questions about God. Unsure if you are right with God,

B)Not sure if you died if you'd be accepted by him...

C)But today you are realizing that God has been pursuing you - Relationship with you.

You have been blinded by your sin - but today your eyes are being opened -

A)Only Jesus can satisfy the Void - respond

B)Or maybe you have been blinded by your religious deeds -

1)realizing - Never good enough - never do enough

C)Jesus said it is Finished!

He stands today with outstretched hand:

A)Come, all you who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

B)All who are thirsty - Come - I will satisfy you - forgive cleanse - New life