

171015 Acts 9

1 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.

We last saw Saul in Acts 8:3, he was making havoc of the church, busting into homes, and cuffing and hauling christians off to prison. Here he expanded this work to the city of Damascus (about 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem).

Still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord: The picture is of an angry, violent man - breathing in - War horse just before battle

We might say that Saul was decided against Jesus when Jesus decided for Saul.

Paul never forgot about his days going after the church. In Philippians 3 he said he was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

In Galatians 1:13, Paul added "For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers."

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." 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."

In Acts 22:6 and 26:13 - Paul revealed that this happened at mid-day, when the sun shines at its brightest. Yet Paul said that this light was brighter than the sun. Rev 21:23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

Saul, Saul: When God repeats a name twice, - Abraham, Abraham, Moses, Moses, Samuel, Samuel - Pay attention - listen up - divine appointment

Why are you persecuting Me? As the glory of God overwhelmed him, Saul found out that He persecuted God, not man.

Saul thought that he was serving God by attacking Christians, but he discovered that he was fighting God.

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What do you want me to do? - life long pursuit

A goad was a long, extremely sharp stick used to poke an animal to redirect them. Jesus goaded Saul into the right direction, and the goading caused Saul pain.

Saul was being a stubborn ox, more than just resisting the Lord - persecuting kicking back; Instead of submitting to Jesus, Saul kicked against the goad – and only increased his pain.

Who are You, Lord? - Great question - lifelong question

When He said, "I am Jesus," Saul knew exactly which Jesus spoke. - Resurrected Lord

Saul was **trembling and astonished** - To find out you totally missed the boat, thought you were fighting for God, actually against God - find out you're His enemy, not His allie. Think of Ananias & Sapphira. Saul was terrified by this experience; not oozing with warm, gushy feelings.

Saul learned the gospel that he would preach his whole life. Galatians 1:11-12, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

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.

This was a humbling experience, and a time when Saul must have challenged all his previous ideas about who God was and what pleased God.

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." 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."

Ananias was an ordinary man – not an apostle, a prophet, a pastor, an evangelist, an elder, or a deacon. Yet God used him because he was an ordinary man.

God simply used Ananias because because God loves to use people, and Ananias was a willing servant.

Ananias heard the voice of God sweetly in a vision, where God called and Ananias obediently responded. To say, "Here I am, Lord" is a perfect response to God.

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." 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."

Ananias asked, "God, do you know what kind of guy this Saul is?" - Are you sure you know what you are doing God?

He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name: God had a call upon the life of Saul.

Gentiles, Kings, and Israelites - A broad outline of the calling and future work for Paul

Saul would leave a life of privilege to embrace a higher call, but a call with much suffering.

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

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

Ananias went his way and entered the house: This took great courage. Ananias had to overcome this fear or suspicion.

The act of laying his hands and the words "Brother Saul" powerfully communicated the love of God.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit: Here is where he received the Holy Spirit and was healed from his blindness, which was spiritual blindness as much as physical blindness.

When Saul could see – both physically and spiritually – he immediately wanted to identify with Jesus and with the disciples of Jesus by being baptized.

Paul regarded his conversion experience as a pattern for all believers: Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief... However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (1 Timothy 1:13,16)

Greatest Conversion story in all of History - Saul - later becomes better known as The Apostle Paul.

Conversion talk makes people nervous uptight - some say calling for conversion is narrow minded and primitive -

Even in the church - people get uptight about conversion - Conversion - radical change - transformation - metamorphosis - **2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**

Matthew 18:3 - unless you are converted you cannot enter the Kingdom of God

John 3 - Unless you are born again you cannot enter the Kingdom of God

Conversion stories are very diverse - dramatic - plain - emotional - not emotions - sudden - drawn out
Experiences can be radically different - and very much the same. Snowflakes - model not appearance but substance.

Collision (1-5) - Revelation of light and darkness (6-9) - Embrace (17-19)

Collision - Saul is knocked to the ground - knocked of his high horse (in saying rather than reality)

Collided with reality - substance - weight - glory of God.

Stephen's msg - Paul would think that God would never become a human being - God would never set aside the temple or the sacrifices - He thought he would not be like his ancestors and reject the coming Messiah.

This is why Paul was so enraged against the Christians - they undermined everything he had built his life upon. He thought He knew what God was like, and the Christians were wrong.

Paul discovered that he was following a God he had constructed, a God of his own liking. Paul collided with God - who was not construction of man - Paul collided with the creator of man.

People are still constructing a god of their own today - a soft god - a god you have made - is a projection of yourself - therefore your God is not greater than you - not a reality - and your God will not be able to help you in a time of need - that God can't convert you, change you, transform you - because that God is not greater than your heart

We all struggle with inadequacy, self-doubt, failure, loserness - if God is a construction of your own heart - he can not help you when you get down on yourself - he can not lift you up - your countenance - pull you out of the slough of despair - because it is not a real God- it's just you.

1Jo 3:20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

When your heart condemns you, you feel like the world biggest loser - God comes along and says NO you're not - you are wrong about who you are - I love you - there is a purpose for who you are - there is a plan for your life - there is a hope to look forward to - **that only works if God is real - greater than your heart.**

God has to be real - unless God is real, and He is an authority in your life whom you bow the knee to, and can contradict you - then that God is not real. I accept you, even if there are things you have to say I don't like - I don't want to hear.

A God cannot be greater than your heart - if God is a construction of your heart. A god who is a construction of our heart - is a magnified self

One of the marks of conversion is you start to deal with a God who is really there. Not a buffet plate from the writings of many opinions or faiths. When God is real, He will speak into your life and tell you things about yourself you won't like, and about Him that you won't like, but you know it's true - real. A personal God, not a god you made up, not a god of your imagination. Collision

Set the Bible up as the authority in your life - you find that God is real - relationship with a mannequin or another human - stepford wife or real wife - contradict - argue - challenge -

Real God - at times will upset you - frustration you - humble you - People who get converted experience this collision with a real God.

2 - Revelation of personal Darkness - light of Jesus

Paul's conversion is dramatic - but I'm not sure how sudden it was. Paul finds himself after his bright collision with the reality of Jesus - finds himself blind - in darkness - no food - God put in Paul in circumstances where he had to think.

John 3 - 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

Paul was rethinking his understanding of God - seeing things he had never seen before. Saul would have rejected the idea that Jesus was the Messiah - because the Messiah was to be blessed by God. Jesus was crucified on a cross, and Paul would believe that anyone hung on a tree was cursed. "My God My God why have you forsaken" Jesus was cursed and abandoned by God.

The Saul meets the resurrected Lord - I saw Him - He was vindicated - He was blessed by God - on the cross He wasn't being cursed and abandoned for His own sins - or He never would have been raised from the dead - therefore Jesus must have been cursed and abandoned for someone else's sins. Ours!

Everything in the word starts to come to life - make sense - riddles are no longer riddles - How the Messiah would be a suffering servant and a conquering King. All the sacrifices make sense for the first time - because they are signs that point to Jesus.

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Second thing in his darkness - Paul was rethinking who he was - Acts 26 - Paul recounts his conversion story - Jesus also said "It's hard to kick against the Goads"

Romans 7 - Paul opens up about this dark time - I was alive apart from the Law came home, and I died.

Alive - I like myself - had a great self image - thought highly of himself - loved himself - but in reality he was keeping the law at arms length - First 9 commandments can be kept behaviorally - Jesus unmasked them - to show that they were heart matters - but the 10 commandment needed no unmasking - coveting is always a matter of the heart -

Covet doesn't just mean want - covet means to want to intensely that you are discontent without it.

Saul who built his life on the fact that He was right with God, came to the realization that he is to be so satisfied with God's love, that he should always be content.

When that hit home, his whole system of thought came unraveled - started happening with Steven. Stephen's sermon and the way Steven died - shined with peace - father forgive - Goads

We tend to build our identity on achievement, lifestyle, etc.. The best thing that could happen to you is have it all unravel. Crisis of heart - reveals your need for a savior. You can't save yourself.

Conversion is not adopting a moral code. Becoming a Christian is far more than just going to church, being kind, refraining from sinful activity, and engaging in ministry. **Conversion is a challenge to self-righteous morality. Paul was humbled and saw he couldn't save himself.**

3. Embrace - Ananias placed laid hands on Saul, and said brother. Embrace a man who has been given legal authority to arrest me, and have me killed.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done - Gospel - all sins are forgiven - God used ananias as the hand to embrace Paul. Saul, you are my kid, rest in my arms.

Collide, convicted of sin, believe in a savior - faith we have to have faith - does that mean get rid of all your doubts - no - faith is resting on God's arms - letting down the burden of being your own master - being your own savior - thinking you are competent and able to run your own life.

Conversion - the burden comes off - My yoke is easy and my burden is light - Jesus does all the heavy lifting.

How do I know I am converted - can't look at the conversion experiences - you have to look at the results - intimacy with God - Ananias is told that Paul will be praying. Not saying his prayers - engaged in prayer. Talking to God as Father.

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Sacrifice - Show him how much he must suffer for my name - when you become a Christian you are willing to sacrifice - if God had sent a strong Messiah - as an example to be saved by summoning up enough strength - we would look down on those who aren't strong enough to be saved - Jesus came as a suffering servant - to those who would reject Him - sacrifices Himself - put me first - and gave up Himself for me - becoming more and more unselfish.

Desire for Community - when Jesus Christ converts Saul - why are you persecuting me - when you persecute them - you persecute me - you are saved into a body of believers - all of whom are part of Christs Body. There is a lot of Jesus you will never see, until you see it in your brothers and sisters in Christ.