

“Saul-Before Christ”

Acts 7:58-8:3, ESV

Introduction: All who are in Christ have a testimony of conversion to Jesus. A part of that testimony involves who we were **BEFORE** we came to faith in Jesus. That is true of Saul, aka Paul. Saul, before Christ, was an intense persecutor of the church. At the zenith of Saul’s disdain for Christians, was his approval, his consenting of Stephen’s stoning.

1). The Stoning of Stephen (7:58-59).

- This man was known for **faith**, wisdom, grace, and for being filled with the Holy Spirit.
- This man prayed for **God to forgive** the ones stoning him while they were in the express act of murder.
- His prayer mirrors the **prayer of Jesus** while the Lord was being crucified.
- Stephen was the **first to die** for the faith.

Application: For what or for whom are you **willing to die**? Have you ever thought about it? How is it that one can be full of faith, wisdom, grace, and the Holy Spirit and end up dead for such great qualities? I am NOT asking you this morning if you are willing to **die** for Christ; rather, I am asking if you are willing to **live** passionately for the Savior?

2). The Sanctioning of Saul (8:1a).

- The greatest **theologian**, the greatest **missionary**, the greatest **evangelist** in the history of Christianity, apart from Jesus Christ Himself, was the apostle Paul.
- Saul was brilliant—privileged to have studied for seven years under **Gamaliel**, a distinguished teacher among the Sanhedrin. He had the equivalent of two PhDs. Saul knew the **Scriptures**.
- He was a **Roman** citizen, a rising star in **Judaism**. He was a conscientious **Pharisee**.
- Yet, BEFORE Christ, Saul was easily the greatest **enemy** of the church. He was consumed with destroying the church. What is that that consumes YOU?
- Galatians 1:13-14**. He genuinely believed the Christian movement was dangerous to Judaism.

Application: Saul is a **trophy** of the amazing grace of God in Christ Jesus. He embodies **1 Cor. 6:9-11**.

3). The Scattering of the Church (8:1b-3).

- “On that day...” a great **persecution** came against the church in Jerusalem (v. 1b).
- “And they were scattered...” Samaria, Judea, except the Apostles (v. 1b).
- Stephen was buried and mourned over greatly (v. 2).
- Saul was **ravaging** the church, wreaking much havoc (v. 3).

Application: When you pause to think about it, this morning we are the church gathered, but in a few moments, we will be the church **SCATTERED**! Praise God, we are not who we used to be!!