

Ministry of The Holy Spirit
Saul's Conversion
Acts 9:1-16

Last time...Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch

An Adventure in Faith: God's will for our life is revealed progressively

When we walk by faith, we are led by the Holy Spirit one step at a time

After we obey Step 1, we are given Step 2, etc

One step will lead to another and all the steps lead to "WOW!!"

This time...Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus

We will be in Acts 9

v1-2 Saul...threatenings and slaughter...letters to Damascus:

Yet...Saul's impact on the Church is Acts 8:1-4

Saul is rabid about the destruction of this "heresy" known as "The Way",
which he fanatically believes to be blasphemous

He is the first of a long line of fulfillments of Jesus' prophesy in John 16:1-4a

So intent is Saul in eradicating this "blasphemy" that he, without invitation but on his own initiative, went to the high priest to get official papers (arrest warrants) authorizing him to go to Damascus to arrest these religious villains of "The Way" and bring them back in chains to Jerusalem to be tried and punished for their crimes against God (remember, all the disciples of Jesus Christ at this time are Jewish)

Saul is

- zealous and relentless
- a menace and a terrorist
- a hunter of men who are fishers of men

Later, by his own testimony before a king, Acts 26:9-12

Damascus

- Oldest city in the world with a continuous history, dating from Uz, Noah's grandson until today
- In modern day Syria, 150 miles NNE of Jerusalem
- 4th most holy city in Islam, behind Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem
- mentioned 60 times in Scripture
- its destruction is prophesied in Is 17:1...seen in the civil war

Why Damascus?

Scripture does not say

But, by Clement's account in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Saul believed that is where the Apostle Peter fled from the persecution in Jerusalem (which he was spearheading).

Best way to kill this movement: kill the head

Selectively listening to his master in Acts 5:33-37...

but not Acts 5:38-39 because he "knew" this was not of God!

That would be consistent with Saul's fervent, fanatic, and combative personality

v3 came near Damascus and suddenly...a light from heaven:

From Jerusalem with papers in hand, Saul would travel

- east, down to Jericho
- north along the Jordan River to the Sea of Galilee (avoiding Samaria)
- along the west shore of the Sea of Galilee thru Tiberias to Capernaum
- to pick of the Via Maris (the Way of the Sea) to Damascus

He was almost to Damascus when suddenly a light brighter than the sun shined from heaven

Acts 22:6 about noon (sun at its strongest and brightest)

Acts 26:13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven,
above the brightness of the sun

v4-5a why persecuteth thou Me:

Acts 26:14 saying in the Hebrew tongue

Saul was not knocked down, he fell down prostrate in reverence...
the humble position of worship

Then he heard a voice from heaven asking him a very penetrating question:

Saul, Saul...repeated for emphasis

why persecuteth thou Me...the Voice knows what is in his heart, and
what he is doing and where

To which Saul responds:

["Me? Persecuting Jehovah? Me? I'm serving Jehovah!
I'm so confused and frightened!"]

This very religious man knows he has heard the voice of God...
yet believes he has been serving God by "throwing the Book at"
these heretics and blasphemers.

His brilliant mind must be racing!

Ps 89:15 Blessed *is* the people that know the joyful sound:
they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy
countenance

Ps 104:2 Who coverest *thyself* with light as *with* a garment

(which Saul would know)

Who are you, Lord...Supreme Authority, God

v5b I am Jesus:

To a broken man, Jesus reveals Himself

I am Jesus...not “I was” (crucified, died, buried...and indeed risen!)
Who was, Who is, Who is to come...I AM

whom you persecuteth...Jesus takes personally every attack on
every part of His Body, His Bride

Persecution is always an attack on Jesus Christ,
not on the follower of Jesus bearing testimony of Him
Therefore, to suffer persecution for Jesus’ sake is to bear
hatred of Jesus, for Jesus

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks...the sharp-pointed shepherd’s
goads to get wandering or rebellious sheep back safely in the fold

Jesus may have been using a play on words with this brilliant mind
and “gifted” student of the Law
Remember, Jesus is speaking to Saul in Hebrew

Deut 4:1 Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes
and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do
them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the
land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth
you.

plus 8 other places in Deut
teach = “goad”

Why are you, such an intelligent man and brilliant student, so
stubbornly, proudly unteachable?
Why are you fighting against the Living Word of God?

Saul heard Stephen's testimony (Acts 7:2-53)
As a "gifted" student of the Word of God, Stephen's sermon must have
rung true to Saul
And maybe it made him angry (Acts 7:54)...like it did Brett
So he fought against the Truth...kicking against the goads of the
Good Shepherd
But, Stephen's testimony (Acts 7:55-60) now bears fruit!
More fruit will come of Stephen's death than of his life

v6 trembling and astonished...have me to do...Arise and go:
Broken and shattered, stupefied and shaking with fear, Saul surrenders right here
Right here, Saul is converted

Conversion is instantaneous event, in a moment, not a process
2 Cor 5:17 is a radical transformation of the heart, a re-birth of the spirit
Many events lead to conversion but conversion happens in the moment of
surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ
Rom 10:9
After conversion is a process of being conformed into the image of Jesus
(Rom 8:29), another work of God (Phil 1:6)

Proof: Saul's response

Lord...the name of his Lord (v5) is Jesus (v5), Saul is knowingly and
personally addressing the risen and ascended Lord Jesus
Without so much as even a hint of disagreement or denial

What will You have me to do...no longer my will be done, Lord, but Your
will be done

And the Lord Jesus tells his newest disciple what to do
Again, the instructions come one step at a time – Arise and go
Just like Philip's 1st instruction in Acts 8:26
Just as in every Adventure of Faith

Saul is told to continue his journey into Damascus and to go to the street
called Straight
One of two "Main Streets", if you will, in every Roman city
(N/S and E/W)
Still the main east/west road in the old city

Saul is not given

- What next...Step 2 not yet, not until obey Step 1
- Why...not yet (later, summarized in Acts 26:16-18)

v7 the men...speechless, hearing...seeing no man:
Saul, to carry out his “orders” from the high priest, travelled with an entourage,
tough men to bind and transport criminals
Those men, dead in their sin, stood speechless...
as will every sinner stand speechless before God (GWT in Rev 20)
They heard a voice but did not see the One speaking to Saul

Several considerations at this point:

1. what the men saw and heard
 - Acts 9:7...hearing a voice, not seeing Jesus
 - Acts 22:9...saw the light, did not hear Jesus
 - Did they hear or not hear Jesus?
 - Acts 26:14...Jesus spoke in Hebrew, the language of scholars not common folk
 - They heard a voice but did not understand, did not know it was Jesus speaking or what He said
2. what Saul saw and heard
 - clearly, heard Jesus speak directly to him...in “his” language
 - he also saw Jesus, not just the light
 - 1 Cor 9:1 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?
 - 1 Cor 15:8 And last of all he was seen of me also

v8-9 eyes were opened, he saw no man:
The entire entourage saw the brilliant light from heaven, but only Saul is blinded

Why?

1. A lesson in dependence upon the Lord to break his independence
2. A lesson in light and darkness, sight and blindness (John 9:25, 39-41)
3. To rock Saul to his very foundation...and replace it
 - fasted (to afflict the soul) and prayed
 - wondered, thinking
 - his murderous persecution of followers of Jesus Christ
 - Stephen, his words and actions in Acts 7
 - the value and worthiness of his life (vs others)
 - Now what?
 - re-evaluating everything he thought he knew and arriving at a life-changing conclusion (Phil 3:7-8)

For 3 days Saul lived

Ps 41:4 I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee

Ps 51:16-17 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise

v10-12 disciple...Ananias...vision:

Jesus not only appeared to Saul (in glory), He appeared to an “ordinary” disciple named Ananias in a vision (a “dream” while awake ala Joel 2:28)

Ananias has a heart after Isaiah’s heart...Is 6:8

Ever ready, always willing and available

Jesus tells His disciple to go find Saul of Tarsus (tells him where) and to lay hands on him to restore his sight

After appearing to Saul near Damascus, Jesus gave to Saul in Damascus a vision of who was going to come to him and what he was going to do to/for him
Then He appears in a vision to Ananias

Jesus is working on earth from heaven

Jesus is preparing Saul for Ananias, and Ananias for Saul

The Lord works “in stereo”, in “tandem”

So, if someone comes to you and says they have a word from the Lord for you, check it against what the Lord has told/showed you

John 9:39-41 will be “flipped” for the repentant Saul

v13-14 I have heard:

Wait! What?!

“OK, Lord, I hear You.

But...I have heard from many people about this guy...

- what he has done in Jerusalem...to Your saints
1st time that believers (all) in Jesus Christ are called saints
- why he is here in Damascus...to those that call on Your name
i.e. believers

His reputation precedes him!

He is Christian Enemy #1

Am I to go volunteer to get arrested and bound by him?”

Ananias is

either asking “Why?” in the form of a statement
or, while not saying, No”, seeking comfort in his “Yes.”
Perhaps counting the cost for his obedience

v15-16 Go thy way...chosen vessel...to bear My name...suffer:

Jesus tells Ananias to get going...

tells him just enough to test his faith (“Do you trust Me?”)

He gives Ananias the “Big Picture” regarding the person and calling of
Saul of Tarsus

person: My chosen vessel

the 12th Apostle, replacing Judas Iscariot

(currently waiting in the house of another Judas)

John 6:70

John 15:16

Jesus did NOT choose Mathias in Ch 1, He now chooses

Saul of Tarsus in Ch 9

calling: My witness before

1. the Gentiles (Rom 3:9)

2. kings (all Gentile because the Jews have no king)

3. the Jews (he is a Jew's Jew)

To suffer great things for My sake (to be told Saul beforehand!)

- the great persecutor will become greatly persecuted

- 2 Cor 11:23-30

- 2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18

Saul proudly went to Damascus with the power and authority of the
corrupt high priest

Saul humbly came to Damascus with the power and authority of the
Holy One of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ

To say Saul's plans in Damascus have radically changed (converted)
is understatement!

Saul was being prepared by God for this calling his whole life;

only he didn't know it and now it will be revealed to him in steps

of Tarsus:

- in the Roman province of Cilicia in Asia, modern day Turkey
- a card-carrying, freeborn Roman citizen
- in depth knowledge of the Greek culture and Roman law

Jew:

- the tribe of Benjamin (known to be feisty)
- in depth knowledge of the Jewish culture and history

Pharisee, son of a Pharisee:

- brilliant student of one of the most respected teachers
- very in depth knowledge of the (letter of the) Law and prophets

personality

- not intimidated by accomplished men or large groups of people
- does not back down from a fight

Saul of Tarsus has “the right stuff” to do what the Jesus’ Apostle needed to do
He has been prepared by the Lord from before the foundation of the world

2 Tim 1:9

Application/Lessons

Conversion: a radical change

Seen

Heard

In the case of Saul of Tarsus

a major attitude adjustment.

shown he is dead wrong about the only thing that matters – salvation

bankrupt self-righteousness

dead legalism...death in the letter of the Law but life in the Spirit of the Law

a proud “elite” is now a humble servant

Examine our lives: Have we had a conversion, a radical change in our lives?

Were we once blind but now we see?

Have we met Jesus Personally?

Do we think differently now than before we met Jesus Personally?

Do we see everything differently because we met Jesus Personally?

Conversion cannot be faked; might fool men but cannot fool the Lord God Almighty

Reputations

Bad reputations are very difficult to turn around.

Good reputations are very easily tarnished.

Ever get a bad one and try to live it down?

Ever lose a good one?

Let your conversion/radical change be seen and heard

Protect your witness; people are always watching!

2 Tim 1:9

Our past has a purpose now and in the future

God has and is preparing us for His work

Be ever ready, always willing and available to Arise and go

- a. be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ
- b. be transformed by the renewing of your mind (the mind of Christ)

Jesus is

- encouraging, not discouraging
- hopeful, not despairing
- joyful, not a bummer
- all about God and others, NOT Self