

“A Man Enlisted for Service!”

Acts 9 (9:1-19)

Intro. – A Paul Rees said it well, “What Socrates is to philosophy and what Shakespeare is to literature, the apostle Paul is to the Christian faith.”

The remainder of the book of Acts tells how SAUL became a Christian and how he developed into one of the primary forces of the first century Church. Luke, under the inspiration of God, repeats the account of Saul’s conversion three times in chapters 9, 16 and 22. No other historical incident in the Bible has that kind of exposure with the exception of the crucifixion and the resurrection of our Lord. Why, why so much dedicated space in the Bible to tell of Saul’s conversion? There are several reasons, but, the one we want to focus on today is the fact that all are *called* but not all *respond*. Saul (Paul) responded to the call of the Lord. His response serves to remind you and me of an important Biblical principle!

Purpose: to learn that service to the Lord is ALWAYS a choice

Saul was enlisted by the Lord as a *chosen instrument/vessel*; however, this was not in exclusion to Saul’s choice. Saul was brought face to face with the risen Lord and it was Saul’s choice that led him to fasting and prayer. Ultimately it was Saul’s choice that led him to heed the Lord’s instructions given through Ananias. By choice, Saul became a Christian and by choice he was enlisted for service!

There are three valuable matters we must learn from Saul’s conversion/enlistment for service:

I PRIDE Will Hinder Service

- Saul was a pride filled man:

A. Proud of His Pedigree

1. He grew up in a wealthy family – Philippians 4:12 *“I know what it is to be in need and to have plenty.”*
2. His parents must have been well off – though they were Jews they also Roman citizens...
3. Hometown was Tarsus = one of top three university cities then (Athens, Alexandria, Tarsus) = equivalent of modern day Boston, Berkley, Stanford.

B. Proud of His Education

1. Parents could afford to send him away to have the best education.
2. At a young age sent away to Jerusalem to study at the feet of Gamaliel:
 - Talmud: *“Since Gamaliel died, the glory of the Law has ceased.”*
3. Acts 22:3 – fact that he was brought up in the city, educated under Gamaliel = meant great deal...

C. Proud of His Intellect

1. Saul was sharp = fluent in several languages... writer...
2. Could go to Athens and debate the best of the best... go to Corinth and speak Hedonist’s language... go to Jerusalem and hold his own with theologians... go on a ship and discuss weather and navigational matters...
3. Saul was brilliant, but, such blinded him to the truth = danger of being prideful in intelligence:
 - Illus. – John Wesley received letter from a self-appointed critic: *“The Lord told me to tell you that He doesn’t need your book learning, your Greek and Hebrew.”* John Wesley. replied, *“Thank You Sir: Your letter was superfluous, however; as I already know the Lord had no need for my ‘book learning’ as you put it. However, although the Lord has not directed me to say so, on my own responsibility I would like to say to you that the Lord doesn’t need your ignorance either.”*

D. Proud of His Religion

1. Philippians 3:4-6 *“...although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”*

2. Saul of Tarsus thought of himself as God's gift to Judaism – kept the Law, was a Pharisee and proud of every earthly achievement.
3. Results of his pride = persecution of the Church... Stephen stoned... 22:4 *“killed and tortured Christians”*... 26:11 *“went from synagogue to synagogue having them punished... and I tried to force them to blaspheme.”*
4. Saul was arrogant and proud = a guy really tough to love...

E. Application for Us

1. What are you and I “proud of” that blinds us from the Truth and hinders our service to Christ?
2. All of us are “proud” people to a certain extent and frankly that pride is what gets us in trouble!
 - Illus. – Moody told of a swaggering cowboy years ago who in a crowded blacksmith shop, picked up a horseshoe not realizing it was red hot. Immediately he dropped it and didn't rub his hands because he was too proud to admit how stupid he had just been. “What's wrong Zeek, too hot to handle?” “Nope, just doesn't take long to look at a horseshoe.”
3. Proverbs 6:16ff gives a list of seven things God hates = first one is “haughty eyes.”
4. Pride is what makes us concerned about sophistication and dignity... but what God wants is submission and a teachable spirit...
5. Pride hates submitting to God... frankly why so many have no problem with Godless leadership and the direction we as a nation are headed...
6. Bible is clear (Matthew 23:12) *“...whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Brethren and friend, may we learn from Saul of Tarsus – pride most definitely hinders service!

II HUMILITY Will Lead to Service

- A.W Tozer said, “It's doubtful that God uses anybody greatly before He hurts them deeply.”

A. Knocked to the Ground (vv 3-4a)

1. There are not many more humiliating experiences than being knocked down in front of people.
2. A bright light from heaven = same light knocked the soldiers to ground at Jesus' tomb... God knocked Saul to the ground and got his attention!
3. The point is obvious – sometimes don't look upward (to God) until we're knocked to ground.

B. Shown How Wrong He Was (vv 4b-5)

1. Our Lord appeared to Saul = note: Saul on the ground asking *“Who are you, Lord?”*
2. *“I am Jesus Whom you are persecuting.”*
3. Illus. – difficult to admit you are wrong: e.g. balancing the check book... I would get upset because it never comes out balanced and I'm thinking all along “It's Mary's fault...” and then it turns out to be my fault... “Honey, are you done and did you find the problem?”
4. It's so hard to admit you are wrong... Saul dedicated his life to wiping out Christianity... and now he is shown in dramatic fashion just how wrong he had been!

C. Given a Handicap (vv 6-9)

1. Saul was rendered blind – was going to Damascus to arrest Christians... now being led there because he was totally blind...
2. For three days he was blind... fasted and prayed...
3. God can crush pride in an instant – case in point – Saul of Tarsus.

D. Application for Us (3 ways we keep ourselves humble)

1. Exposure to other people = such prevents a “backyard mentality” = we don't have corner on the market when it comes to ideas, experience etc.
 - Illus. – man bragged about surviving the Twin Valley flood... all he talked about... died went to heaven. Brag to Peter how he survived the Twin Valley flood... get everyone together so I can tell them about it... “That's fine, but remember Noah will be in the audience.”

2. Memory of past failures – how can we be proud when we remember the senseless things done?
 - Illus. – left car in drive to look at a vehicle... hit truck parked ahead...
3. Compare ourselves with Christ alone = then we'll realize how far short we "measure up"

When we humble selves before God, not necessary to strike us to the ground everyday to be used of Him!

III RENEWAL Will Continue in Service

- Lord sends Ananias, a reluctant servant to Saul to tell him what Saul is to do what he'd suffer...
 - sight restored, told to arise and be immersed, washing away sins calling on the name of the Lord.
 - Christ makes Saul a new man in lot of ways – here are two significant ways:
- A. Renewed in Personality
 1. Dr. Wegg told Mary once, "Once a jerk always a jerk..." but Christ in transforming business!
 2. From a proud, obnoxious, arrogant person to a submissive, dynamic servant of the Lord.
 3. Said following: "*I am least of all the apostles*" (1 Cor. 15:9)... "*O wretched man that I am*" (Romans 7:24)... "*chief of sinners*" (1 Tim 1:15)... sounds like a changed man to me!
 4. Mature faith doesn't desire nor does it demand center stage... works for the Lord not for men...
 - B. Renewed in Ambition
 1. Saul was given a new GOAL (Philippians 3:7ff) "...that which was gain is loss..."
 2. Here was a man obsessed with status, prestige and power – but now concerned about worship... service and taking as many with him to heaven as he could...
 - C. Application for Us
 - how we need to be renewed in Spirit... only through the grace of God will such happen!

Conclude: Newspapers in Naples, Italy were calling it "*The Miracle in Naples.*" Police started cracking down on welfare fraud. Since that crackdown, 50,000 people who had been collecting disability no long are disabled.

Let me use this to summarize the idea of "choice(s)." Are we making the right choices? August 6, 1996 a woman in England was carrying twins. She made it known that she wanted to abort one of her twins but save the other. Why? She said she could not afford to raise two babies. Many picked up on this and started to raise funds for this woman. In less than twenty four hours the equivalent of \$100,000 had been raised and offered to the woman. She accepted the money but went ahead with the abortion.

Wow! What a choice! Again every day we are called upon to make choices. Are we making the right ones? Romans 6:16 says, "*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?*" Let's make good decisions – decisions to be servants of His!