

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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THE CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS

Acts 9:1-22

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The points to my message today are:

- Saul's conversion proves the saving power of Jesus.
- God got Saul's attention.
- Saul's conversion followed a progression.

**INTRODUCTION:** This past week, I talked about Saul who became the Apostle Paul with a class of children. I was on chapel duty in Georgia. There was a 12 year old girl who seemed a little more mature than the other children. And though she was very curious, she had no church background. I realized as I was sharing the gospel, that this girl was hearing it for the first time. The Scripture that night was Romans 6:23. She was reading about sin and she turned the page and saw the picture of a cross, and she said, "That's why Jesus died on the cross." The light came on. I can tell you that she walked out of there with the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

And I thought about Saul and realized that he saw a light too. A very different sort of light.

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 9:1-22

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.<sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

*<sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

*“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. <sup>6</sup> “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”*

*<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

*<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”*

*“Yes, Lord,” he answered.*

*<sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”*

*<sup>13</sup> “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”*

*<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”*

*<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.*

*Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. <sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah..*

## SAUL'S CONVERSION PROVES THE SAVING POWER OF CHRIST

**EXPLANATION:** In our studies, we focus mostly on the man Paul. We don't focus on the man named Saul because it's not a pleasant story. Saul was intent on destroying the church, putting both men and women in prison.

Galatians 1:13, Paul confesses: *For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.*

Galatians 1:22, he says *I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.* <sup>2</sup> *They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."* <sup>24</sup> *And they praised God because of me.*

Acts 22:4 *I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.*

If there is anything worse than an ignorant person, a person who just doesn't know... it has to be an educated ignorant person. Saul was an educated lost man. Ignorance is bliss, as the saying goes, until knowledge confronts it. I've faced a lot of ignorance in my lifetime and I am sure you have as well. But a person educated in Bible teachings but not a believer in Jesus Christ can make for a difficult and challenging conversation.

Saul was educated in the Old Testament scriptures. He was educated under Rabbi Gamaliel. Acts 5:34 tells us that Gamaliel was the one who argued to give the disciples some space and said that if their message and healings were of God, then they would stand the test of time.

Gamaliel was well respected. Many believed he was the best rabbi of all time. If that were the case, then no doubt Saul had a solid education in Judaism. However, we see that Paul was not tolerant like Gamaliel. He didn't want to accept anything new. He didn't believe God could manifest in a new way, certainly not through Jesus.

Saul viewed Christianity as a threat to Judaism and felt the best way to deal with it was to eradicate the followers of Jesus. Saul believed he was doing the right thing by fighting to protect Judaism. I am sure the thought he was helping God's cause, similar to the way Muslim extremists believe they are honoring Allah by killing non-Muslims and conducting suicide bombings, and so on. They believe they are doing the right thing but are completely misguided.

If Christ can save Saul, he can save anybody. If Christ can take a man who hated Christians to the point of imprisoning them and killing them and overseeing their deaths... if he can save him, he can save anybody.

## **GOD GOT SAUL'S ATTENTION**

**EXPLANATION:** Knowledge alone would not cut it with Saul. He was brilliant. He could out-argue anyone. He was more knowledgeable about the scriptures than most people of his day, probably more than most Christians today.

As a person of knowledge, reason, and debate, and a defender of the Judaic law, God knew that Saul needed something supernatural to get his attention. No doubt he had heard of the miracles worked by the apostles. But he probably wrote them off as hoaxes or acts of Satan. Now God would do something to him that Saul's knowledge could not explain. Something that was so profound that Saul's life would change forever. The light and the voice that hit him were so profound that there was no denying them. Saul himself was an eye witness to God's power over nature and human will. The light that shone during the day, the voice that he heard... these things were meant for Saul specifically.

For the rest of his life, Saul would tell of what happened to him. He would shock people with his story and people who did not believe would then believe. It was as if a whole generation of people said, "If it happened to Saul of Tarsus, then it must be real, because Saul doesn't mess around. He has no time for folly."

Just because of who he was... this cruel man who was consistent and believed he was doing the right thing... just because of who he was, he was a credible witness. Saul meant business.

**APPLICATION:** How credible is your testimony? Are you credible enough that people will say, "Well, if he says it, it must be true?"

## **SAUL'S CONVERSION FOLLOWED A PROGRESSION**

**EXPLANATION:** We see conversion as an event. We repent of our sins... we profess that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. We see it as a born-again experience. There's always a progression. The journey of life takes us on a journey till we reach that point when we hear the Gospel and we either receive it or reject it.

Note the progression of Saul's conversion experience.

- Even though Saul was going to Damascus, he was really wandering.
- He would say he was minding God's business, but he was completely misguided.
- Saul was working on his own goals. He believed he had a noble mission.
- Saul saw the light of Jesus. The light was so bright that it knocked him down.
- Saul heard the voice of God, directed at him.
- Saul is blinded for three days. During that time of darkness, he had time to reflect on those he had persecuted. He had time to remember Stephen.

- Saul was totally dependent on others, completely humbled. Up until that point in his life, he didn't need anybody. Now, he was alone to ponder what he had done.
- In 3 days, Saul regained his sight.

Saul was born with sight. And he was born again with a second opportunity to see. He saw everything with a brand new perspective. Saul's old vision was gone. As Paul, he had new eyes. New vision. A new mission in life.

**CONCLUSION:** Without Saul, who we know as Paul, we would not have all the epistles from which we get our doctrine. There would be many questions, and in fact, we would probably look back at the early Christians in the same way we observe other things in history. We read a historic fact or watch a documentary on TV and then we say, "Well, isn't that interesting?" But Paul's letters, inspired by God, were circulated and copied and passed around and eventually became a big part of the New Testament. God used Paul as a mighty man for the rest of his life to change the world forever.

In Saul's life, Rabbi Gamaliel's words came true. Acts 5:39 *"But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."*

Saul of Tarsus fought against God. When he began fighting for God, he had a completely different life. If God can save Saul of Tarsus in the middle of his hate, God can save anyone. He can save that person you are praying for. He can save you. Don't give up. Keep praying. Keep witnessing.

Let's take the five elements of progression in the conversion of Saul and put "you" in place of Saul.

- You may have a direction in life, but without Jesus you are merely wandering, like Saul.

- You may be working on your own goals in life but without Jesus your goals are misguided.
- Just as Saul was knocked down by the bright light, you should respond to whatever light or insight is given to you.
- Just as Saul heard the voice of God, while you may not hear a literal voice, you must respond to that tug at your heart.
- Saul was blinded. It took that for him to be humbled and wake up to the truth. Don't wait for something to shock your world. Don't wait for God to do something drastic to get your attention.

Without Christ we are spiritually blind, but when he saves us, we see things from a different perspective. If you are living for Jesus Christ, you have reasons to live which are more fulfilling, and you have an eternal life, which God promised before the world began.

When Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, died and stood before Jesus, Jesus didn't say, "Hey what about all those Christians you killed?" He welcomed him. Because he was a forgiven man.

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