

Damascus Road: The Conversion of Paul

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Date: 27 January 2008

[0:00] Let's turn to God's word shall we? To Acts chapter 9.

! Let us pray. Lord we thank you today for this time of fellowship and praise and Lord for your precious word. Help us Lord to have it open to our understanding that we might learn and grow and gain from these words we pray in Jesus name we ask it. Amen.

Acts chapter 9 tells the story of Paul who was first called Saul. Saul was named after one of the greatest kings of Israel. But after his conversion his name became Paul which means little. This is the record of his conversion. This is the account of how someone got saved in the New Testament.

Acts chapter 9 and verse 1. We're going to read some passages and then comment as we go through. Acts chapter 9 verse 1 it says Saul was a committed anti-Christian. He was committed to the cause of destroying the church. He was breathing out raging fuel

He had a bad breath problem. He was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. He was travelling to Damascus. His intention, his mission was to destroy the church of God. That was what he was on about.

And what a conversion we read here as we read further. In verse 3. And as he journeyed he came near Damascus and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven a light, a dazzling, brilliant glorious light shone down God got Paul's attention a light from heaven he saw the light as we know as a phrase we use for conversion he saw the light the light which flashed around him he described it as brighter than the sun in the word of God it's a symbol of God's holiness of his purity of his awesome character and glory his truth his life and this dazzling light shone right into the soul of Paul into the darkness that was his ungodly heart the light of God the glory of God came down and we read further in verse 4 and he fell to the ground he fell to the earth and he heard a voice saying unto him

[3:22] Saul Saul why persecutest thou me? and he said who art thou Lord? and the Lord said I am Jesus whom thou persecutest it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks the Lord Jesus said I am Jesus whom you are persecuting when Saul was persecuting the Christian people he was actually persecuting the Lord Jesus himself and when people do that to you as a believer they're really hurting Jesus it's really them that they're attacking when they're hurting you and attacking you here he was he was brought to his knees he was brought to his knees he was brought to his knees he was brought to the earth to the ground to his face he was humble he was humble this was conversion a conversion account and in conversion in the Bible way we humble ourselves we bow down before the almighty one we get things truly in perspective about who we are and who God is

God almighty overshadows us and we are humbled and brought low before him that is conversion and the Lord Jesus hearing was speaking to Saul the Lord Jesus was talking about the promptings of the Holy Spirit when which Paul was resisting as oxen ploughed a field the one driving them kept them in line by goats which used to prick against their heels eight foot long sticks that jammed them and kept them in line sharpened at one end this is what the Lord Jesus was saying to Saul that he was kicking against the guiding power of God in his life it was as if God was trying to get Saul's attention for a while it was as if he was saying you had the law you had the prophets telling you who I am you heard of me in three years of earthly ministry you heard of me in the messages of my followers you heard of me from Stephen don't you find it hard kicking against all that evidence all that all that that I sent your way to grab your attention and how many of us too at times like were sung earlier years I spent in vanity and pride sometimes it takes years for a soul to trust Christ sometimes it takes years for a man a woman to say

I'm going to follow the Lord Jesus as my Saviour and this is what happens when we resist the Holy Spirit when we resist that convicting power of God every time God sends another word of testimony we're resisting it we're resisting his guiding his leading this was the conviction of the Holy Spirit in conversion there's a conviction of the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit grabs a hold of us and prompts us and urges us and it could take some urging some pleading some striving and the Bible says one day that God's Spirit will not always strive with man God's striving will cease God's beckoning God's invitation will end and friends we need to make sure we're converted by the power of God conversion is God arresting us on our journey on our hell bent journey and God is grabbing a hold of us and stopping us in our tracks conversion is marked by God arresting us and getting a hold of us this is what happened to Paul here he was intent on going to Damascus to arrest the Christians to hold them in chains to bind them to drag them away to jail and God arrested Paul God arrested him and stopped him in his tracks so what happened verse 6 it goes on and he trembling and astonished said Lord what will they have me to do Paul was utterly shaken up trembling astonished and Paul asked the two greatest questions that really any of us could ask and want to know the answer to first he asked who are you Lord who are you Lord and secondly he says what do you want me to do who are you Lord and what do you want me to do that's conversion that's finding out who the Lord is it's finding the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and then it's saying Lord what do you want me to do what would you have me to do and verse 6 goes on and the Lord said unto him arise and go into the city and it shall be told thee what they must do and the men which journeyed with him they stood speechless hearing a voice but seeing no man his fellow travellers they were utterly amazed they were astonished this was an astonishing event salvation is astonishing it's amazing you know as the song goes amazing grace amazing it's astonishing isn't it that God would save the wretch like me like you a worm that God would deign to to bow himself to become a man in human form to take our place our very sin to die in our stand and take the very penalty and price in full upon his own body and verse 8 it goes on our account here of this conversion and Saul arose from the earth and when his eyes were opened he saw no man but they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus and he was three days without sight and neither did eat nor drink

God got his attention didn't he God got a hold of Saul who was to become Paul and humbled him so that he couldn't even see he couldn't eat nor drink he had to be led by the hand he was the man who had the authority from the powers that be to wreak havoc upon the church of God he was the man who was authorised to imprison and punish these Christians and yet what authority had he now he was led by the hand a blind man hopeless helpless what a sight God had truly humbled Saul and it's a humbling experience conversion is a humbling experience it's when we realise that we come to the end of ourselves when we face up to our great sin and our great need of the Saviour and of God's greatness and it's a coming to the end of our own strength and our own ability and realising how reliant we need to be upon the Lord the story goes on in verse 10

[10:01] God was at work in someone else's life also in verse 10 and there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias and to him said the Lord in a vision Ananias and he said behold I am here Lord and the Lord said unto him arise and go into the street which is called straight I am told that there is still a street called straight in Damascus today go to the straight street and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus for behold he prayeth and verse 12 verse 12 and he hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he may receive his sight then Ananias answered I have heard by many of this man how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name that word it means chain them up he had authority to arrest them and shackle them in chains he had authority of the law of his day of the authority of the government of the powers of the day to get these Christians and to tame them and arrest them verse 15 but the Lord said unto him unto Ananias he says go thy way for he

Saul is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel the Lord told Ananias Saul Paul is my chosen vessel here's the one I have chosen to carry my message to this world this hateful evil man Paul driven to destroy the very church of God was

now a new man it was a revolution a conversion had occurred in his life God had revolutionised him there was a life change a heart change an attitude change everything changed for Paul from this instant from this moment Paul was changed and for what?

verse 16 what lay in store for this man Paul? verse 16 verse 16 for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake this was no easy believers and brother or sister today this was no easy careless kind of gospel some happy clappy feel good kind of religion that Paul was promised how great things he must suffer for my name's sake Paul was promised suffering not blessing not bucket loads of blessing bucket loads of suffering this was not some modern kind of feel good gospel of come to Jesus and you will have a carefree easy and smart kind of life and it's a rollercoaster you know it's a pleasure cruise to glory no this was a gospel one of challenge one of one of urgency one of testing of trial of battle this life that Paul was to enter was going to be a life of tests and commitment a walk of fame a wrestling match a very hand to hand combat a fighting of the good fight a running of a of a long distance marathon event a fight against a committed enemy of his soul this is what Paul was to face that is conversion that is conversion that you're entering into a life of challenge of testing and yet of victory of victory because if you want a victory you've got to go through the battle if you want to have victory you've got to go through the tough things and friends sadly in many circles this kind of gospel is not preached that people aren't challenged that hey committing to Christ means a cross that you're going to have to carry the Lord Jesus says take up your cross daily and follow me if you want to be my disciple that is conversion it means commitment no matter what it means commitment no matter what the cost no matter what the price no matter what faces you as a believer it means standing strong and firm through that fire that you might have to go through and verse 17 it says of Ananias he went his way and he entered into the house and putting his hands on him said brother Saul the Lord even Jesus that hath appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost interesting here isn't it

Ananias the public enemy number one for the church of his day the murderer the destroyer of Christians is addressed here as brother Saul brother Saul he was a saved man at this point he was saved God had transformed him God had taken that old dirty sinful heart of evil and flesh and replaced it with a heart renewed a mind renewed a life transformed with his spirit within Saul was saved a saved man a brother in Christ notice that this was before he was baptized now some think you've got to be baptized to be a Christian he was saved then and there at that moment baptism followed later baptism happens after we are saved some get it topsy turvy verse 18 and immediately immediately they fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received his sight forthwith then and there and he arose and was baptized and when he had received me he was strengthened then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus what a revolution what a transformation he was with the disciples with the very people that he had gone there to destroy he was sitting with them talking with them fellowshiping with them and verse 20 what did he do and straightway immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the son of God but all that heard him were amazed and said is not this he that hath destroyed them which called on his name in Jerusalem and came here for that intent that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests but Saul increased them more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus proving that this is very Christ notice here that straight away God got a hold of this man and put him into action if you are saved God has a work for you to do God has something for you to do he's got a message for you to share to declare you don't have time to sit around and get offended at some trivial issue you know sadly in church circles it happens so often some trivial issue some finding fault some offence or getting upset finding maybe going looking for some other church that will pamper more effectively and pander your ego that's the church world of our day that's the churchy amity that's the kind of sugar coated fairy floss kind of Christianity of today you know if the preacher doesn't please you find someone who does find some church that will tickle your ears and please your fancy and meet your need and yet no he was about a mission he had a call he had a mission he had a purpose a calling a responsibility to fulfil and you brother if you're saved this morning today you have a purpose you have been saved for a reason to serve to make your life count while you have time while you've got breath to breathe

[18:19] God's got a job for you to do and it tells us here of Saul of Paul but he grew more powerful his faith grew his commitment grew this is conversion a life revolutionised transformed converted and God's power was evident in the way that he talked and walked and lived it transformed

and revolutionised how he went about his day by day great power and vitality when you become a Christian you get up and you do something you know it's not that you're saved by your works but you're created in Christ Jesus to be his workmanship you're created to do good works verse 23 and that many days were fulfilled the Jews took counsel to kill him here he was the Christian killer was now in the target sites himself but their laying in wait was known as Saul and they watched the gates day and night to kill him to kill him they had the cross hairs at their target site set right on his face he was an enemy of the Christ haters of his day and they hatched a plot to kill him verse 25 and then the disciples took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket here he was in this high walled city and they let him down with a rope so he could escape from the city without them capturing him and he attempted to join the disciples but they were afraid of him they were all afraid of him in verse 26 and they believed not that he was a disciple the very Christians were afraid of him he couldn't win could he he had the Jews on one side trying to kill him and the disciples the believers didn't believe he was for real and verse 27 but Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way and that he had spoken to him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus you know the Lord Jesus says if you confess me before man

I will confess you before my Father which is in heaven God wants us to testify God wants us to give testimony to give voice to the message of Christ saving us to others this is what Paul did it showed he was a real Christian you know at times we ask people you know when they profess in Christ speak to another share your testimony tell another you know declare it in the public fashion in a testimony in a meeting you know baptism time will ask those that have trusted Christ to say some words of testimony to share what Christ has done for them that's what God expects of us what a dramatic conversion story for Paul and he told it later he recounted this story a number of times later when he was confronted and challenged about what he believed in he recounted this story in other occasions in Acts later on God wants you to share your testimony God wants you to be a witness of the life that Christ has put in you and we see the transformation of his heart what a change in life what a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart that was Saul's testimony that was Paul's story look at what he was what he came from where he came from

Ananias was concerned about this man and he had justified concerns he knew the record the track record the history of this man what he was on about before he was saved how much evil he had done the harm the evil the danger the havoc that he had created to God's people at that time look at the track record of this man this man he was so busy he was chaining up Christians imprisoning them hunting them to their very deaths and this is the man he had mixed with those who murdered Stephen holding their garments while they stoned him he made havoc of the church in Acts 8 verse 3 this is a word that describes like a wild hog in a vineyard tearing it to bits violent and destructive this was the nature of this man he entered in the homes of Christians and he dragged them out to prison he hounded Christians to their death he beat up believers he voted to have them put to death and he attempted to torture them to force them to curse Christ he persecuted the church beyond measure and wasted it that was the the devilish intent and evil power that was at work in Paul before he was saved what did God have in store for this man the gospel brings persecution and challenge as I've said it means a cross if you're going to follow Christ it means you're going to follow him no matter what it means you're going to follow him no matter what the opposition maybe there's family that will oppose you maybe in some countries we know if they convert to Christ that they face brutal punishment and maybe death for trusting the Saviour what about us for us western weak Aussies you know we've got nothing to compare with the cost of trusting Christ that people in other countries have we're pathetic in comparison look at what Paul was to suffer some of the great things that he was to suffer and this is the man who tells you and me he says if you're going to live godly in Christ Jesus you shall suffer persecution it's guaranteed so hey look don't think

God's abandoned you if you're going to get some persecution kids at school I know what it's like when you stand up for Christ you know people laugh and joke and us older ones too it happens still today the whole world is geared against the believer who wants to follow out the Saviour and be an out and out Christian and friends if you're going to follow Christ and really mean it it means you're going to have to go through that kind of tough times of being tested and challenged and go through it and suffer persecution God will bless you for it look at the great things in store for Paul you know here was this man you know it wasn't like some kind of altar call where they say come to Christ and you know it's going to be an easy road you're going to God's going to bless you financially and give you everything everything's going to go perfect for you you're going to have perfect health and prosperity and you know you're going to have a smile on your dial 24-7 you know that's not reality I know in our soul we've got a smile you know but as we know through practicalities of life challenges come the rain falls on the just and the unjust you know we face the day by day challenges just like any man and woman on earth and as a Christian maybe more so you'll face some challenges especially for your faith and trust in Christ look at the great things that Paul faced he didn't have some great things as in great blessings so much as some of these things look at it in the account of Paul it says that on at least five occasions people are plotting his death he was the first mistrusted by believers disliked by some his work for God was constantly opposed by his own countrymen on one occasion he was stoned and left for dead they'd thrown rocks at him to kill him and it looked like he was dead he suffered from repeated beatings he experienced at least three shipwrecks we could go on so many things he was ridiculed falsely accused many times bitten by a poisonous serpent in prison in Philippi

Caesarea in Rome twice acquainted with physical hardships in constant danger pressures over concern for his beloved churches he was nearly torn apart by an angry mob in Acts 21 what a challenge what a story friends trust in Christ it's all going to be rosy and easy it means a commitment to go through and battle on and press forward to press towards the mark and to go on and keep on going it's a challenge for us in contrast to the average casual undemanding kind of Christianity that is so weak and powerless today that is a message of you know God wants to to make life perfect perfect for you it's not so you know we faced it as believers as Christians personally abusive phone calls you know people cursing and swearing and attacking and it happens all so often and if you're going to stand for Christ expect it it's not something to deter you it's to steer you forward to press you on and the Lord transformed him

[27:03] Paul was still headed down the road to Damascus but he made a U-turn on the inside of him God had turned his life completely around and he was born again we must all come to face to face with our sin that's what happened to Saul there Saul this man so godless so Christ rejecting and yet God turned his life around and he wrote much of the New Testament he penned it much of the New Testament that we hold in our hands and he was a great leader of the church of God friends just let's make it personal now if you're saved this morning and you still got breath in you God is not finished with you yet God is not finished with you you have a message to take to others just like Paul and God isn't prayer answering God he's real you can experience him you can know him personally just like Paul did we may not have a dazzling light so much but yet God can strike his life into the darkness of our sinful soul and transform us as he did to Paul and friends

I just want to urge you today to trust him Paul said I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision God got a hold of him I pray for everyone present here this day that you would trust him that you would call on him let us pray Heavenly Father we thank you for the testimony of this man Paul how you turned his life around how you changed him Lord help us to see the great victory that we can win through life's trials and as we stand firm and steadfast for you as Saul as Paul did Lord that we can experience that wonderful life changing power and help us Lord and help us Lord to live in reality in that walk of faith no matter what comes our way knowing that as we carry that cross and follow you you'll be there helping us to carry it you'll be there to help us through you'll be there beckoning us on at the finishing line as we run life's race as we fight the good fight of the faith you're there to strengthen us and help us through

Lord we thank you if there's anyone present here Lord that knows you not we ask that they'll trust you Lord they'll put their faith and hope in you they'll abandon and turn away from their sin and turn around and receive you and receive that wonderful dazzling light of your holiness of your purity of your glory as you come within and make us new and make us alive for eternity we thank you Lord in Jesus wonderful name Amen To God be the Glory of great things He has done think of that Glory that Glory of God what number is that?

what's the number of Glory again? 212 think of the Glory of God To God be the Glory of great things He has done think of that Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God think of the Glory of God