

Damascus Road

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[0:00] In Acts 9 we read about the conversion of Saul. Acts 9 from verse 1 And Saul yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord! went unto the high priest! and desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues that if he found any of this way whether they were men or women he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Now Saul was a committed anti-Christian. He was an anti-Christian. One preacher said it looks like Saul had a bad breath problem.

He had a bad breath problem because he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter. You know he was just he was frothing at the mouth just about.

He was so hateful and venomous and vicious that he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ.

He was so hateful and he was so hateful and he was so hateful and he was so hateful and he was so hateful and he was so hateful and you could see his face contorted and twisted in his rage.

[1:26] That was how hateful he was. He could just I'm being a little inventive here. And he was traveling to Damascus to destroy the church of God. That was his intent.

That was why he was going to Damascus. Now Saul was named after one of Israel's greatest kings. But after conversion he took the name of Paul which means little.

Means little. And this is the record of his conversion. And what a conversion it was! Verse 3 God got Paul's attention.

This light shone from heaven. Paul saw the light. This light which flashed upon him and around him he described as brighter than the sun.

It was just so dazzling and brilliant and glorious. And we know that light in the word of God it is a symbol of God's holiness.

[2:39] God's holiness of his awesome character. His truth. Life of God. Paul's darkness was penetrated by this dazzling glory of God.

Verse 4 And he fell to the earth. And he heard a voice saying unto him Saul! Saul! Why persecutest thou me?

Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting 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 Christians he was in fact persecuting the Lord Jesus himself. They are really hurting Jesus when they attack you.

[3:47] You know, brother, sister you might feel I'm under attack. They are actually attacking Christ in you. It's Christ in you they hate. They hate the Christ that is in you.

So they will attack you. So Saul was brought to his knees. He was humbled. In conversion we bow ourselves before the Almighty One.

And we get things in perspective. We realize how we are in his sight. The Almighty overshadows us.

And we realize what a little speck of dust we are in contrast to that. And we are humbled. We're brought low before him. That's conversion, isn't it? And we realize wow I am just so insignificant in the context of that.

And the Lord Jesus was talking about the promptings of the Holy Spirit that Saul was resisting. Saul had been resisting the Holy Spirit. And if you've ever ever seen more likely on a movie than in reality but if you've ever seen oxen pulling some agricultural plow some instrument down some farm

paddock as these oxen are plowing the field they're kept in line by goads you know these sticks that prick their heels sharpened at one end and the oxen driver would prod them and press them and redirect them with this prodding and pricking of these goads that would hit the backs of their legs and guide them in the direction that the driver wanted to send the plow and this was what was happening to Saul it was hard for him to kick against those pricks that goading that the goads the sticks that would prod and push them it would be uncomfortable it gets uncomfortable resisting [6:02] God it gets uncomfortable resisting the Holy Spirit and God had been trying to get Saul's attention for a long while it was as if he was saying you had the law and the prophets you know you had the Old Testament prophecies and the foretelling to tell you who I am you've heard of me in my three years of earthly ministry no doubt he would have heard stories he would have heard what was going on in Christ's earthly ministry you've heard of me in the messages of my followers you've heard what the Christians were saying even as he was there first hand in the very presence of Stephen you've heard from me from Stephen don't you find it hard kicking against so much evidence there's so much evidence and that's what every atheist or anti

Christian is doing they're kicking against the evidence all the time they're kicking against the conscience they're kicking against the wonders of creation that should shout aloud deafeningly into their ears but their ears are firmly blocked so they cannot receive but there's so much evidence and Saul was kicking against this so much evidence how many of us are still kicking out like oxen against the goats kicking out against the evidence that is shouting out every time God brings you another word of testimony about himself every time his spirit prompts you in a certain direction we resist the Holy Spirit we resist his spirit you know in the word it tells in Genesis how my spirit will not always strive with men there's an end to his striving there's an end to his goading there's an end to that striving when we face him it'll be too late then to change our mind and so this was the conviction of the

Holy Spirit that Saul was resisting and conversion is marked by God arresting us and getting us to see our need of him and to trust him and verse 6 we see his response verse 6 and he trembling and astonished said Lord what wilt thou have me to do Lord what will you have me do Paul was utterly shaken up and Paul asked the two greatest questions we all need to know first he asks who are you Lord number one second what do you want me to do we read on that that's a part of verse six and the Lord said unto him arise get off your feet arise and go into that that city and it shall be told thee what thou must do so here he was going into the city of

Damascus the city that was his plan was to slaughter the Christians in Damascus and here he was to go into the city and it was going to be told him what he must do verse seven and the man which journeyed with him stood speechless hearing a voice but seeing no man his fellow travelers were utterly amazed this was astonishing what was going on something that really made them shocked and speechless astonished verse eight and then Saul arose from the earth and when his eyes were opened he saw no man so he lost his sight here but they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus here he was led along as a blind man truly humbled truly humbled that they would have to hold him by the hand to take him to the city verse nine and he was three days without sight and neither did eat nor drink now

God had truly humbled Saul brought down to his knees now blinded and it's a humbling experience when we face up to our sin and God's awesome power and greatness it's a coming to the end of our strength and ability this is conversion when we realise our own lack our own inability disability and we become reliant on the Lord God was truly at work here and God was at work also in someone else's life at this same time as we read in verse 10 through 14 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 and inquire in the house of

[11:51] Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus for behold he prayed and had seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight then Ananias answered Lord I have heard by many of this man I heard of this man this man how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem and here he had authority from the

chief priest to bind all that call on thy name Ananias knew the name Saul and who this man was and what he was here for in this city Damascus he's going to bind he's going to hold and capture and imprison and arrest all who call on the name of

Jesus Paul had been intent and authorised on this mission this diabolical mission to arrest and chain up the Christians and Ananias knew only too well what danger this meant for the Christians verse 15 but the Lord said unto him go thy way for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel Saul who became Paul was God's chosen vessel this hateful evil man driven in his vile rage and fury in his anger and hate he was driven to Damascus to destroy the church yet now he was a new man this was a different man that's conversion isn't it conversion it brings a life change a heart change an attitude change this was a radical transformation and it's interesting reading the testimony of Paul as he recounts his conversion several times through Acts you can read the various accounts he counted it important to relay his testimony and brother sister you have a testimony amen you have a testimony that was an old you and now there's a new you amen that's conversion that old man is dead and buried sometimes resurrects now and again we've got to kill him off again

I know that's true for my old man not my father but the old man the old man that was the old me amen but now I'm a new man in Christ and we are in Christ new born and new born again new creatures new creations in Christ but the story goes on of this man verse 16 for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake now this is interesting isn't it I must show him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake you know Paul was promised suffering not bucket loads of blessings we can't coax people to Christ and bribe people to Christ with some kind of bribing of material prosperity or you know blessings necessarily tangible but Paul was promised suffering suffering now this was not the modern kind of feel good gospel a feel good gospel come to Jesus and you will live an easy and smug kind of life and it will all be rosy and easy for you no for Paul certainly no and this gospel was one of challenge wasn't it of battle of trial this life that Paul was about to enter was a voyage of tests of commitment a walk of faith a wrestling match a struggle a fighting of the good fight a run of the race and not a sprint but a marathon long distance event a hand to hand combat against the enemy a committed enemy that is conversion conversion when you get saved you enter into the battle zone when you get saved you enter into the wrestling match that is life and you've got to get in hard and keep on hard fighting with God's strength verse 17 and Ananias went his way and entered into the house and putting his hands on him said brother Saul he already saw he was his brother his brother brother Saul the Lord Jesus the Lord even Jesus that 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 Ananias goes to him and addresses him not as the church enemy number one not as the murderer certainly an accomplice to murder in effect murderous certainly as the destroyer of the church that he was but rather he addresses him brother Saul he was a saved man a brother a brother in Christ and notice this was before he was baptized so this plainly shows us that baptism happens after we are saved amen after we are saved doesn't make you a

[18:25] Christian brother get baptized it follows on now there's some churches that teach you're not saved till you're baptized that's a lie that's error I know there's a lady who visited this church and was searching for churches and she went to one down the road and said how nice it was I said sister they teach baptismal regeneration which is an error which is saying you're not saved till you're baptized it's a falsehood it's a lie it's a trusting and a work but baptism doesn't save you it is merely the portrayal of the salvation that has happened within you that has already happened verse 18 and immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received sight forth with and arose and was baptized and when he had received meat he was strengthened then was so certain days with the disciples which were at

Damascus so what a change he's in the company of God's people he's with the disciples he's baptized he starts to eat again he was strengthened and he was there certain days verse 20 and straight way he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the son of God straight away he preached Christ in the synagogues verse 21 but all that heard him were amazed and said is not this

he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem and came here for that intent that he might bring them bound unto the chief priest!

but Saul increased them more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus proving that this is very Christ this is the very Christ this is the real Christ the real Messiah notice here that straight away straight away God got to work in this man straight away if you are saved God has a work for you to do you don't have time to sit around and get offended at some trivial issue or sit back and find some fault or get upset and go wandering for something that better pampers you and panders to your ego many Christians are soft skin we need to get a bit of a bit of rust skin we need to get a bit of stickability don't we and not get upset about little things not neglect the gift that is in us each one of us got a mission you have a mission your mission is your mission you have a mission you have a call you have an anointing you have a gifting you have an ability you have a responsibility to fulfill we know as mothers as fathers as brothers as sisters of others we've all got a responsibility in our domain and it's wider than that isn't it the people we rub shoulders with the people we work with the people we meet and live with this city this community this state this nation this world that we live in we've got a mission to fulfill and God will show you the extent of that mission he'll show you where to serve how to serve he'll equip you to serve if you'll be willing to be equipped and for

Saul who became Paul he had a mission and straight away he got on with it and you have been saved to serve make your life count make your life count and you can make your life count in telling ways in your circle of influence and your extent of your mission don't hold back and I'd just love to encourage people to step out of the comfort zone step out of the comfort zone when it's comfortable we can be constrained and we can just be neglectful and we'll be a bit like that plant I was talking about it doesn't thrive as Christians we don't thrive on neglect we've got to be cultivating cultivating cultivating and I know

I love it when I hear people have been approaching me and asking how can I increase my Christian knowledge and how can I grow there's a Bible school on the notice board there and you can do it by distance education you can do it online happens to be in Victoria but we can be part of even though those Victorians are funny creatures at times we know that they've got something good over there in Victoria there's a good Christian course you can do I'm not just kidding we love Victorians I know there's a someone here from Victoria today just a good natured ribbing for our Victorian cousins there's a Christian college there that you can do distance education you can go online and you can do that course it's one of few that I can recommend to be honest there's not many Bible schools that I could really wholeheartedly endorse today

[24:44] I wish there was a good one in Adelaide I don't believe there is a good one in Adelaide anymore there might have been at one time but it's sad but get equipped look at the opportunities to do online study or if you don't have much access on the internet I'm sure there's ways you can still access and get things posted to you to study to learn to grow fellowship wherever you can so you can cultivate and come to meetings so you can participate and Sunday night be a part please every opportunity you can to cultivate your Christian giftings and callings the more that we are fellowshiping the more we are participating the more we will grow and cultivate we don't thrive on neglect we must cultivate our Christian giftings and character so you have a mission to fulfil it tells us here that

Paul grew more powerful his faith grew his commitment grew this is conversion when life gets transformed the old is gone the new has come we get transformed we get revolutionised and we get filled with God's great Holy Ghost power and vitality and we get up and go and do something verse 23 and after that many days were fulfilled the Jews took counsel to kill him you're going to do something for God expect enemies expect hostility expect antagonism verse 24 but their laying away was known of Saul and they watched the gates day and night to kill him Paul himself became a target this Christian killer with his bad breath problem of breathing out slaughter and hatred and venom was now one of those he came to kill this Christ hater became himself a target and they hatched a plot to kill him verse 25 then the disciples took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket now this big high wall the city wall they let him down down to the ground to safety and verse 26 and when

Saul was come to Jerusalem he attempted to join himself to the disciples but they were all afraid of him he'd gone back to Jerusalem where he presided at Stephen's killing I don't know whether he threw one of the stones that killed Stephen chances are he may have done certainly held the coats for those who threw the stones and bashed Stephen to death and so Saul was an accomplice in Stephen's murder and here he was back in Jerusalem no wonder they didn't want a bar of Saul they didn't want a bar of him they were all afraid of him and believed not that he was a disciple there's no way he's a disciple he's a Christ hating church killer church hating Christian hating church Christian killer so they were all afraid of him here he was the Jews were busy trying to kill him and the disciples didn't believe he was for real so he had them from both ends the Jews were busy trying to kill him and the disciples didn't believe he was a real

Christian verse 27 but thankfully someone came along who believed him but Barnabas took him verse 27 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 to him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus in the synagogues what a dramatic conversion story the transformed life of Paul what a change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart look at who and what he was and a nice concern over how much evil he has done you know his infamy was well known how much evil he has done to God's people and we look back and these are all various Bible references to these things that I'm saying just now look at the track record of this man he was busy chaining and imprisoning

Christians hunting them to their deaths he consented to Stephen's death he mixed with those who murdered Stephen he made havoc of the church in Acts 8 verse 3 havoc and this word havoc is like a wild hog viciously uprooting a vineyard violent and destructive you ever seen wild hogs you don't want to get in their way do you they must have some of them in Papua Guinea aren't they so you want to get in the way of a wild hog they viciously uprooting a vineyard this is the picture of how violent and destructive he was he made havoc of the church and he entered into the homes of Christians and dragged them out to prison he hounded Christians put them to death he beat up Christians he voted to have!

[30:19] torture to force them to deny Christ to curse Christ and he persecuted the church beyond measure and he wasted it Galatians 1 verse 13 he wanted to just turn it into a pile of rubbish he wasted it he destroyed it what did God have in store for this man when you think about Saul how hateful he was to Christians there's hope for all of us isn't there there's hope for even those that you might think they use the term beyond redemption I think they use it to talk about a vessel a ship that might be it's just beyond repair it's just scrap metal it's beyond redemption just chuck it away beyond redemption it's beyond saving there's no way this can be saved but really there's no one beyond redemption still got breath I believe there's still opportunity for even the most hateful of people and so great things can happen to you as a

Christian and those great things the Lord said I'm going to show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake the great things that can happen to you as a Christian in certain countries you can expect to be beheaded you can expect it in Adelaide we haven't got quite to that point yet have we not yet but there's great things that we can suffer as a Christian you know there's all manner of persecution from various quarters I know in India and other places where all manner of people hate the Christians and want to do them harm and so God told Saul he became Paul what great things he would suffer and we know that all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution think of some of the great things that Paul underwent for the name of

Jesus he was plotted against on at least five occasions I've got all scriptures here but I won't cite them he was at first mistrusted by the believers he was disliked by some believers his work for God was constantly opposed by some of his own countrymen on one occasion he was stoned and left for dead he looked like a dead body that's how bad it was he suffered repeated beatings he experienced at least three shipwrecks he was subjected to intense satanic pressure he was ridiculed he was falsely accused numbers of times he probably suffered some eye trouble he suffered the bite of a poisonous serpent he was in prison in Philippi Caesarea and Rome for the first time and in Rome for the last time in prison he was acquainted with physical hardships he was in constant danger he bore the awful pressure of concerns for the church he was nearly torn apart by

an angry mob he experienced terrible internal pressure he was forsaken by his friends in the final hours you know we read 2 Timothy 4 it was the last chapter the last paragraph of his life and he says virtually everyone had left him forsaken you know people of God don't ever think if you're going through a hard time that God's left you

Paul was in the centre of God's will amen he was in the centre of it Paul was in the centre of God's will and God allowed these things to happen so what a challenge this is for us when we think of all that Paul went through when we think of our average casual Christianity is so pathetic and weak in comparison isn't it so powerless that the least little thing the least offence the least inconvenience the least putting ourselves out is such a hardship people of God we need a reality check so God did amazing things in this man the Lord transformed him he saw this great dazzling light but for all of us we must travel the road to Damascus and come to the end of ourselves

Paul still headed down the road but he made a U-turn on the inside of him amen that's what he did God turned his life completely around now some say I did a 360 degree turn no don't do that do a 180 amen do a 180 a U-turn but we must all come face to face with our sin and our need of Christ if we're saved and we've got breath on this planet God is not finished with us yet don't be put off your Christian walk by hardship the centre of God's will could mean that's where you have to be and stay we must be like Saul and come face to face with our need of Christ with our sin to know him to know is life eternal there's much much more we could say but honestly people of

[36:06] God we know that at the end of the day we've got to have a Damascus road and we've got to learn from Saul he did a 180 and he went to that very city that he was going to kill the Christians and he straight away Prince Christ it says in Acts 26 I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision now you can obey or disobey God you might get the dazzling light as it were and still turn away many do don't they the evidence is staring them in the face they're kicking against the evidence they're resisting the Holy Spirit friends let's not resist him let's surrender let us pray Lord God we thank you for the life of Paul of the conversion of this man of the testimony Lord and of the hardship yet that he bore and kept on bearing as that message bearer to our world

Lord let us be like him in our fortitude help us Lord not to not to be deterred though the devil dogs are every day let us not be deterred Lord help us even when others misunderstand as in his case we won't be deterred Lord help us to be resolute help us Lord to find your mission and fulfil it encourage each one here today we know there's none they're burdened down it's heavy going it's hard yakka Lord it's life in the real world where the hurt is tangible and it's real help us Lord not to let the hurt hinder us but find the healing that comes from knowing you to find the shelter in the storm to help us through Lord help us to find grace all sufficient grace grace that is greater than all our sin and grace that is sufficient in our lack of strength grace that keeps us going going and going on

Lord we pray if there's any yet here who yet to have that Damascus road they might still be fighting you on the inside Lord let it be a day of surrender let it be that will wave the white flag and say Lord I surrender I give you my all my heart my will my life to you to your control I surrender to you Lord what will you have me to do Jesus name!