

Paul's Account of his Conversion

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to Acts 26, and today we're looking at verses 12 to 18, where as we read, we saw, we read an account there of how Paul gave his testimony, we could call it his testimony, as part of his defense before King Agrippa, as he was here set on trial.

Well, we've been looking at a number of conversions for a while on Lord's Day mornings, and we're looking now at what is, I'm sure, the most famous conversion in history, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul.

And I'm sure all of us would agree that, for many reasons, this is regarded, certainly by Christians, as the most famous and the best known conversion in history.

We find even, in general speaking, on the part of people who are not themselves Christians, there's still talk of a Damascus Road experience. When something dramatic happens, to change somebody's thinking or opinion, these are the kind of words that are used sometimes to describe that sort of thing.

And it goes back to what happened when Saul of Tarsus was apprehended by Jesus Christ, as he was, as he says himself, on the way to cause further difficulty and havoc for the church at the time.

[1 : 30] Now it's interesting as well that, as you read through this testimony as part of his defense, that you'll find his emphasis while he's talking about himself all the time, yet the emphasis is far more about Jesus Christ than about himself.

And that's something we ourselves, of course, must be conscious of, too, when we're asked to give our testimony. It's all too easy to focus so much on the I part of it, that we kind of present ourselves more to the fore than the Jesus that we want to promote.

And here is, when Paul is giving his testimony, it's obvious how, in fact, it's the person of the Lord. It's the Lord in charge of the event. It's the Lord, as he dealt with him, that he brings to the forefront of what he has to say.

And indeed, he goes on to say how the Lord spoke to him in such terms as actually revealed why he had come to meet with him on the way to Damascus. It wasn't just to convert himself.

It wasn't just to change his life round about. It was to make him a very important instrument or a person of importance in his church as a missionary to bring the gospel to the Gentile world.

[2 : 47] As Jesus said to him, as Paul says here, to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

And how much in the history of the church was really dependent on that great event of Saul of Tarsus being changed by Jesus Christ.

Just think of how much flowed from that one event that you and I still benefit from through the gospel. Well, two things that come to us from this passage and they're both about Jesus.

First of all, the glory of Jesus. And secondly, the authority of Jesus. Two very important facets of Christ and our relationship with him and our knowledge of him.

The glory of Jesus and the authority of Jesus. And both of these are keyed into what conversion is about. What happens in conversion. What people are aware of in conversion or through conversion.

[3 : 51] That Jesus is a glorious person. And that his glory as it belongs to him is in fact directed towards us and our good. And that the authority of Jesus is the authority that guides our life.

That should in fact be also in control of the development of our life. And all of that is packed into this passage. Let's look at a few of the details. The glory of Jesus.

First of all, this light from heaven. Where Paul says, I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. And then you notice, Now it was midday.

Around midday. The brightest part of the day. The time when light was, you would expect, at its height. As it was. And yet this light that shone from heaven.

That met with Saul of Tarsus. And those companions of his on the way. It was brighter, he says, than that sun. You know recently from the eclipse that took place.

[5 : 01] How many times we were warned. Never look directly at the sun. Why can't you look directly at the sun? Because it is so bright. That it will blind you.

If you look at it unaided. If you look at it just directly. Without something in between. It is going to blind you. If you do it too much. It is so bright. Yet he is saying here.

This light from heaven. Shone brighter than the sun. What a light. Just imagine that kind of experience. A man who was used to the brightness of the sun.

Shining at midday in a cloudless sky. And all of a sudden this light breaks out around him. And covers them. A light that is brighter than the sun. What is it about? Why does he call it?

A light that is brighter than the sun. Well because. The word that is used here. For shining. Or this phrase that here. That shone around me. It is only used once.

[6 : 01] In another place. Only one other time. In the Bible. And it is in the Gospel of Luke. The same author has wrote this book of Acts. And it is in Luke chapter 2.

And at verse 9. And it has to do with what happened at the birth of Christ. Whereas the angels appeared.

And the celebration of heaven. Accompanied this great event of Christ's birth. The son of God coming into the world. By being born of Mary.

Suddenly there was this great light. Which shone all around them. Same thing exactly as here. In other words. What Paul experienced.

Was nothing less than the light of glory. It was a divine light. It wasn't just the light of angels. It was the light of God. And the light of Jesus. As God.

[6 : 54] The light of the glorified Jesus. The light of the son of God. In his splendor. As exalted to glory in our nature. And yet. Also of course in himself divine.

That's what it is. That's what met him. That's what's true. About this person. And that's what comes across to us. From this. And what did they do? Well. They fell down in his presence.

After we had all. Fallen to the ground. I heard a voice saying to me. Saul. Saul. They fell to the ground. What do you do in the presence of God?

What do you do when God reveals himself. Or a very small glimpse even of his glory. Let alone something like this. What was it like in your own life. When you came to know something of the glory of Jesus.

Did you just stand upright. And say well I can cope with this. No you went on your knees. You did the only thing that's appropriate.

[7 : 52] You paid homage to that greatness. You bowed. You stooped. You laid yourself low.

In the presence of this light. And you can turn that round. And ask yourself well. Why do so many people in the world. Not want to.

Bow the knee to Jesus. Why don't they want to acknowledge Jesus. As the Lord of their lives. Because they have never come to know anything of his glory. They don't realize the grandeur.

That really belongs to this Jesus. They have never come. Into confrontation with. This wonderful person. And who he is. And what he's like.

Because the moment you get a glimpse of this Jesus. Through the gospel. The moment you actually find your life confronted. With the immensity of this person.

[8 : 49] With the importance of this person. With the glory that belongs to this person. You cannot stand then aside idly. Just as you've always been. And just pass it off as insignificant.

Or refuse to believe in it. And one of the things we have to pray for. Is that through the gospel. And through the witness of people like yourselves.

Through the church's testimony. That the glory of Jesus. Will confront people in their lives. That they will come to realize.

Not only that he exists. But that this is the person who exists. Have you. Yourself come. To appreciate something of this glory.

To the extent that you've come to bow. Your whole life before him. And you've come to acknowledge that. It's the only appropriate thing for you to do.

[9 : 49] In the presence of this majesty. This glorious light. Shone he says. All around me. But we have to take care.

Because we mustn't actually even give the suggestion. That every conversion has to be like this. Some people actually are waiting for this kind of experience.

So that they can say of themselves. Well if it's happened. And it happens this way. I will know that I'm a Christian. I will know that I'm converted. I'll know that I have forgiveness of sins.

Most of the people who have come to know the Lord. As their savior. Who have come to receive forgiveness from him. Have not come through such a dramatic event as this.

Have not come through a dramatic. A dramatic. Spectacular experience. Not through what you might call a Damascus Road experience. Remember it is just. As appropriate.

[10 : 50] And. As meaningful. And as beneficial. To gently give your life to the Lord. Without any dramatics. Without anything like this.

Accompanying the event. 99% of Christians have never met. The Lord in a Damascus Road type of way. You don't have to.

The Lord is not saying to us. Unless you have something similar to this in your life. You can't be a Christian. And don't. If you're here today. Please don't wait.

For something like this. And don't ask for something like this. Before you can actually. Say that. You know the Lord. That you have.

Acceptance with him. That you are a Christian. Don't wait for something like this to happen. And don't. Even ask for it to. To happen. All that's required of you. Is that you just bow.

[11 : 48] Your knee to him. That you accept him. That you accept his. Lordship over your life. That you give yourself to him. Quietly. Unobtrusively. It's between yourself and himself.

Nobody else needs to see it. You don't need to say. It was anything spectacular. Well of course in a sense. Every conversion is dramatic.

Every change in a person's life of this kind. Is dramatic. Because something radical happens. We are born again. But what I'm saying is.

Don't think that it has to have this kind of outward. Spectacular. Dramatic experience. Where you're really shaken up. Where you have light from heaven. Where you see things that are.

Completely out of the ordinary. Doesn't have to be like that. It very often isn't. Even though you find it here. With Saul of Tarsus.

[12 : 47] So there's the glory. Of Jesus. Firstly. As something which. Met with Paul. With Saul on the way. To Damascus. And what I'm saying is. That you and I.

Have to know something. Of that glory of Jesus. Not necessarily. In such a dramatic way. Yes this. It will not as we say. Often be like that. Hardly ever be like that. But still.

Every Christian knows. The glory of Jesus. Confesses the glory of Jesus. Bows before the glory of Jesus. Wants to actually. Speak about the glory of Jesus.

To other people. And realizes. That it is in fact. Divine majesty. That you bow your life to. The glory.

Of Jesus. Secondly. The authority of Jesus. Because. The Lord. As Paul. Says here in his testimony. When we had all fallen to the ground. I heard a voice saying to me.

[13 : 42] In the Hebrew language. Saul. Saul. Why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick. Against the goads. And I said. Who are you Lord? And the Lord said. I am Jesus.

Whom you are persecuting. Now the authority of Jesus. You can see it coming across. In two things. Examination. And then. Instruction. There is examination.

First of all. Because there is a great question. A question addressed directly. To Saul himself. In his situation. Saul. Saul. Why are you persecuting me?

Jesus leaves him. In no doubt. As to. As to who he is addressing. He calls him twice by name. He emphasizes. The fact that it is to him. That the question is addressed.

Whoever else is with him. In a sense. Is insignificant right now. Because the Lord has his focus on Saul. And Saul knows. That the Lord has his focus on him. You felt like that.

[14 : 38] Through the gospel. Haven't you? You have come to a point. Where you realize that. Whoever else is with you. In the gathering. In the room. Or even if it's on your knees. Or reading your Bible. And this kind of thing has happened.

Where you know that. There is something in your mind. In your conscience. In your heart. That's being addressed. From this gospel. From this message of the Bible. Well he is speaking to you.

It's not going to be passed off. To somebody else. It's not for someone beside you. It's to you. He is speaking to you. He is speaking to me. Personally.

That's how the Lord deals with us. He doesn't speak over our heads. He doesn't go past us. To somebody else. When we are listening to the gospel. God is speaking.

Jesus is speaking directly to me. And to you. Every time. We may choose to ignore it. Or pass it off. But that doesn't mean it's not like that. Doesn't mean he's not actually doing this.

[15 : 35] Saul. Saul. Why? You. Why are you doing this? And what is interesting here. Firstly. There are a number of points really of interest.

The first one is that. Jesus is connecting. What Saul was doing to the church. To himself. There's such a close tie.

Between the Lord. And his people. That when his people are persecuted. He is being persecuted. That's what he's saying. Why are you persecuting me?

Saul was persecuting the church. That's what the first part of his testimony says. He was convinced. That he ought to do many things. Opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. I did so in Jerusalem.

Not only did I lock many of them up. But. When the chief priests were casting their vote. I cast my vote against them as well. He was himself. A member of those.

[16 : 32] Who had a vote. To cast. Against Jesus. And against. The way of following Christ. Against the church. Against the message. Of the gospel. I did this. I used my vote.

To persecute. These people. To cause some of them. To be put to death. He says. But that's the very point. That Jesus picked up in his question.

Why are you persecuting me? Paul was brought face to face. With the fact that. He wasn't just persecuting. People in this world. He was persecuting.

This Lord. It was against him. That his violence was directed. But he then added. It is hard for you.

To kick. Against the goads. These are words which. Have caused a lot of. Discussion over the years. As to what exactly. Was meant by that.

[17 : 29] Let's look at. The kind of image. That's presented. First of all. Of kicking against the goads. What's that taken from? Well it's taken from. The habit of practice. At the time. Of having to train.

A young ox. To actually. Become used to. To being yoked. So as to pull a plow. Or to. Be involved in some kind of. Agricultural work like that.

Pulling a cart. Or a cow. You needed to get the. The young ox. Used to. A yoke. Around its neck. To which the instrument. Would then be attached. And of course. When you try to do that. It's a bit like.

Same thing. When you. First of all. Come to try and saddle a horse. That's never been ridden before. Doesn't like it. It starts kicking out. And there was. A way in those days. Of. Getting an ox.

A young ox. Used to carrying. The yoke. Because. They had. Other parts. Bits of. Wood. With some spikes in them. And when the ox.

[18 : 24] Kicked out. He kicked against those spikes. And hurt himself. And there's a way to try and persuade him. Well it's better for. For you not to kick out. Just get used to carrying the yoke.

And then you won't get hurt. That's the kind of idea behind it. Where kicking against the goads. Was just trying to cast off. What was being done.

And yet hurting. Itself. At the same time. And. The Lord is using that. In a spiritual way. With Saul here. Saul of Tarsus. When he met him. This is what he added to the question.

It is hard for you to kick against the goads. And that's taking us into Saul's own life. It's taking us into his mind. It's taking us into his conscience. Because.

While you find some people thinking that. Paul or Saul had never thought positively. In any way about. Jesus. Except to absolutely destroy. Everything to do with his name.

[19 : 19] You actually know from this. That actually. Saul of Tarsus had begun. To think about Jesus. In a way that really got to his conscience.

The testimony of the church. The. The people that he was persecuting. The witness that they bore to Jesus. Their courage under witness.

The message that they proclaimed. It had already started getting to Saul. His conscience was being pricked. He was kicking against the goads.

The Lord was already trying to place the yoke of service upon him. If we can put it that way. And Saul was kicking out against it. He didn't want that. He was in fact.

You could say. That. The more violent he became against the church. Was really. Part of the way that he was trying to. Kick against. What he knew was happening in his conscience.

[20 : 13] Where the Lord. And where this Jesus of Nazareth. And the impact of this Jesus. Was making itself known in his life. You see. You mustn't think that. Somebody.

That you meet with. And is violently opposed to the gospel. That there are no positive thoughts. In that person's mind about Jesus. Just reading recently. A republication of a.

Well known book. It came out many years ago. Out of the salt shaker. Into the world. It's a book that. Sets out how.

We should seek to be as influential. As possible. For Jesus. In the world. As Christians. Following the. Imagery of Jesus himself. Saying being. The salt of the earth. Well he says. That's the. That's the title.

Out of the salt shaker. Into the world. The salt's no use. If you keep it in. In the salt shaker. You've got to shake it out. And you've got to put it on the food. That's the idea. But. The author of that book.

[21 : 11] Mary. Mary Pippard. Sorry. Not Mary Pippard. But Rebecca. Pippard. Talks about Mary. Somebody that she met. When they were students. In Spain. And.

Rebecca. Was a Christian. And this Mary was not. In fact. She was a confessed atheist. And Rebecca. The author of the book. Decided. She would start a Bible study. In her flat. And.

She set about inviting certain people. And one of the people she. Went to invite. Was Mary. And Mary's first response was. Well that's great. I've just managed to persuade. Two people today.

Against becoming Christians. And Rebecca said to herself. What have I done? She's never going to respond positively.

And if she does. It'll just be a problem. But she came. This Mary came to. Bible study. And. For the first couple of times. She was just like that.

[22 : 07] She would just. Pass off. What was being said. And. Make light of it. But she was converted. And when she was converted.

She came to confess. To Rebecca. After Rebecca. Had confessed to her. All her fears. And all the things. That she initially thought about. Mary. When she came. Mary said. Well she said.

Actually. If I'm honest. I have been seeking. Or wanting the Lord. All my life. And what I was doing.

In confessing myself. To be an atheist. In rebelling against. The teaching of. The gospel. Or the message of the gospel. And my reactions. To such things as. In your Bible study.

They were just me. Rebelling against. What I knew was happening. What I really. Deep down. Wanted. In my life. So remember that. Remember when you meet.

[23 : 00] Somebody. That really is violently. Opposed to the message. Of the gospel. And to your witness. It does not. Necessarily mean. That there's nothing. Deep down. In that person. That wants.

What you've got. That wants salvation. That wants to know. Forgiveness. That wants for themselves. To have this Christ. That you're presenting. To them.

And that's to encourage you. Don't be put off by. That kind of. Vehement reaction. It may actually. Just be a cover. As it was. For Saul of Tarsus.

It's. It's really. Hostility. If you like. As a mask. Or as a covering. For someone. Who's grappling. With God. And grappling. With their conscience. You have to go on.

Keeping. With your witness. To them. And. If you're here. Today. And you're kicking out. Against the gods. If the Lord.

[23 : 56] Is trying. Or seeking. To lay. His yoke. Upon you. Well. Just like you would say. To a young ox. Seeing him. Or it kicking out. Against the gods.

You would say. If you were the owner. Of that yoke. Why don't you. Just submit. And stop hurting yourself. So it is for you. As a human being. The only thing to do.

The proper thing to do. Is to submit. To the Lord. To give your life. To be ruled by him. You're only going to hurt yourself.

More. The more you kick out. Against him. Against the gods. That the gospel. Is bringing. Into your life. But.

There's goads. Of course. Not just in terms of. Bringing us. To conversion. The Lord. Keeps on goading us. After you're converted. Because there are people.

[24 : 54] That have not yet. Stepped out. Into the way. Of life. Openly. As a Christian. That would make them. Salt. And light.

In the world. And it may be. That you're here today. And you're Christian. And you're Christian service. And you're Christian witness. You've not yet. Stepped out. To make that.

As obvious. As it should be. You maybe have not yet. Made it known. That this is what you are. That deep down. In your heart. You've come to know the Lord. You may be afraid. Of witnessing to him.

You may be afraid. Of taking the next steps. Whether it's taking communion. Or going to the Bible study. Or going to the midweek meeting. Or whatever it might be. The Lord is saying to you.

Don't kick out against the goats. You know what I want you to do. Submit to it. Submit to me. Stop hurting yourself.

[25 : 51] By holding back. From what you should be doing for him. Is the Lord goading you today. Into something that. You're resisting.

Something you know is right. And yet you're resisting it. Well. Why is he goading you? Why are there these goads? These pricks in your conscience. These things getting to your soul. Because the Lord knows.

The best thing for you. To submit to his will. To give yourself in. To his service. To his. To his custody. To his control.

That's the examination. That's taking place. As Saul meets with Jesus. And he says. Who are you Lord? And the Lord said. I am Jesus. Whom you're persecuting.

And then comes the instruction. Rise and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you. For this purpose. To appoint you as a servant. And witness. To the things in which you have seen me.

[26 : 50] And to those in which I will appear to you. Delivering you. From your people. And from the Gentiles. To whom. I am sending you. The Lord. You see. Will not leave us prostrate.

On the ground before him. And in fact. You take it from this. That it is the Lord. In fact. Who sets us on our feet properly. And gives direction to our lives. What is he doing with Saul?

He's really saying. Well. He's not actually saying. He's doing the wrong thing. By falling down in his presence. He's not accusing him. Of doing something wrong. He's not criticizing him. For doing that. But he is saying to him.

Now Saul. I want you to get on your feet. I want you to actually get on your feet. I'm sending you. On a specific mission. That's what the Lord does to us. He puts you on your feet.

He sets your life straight. He sets you in a course. By which you become. His servant. By which you become. A witness for him. And the Lord. Is the only one.

[27 : 44] Who can do that. Our life needs. Straightening out. Our life needs to be. Established properly. We have to have. Our lives. Whatever we are. Whatever our upbringing.

Whatever our age. Whatever our background. We need to be established. Properly. In relation to God. And the Lord. Alone. Can do that for us. That's what he's doing to Saul.

Get on your feet. Stand up. Because I have something. For you to do. And that something is that.

He would be a servant. And a witness. I appeared. Have appeared. To you for this purpose. To appoint you. As a servant.

And a witness. Great combination that. Isn't it? Servant. And witness. Sometimes you want to be a witness. Without being a servant. It's natural to us.

[28 : 39] We don't want the labor of. Of serving the Lord. And the rigor. That goes along with it. We want to be a witness for him. We want to be a bright witness for him. But you can't be a witness.

Without being a servant. And you can't. Be a servant. Without also that. Carrying. The emphasis of witness. Because sometimes also. We want to be a servant.

Of the Lord. But have it in a kind of. Undefined. Or unnoticed way. We want to be a servant. But not have. That dimension to our lives. That witnesses. That people see.

That actually cause. Or bring opposition to us. Or get us into. All the sort of. Difficulties of facing hostility.

You want to be a servant. You have to be a witness too. The two things go together. Because this is what. The Lord said to. To Paul. I have appeared to you.

[29 : 35] For this purpose. To appoint you. A servant. And a witness. To those things. In which I will appear to you. And that's what Jesus. Has done with the life. Of everyone here.

Who knows him. Who has come to be converted. By him. And under his authority. In relation to his glory. He's made you a servant.

And a witness. He has made you. Someone who. Goes forth to be. A servant. In all aspects of your life.

You're a servant of Jesus. You're under. His ownership. You're under his mastery. And you're a witness. He's given you a burden. In your heart. To witness for him.

To testify. That the. The life that you live. Will itself. Speak to other people. About this Jesus. To whom you've given.

[30 : 31] Your life. Of course. In Paul's case. As the Lord went on. To say. That this was. That he was sending them. Him to the Gentiles. To open their eyes.

That they may turn. From darkness. To light. From the power of Satan. To God. That they may receive. Forgiveness of sins. At a place among those. Who are sanctified.

By faith in me. Well there's a big sermon. And that in itself. I'm not going to. Open it up. Just now. But. It's something. We may come back to. At some point. Because it's so packed full.

Of significant things. What is it to. Engage in mission. For God. What is the mission. Of the church. What is it to. Evangelize. What's the purpose of it. What is the aim of it.

Well there you have it. It's. God sending us. To those. Whose eyes. Need open. That through. God's people. The eyes of those. Who are still lost.

[31 : 27] May be opened. And from. The opening of the eyes. Comes. This turning. From darkness. To light. And from the power of Satan. To God. And connected. With that. Is the receiving. Of forgiveness.

Of sins. And a place. Among those. Who are sanctified. By faith. In Jesus. You see. It all. Comes together. It's all. Connected together. And one thing. Follows from the next.

So much. Of that. All of that. Flows from. From. The opening of the eyes. That's what the purpose. Now of. Saul's life.

Is to be. That's why Jesus. Met with him. But the point. Really. To take from this. Today. Really. If we leave it at this.

Is that. Knowing the glory. Of Jesus. From the passage. And the authority. Of Jesus. From the passage. And the examination. And the instruction.

[32 : 19] That he gave to Saul. Where does that. Leave your life. And my life. Where are we. In relation. To these things. Whether it's.

Here as Christians. Or still not. Converted. So much. In this passage. For us. Isn't there. And so much. Not just to learn. About conversion. And what it is.

But what we should. Be ourselves. In relation. To Christ. Let's pray. Lord of God.

We give thanks again. For the fullness. Of your word. For the glorious things. That are contained in it. Especially in relation. To yourself. And to your person. We thank you today.

Lord. For the way. In which you have addressed us. Through the gospel. And challenged us. To look into our own lives. In relation. With you. And in relation. To those things. That you require.

[33 : 15] Office and service. And in witness. For you. We pray Lord. That your power. Will accompany your word. Once again. In our experience. And that you will take us on.

From here. To be your servants. And your witnesses. And for the time. That remains. Of our lives. Hear us now. We pray. For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Amen. It's come to you. Amen. Hold on deinenque. Hear us now. Thank you. Thank you.