

Study on Acts no.7

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 9.

Consider tonight the conversion of Saul of Tarshish as we have that account of it in this chapter.

Acts, Chapter 9, reading at verse 3, As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly they shined on about him a light from heaven. And so on.

Remember that when we dealt with the death of Stephen, that we saw there that when he was being stoned to death, that the witnesses fulfilled their duty by casting the first stones at Stephen.

And before doing so, they cast their outer garments at the feet of a young man called Saul. And that is how the greatest Christian man of all times makes his debut in the Word of God.

[1 : 31] And what an inglorious debut it is, being a party to the death of a great and a gracious man who loved and who served the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul never forgot the part that he played in that death. And he never forgave himself for it either.

And tonight we have the account here in this chapter of the conversion of this man. And indeed, from this point onwards, the story of the extension of the Church of Christ, as it is recorded for us in the Book of Acts, proceeds in ever-widening circles.

And at the heart of that story, from now on, is this man, Paul. The man who was destined to become the greatest man in the history of the Christian Church.

And the event here recorded is without doubt one of the most important, if not the most important, that took place in the history of that church since the day of Pentecost.

[2 : 57] And you can gather some idea of its importance by the fact that on at least on three separate occasions it is referred to fully in this book and in the letters that he wrote.

Paul makes reference to this event in his life. For example, in the passage you read in Philippians, he speaks of it in Galatians, he speaks of it in the letter that he wrote to Timothy and indeed in the letter that he wrote to Corinth.

Such was the importance of this event that we turn to consider here tonight, the conversion of Saul of Tarshish. And I want to look with you tonight very briefly at what we can gather of first of all the man, then his religion, thirdly his conversion, and seek to apply this, say, something of the lessons that we have from his conversion to ourselves.

First of all then, this man, Saul of Tarshish. Now, we read, we gather this information from various passages in the New Testament that he was born in Tarshish, a city of Cilicia, brought up a Greek.

It was a very famous city in his day, a university city. His father was a Roman citizen, a Jew who had become a Roman citizen.

[4 : 26] His mother was also one Jew is. And Saul of Tarshish had the great advantage growing up of being both a Roman citizen and a Jew.

His life was colored by the thinking of the city in which he was born. In other words, colored by the thinking and the intellectualism of Greece.

His life religiously was colored by the Jewish faith in which he was zealously brought up. And that probably became the most important factor of all in later years.

He was bilingual. He spoke Aramaic and Greek and that was also to be important for the spread of the Gospel. We know that like every other Jewish boy, he was brought up, he was given a trade to learn.

We know that he served as apprenticeship as a tent maker. And we also know that he was sent by his father to Jerusalem to study in what you would probably call a church school, perhaps a theological hall.

[5 : 44] He was sent to Jerusalem by his father to study at the feet of probably the greatest living Jewish teacher, lecturer, professor of the time, Gamaliel.

And there he learned a law that was going to be of great importance to him in years to come. But the most important aspect of this man's early life was that he was a Jew, the child of a Jewish home and was that Jewish influence upon his life that really molded the whole of his life and the whole of his thinking.

He was steeped in Jewish traditionalism. He stated himself in the episode to the Philippians that he could trace his ancestry back to Benjamin. He was of the tribe of Benjamin.

He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was a Jew through and through and religiously he was a Pharisee belonging to the strictest religious sect of them all.

And that brings us to speak and to say a word or two about his religion. From the very earliest times we know that Paul was very religious. He was a good, indeed he was an exceptional student because he tells himself that he was, that he excelled all his contemporaries.

[7 : 11] He wasn't boasting. This was a statement of fact. There wasn't a student in that school in Jerusalem who could touch this young fellow, Saul, who came all the way from Tarshish to Jerusalem.

He was more advanced than his contemporaries and he became a great zealot. He was out and out a Jew and he would go to any lengths to defend and to propagate the Jewish faith that meant so much to him.

But he was also a legalist. He grew up to become a real legalist, a moralist. Nothing mattered to Paul by the time this story opens for us in chapter nine.

Nothing mattered to him but his obedience to the law. And he himself tells us that looking back on his life as a young man he says concerning the righteousness which is of the law I was, which is in the law I was blameless.

Now what did he mean by that? Well you and I understand the law very often to mean the moral law, the ten commandments. But for a man like Saul, for a young man like Saul, for a Jewish boy growing up like Saul of Tarshish, in a strictly religious Jewish home, the law meant far more than that.

[8 : 41] It wasn't just learning the ten commandments off by heart and trying to keep them, it was also learning all the little bits and pieces that the rabbis through the years had added to the law.

There were many things in addition to the law as you and I understand it. And Paul got to know these things and he got to know these commandments, the ridiculous additions that were made to many of the laws.

For example, this man was very careful, even growing up as a boy, how he would use cups and plates, very careful. He made sure that he cleaned them before he used them, and much more so than you and I would.

And that's just but one aspect, one insight into this law that meant so much to him. And it wasn't just a case therefore of keeping the moral laws, a case of keeping all the little bits and pieces that the Jewish teachers had added to these laws as appendices.

And he was zealous, he was righteous, he really tried to keep them. He went out of his way to make sure that he didn't break one single law.

[10 : 00] Went out of his way to make sure that he didn't break them. And he sought desperately to earn his way to heaven on the basis of his own obedience.

And this is why Saul of Tarsus became such an inveterate hater of the Christian faith.

He opposed it tooth and nail because it was so contrary to anything that he himself understood about religion and about the way to heaven.

And the distinction between the Christian faith and the Jewish faith that he practiced was quite clear cut for the apostle Paul, for Saul of Tarsus. It was like this.

I'm a man, he says, and I belong to a faith, to a religion that knows that God must be obeyed. And I believe, he says, that there's only one way to win the favor of God, and it is through obedience to the law.

[11 : 09] I believe in the immortality of the soul, and I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and I believe as a Pharisee in the future judgment of God. I believe in heaven and hell, and for me there's only one way to get to heaven.

I've got to earn my way to it, and I must obey the law, day and night, every jot and every tittle of it, every single aspect of it, I must obey it, otherwise there's no heaven for me.

And here now comes this new faith that had sprung up in Jerusalem, which proclaimed that acceptance in the presence of God was not on the basis of what we do, but on the cross their thinking, and he became opposed to it, and he tried to obliterate this new faith from off the face of the earth because for him it was a threat to the faith of the Jew.

Together with that, at the heart of this Christian faith was a man, or a person so claimed who was a Messiah. And for Saul of Tarsus, this man was no Messiah, no Messiah, according to the Jewish thinking, would ever come and suffer and be crucified in weakness and seeming weakness as this person was.

So he was opposed to it. And we read in chapter 8, verse 3, for Saul he made havoc of the church, that is of the Christian church, entering into every house and hailing men and women, committing them to prison.

[13 : 19] Now the meaning of the word havoc here is this was the activity of a man who was acting almost like a wild animal. He was let loose and he was trying everything in his power to destroy this faith and he entered into homes, he hauled men and women before the Sanhedrin.

He was a party to their arrest and to their condemnation and in some cases to their death. He made people blaspheme.

He said himself, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he was on the way to Damascus with orders to extradite others and haul them before this court so that they too would be either imprisoned or put to death.

He was absolutely convinced that the Christian religion was wrong, that it was illegal and that it was unholy.

It was opposed to God. This man was religious and yet he was completely opposed to the gracious influence and spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 44] He was an enemy at heart, a rebel against God without knowing it. He was antagonistic to the faith and he blasphemed the faith himself and I thought he said that I was doing God's service by acting like that.

But there's one instance that comes to light about this man and it has caused a lot of problems to people who try to interpret this passage. In verse five, when the Lord confronted him on the way to Damascus, he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecuted.

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks or to kick against this thing that's digging into you, this gold, this thorn that is digging into you.

Now there are some people who maintain from this version that Paul was at this time under conviction, that he knew there was more to the Christian faith than he was prepared to admit.

Now, I don't think that we are warranted really to accept that. Certainly we are not warranted to be dogmatic and I don't think it would be right for us to say that he was a man under conviction.

[15 : 57] To an extent, maybe. It is true, for example, that he had heard Stephen preaching the gospel and there are many who believe that Stephen's defence and Stephen's attitude coloured a lot of Paul's thinking in afterlife.

He was a party to his death. He saw him in the act of dying and he saw an unusual death. He saw a man whose face looked like the face of an angel.

He heard Stephen say that he was seeing the heavens opened, that he could see the Lord Jesus standing on the right hand of God. He heard Stephen praying for those who had put him to death and he was amongst them.

Father, forgive them. He heard that prayer and it may very well be that these things worked on his mind. It may be. But there's one thing certain.

If he was under conviction, if these things were getting him and getting at him and getting under his skin, they weren't bringing him any nearer the Lord. They were only driving him away.

[17 : 13] And it is possible that convictions will not subdue the heart into an acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ and into a seeking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, there are times when convictions arouse enmity in the human heart, opposition to the things of God, and hatred of the gospel of the grace of God.

And whatever else he heard from Stephen, either in the synagogue to which Stephen belonged, the synagogue that the Greek-speaking Jews attended, and maybe Paul himself, sort of Tarsus, may have been there himself at one time, being a Greek-speaking Jew, whether the defense of Stephen before his death, or the prayer of Stephen, or the appearance of Stephen, or the assurance of Stephen, whether any of these things, or all of these things, produced a conviction in his mind and in his heart.

The conviction didn't draw him closer to the Lord, it only made him a bigger and a more antagonistic opponent of Christ than he had ever been in his life before.

Now, I suggest to you that there are people like that even in our own community. And there may very well be people in this church tonight who are like that, and I know for a fact that there are homes in Stornoway, where they might not be represented here tonight, and they may be, but I know that there are homes in Stornoway, as in many another place, where there are people, and the Christian faith, the Christian gospel, the Christian church get under their skin, and they show it by their devilish, satanic opposition and antagonism to all that is associated with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[19 : 19] and behind that antagonism may very well be this kicking against somebody that is digging deep in, and they try to get rid of the thorn, or the goat, or the prick, they try to get rid of the thing that's annoying them, and they can't, and the more they try to get rid of it, the more it annoys them, and this is the way that it very often works, this unease that they feel of the discomfort, the opposition, and the restlessness, and the rebellion, and the unhappiness, they try unsuccessfully to convince themselves of the meaninglessness of the Christian gospel, and the Christian way of life, and the more they try it, the more unhappy they become, and then they turn and they blame so many people for these things that they will never blame themselves for, and the basic problem with them, as it was with Saul of

Tarshish, is this, that Saul was a sinner, and he didn't know it, he was a rebel, and he didn't recognize it, and he was a fugitive, and he was blinding himself to that fact, as someone put it, the fairest exterior, may often conceal a dissatisfied, and a non-sanctified heart, and all that, showed that this man needed that great spiritual change, which we call conversion, and I come now to consider with you the conversion of Saul, remember then, the man, his religion, and his opposition to the Christian faith, and if I may just come back to this before I leave it, because I think that it might be applicable to some people here tonight, if not here, you might know someone to whom it may apply, it's amazing, you know, how often you find people with this attitude, they will try everything in their power to oppose the

Christian faith, I don't know if I ever told this in the pulpit here, but I'll tell it now, I knew a young man in Aberdeen University, and I remember in conversation with him, as we often were, those of us who were Christians at the time, conversation with non-Christians, in a place that many of the students here tonight will no doubt be well aware of by now, the pavilion in Aberdeen University, that day, I remember one day in conversation with this person over a cup of coffee, and I never forgot what he said to me, it often made me afraid when I thought of it, and it still does to this day, you know, he said, if I ever find myself in a community in which you are a minister, I will do everything in my power to oppose the cause that you represent, and I find myself now in the same island as that man, and I often wondered if at the back of that statement was a conviction that he was desperately trying to get rid of, I often wonder, and I have the hope in my heart that that man will yet come as

Paul came to recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as his own Savior. Savior. There are people in this church tonight, I know it, who were bitter opponents of the gospel of Christ, who are now the followers of Christ, and they opposed them.

They opposed the gospel with all the power at their disposal, and yet they knew in their heart of hearts that there was more to the gospel than met the eye, and there was more the gospel than they thought.

[23 : 55] May you be sitting here tonight like that? Are you kicking against some conviction deep, deep in your mind and in your conscience and your heart?

Are you trying to resist the gospel? Do you, for example, get a moment of relief when you hear someone say, perhaps someone of no doubt, there's nothing to the gospel?

Does that give you some kind of relief? It may do when you're here, and then the very next day, what happens? You're back to square one, and this thing is gnawing away at your mind, and you can't get rid of it, and you're here tonight, and it's still there.

What does the Lord say to you? He said what he said to Saul. Saul, you can't resist the power of the gospel. There's no point in doing it.

what you have to do with conviction is not to resist the conviction, but to succumb to it, and to accept the truth of the gospel.

[24 : 56] That's what happened to this man, and it happened in a very wonderful way. At the very height of his persecuting zeal, when this man least expected it, when the people of Damascus least expected it, he was wonderfully converted to the Lord.

now, I'm just going to run briefly over this conversion, and apply it to ourselves here tonight. Consider the supernatural element that was in it. He was a man, and he saw a wonderful light from heaven, and he says himself to King Agrippa, and you know King, he said, it was the brightest light I've ever seen in my life.

It was brighter than the midday sun. Brighter than the noonday sun. Have you ever seen a light as bright as that? Well, Paul said that this light was brighter. He saw a light.

What was it? Well, he tells himself, he saw the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll see the significance of that in a minute. And then, he heard a voice. Now, of course, there are many people who are trying to tear the Bible to bits, and they say, ah, Paul says that he heard a voice, and then there's a passage there that says that the people are with him, that they heard a voice, and then another passage says that they heard nothing.

Well, you see, the Bible never contradicts itself. It's quite easy to reconcile these things. You shouldn't get into a fankel over these things. It's quite easy. There's always an answer to these things in the light of the word of God.

[26 : 21] You see, it's possible, for example, they may have heard the voice, but they hadn't a clue what the voice said. Only Paul knew what the voice said.

What's wrong with that interpretation? Not a thing, and it fits in perfectly. Of course, there are other interpretations which are equally acceptable. He heard the voice, maybe they didn't.

Or they all heard the voice, but only he heard what the voice said. That was the other supernatural thing. And then there were the words that were spoken to him, spoken by a Christ passionately confronting himself.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? He heard the voice, he saw, the person, and he heard the words, and he spoke to him. Lord, who art thou?

Lord, what will you have me to do? And it was so, the light was so bright, he was struck with blindness, literally, blinded for three days, and led by others into Damascus, and lay there for three days, without sight, without eating any food.

[27 : 31] Some people say in a state of shock, maybe he was, maybe he was, when you're in a state of shock, you don't feel like eating anything. But, maybe there was that physical and emotional reaction to this marvelous experience that he had.

But remember, this was a supernatural occurrence. This was a conversion from the Lord. This was the Lord meeting this man literally on the road to destroy other people.

Jesus that Jesus appealed to him. Not as someone says to put him to shame, but to save him. And the poor, bewildered, broken-spirited rabbi becomes the most influential Christian man in the history of the world.

And for Paul, for Saul of Tashasar, this was a real confrontation with our real Christ, with the risen Christ, with the reign of Christ.

And here is a man who recognizes that these people of the way, the Christian people, they were known as the way, these people are right. After all, they're not imposters.

[28 : 43] All that they're talking about is correct. They aren't any fools. And he becomes one of them. And he who came to Damascus to persecute them is now led into Damascus.

as one of themselves. Now, I've just rushed over the conversion of Paul because the account of it here because I want to apply it.

And I want to apply it in this particular way. You see, there are many people who will say that before they can be converted, they must have a conversion experience similar to Paul.

Now, what do you mean by that? Well, I'll tell you what you mean. there must be some wonderful things happen in your life. You must see a light. You must hear a voice. You must see the heavens open.

And it must come present to yourself and it must say to you, you, such and such a name, you now are converted by me. I am the Lord and I'm speaking to you and I've got some work for you to do.

[29 : 48] You see, there must be this extraordinary thing in it for you. Is that not right? Have you not got some preconceived idea in your mind that before you can be converted, something like this must happen to you?

Have you ever heard some people, for example, giving their testimony? And I remember a man telling this, and maybe some of you will follow this tonight, saying that when he was converted, that when the Lord entered his life, he was in a room, he was in Glasgow, and the room he was staying in, when he put the light off, he went to bed at night, he would wake, he was afraid that he would fall off to sleep, and he would stay awake in the hope that he would see something literally on the wall to convince him and confirm to him and assure him that he was genuinely converted, brought up in a Christian home, and yet he waited for this extraordinary thing to happen in his life.

You see, he had a preconceived idea that it must be like that, and I am sure there are people here tonight who are like that. They've got some idea at the back of their mind that something wonderful akin to what happened to Saul of Tarshish must happen to them.

Let me tell you of four people in the book of Acts whose conversions were very different. One of them we looked at last week, the Ethiopian. Tonight there is Saul, then there is Lydia, and then there is the Philippian jailer.

Now you take Saul of Tarshish and the Philippian jailer, right enough, you read Acts 16 when you go home, right enough, there were supernatural occurrences at the time of their conversion. There were phenomena associated with the conversion that you would say and I would say it made it easy for them to believe that it was the Lord.

[31 : 34] For Saul a light and a voice, for the Philippian jailer thunder and the earthquake and the opening of the prison doors and so on. But for Lydia and the Ethiopian, there were no supernatural occurrences like that.

It was just the dawning of the light of the truth upon their understanding. As the Bible was explained to them, they came to believe the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I want to quote to you what an American theologian put, how he put it, Gresham Mitchen. It is a great mistake, he says, to demand of every person that they should be able like Paul to give, now this is important, to give the day and the hour of their conversion.

Many, it is true, he says, still have such a definite experience, but it is not universal. The children, he says, of Christian homes seem to grow up into the love of Christ and their recognition of being believers may simply be the culmination of a God-enriched childhood, a recognition of what God has already done, rather than the recognition now of something new in their life.

And I often wonder if we in this part of the world tend to lay too much emphasis upon what some people would call adult conversion and forget that a great number of the conversions of Christian church are people who are gradually brought to the faith from childhood, right up until a time when they can look back and say, and see rather, this gradual development or unfolding of the things of God in their lives, the gradual breaking of the light upon their consciousness darkness, like the dawning of the day after a dark night.

[33 : 45] You see, the point I want to make is this, there are some people who are of the mistaken impression that conversion for them must be something similar to what happened to Paul at a certain time, on a certain day, at a certain hour, and in a certain way.

Well, that isn't the case, but having said that, there are elements in the conversion of Paul that must be in the conversion of every single individual, no matter how they are brought to know the Lord.

And this is how I want to close here tonight, just very briefly, mentioning several things that are in every single conversion. And maybe as I mentioned, you may discover yourself that you are numbered among those who are converted.

There is this, first of all, there is the entrance into the sinful heart of something from the outside. That is the life of God.

Because every person by nature is a sinner cut off from the life and the favor of God, no matter how young or how old you may be. And when this thing comes into the life, when the power of God comes into the life of an individual, all his hatred towards God is turned to love.

[35 : 20] All his opposition is turned to service. All his prejudices and all his antagonism and all his hostility is turned away.

and he seeks more of the law. That's what Paul said. When I was converted, he said, the things that meant so much to me, the things that meant everything to me, I counted them but lost.

You know what that means? I threw them overboard. I threw them out into the rubbish heap. All my prejudices, all my antagonism, all my opposition, all this trying to earn salvation by my own works, out they went when the Lord came in.

And there isn't a convert here tonight, no matter how he was converted, there isn't a convert here tonight who isn't like that. These things have gone. Nothing matters, no but Christ.

Then there is this second thing. There is dissatisfaction with every other way of salvation but Christ. Now I know that there are people here tonight who may feel terribly dissatisfied and terribly uneasy and with a spirit of dis-peace in their lives.

[36 : 37] They may not know what's causing it. They may not know what's at the root of it. But every convert knows this, that there is peace of conscience for them only through faith in Jesus Christ.

No matter how they were brought or when they were brought to it, this is the recognition, there is peace for them only in Christ. There is only one way of salvation and they wouldn't have any other.

That's the other element. Then there is this third one. Every convert is brought into contact with the unseen and with the eternal. For Saul of Tarsus it came in a very wonderful way.

The Lord appeared to him and he cried to him, Who art thou, Lord? You see, he was brought into contact with the unseen and with the eternal. And so is every single convert.

the life of God enters the heart and it produces, it brings this contact between the individual and God into being. And that final expression I'll see in a minute, for example, in prayer, beholds his soul, says God to Ananias of Damascus, this man is now praying.

[37 : 49] He thought he had prayed before but he never had. But he was praying now. He was in touch with the eternal. Then there is this fourth thing. It brings the individual under the influence of grace.

It is vain for you, says God, to solve to resist, to resist this conviction. Grace is irresistible and the convert recognizes it.

What's the point of fighting against God? They don't want to fight against God, no. God is received by faith into the heart and the grace that was resisted before is received now.

Then there is this fifth thing and this is a very important one. The place that the truth has in the life of the convert. I am Jesus, says the Lord to Saul of Tarsus.

The truth brings home to the individual mind and heart and conscience the reality of this being who is now alive with power from the dead, who is risen at the right hand of God the Father.

[39 : 01] It awakens, the truth awakens in the human heart, feelings and emotions of, for example, discomfort. A sense of sin is not a comfortable thing to have.

Maybe we don't have enough of it. There is a sense at times of fear. Fear. There is the emotional involvement in the things of God.

The heart is moved. The trouble with us is that we're not moved enough. Remember the father who came with his child to Jesus and said, Lord, can you heal, can you help?

And the Lord said, if you believe, all things are possible to him that believe. How did he reply? He cried with loud cries and tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

You know, my friend, there isn't, you and I shouldn't give too much credence to the kind of faith that suggests that there is no change brought to bear upon a person's life.

[40 : 09] That he has no feelings, no emotional involvement in the things of God. I suggest to you that maybe our problem is we don't have enough. Don't have enough. don't you be afraid of the subjectivism of the Christian faith.

Because there is feeling in it. No man is in contact with the eternal without him feeling it, without him realizing it.

Contact with the eternal isn't flopping on your knees and rushing through a prayer that you may have learned from somewhere else or perhaps taught yourself. There's far more to it than that. There's feeling in this.

So it was with Paul. He fell down trembling. Oh you say, ah yes, if I saw what he saw, I also would tremble. And I said this in reply to you, if you have the slightest knowledge of what it is to be brought into contact with the living God, you too know what it is to tremble.

Maybe not to the extent that Saul did, but you know it. then there was a truth conveying solace and peace to the heart.

[41 : 21] I am Jesus whom you persecute. This was of all things the most gracious disclosure.

I am Jesus. And it also communicated to him this truth, the wonderful connection that exists between Jesus Christ and those whom he loved in the world.

I am Jesus whom you are persecuting and Saul may have protested. Lord, what are you talking about? I'm only on your side.

I set out to arrest these people because they're bringing your name into disrepute. I'm out to get them. I'm on your side. Saul, they and I are one there on my side.

And for the first time in his life, Saul came to realize the inseparable connection between Christ and the church. And this is something else that the convert comes to realize.

[42 : 29] And it's a growing realization in the heart of the believer, the real close contact between Christ and his church.

Then there's something else, a sixth thing that isn't present in every convert's heart. He is quickened to respond with an offer of service. Lord, what will you have me to do?

Do I take it to me now rather than Paul wondering if he can do something else to earn his salvation? I think that it is a recognition on Paul's part that this is indeed the Lord gracious revealing himself to him and the human soul responding as every convert has ever responded, Lord, what will you have me to do?

What shall I render to the Lord for all his gifts to me? And this is why the Christian church through the ages should always harness in the best possible way the enthusiasm of every convert because every convert wants to say the Lord Jesus Christ something.

Lord, can I do something for thee? And I suggest to you that if you're here tonight with the grace of God in your heart, that this is one way in which you know it, you want to do something for him.

[43 : 58] And then Paul tells us later on in Philippians chapter 3, this he says was why I was arrested, I was arrested by Christ, for Christ.

That's why you're arrested too by his grace, that you might serve him. And then, and I'm really finished, he discovered something else. He discovered the wonderful provision God had made for him and the means that God was employing to help him.

You go, he says, to Damascus and it shall be told you what you're going to do. And as Saul was on the road to Damascus, God appeared to a man in Damascus called Ananias.

That's all we know about him. Just his name. He was a disciple, that's all. It's probably right to believe that he was praying at the time when the Lord spoke to him. And the Lord commanded him in a supernatural way to go to this particular house, to speak to this particular man, Saul of Tarsus, and you can almost see Ananias recoiling.

You can almost see his reaction, Lord, and he says it, Saul of Tarsus, go and speak to that man. Do you realize that that man's on the way here to arrest people? Ananias, the Lord said, I've got a gracious purpose for that man.

[45 : 15] You go and you tell him what he has to do in my name. And Saul then discovered that God has so many means at his disposal to help and to bless and to direct.

You've discovered that as well, if you're a convert. The many people that God has used in your life, the many means that he's used in your history, to bring things that have been of good to your soul, to bring them to you, and to communicate them to you as well.

The many mouthpieces that God has. Ananias was only one. And you know, I think there's a wonderful version of the Bible that we have here. Ananias came into this room that Saul was lying in, blinded.

Ananias laid his hands and said to him, Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me that you might receive your sight.

And the Lord has sent me to tell you that you're a chosen vessel for him to bring the message of the gospel to the Gentiles. That's something else that he learned.

[46 : 26] That he had the best friends in the world in the Christian church. This is what every convert has learned as well. You see, pre-converted days, it's great to have comradeship, great to have companionship, great to have friends, and they can stand you in good stead.

And there are many, I believe myself and I know that there are very many good friends who have no grace at all in their heart. and that in a graced state you knew them as well. But I say this to you, you've never had friends in all your life like you have now in the Christian church.

They are your brothers and your sisters in the Lord. And they mean more to you than any friend you ever had before. This is the way it is.

And that's true of every convert as well. And finally, there is this in the experience of every convert as well. the recognition that Jesus Christ is the Lord and the Saviour.

Christ now takes a place that other things had in the life before. With Paul, it was his legalism, it was his misguided zeal. These are the things that ruled his life.

[47 : 38] But now, no more. For me, he says, to live, now is Christ. And that's the case with every single convert.

Now, I hope that in some way or other, you may have discovered that though you haven't had the supernatural and the extraordinary experiences that Saul of Tarsus had, that nevertheless, the Lord has so operated through the years in your life in his own wonderful way, that you have come to recognize that these elements that were present in his conversion are also present tonight in your life as well.

But I can't leave it without saying this. What if you're here tonight without these things? What if you're here tonight?

may be religious, may be upright, may be highly principled, may be quite zealous for the church, and all these things?

No. Far be it from me, far be it from me to set aside any of these things.

[49 : 06] But what I want to leave you with is this. you remember that none of these things, and all of these things, that's not salvation.

That's not salvation. What you need, no matter how highly principled you may think yourself to be, and others may know you to be, you remember this, that by nature you're still an enemy of Christ.

You're still at a distance from his grace, and in your condition tonight, perhaps you should consider that instead of coming nearer the Lord, you are only going further away.

What do you need then? You need what Paul needed, what we all needed. You need the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. And the Lord speaks to you in and through his word, and he offers you himself.

And if you have him, no matter what experiences others may have, or have not, this is what's important, not experience, but the Lord Jesus Christ.

[50 : 22] Let us pray. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, and bless us with thy presence, and with thy peace, and with thy power. O do thou draw near to us, and do thou help us to understand thy word.

Apply it, we pray, thee, with conviction, with power, with meaning to our hearts. Part us now with thy blessing, and forgive our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.