

# Paul - The Convert

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Date: 10 October 2021

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn, please, to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 13, if you will. And we read there from verse 1 to verse 5.

Acts of the Apostles, chapter 13, there from verses 1 to 5. Now, in the church which is in Antioch, there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manain, a personal friend of Herod the Tetrach, and Saul.

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucus, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

And when they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

[ 1 : 36 ] Amen. May the Lord bless us for that reading. May we be to his praise and to his glory. Amen. Amen. Over the next three Sundays, including this one, we're looking at the character of Paul.

And these three things, these three sermons, are actually a unity. So hopefully on the third Sunday, at the end of it, I'll tell you how they all tie together. But today, we're looking at Paul the convert. Now when you turn to the 13th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, it becomes clear that something new and something different is about to happen.

In the Acts of the Apostles, in the first five chapters, from the day that the church was founded, in Acts 2, it may be judged as being primarily a Jewish church.

They met around the temple. They prayed around the temple. They prayed from house to house.

But it was Jewish. When you get to chapter 6, right through to chapter 12, it may be called to be the church in transition.

[ 2 : 52 ] Now there are many factors that caused this, but the most important factor is the death of Stephen, the first martyr of the church.

His death unleashed a persecution. And so many of the believers were scattered, as in Acts chapter 8.

These believers made good use of the opportunity to where they were by preaching the word of God wherever they went. In the Acts of the Apostles, right at chapter 1, before Jesus ascended, he said, You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Now whether they took this on board at the time is difficult to say. But one of the things that you have to realize is that what Jesus was saying in that statement is this.

The gospel will cross over every cultural boundary there is. You remember what the woman said to Jesus?

[ 4 : 08 ] The Jews have no association with the Samaritans. Now there were historic reasons for that and we don't need to go into that. But we find that Philip the Evangelist went down to one such city of Samaria in Acts 8.5 and he preached Christ to them.

And there was a mighty turning to God. So the church is now heading in a new direction. And what it needs is someone in a new position, with a new vision, a new call from God to take the church forward.

Can it be that God is saying to us, we need to face a new direction? And if we do, we don't need one person.

We need us all to look in a new direction, a new vision, a new call to a lost world. Let's look at the conversion.

In the church, which is in Antioch, there were prophets and teachers. And while they were worshipping and fasting, the Lord said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

[ 5 : 30 ] So here's the call of God to Paul. But no call could have been made to Paul had he not been converted, first of all.

And you find that in Acts 9, initially, Paul preached probably his conversion in the synagogues of Damascus and then in Jerusalem.

And because of persecution, he was sent back to his hometown namely, Tarsus. And what brings Paul back into the picture is the character of Barnabas.

He was sent to Antioch because there was a great turning to God. And so Barnabas thinks the person to deal with this is Paul.

But there he is in Tarsus, presumably witnessing to his own family of what he now believed relative to the Christ. News came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem when they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

[ 6 : 41 ] When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord. So here we have Barnabas going to Tarsus, finding Paul and bringing him to Antioch.

And here they are in the midst of this worshipping community. And we're told that for a whole year they met with the church and taught a large number of people.

But it's at this point the will of God comes in and cuts right across what they're doing. And it's the call to the church to release Barnabas and Saul for a further work in preaching the gospel.

Now we find that all of this challenge came through the voice of the Holy Spirit, perhaps through a word of prophecy. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So if you take it, here is a fledgling church starting on its mission only recently having received the Lord into their midst.

[ 8 : 02 ] And they're now being asked to make the greatest sacrifice of all to release the two leaders. Now this came to them because of the soundness of the conversion of Barnabas and Saul Paul.

Now Barnabas comes into the picture just at the end of Acts 4 and we read this. Then Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas which means son of encouragement a Levite a native of Cyprus sold a field which belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet. Now that verse by itself or these two verses don't tell us anything about the conversion of Barnabas but the actions that he took clearly show us that he received this new faith.

He was Jewish. He was a Levite a member of that tribe dedicated to the service and worship of God. Now when we come to Paul the first thing that we learn about him is that he's intent on destroying this new way of serving God.

in the Acts of the Apostles you will find that the Christian way Christian faith the organization the church is referred to as the way and also we find that Saul went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the way he might bring them bound to Jerusalem so Saul makes his way to Damascus and then things change as he journeyed he approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him Saul Saul why do you persecute me this was the moment of the fact that this

[ 10 : 35 ] Saul this proud Pharisee was convicted of the fact that he had sinned against God he was now a different person he looks back on this experience and he says in Galatians 1 when he who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles I did not confer with flesh and blood so what's he saying he's saying that as he thinks of that moment on the Damascus road things are now different he was pleased speaking of

God to reveal his son to me and those that have had this experience will know that it never leaves you and so in the last letter that Paul wrote which is 2nd Timothy he says but I am not ashamed for I know in whom I have believed and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him totally certain about this conversion experience it's so stamped on his soul that he will never ever forget it is that your experience now I want to go on now to think about the experiences of Paul the apostle if you read 2nd

Corinthians chapter 11 you'll find a great number of experiences which Paul has but before considering any of these if indeed we will at all I want to consider the experience of Paul at his conversion to the faith in Acts 26 he's making a defense to Herod Agrippa the 2nd and he says wherefore O king Agrippa I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision now what was this vision what was this thing that he saw and part of the vision is related in a vision which was given to Ananias who was well thought of in the city of Damascus and God said to him rise and go to a street called straight and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul for behold he is praying and he seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight so he has this vision in his mind of this Ananias whom he had never seen before coming in and laying his hands upon him and so that happened but something else happened when Ananias came in Ananias stated to him his call like this the God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will to see the just one and to hear a voice from his mouth for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard so here it is by this word of revelation through

Ananias Paul is now informed as to the real reason for this experience it is that he should preach the word of God and be a witness to the truth of the gospel now this call also like his conversion experience never ever left him for this gospel I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher that's second Timothy and towards the end of the same letter he says but the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the message fully that all the Gentiles might hear it so he has this to his dying day even when standing before Caesar attempting to defend what he's what he does and what he says knowing that the death penalty is coming what is he talking about he's not talking about the loss of his life he's talking about the ministry of preaching the gospel and so this vision may be judged to be the beginning of his spiritual life as an ambassador of Christ and the way he put this into practice was by immediately following on from his conversion experience and he tells us

[16:35] I did not consult with flesh and blood nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me but I went away into Arabia and again I returned to Damascus so Paul has no intention of having a human consultation but he is intent on one from heaven and for this purpose he went to Arabia it's the only place you can read about it in the New Testament and Luke doesn't refer to it when he wrote the history of the church and when we think of Arabia we tend to think of vast areas of desert but that's not what intended here because at the time of this narrative the city of Damascus was very near the Arabian border and it bordered on to the kingdom of Nabatea and this is confirmed by a reference that Paul makes in 2nd Corinthians 11 to the king of

Nabatea who was king Ariatus the fourth so he went there and he went there to seek guidance from the Lord as to how he should go about this great mission in his previous life as a Pharisee he'd been reared in these rabbinic traditions which he would inherited from his fathers in the faith and so he talks about this in Galatians 1 and says I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers when he goes to Arabia and the solace of that place which was an inhabited town he does so by reading the scriptures of the Old Testament at the time in the synagogue and it's still true today they would read from the law some portion of

Genesis to Deuteronomy and they would associate it with the prophets and Paul refers to that in Romans 3:21 he says but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law although the law and the prophets bear witness to it and so in this solace of Arabia by himself with his Old Testament he read and studied the law perhaps Deuteronomy along with the prophets perhaps Isaiah which Gerald read from this morning I want to turn to Paul's aim to consider if it's our aim and in this final section I want to introduce you to a Greek verb which is *philoteomai* which means to make it your ambition now this verb is only used three times in the

New Testament and they're always found in the letters of Paul the first of them is in 1 Thessalonians 4 verse 11 to make it your ambition to live quietly to mind your own affairs and to work with your own hands as we charged you so that ambition is to live a life that is pleasing to God and we need to follow that the second one is in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 9 what he's talking about here is the possibility of dying or being present in the body so whether we are at home in the body or absent from the body we make it our ambition to please him an ambition to have a pleasing life before God but the final one and it's the most important is in

Romans 15:20 thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel not where Christ has already been named lest I build on another man's foundation and this ambition is what is governing the heart and the soul of Paul as he seeks this mission as he seeks this opportunity to proclaim the gospel he goes on a few verses before that one in Romans 15:18-19 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles by word and deed by the power of signs and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit so that from Jerusalem and as far round as

[22:19] Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ now this reference to Illyricum is not a town it's a province and it's a province above Greek Greece and it included the cities of Thessalonica so this is what his ambition has taken him in pursuit what was his message I am not ashamed of the gospel it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith to the Jew first and also to the Greek now in making that statement no doubt Paul can think of the many people who turn to the Lord through his ministry and so he goes on for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written he who faith is righteous shall live so in other words what Paul is saying is that those that receive this new faith it is a revelation to them and that's what he said to the Galatians I did not receive it from man nor was I taught it but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ none of the rabbinic traditions that he had been taught in his youth were of any use but now he is a personal revelation of Jesus Christ himself and it's not unique to him we read in John's gospel verses 1 and 14 in the beginning was the word and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and we have seen his glory the glory as the only son from the father now while it's true that

John because of when he lived can think of the first moment that he clapped eyes on Jesus it's equally true for us who have this conversion experience we've seen him for ourselves listen further to the words of Peter he reflects on the transformation of Jesus on the mountain in 2 Peter 3:17-18 the voice was born to him by the majestic glory this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased we heard this voice born from heaven for we were with him in the holy mountain so here's another witness and he's saying the same thing what he's saying is that when we were on the mount of transfiguration the veil was taken away and we saw

Christ in all his glory for ourselves what about today the situation is no different we have to have this experience this meeting this revelation which will give us a testimony of salvation where do we stand in the light of all of this Peter Paul and John did this by receiving him into their hearts by faith and so Paul makes an appeal in 2nd Corinthians 6 working together with him then we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain behold now is the acceptable time now is the day of salvation there is never a more important time than this moment that we are here today to make sure that we know the Lord

Jesus Christ in all his glory and that we have a testimony of salvation amen I'm going to celebrate now the sacrament of the Lord's supper I'm asking Paul if you would come forward and read the words of the institution