

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon November 27, 2022

Acts 9: 1 – 9 “The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus”

36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" 37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. 8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12 "And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." 13 Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14 "And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." 17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. 19 So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

I. Introduction

a. Acts Recap

- i. Acts 1 - “All that Jesus began both to do and to teach”; Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit; Jesus Ascends; Prayer and Mathias chosen

1. 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
- ii. Acts 2 - Holy Spirit poured out, tongues, Pentecost AD30; Peter's first sermon, many conversions; The Church grows, mutual care and assistance, many wonders and signs
 1. 2:46,47 "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."
- iii. Acts 3 – Lame man healed; Peter's 2nd sermon
 1. 3:18,19 "But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"
- iv. Acts 4 – Peter and John arrested and 1st appearance before Sanhedrin, teaching and preaching in the Name of Jesus forbidden; church prayers (Psalm 2) for boldness and mighty signs and wonders, vital united church → mutual aid and assistance, Barnabas as the good example
 1. 4:31 "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."
- v. Acts 5 – Ananias and Sapphira lie to God and drop dead; church growth, sick laid in the streets to be healed, Gospel spreads to cities surrounding Jerusalem; apostles arrested then freed from prison by an angel and sent back to temple to preach, apostles brought before Sanhedrin again: "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?", apostles: "We ought to obey God rather than men."; Gamaliel's advice, apostles beaten and told again not to preach in Jesus' Name and freed; apostles rejoice and keep on preaching the Gospel everywhere in Jerusalem
 1. 5:41,42 "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."
- vi. Acts 6 – the 7 proto-deacons chosen after first internal Church dispute; Stephen accused of blasphemy
 1. 6:7 "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."
- vii. Acts 7 – Stephen's defense → history of stiff-necked people; Stephen martyred while Saul is present and approving

1. 7:51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.”
 2. 7:60 Stephen: “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”
- viii. Acts 8 – Saul makes havoc of the church, great persecution against the church at Jerusalem, Stephen’s burial; Philip preaches Gospel in Samaria, multitudes believe, demons cast out, many healings, joy in the city; Simon the Sorcerer; Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch; Philip transported to Azotus (Ashdod)
1. Great joy in Samaria → Gospel to Samaria
 2. Gospel “to the end of the earth” → Ethiopia, coastal preaching Azotus to Caesarea
- ix. Timeline – Saul’s conversion occurred AD33 per Pastor Phil Kayser – “A conservative chronology of Paul with emphasis upon the correlation with Galatians”
1. <https://kaysercommentary.com/Sermons/New%20Testament/Acts/Acts%2015/A%20Conservative%20Chronology%20of%20Paul.m.d>



- b.
- c. Acts 9: 1 – 9 “The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus”
- i. Saul the villain v1,2
 - ii. Saul meets Jesus v3-7
 - iii. Blind Saul fasts in Damascus v8,9
 - iv. Questions to know, love and obey God

II. Saul the villain v1,2

- a. 1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
- b. Still breathing threats and murder
 - i. Saul's havoc against the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ has continued, now described by Luke as "breathing threats and murder"
 1. "The Holy Ghost hath most graciously shown, in the history of *Saul of Tarsus*, to what a desperate height the human mind void of grace is capable of advancing, in malice and hatred, against the Lord, and that the church of Christ might learn, that there is no difference between one man and another, in the Adam-nature in which all are born; the Lord the Spirit hath here shewn in the example of one of the most eminent servants of Jesus, as he afterwards proved, what our state would do, while unawakened, and unregenerated, before the Lord: and what the Lord enables his people to do when called by sovereign grace from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and Satan to the living God."¹
- c. Commissioned by high priest, letters from high priest to Damascus synagogues
 - i. Here we see Saul's commitment to the apostate Jewish leadership. Saul is dead in his sin and trespasses, and he is imprisoned within the system he loves. Devoted to the wrong authority. In addition, we see Saul's devotion as he attempts to extend the persecution into Syria.
 1. Galatians 1:13,14 "For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers." (~AD49)
 2. "Saul's eagerness to help oppress the followers of Jesus comes to expression in the fact that he took the initiative to expand the persecution beyond Jerusalem and Judea. He went to the high priest, Joseph Caiaphas (see on 4:6), and asked for letters (ἐπιστολαί) which would give him the authority (v. 14) to arrest the followers of Jesus in Damascus, both men and women, and to take them to Jerusalem where they would be interrogated and punished."²
- d. The Way – John 14:6 "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

¹ Robert Hawker, [*Poor Man's New Testament Commentary: Acts–Ephesians*](#), vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013), 76.

² Eckhard J. Schnabel, [*Acts*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 9:1–2.

e. Arrest all Christians

i. Not only does Saul desire to persecute the Church throughout the world, he wants to arrest all Christians, men and women. He want to bind them and bring them to Jerusalem for trial before the Sanhedrin. Saul is filled with burning hatred for all Christians. Hear Paul's own description of his hatred:

1. Acts 26:10,11 "This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 "And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities." (~AD57)
2. "By this commission, all that worshipped God in the way that they called heresy, though agreeing exactly with the original institutes even of the Jewish church, whether they were men or women, were to be prosecuted. Even the weaker sex, who in a case of this nature might deserve excuse, or at least compassion, shall find neither with Saul."³

III. Saul meets Jesus v3-7

a. 3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

b. The light from heaven

i. The Lord Jesus Christ begins Saul's conversion by suddenly bringing a light "from heaven". This is not a celestial event NASA could explain. This is similar to when Stephen saw Jesus in heaven at God's right hand.

1. "The first act of sovereign grace here said to have been manifested to *Saul*, was *a light from heaven*. He afterward, when speaking of it, described it as above the brightness of the sun, though it was now mid-day, Acts 26:13."⁴
2. Acts 26:12,13 ""While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me."

³ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2100.

⁴ Robert Hawker, [*Poor Man's New Testament Commentary: Acts-Ephesians*](#), vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013), 78.

- c. Saul falls to the ground
 - i. Note this is Saul's first response to Jesus. Saul falls to the ground, not as if he made a conscious choice, but the brightness and the power of the light put him on the ground.
 - 1. Similar to John's experience on Patmos: Rev 1:12-17 "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.""
 - ii. Note, worship of God is always a response to Who He Is. He reveals Himself to us, and then we respond. Next, note that when we are brought into God's Presence, we fall down to the ground. Knowing God, by necessity, involves being brought low.
 - 1. "Those whom Christ designs for the greatest honours are commonly first laid low. Those who are designed to excel in knowledge and grace are commonly laid low first, in a sense of their own ignorance and sinfulness. Those whom God will employ are first struck with a sense of their unworthiness to be employed"⁵
- d. Jesus questions Saul
 - i. After Saul falls to the ground because of the bright light, brighter than the sun shining around him, the Lord Jesus Christ continues Saul's conversion by questioning Saul from heaven.
 - ii. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"
 - 1. Jesus asks Saul to examine his own motives for his sinful persecution activities. Conviction of sin begins the conscious conversion process.
 - 2. Also, Jesus here shows that persecuting His Church is to persecute Jesus. Jesus suffers when His Church suffers.
 - a. "*Why persecutest thou me?* He thought he was persecuting only a company of poor, weak, silly people, that were an offence and eye-sore to the Pharisees, little imagining that it was one in heaven that he was all this

⁵ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2101.

while insulting; for surely, if he had known, he would not have persecuted the Lord of glory. Note, Those who persecute the saints persecute Christ himself, and he takes what is done against them as done against himself, and accordingly will be the judgment in the great day, Mt. 25:45.”⁶

- i. Mt 25:45 “Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’”

3. Jesus uses the double vocative, saying Saul twice. Both tender and convicting, and very personal.

- a. “He was called by his name, and that doubled: *Saul, Saul*. ... Calling him by his name intimates the particular regard that Christ had to him ... His calling him by name brought the conviction home to his conscience, and put it past dispute to whom the voice spoke this.”⁷ “The tender concern that the blessed Jesus had for him, and for his recovery. He speaks as one in earnest; it is like *Martha, Martha* (Lu. 10:41), or *Simon, Simon* (Lu. 22:31), or *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, Mt. 23:37.”⁸

e. Saul’s question to Jesus

- i. On the ground, under the divine light of Christ Himself, after hearing Christ’s Own Voice tenderly convicting him of his sin, Saul responds with a question. This question shows Saul has yet to understand the situation. Saul does not know this is Jesus Christ speaking to him. Again, true worship always involves us responding to God’s initiative.
- ii. “Who are You, Lord?” says Saul.
 1. Note that Saul does now know enough to call the Speaker, “Lord”. Saul believes he is having an encounter with God.
 2. “The context of the flashing light, the fall to the ground, the heavenly voice, and the question regarding the reason for his activities as a persecutor of believers in Jesus indicates that the term “Lord” (κύριε) is more than a polite address used in encounters with a person. While he does not yet now know, at this instant, with whom he is dealing, he would assume, as a

⁶ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2101.

⁷ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2101.

⁸ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2101.

devout Jew who knows the Old Testament theophanies, that he is being addressed either by an angel or by God himself.”⁹

- f. Jesus answers: again, unity of Christ with His Church
 - i. “Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.””
 - 1. Jesus reveals Himself to Saul, and once again Jesus emphasizes to Saul that he is filled with hatred, malice, threats and murder against Jesus Himself, Whom Saul now understands Is God.
 - a. “*I am that Jesus whom thou persecutest, and therefore it will be at thy peril if thou persist in this wicked course.*”
There is nothing more effectual to awaken and humble the soul than to see sin to be against Christ, an affront to him, and a contradiction to his designs.”¹⁰
 - ii. Kick against the goads
 - 1. Goad = an iron goad, for urging on oxen, horses and other beasts of burden
 - a. hence the proverb, “to kick against the goad”, i.e. to offer vain and perilous or ruinous resistance
 - 2. Jesus shows Saul he has been acting like a stubborn animal refusing to be tamed. Saul has been refusing the preaching of the Gospel, stubbornly acting along with all the other stiff-necked Jews of his day.
 - a. “It is hard, it is in itself an absurd and evil thing, and will be of fatal consequence to him that does it. Those kick at the goad that stifle and smother the convictions of conscience, that rebel against God’s truths and laws, that quarrel with his providences, and that persecute and oppose his ministers, because they reprove them, and their words are as goads and as nails. Those that revolt more and more when they are stricken by the word or rod of God, that are enraged at reproofs and fly in the face of their reprovers, kick against the pricks and will have a great deal to answer for.”¹¹
- g. Paul acknowledges Jesus as Lord and seeks to obey Jesus
 - i. “So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?””

⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 9:5–6.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2101.

¹¹ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2101.

1. Trembling → Saul is experiencing soul-shaking exposure to God. This trembling is always a part of what we God's creatures experience in His Presence.
 2. Astonished → Saul now realizes he has been hating God, and that Jesus Christ lives and reigns.
- ii. Evidence of Saul's regeneration: a new Master
1. "Lord, what do You want me to do?" – Saul now calls Jesus Christ "Lord" – Saul, without a word about it, has admitted that he has been in rebellion against God in Christ, and Saul now looks to Jesus for his instructions. Saul no longer cares about the high priest's letters.
 - a. This is always the heart of genuine faith, looking to Christ as Lord and seeking to hear His Voice and follow Him.
 - b. "Note, A serious desire to be instructed by Christ in the way of salvation is an evidence of a good work begun in the soul."¹² "Lord Jesus, *What wilt thou have me to do?* Did not he know what he had to do? Had he not his commission in his pocket? And what had he to do but to execute it? No, he had done enough of this work already, and resolves now to change his master, and employ himself better. Now it is not, What will the high priest and the elders have me to do? What will my own wicked appetites and passions have me to do? But, *What wilt thou have me to do?* The great change in conversion is wrought upon the will, and consists in the resignation of that to the will of Christ."¹³
- h. Jesus commands Paul
- i. Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."
 - ii. Note, when we seek the Lord's direction, He will guide us into His will. When we ask according to His glory and His Kingdom, our gracious King will Shepherd us.
 - iii. Note, also, the simplicity of Christ's first command to Saul. Jesus leads us tenderly, preparing us along the way to know Him, trust Him and obey Him more and more. "You will be told what you must do."

¹² Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2102.

¹³ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2102.

1. "Christ manifests himself to his people by degrees; and both what he does and would he have them to do, though they know not now, they shall know hereafter."¹⁴

IV. Blind Saul fasts in Damascus v8,9

- a. 8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
- b. Saul obeys Jesus – Saul goes into Damascus and waits for further instructions.
 - i. Often, God's commands to us involve a requirement to wait for further instructions. We are faithful to wait and not go whenever the Lord says "wait".
- c. Saul fasts in Damascus while he is blind
 - i. The Lord often surprises us with frightening providences. Yet, in his blindness, Saul is given the opportunity to have fewer distractions. His mind will be more easily set upon the last sight he saw, likely Jesus Christ Himself in His shining glory from heaven, and the knowledge of his great sin against God.
 - ii. Saul gives another evidence of his faith. He is in a complete fast for 3 days as he seeks the Lord, waits upon the Lord.
 1. "we have reason to think he was all this time rather in the belly of hell, suffering God's terrors for his sins, which were now set in order before him: he was in the dark concerning his own spiritual state, and was so wounded in spirit for sin that he could relish neither meat nor drink."¹⁵

V. Questions to know, love and obey God

¹⁴ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2102.

¹⁵ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2102.