

**Acts 19:1-22****The Conversion Witness of Paul**

**9** But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. <sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." <sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." <sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." <sup>17</sup> So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; <sup>19</sup> and taking food, he was strengthened.

**Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues**

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." <sup>21</sup> And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of

those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

### Intro:

Christian church throughout the world in the Western Tradition celebrated Easter, The R;n of Christ 3 Sundays ago. The eastern Orthodox churches celebrated Easter one week later. We are still in the "R'n" season and it is difficult to move on with our previous study in 2 Tim without lingering a while longer to consider this greatest of all events in the history of the world, the R'n of Jesus of Naz from his tomb on the third day of his death. This is an event, as we considered before that had never happened before, that was "outside the box" of anything every experienced by the Jewish people, even the most devout Jews who read and believed the OT scriptures. The R'n of Jesus Christ shook them up, astounded them, shocked them, yet as its truth and reality sunk in, became the greatest news of encouragement and joy that they could every have imagined. The implication and teaching became clearer and clearer: Because Christ arose from the dead, so too, those who believe in him, will rise from the dead also at the last Day when Christ returns for his own and to judge those who are not his own.

### Literary context:

The witness given to Paul by Steven:

Acts 8:58-59

<sup>58</sup> They threw him out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses laid their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul.

<sup>59</sup> While they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" <sup>60</sup> Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." After he said this, he fell asleep.

**But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.**

Acts 22:6 and 26:13 we read that the light appeared to him “around midday” – when the sun was brightest – so it must have been a very bright light.

Paul designates it as “a light from heaven” so it was not an earthly light but a light from God himself that appeared. This light wasn’t just some magnificent star that appeared in the sky but it came from heaven itself. So this person who spoke to Paul was divine, he was God. This was a supernatural manifestation from the throne of God. No wonder Paul fell to the ground. No wonder his eyes were blinded. No wonder he was stunned; he was totally shocked; he never expected this.

Perhaps the defense that Stephen had given came to his mind and it made sense. He understood now what Stephen was saying.

As we read 2 Cor. 4:6 it makes us wonder if this text is somewhat reflective of Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus:

<sup>6</sup> For the God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,”<sup>[a]</sup> is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person<sup>[b]</sup> of Jesus Christ.

One commentator wrote: “...such total brokenness of self-will and pride is a necessary state of all genuine conversions.” (Polhill p. 235)

#### **4 And falling to the ground,**

This falling to the ground is reminiscent of OT saints who also encountered a “similar divine visitation.”

**he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why - are you persecuting me?”**

This double address was common. See 1 Sam. 3:10 - <sup>10</sup> And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.”

#### **5 And he said, “Who are you, Lord?”**

“Lord” here is the name of deity.

**And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**

Did Paul really see the risen Christ or just some kind of heavenly light and heard Jesus’ voice?

Hear the testimony of Paul and others as to what he saw that day:

1 Cor. 9:1 - (A)Am I not free? (B)Am I not an apostle? (C)Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? (D)Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?

1 Cor. 15:8 - <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, (A)he appeared also to me.

Gal. 1:16 - <sup>16</sup> was pleased to reveal his Son to<sup>[a]</sup> me, in order (A)that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone:

Acts 90:17 - <sup>17</sup> So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

In Acts:

In Athens, for example

Paul's same testimony of his conversion to Jewish crowd at Jerusalem:

Acts 21-22

Acts 24 – before Felix the governor

Acts 26 – Before King Agrippa

Peter May:

Paul, however, does not differentiate his experience from the rest of the apostles, other than in its timing. He was not with them at the beginning. He says "*he appeared to Peter ... he appeared to James ... and last of all he appeared also to me*".

Paul mentions 31 times his meeting Jesus on the road...

In a split second of time, Paul's whole world was turned upside down. His ravenous passion to stamp out the name of Jesus suddenly hit a brick wall. Two great realities burst in upon his mind:

- A. Jesus, who he hated along with all his followers, really was risen from the dead.
- B. This Jesus stood before him in his divine glory, so Paul saw that he was not only risen from the dead, but was the glorious and divine Son of God.
- C. In addition, a third great fact began to be formed in his mind: and that was that the people of God, the church, the called-out ones, were so intimately connected to Jesus their Lord that they were considered to be his body and he was the

head of this body. So to persecute the people of God was to persecute Jesus himself.

Paul's persecution of the followers of Jesus was direct persecution on the Lord of glory himself.

**<sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.**

Acts 22:9 - we learn that they also saw the light. So what these companions of Paul saw was a bright light and heard a voice but they could not see the one speaking.

**<sup>8</sup> Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.**

Paul was reduced to helplessness. The great mighty persecutor was reduced to blindness and had to be led by the hand into Damascus – no longer breathing our fire against the Christians but was totally subdued and conquered by the very One who he had despised.

**<sup>9</sup> And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.**

I think the reason Paul did not eat or drink was because his whole being was in such a mental, psychological and spiritual shock that he had no thought or desire for food or drink.

**<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” <sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” <sup>17</sup> So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the**

Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;<sup>19</sup> and taking food, he was strengthened.

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The word “proving” here carries the idea of joining or putting together – indicating that Paul was using the OT prophecies of the Messiah to show how they were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Why Paul’s encounter with the risen Jesus is so significant in confirming the reality of Christ’s R’n from the dead:

1. **Extension of the R’n** – the continuing manifestation of the reality of the risen Christ: Here is the first instance of Christ’s appearance to someone who was not one of the original apostles or disciples. In other words, in appearing to Paul we know the same resurrected Christ who appearance to the disciples over that 40 day period is still alive some 20 or so (?) years later. He had not limited his R’n appearances to those initial 40 days.
2. **Conversion of an enemy of the R’n** - Here is the first example, not just of former companions and disciples and friends of Jesus, embracing them as their Lord and Savior, but also enemies of Christ can be converted if Jesus sets his eye and love on them.

The significance of Paul’s conversion lies in his initial antagonistic view toward the early Christian movement. Paul was not a disciple of Jesus who was primed to see a vision of Him due to wishful thinking or grief after the execution. Saul was a most unlikely candidate for conversion. His mindset was to oppose the Christian movement that he believed was following a false messiah.

<https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/resurrection-of-jesus-christ-and-the-conversion-of-saul-faq.htm>

3. **Conversion of an OT Jewish scholar to the gospel.** Paul’s conversion is a chief example of a highly educated and trained Pharisee, a man thoroughly steeped in knowledge of the Law, Prophets, and Writings who was seized upon

by the risen Christ and who, by the grace of God, responded wholeheartedly to the realization that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, and thereupon, dedicated his entire life and energy to proclaiming this fact.

4. Reliable witness: Paul is an example of a man of high integrity, broad knowledge, and rigorous logic who not only embraced but defended the Gospel,
5. **Example of the power of Christian conversion**: He demonstrates how powerful and radically life-changing true conversion is.
6. Christ's R'n became the cornerstone of Paul's gospel.
7. Paul's encounter with the Resurrected Christ was the unforgettable and driving force that spurred him on to a life of unprecedented devotion and commitment to Christ and to preaching him far and wide .
8. As the "18<sup>th</sup> century English statesman George Lyttleton wrote, "the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." P. 196, FF Bruce, *The Book of Acts*

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1. No person, no matter how wicked they are, is beyond the reach of God's grace.
2. Paul's testimony of having seen the risen Christ, when we read it in the Scriptures, is just as real and authoritative as if he were here and standing before you today and said, "Listen folks, the risen Christ who appeared to his disciples, appeared to be also. I hated even the mention of the name of Jesus. But something happened that I was not expecting. He came to me, he appeared to me and talked to me. I have seen him and he has talked to me and want to tell you, that he is alive and well and rules over all things in heaven and earth.

John 17:20 - <sup>20</sup> "I do not (BG)ask for these only, but also for those (BH)who will believe in me through their word,

Peter May: in other words, all over the world, throughout the centuries, people would be invited to trust the risen Christ on the basis of the apostles' clear and compelling testimony. That should have been enough for Thomas – and it should also be enough for us.

John 20:29 - <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? (A)Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

3. Paul's experience, as dramatic as it is, is really a true description of how every person comes to faith in Christ: it is a sovereign act of God that occurs because of his initiative and his purpose. Every sinner who ever came to Christ was seized upon and arrested by the grace of God as he was heading into the Damascus of their own lives to continue to commit more sin. He arrests us; he stops us in our tracks, and calls us into his service. He shows us our ignorance and our rebellion. He changes our hearts and makes us new men and women in Christ. "Behold, whoever is in Christ is a new creature." From then on our lives are not the same. There is a new power and a new motivation in our lives. It is the very Spirit of God who marks us and seals as Christ's very own. So we are no longer our own but belong to Christ. We can now sing and understand the old hymn:

O happy day that fixed my choice  
 On Thee, my Savior and my God!  
 Well may this glowing heart rejoice,  
 And tell its raptures all abroad.

Chorus:

Happy day, happy day,  
 When Jesus washed my sins away!  
 He taught me how to watch and pray,  
 And live rejoicing ev'ry day;  
 Happy day, happy day,  
 When Jesus washed my sins away.

'Tis done-- the great transaction's done;  
 I am my Lord's, and He is mine;  
 He drew me and I followed on,  
 Rejoicing in the call divine. [Chorus]

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