

## Acts 9:1-9

### "What Would You Ask God?"

To a significant degree, the course of world history is hewn; it's fashioned/formed, sculpted & shaped out of what happens in Acts Ch 9. W/out doubt the single most famous conversion in the history of humanity.

Outside of the birth, death & resurrection of J.C. The salvation of Saul of Tarsus (who will become known to us as the Apostle Paul) has had a greater impact upon the history of humanity than any other single event.

Someone has said of his conversion: "Obliterate the influence of this man's 30yrs of ministry and you sweep all churches off the face of the earth. You quench all the moral lights of the age. You give Ephesus back to Diana, Athens back to Nineveh, Paphos back to Venus, and Rome to all the gods of her pantheon and plunge the entire world once again into pagan darkness, and heathen disillusionment to which there is no moral restraint."

He was used of God to pen ½ of what's become the N.T. Did more to establish the church among the Gentile nations (of which you are apart) than any other single person. Now; I don't want to place him so high upon a pedestal so as to leave you thinking that if he hadn't been saved that God wouldn't have used someone else; but its' truly incredible to consider the impact that this *one man* had upon the history of the world... This is the Ch that highlights his encounter w/Christ.

Last week we read of the salvation experience of an Ethiopian eunuch. God revealed Himself to him *through* Philip up in a chariot on the road to Gaza. The salvation of Saul took place down in the dirt on the road to Damascus.

In the book of Philippians, Paul speaks on the theological, psychological & philosophical aspects of his conversion. Here we're just handed the facts, this is what happened to him on the road to Damascus.

## Vs 1-2

Let's not forget that Saul was what we called an "equal opportunist" persecutor. He didn't care if you were a man or a woman. If you were of the sect of people who believed, purported & proclaimed the death/resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth & that to believe on His substitutionary death (for the forgiveness of sins & eternal life by His grace through faith) you were on his hit list. You were part of the problem & he was bringing the solution.

If there's one thing positive we can say about Saul of Tarsus, it's that if he saw a problem, he had no objections to being part of the solution.

It's sad to say, but that's a fairly rare quality anymore. Most people are experts at pointing out problems & finding faults but not so good at being part of the solution. Oh, they have a solution in mind *for you*, but they don't have time or aren't willing to put in the work themselves. Such was *not* the case concerning Saul of Tarsus. He wasn't only willing to be a part of fixing what he thought was a problem, he was happy to lead the charge!

Vs 1 picks up where the last mention of him left off. We 1<sup>st</sup> meet Saul at the stoning of Stephen (the 1<sup>st</sup> martyr of the early church). It's Vs 58 of Ch 7, there he is, guarding the overcoats of the people who were throwing stones while consenting to (that is, enthusiastically encouraging) his death. & There was something about that whole event; hearing everything Stephen said, witnessing the way that he died (saying that he could see the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God, crying out to Him, seeking forgiveness on behalf of those who were killing him...) It triggered something in Saul, it set him off & he went on a rampage (almost like spiritual insanity), he was refusing to relent, trying to harden himself against the truth of what he'd heard/seen.

When Ch 8 opens up Saul is wreaking havoc, just laying waste to the church, entering every house that he could find that contained a home church, dragging off men & women, putting them in prison & seeking the death penalty when at all possible. The result was the scattering of the saints, believers were literally leaving Jerusalem, fleeing for their lives. W/that Saul's intentions kind of backfired on him because now the gospel is spreading everywhere these people go!

Then we have this little side vignette where Philip is used powerfully of God in Samaria to bring about this great spiritual awakening. & Right at the peak of it an angel of the Lord directs him to the desert where he leads the Ethiopian Eunuch to faith in Christ; everything about it is amazing (if you weren't here you want to get ahold of that study).

As the curtain opens in Ch 9 we find Saul (the words are) "still breathing threats & murder against the disciples of the Lord." The idea here is this was his life passion. He was breathing in death; & breathing out murder & the slaughter of the saints. Think of the snorting of an animal consumed w/hunting its prey. He's panting, huffing & puffing, enraged against believers; men/women, didn't matter.

It's almost as if he senses a personal responsibility to round up every believer that scattered because of his persecution, it was his mission to make sure that none escaped. "They left because of me; I'll go get them..."

Damascus was some 140 miles away from Jerusalem, he'd be traveling about a week to get there... But being a "lawful" kind of man, he made sure it was all legal. He went to the high priest (most likely Caiaphas) to ask letters, to get official papers granting him authority to hunt down believers, tear families apart & bring them back to Jerusalem from where they'd fled.

Now; some people like to purport that Christianity is simply a crutch for the weak. Let me say 2 things about that. #1 Christianity is not a crutch, it's a stretcher, an ambulance... it's the whole hospital. It's not for people who just need a little help, it's for those who need altogether revived! Jesus said that like this, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*<sup>1</sup>

Which brings me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing, Christianity isn't just for weak people (though many of us find ourselves at the end of our own strength when we finally surrender), the truth is it's for *sinful* people! Which qualifies us all! Because *all* have sinned & fall short of the glory of God. *All* we like sheep have gone astray; we've turned, *every one* to his own way... The idea being that apart from Christ, we're all lost! Again, Jesus said, *"... for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*<sup>2</sup> God's not willing/wanting that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance...

Believe me when I tell you that Saul was *anything* but weak... He was a very purpose driven, violent man, somehow & in some way thinking he was doing God a service w/every believer he had put to death. Doing everything w/in his power to bring this sect of Jesus followers into extinction.

He hated disciples of the Lord. As for you & me, we sense a need, feel it's our mission to preach/proclaim the gospel. (& Rightly so. Jesus told us, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*<sup>3</sup>) But Saul made it his mission, not to preach but to persecute people who loved/served Jesus.

Now; we wonder. Being such a self-righteous, "God fearing" (in his own mind) kind of guy, where did he get the justification to hunt down & murder men & women who sought to follow the Lord? We don't know (because he doesn't tell us).

There is (however) an example of one man in the O.T. whose name was Phineas.

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mk 2:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Lk 19:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mk 16:15-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Phineas (there in the book of Ex) killed an immoral man & woman by running them through w/a spear & God honored him by halting a plague. Saul (thinking Christianity was both wrong & deceptive) may've thought (like Phineas) he could honor God by bringing an end to this plague of what he thought was a false religion.

Be that as it may; what he'll discover is that far from being the hunter, he was the one being hunted. He wasn't seeking Jesus, but Jesus was seeking him. & Truth be told, that's the story of every one of us who've come to know the Lord. Jesus said, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you"*<sup>4</sup> John said that like this, *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation* (the cleansing agent, the satisfactory sacrifice) *for our sins."*<sup>5</sup> *When you gave your life to Christ, it wasn't because you chose Him, it's because He chose you. You weren't interested in the things of God until He began to provoke you, pursue you, prompt you. We didn't love Him, He loved us & sent J.C. to stand in the gap for us & make a way where there was no way that we might be reconciled to God...*

You say, "I don't know how I feel about that. Did God choose me?" Give your life to J.C. & you'll discover He did. "I don't want to." Then maybe He didn't... ☺ I don't always understand the balance between the sovereignty of God & the freewill of man, but the bible teaches both w/out apology so that's what I do. You can give your life to J.C. whenever you want to. Jesus said, *"...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."*<sup>6</sup> *God's not willing that any should perish, He wants all to come to repentance. There's not a single soul for which Jesus did not die. Having said that; you were chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world, before you were formed in the womb God knew you & had a plan for you that you should walk in it...*

Btw, we see in Vs 2 this mention of "the Way". This is what the sect of Jesus followers were called before they were called "Christians". They were called people of "the Way". It points to the fact that not only is Christianity a belief, or a set of doctrines, following Jesus is a way of life. Of course Jesus called Himself "the Way, the Truth & the Life". *Christianity is the way of truth, it's the way of love, it's the way of grace, it's the way of righteousness, the way of everlasting life... & It was spreading everywhere. Saul was concerned for the presence of these people as far as Damascus.*

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 15:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Jn 4:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 6:37]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## Vs 3-6

Question; was Saul pursuing Jesus? No; he was *persecuting* Jesus. But Jesus was pursuing him... The conversion of Saul affirms the truth that Jesus receives sinners! Family; this is the love of God, that even though you may persecute Him, He (in His love) pursues you, has it in His heart to save you!

Here you are today, you haven't given your life to Christ, He's pursuing you, He's on your heels, seeking to apprehend your heart... He loves you. Believe me when I tell you that in this day, no one would believe this guy could've ever been saved. God says, you're wrong, today @ noon 😊!

Last week I encouraged you w/the fact that God loves you, has a plan for you, it's not uncommon for people to think they're too insignificant for God to really notice, or see them when there are so many others He could place priority on, it's simply not true. But today we're seeing that something else people commonly think (but it's untrue as well). **It's common for people to have the thought that they're too far gone, they've done too much, that God wouldn't receive them, couldn't save them, not after what they've done... nothing could be further from the truth. Again, Jesus didn't come to call the righteous, but the sinner to repentance, it's not the well who are in need of a physician, but the sick.**

This scene is incredible, a light (you've heard the phrase "so & so saw the light", well Saul literally saw the light) shining down from heaven all around him. & You might underline the phrase in Vs 4, "Then he fell to the ground..." God was humbling him. He didn't fall out of awe & holy reverence, he was fearing for his life, as the author of Hebrews says, **"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."**<sup>7</sup> Saul hits the dirt & hears a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" The Lord says, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Wait, what? 3 Things. #1 Can you imagine how these words struck the heart/mind of Saul of Tarsus? "Jesus? I've been enraged against all who believe in You! Everything I've thought, everything I've taught about You has been wrong..." #2 These words were a complete 180 of everything Saul stood for. He'd (more than likely) heard Jesus teach while He was on the earth there in the synagogue, he was on the council that condemned Him to death & branded Him a blasphemous heretic.

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<sup>7</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Heb 10:31). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He'd made it his mission to stamp out everyone who'd purported that He was alive & now here he is face to face w/Jesus Himself! He is alive, He is at the right hand of the Father, He is God... He does reign in glory.

#3 Had Saul ever personally laid a hand on Jesus? No. Yet Jesus is here implicating him in the fact that as he persecutes those who believe *in* Him & belong *to* Him, that it's not *them* he's persecuting, it's *Him*! Family, this is the intimacy of Jesus & the body of Christ, the reality of abiding *in* Christ. Jesus didn't say, "Why are you persecuting My followers?" He said, "Why are you persecuting *Me*?" "What you do to the least of these My brethren (Jesus said) you do to *Me*." He said, "*He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.*"<sup>8</sup> Jesus identifies w/His own.

On the other side of that, Paul said, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*"<sup>9</sup> When we suffer, He suffers, we are the body of Christ, He is the head of the church, we are one. We do well to be mindful of that the next time we're tempted to slander a brother or a sister in Christ, Jesus takes that personally.

Saul thought he'd been *servicing* God, but the reality is he'd been fighting *against* God... So here he is, down in the dirt... & he has 2 questions. If you could ask God anything you wanted, what would it be? You can do a quick internet search & discover what questions people have for God, some serious, some silly. Most are along the lines (in some form or another) of, "Why is there suffering in the world?" "What is the point of life?" "What happens when we die?" "Will there ever be world peace or the absence of disease?"

Can I just say that though those kinds of questions are interesting, God has already answered every one of them in His word. One question I read was, "Am I going to heaven & if not, what can I do to change that?" Guys, God has given us all things that pertain to life (including everlasting life) & godliness in His word... Those questions, really aren't the most important questions to ask.

Saul only had 2, & they were the right ones. #1 Who are You, Lord? To know Him is the most important pursuit of your entire life! Paul would spend the rest of his life wanting to know more deeply & completely the answer to this question, "Who are you, Lord?"

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Lk 10:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>9</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ga 2:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



“That I might *know* Him, & the power of His resurrection, & the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil 3:10-11)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> question? “Lord, what do You want me to do?” This is a question that a lot of people (honestly) are afraid to ask. They fear that if they say, “God what would you have me do?” That God will send them into their deepest fears, some spider, snake infested area of the world or something... what a twisted perspective of the heart of God we can have. God *loves* you, has thoughts of *peace* toward you. Believe me, the safest, most peaceful place you could ever be is right in the center of what God has for you...

& I would never seek to insinuate that salvation is faith plus works. But I would say that true faith goes to work in our lives... As much as from a teachers stand point I want to see you busy about the good works that God has prepared for you that you should walk in them, from a personal stand point (& I mean no disrespect) I’m not too concerned for what God wants you to do, I’m concerned for what God would have *me* to do. **Too often people occupy themselves w/what God would have others to do (& they feel it their personal responsibility to make sure you’re doing it), I would say they may be well intentioned but their notions are misguided, let God worry about what they need to do, you concern yourself w/what you need to do. You might just write down & read later John Ch 21:15-23).**

Notice, that Saul didn’t delay, his desire for direction & unction unto obedience was immediate. & These are the fingerprints of a redeemed/surrendered life; the desire to know Jesus personally, to serve Him passionately. Listen, the plan that God has for us is not a pressure upon us, but a privilege for us! When we realize the price He paid to *save* us, it’s our honor to *serve* Him.

Jesus said, “It’s hard for you to kick against the goads.” When an ox was resisting the direction of its master, the master would goad it w/a sharp stick. Jesus said that it was hard for Saul to do this. The idea is that deep down he knew he wasn’t doing what he should, he was headed the wrong way, but he stubbornly kept convincing himself to do it.

He was of the persuasion, “Don’t confuse me w/the facts, I’ve made up my mind.” Something in him was pressing him, pushing him, prodding him in a different direction but he refused to think about it, refused to give consideration to it, he knew what he knew & that was it. But it was eating him up inside. Convinced outwardly, confused inwardly...

Btw; as I mentioned to you last week, notice that the Lord didn't give him the 5 yr plan, or what he would be doing for the next few months. He only gave him the direction he needed in that moment (go into the city, then you'll be told from there). We want to know the end of it, God leads us step by step. When you obey the 1<sup>st</sup> directive, He'll give you the next.

### Vs 7-9

God was humbling him. He'd been blind spiritually, now he was blind physically. He's being reduced, he's showing signs of shock, confusion & utter brokenness. He's not eating, he's not drinking, he just sat in stunned silence thinking through what he'd been through, everything he'd ever been taught, who God was & his revelation of J.C. Some people weep when they're saved, others jump for joy, Saul was a broken man, his life turned upside down, but 3 days later (spoiler alert) he received resurrection life.

But this is where he learned that salvation is by grace through faith. He didn't do anything to gain God's favor, God simply (by His grace) made Himself real to Saul.

I would challenge you, seek to know Jesus more intimately, serve Him passionately, obey Him immediately & He will be glorified in your life.

### Prayer Points:

God we're so grateful that You pursue us. That though we often resist You, You continue to reach out to us & avail Your grace & Your forgiveness to us. We thank You for Your love & for Your mercy that's new every morning, great is Your faithfulness! Renew our love for You, may we die to self that we might live for You & the glory of Your name!

**If you've not surrendered to Jesus, the hounds of heaven are heavy your heels today! Why keep fighting? It's a battle you'll lose, you can't fight God & win, give Him your heart today.**