

Text— Acts 9:1-18

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

The apostle Paul is certainly well known to us through the New Testament Epistles he penned by inspiration of God. However, it's interesting to note that before Paul became a Christian he was actually a bitter enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ and those who followed Him, for Paul later confessed in 1 Timothy 1:12-13, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Yes, Paul had been an unbeliever and a staunch enemy of Jesus Christ and all Christians.

Paul, who while yet an unbeliever was known as Saul, had regularly persecuted Christians, and he thought he was serving God by doing so since he was full of self-trust, being, as Philippians 3:5-6 reports, "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

Yes, Saul of Tarsus was a super-Pharisee, for it was Saul who was approvingly present when a Christian named Stephen was stoned to death for confessing Jesus Christ the promised Messiah, the Savior foretold of old, for Acts 8:1-3 informs us: "Saul was consenting unto his [i.e. Stephen's] death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." Thus, Saul – before becoming the Christian known as the apostle Paul – was an arch enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ and all of His followers.

Nevertheless, the Lord made a big change in Saul of Tarsus, as is evident in our Scripture selection which relates:

"SAUL'S CONVERSION"

With that as our theme may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) When and how Saul's conversion took place
- 2) What interesting events happened immediately following Saul's conversion

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Verses 1 & 2, ----- (Acts 9:1-2)

The opening two verses of our text make it abundantly clear that Saul certainly hated all followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and desired them dead.

Observe that Saul was working in conjunction with the wishes of the Jewish high priest who also hated Jesus Christ and His followers. The high priest issued letters of authority in order to give Saul the legal ability to arrest those in the city of Damascus who were disciples – followers – of the Lord Jesus Christ if he found any of them in the synagogues, and to bring them in chains to Jerusalem so that they could be tried for their supposed crime of being Christians.

Notice that the disciples of Jesus were also known as people of the Way, for in John 14:6 we read that Jesus once said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Yes, Jesus Christ is the only WAY to God and heaven, which is a fact all Christians know and believe, for we read in Romans 3:19-26, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the

righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Hence, Jesus Christ is indeed the ONLY WAY to God and heaven, for Romans 6:23 declares: "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Nevertheless, Saul and the other pharisees and their followers were stuck on themselves and their own works; consequently, they hated Jesus Christ and His Christians.

Verses 3 & 4, ----- (Acts 9:3-4)

Think about what happened. Saul was en route to the city of Damascus which was about 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Saul was determined to arrest any Christians he found in the synagogues of the city and bring them bound to Jerusalem, but *as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.*

Imagine Saul's surprise as he was suddenly surrounded by dazzlingly bright light from heaven, and subsequently *fell to the earth* and heard a voice out of that bright light saying, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

Verses 5 & 6, ----- (Acts 9:5-6)

Note that Saul knew that it was a divine voice speaking to him from the brightness of glory, for Saul asked: *Who art thou, Lord?* Yes, Saul addressed the Person speaking to him as LORD.

Then, to Saul's surprise, the Lord further identified Himself to Saul by saying: *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.* Oh, Saul knew the Lord was speaking to him, and then Saul was immediately made aware of the fact that Jesus Christ IS the Lord God. Right then and there Saul became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ by the power of Jesus' Word, for it is ever true that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," as Romans 10:17 reports.

Observe that when Saul had persecuted Christians, Saul was persecuting Christ, for Jesus said: *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.* Fellow Christians, Jesus is with and in every Christian. Therefore, when one persecutes a Christian, one persecutes Jesus Christ, for Holy Writ reveals that we Christians "are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (1 Corinthians 12:27)

When Jesus told Saul, "*it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,*" Jesus let Saul know that he was actually hurting himself. Think about it. Pricks are goads or pointed instruments used to get an animal to move— sort of like spurs are used to get a horse moving. Now, if one kicks against the pointed instrument one's self, one hurts one's self: that is what Saul was doing when he persecuted Christians since he was fighting against the only cure for his own sickness of sin— the cure being the Lord Jesus Christ who is the ONLY SAVIOR of sinners.

Take it to heart that every time Saul sought to wipe out Christianity he was hurting himself by striving to stifle the Gospel of Christ which is the very means by which the sinner comes to faith and is saved, for Holy Writ reports: "the gospel of Christ... is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should

boast. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-10; John 3:16-18) Unbelief leaves the sinner headed for hell.

My friends, a big change happened in Saul as he was converted by the Word of Jesus when the Lord Jesus spoke directly to him. Notice that the Saul who was on his way to persecute Christians at Damascus subsequently addressed Jesus as LORD after Jesus spoke to him, and then Saul, *trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* Yeah, Saul was now ready to serve the Lord Jesus Christ rather than persecuting Him and His Christians! The Lord Jesus issued a command to Saul to proceed into the city. Thus, it was on Saul’s way to Damascus that his conversion happened in a powerful way as Jesus spoke to him after surrounding him in dazzlingly bright glorious light.

Verse 7, ----- (Acts 9:7)

Observe that Saul’s traveling companions were perplexed as they *stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.* Oh, those journeying with Saul heard the voice as in hearing the sound of words, but they did not with understanding hear the distinct words spoken, for in Acts 22:9 when rehearsing the incident, Paul declared: “they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.” Realize it was Saul’s conversion, and so the Word of the Lord only connected personally with Saul and not with those who were with him.

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As we ponder our text to its conclusion, let us see

what interesting events happened immediately following Saul’s conversion.

Verses 8 & 9, ----- (Acts 9:8-9)

The fact that Saul had surely been converted is evident in that he obeyed the Lord who had instructed him, as we read back in verse 6 of our text, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do,” for now we observe: *Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.* And, notice after the dazzlingly bright light had surrounded Saul and the Lord Jesus had spoken to him, Saul was now blind, and for three days he remained blind and fasted.

Verses 10-12, ----- (Acts 9:10-12)

Here we are introduced to a Christian man named Ananias, who was quite privileged to have the Lord speak to him in a vision and give him instructions to visit Saul of Tarsus. It’s interesting to note the information the Lord gave to Ananias— the exact location in Damascus where Saul of Tarsus was praying and was given a vision concerning Ananias coming to him and restoring his eyesight. The Lord surely knows ALL things.

Verses 13 & 14, ----- (Acts 9:13-14)

Ananias was well aware of Saul’s reputation as a hater and persecutor of Christians. Consequently, Ananias was reluctant to follow the Lord’s command and questioned His instructions. Oh, Ananias dwelt in sinful flesh like you and me, and therefore he was a bit scared to go and see Saul.

My friends, there are Christians today who also question the Lord’s instructions. For example, certain Christians question the Lord’s command to baptize people of all ages— they argue that people must reach a certain age before they can be baptized, even though the Lord Jesus clearly commands in Matthew 28:19, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name

of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Fellow Christians, the Lord Jesus desires that we obey Him rather than questioning Him. Let us repent of our weaknesses and take Jesus at His Word.

Verses 15 & 16, ----- (Acts 9:15-16)

The Lord Jesus is so very patient with us weak and sinful people who believe on Him, for He did not yell at Ananias or get-on-his-case about his questioning the instructions he was given. No, the Lord Jesus simply said to Ananias: *Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*

Hence, we see that the Lord Jesus let Ananias know that Saul was now one of the chosen, a Christian who would go forth and preach Jesus to Gentile and Jew alike, including kings; and, Saul would even suffer for Jesus' name. Note well that Saul did NOT choose Jesus; rather, Jesus chose Saul, for Jesus is the good Shepherd who seeks out the sheep. No sinful human being has the power to choose Jesus; the Lord does the saving, all of it, for it is written in 1 Corinthians 12:3, "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." And, Philippians 2:13 states in no uncertain terms: "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Thus, Saul who once persecuted Jesus by persecuting Jesus' followers, would now as a Christian himself suffer for the sake of Jesus' name. Oh, when the Lord Jesus changes a person, the person is changed in a big way!

Saul later became known as Paul, and he is arguably one of the most effective missionary preachers of the Gospel of Christ that has ever been. Paul preached and suffered for the name of Jesus, just as Jesus said he would, for Paul later wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been

in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Accordingly, Saul – who is also known as the Christian apostle named Paul – truly suffered much for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 17 & 18, ----- (Acts 9:17-18)

Despite Ananias' initial doubts and questioning of the Lord's instructions, the Christian man Ananias subsequently obeyed Jesus' command.

It's beautiful that Ananias addressed Saul as "brother" since Saul was now a fellow Christian. Furthermore, Ananias let Saul know that the Lord Jesus had sent him, the same Lord Jesus that had appeared to Saul as Saul had journeyed toward Damascus. Yes, there is but one Lord Jesus Christ, and He is Saul's Lord, He is Ananias' Lord, and He is our Lord, fellow Christians, for Acts 4:12 reports: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Observe that Saul's eyesight was immediately restored; and, Saul wasted no time in arising and being baptized. Yes, the newly converted Saul was aware of the importance of Holy Baptism and desired to follow Jesus' command by being baptized in the name of the Triune God. Hence, we see that several interesting events happened immediately following Saul's conversion.

Let us thank and praise the Lord for Saul's conversion. Let us also thank and praise the Lord for our own conversion, for we would not be Christians if the Lord did not choose us, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins. Let us

keep our full trust and confidence in Christ Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord, for He is our Rescuer from never-ending ruin. Amen.

m.e.l.