

Acts 9

Last week we read about Philip, a deacon who ventured into Samaria where, by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit's anointing, preached salvation through Christ alone. His message was received and many came to Jesus.

Chapter 8 began with a description of the havoc that Saul was causing in the church causing more than just Philip to scatter. But most of these ventured no further than the towns in Judea.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch...

(Acts 9:1 NKJV) Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

(Acts 9:2 NKJV) 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.

"The Way" was the first name applied to the believers. Did Jesus not show them the Way? Did Jesus not tell them that He WAS the WAY?

(Acts 9:3 NKJV) As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

(Acts 9:4 NKJV) Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**"

Truly, it is the Lord that he is persecuting. Being "in Christ" implies a oneness between His disciples and Himself. Remember what Jesus taught in Matthew 25:40

Mat 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.'

Jesus asks him, "why are you...", as if He can't believe that Saul is doing something so futile.

(Acts 9:5 NKJV) 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.**"

The Greek word for Lord (Kurios) nearly always translates as LORD, meaning Yahweh. However, it can mean "Sir". Many believe that Paul was using it as "Sir". Many others believe that Saul knew that it was the LORD but not that it was Jesus.

A goad is a piece of pointed iron stuck in the end of a stick with which the ox is urged on when drawing the plough. But, oxen can be stubborn and kicks back against the goad and hurts himself more deeply than if he had just moved as he should. By kicking against the goad, it shows the the futility and absurdity of rebelling against lawful authority.

Can you imagine what was going on inside Saul's head at the instant he heard "I am Jesus"!

Perhaps his entire religious life flashed before him. Everything he believed, everything he did, every thought, everything he was taught flashed before him. And, it was all wrong. It was all a lie. He had worked so hard, thinking that God was pleased with him for his good service. And now, to hear the voice of Jesus...He was alive as those disciples had said! He was hearing Him out of heaven; The cross that killed Him could not keep Him dead! Everything He said, everything He taught, everything He did was right and true!

But Paul was confronted with the Voice that said "I AM Jesus". ~~Man~~, I wish that was me on that road; ~~man~~, if I only experienced the miracles of Jesus, ~~man~~, if I only was there at the Red Sea or was walking around the walls of Jericho as they crumbled to the ground. If only I was there when Jesus cried out "Lazarus, come forth"; I would have fallen to my knees and given my life to God. Perhaps.

Some of us ease into the Truth; we had people who witnessed to us; maybe we were brought up in a Christian home; Some us came to the saving Truth because of some felt need for drastic help in changing the path we were on.

In reality, in Truth, the moment we came to Him, the moment He drew us to Himself, the moment before we said "Yes", we too heard the words "I AM Jesus".

Before Abraham was, I AM. When Moses inquired of His Name at the burning bush,

Exodus 3:14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

I AM Jesus.

And those 3 words turned Saul's world upside down and backwards.

(Acts 9:6 NKJV) 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.**".

Knowing quite well what he had done and why he was going to Damascus, and then being asked "Why are you persecuting me?", this Pharisee of Pharisees was dumb-struck, with the emphasis on "dumb". I suppose asking "**what do You want me to do?**" would be better than "Lord, what are you going to do to me?"

Still scared and wondering if this was really happening, perhaps Paul thought that Jesus had something more in mind other than GO and wait. Maybe "Go and apologize to everyone you harmed, then we'll talk". Or, "Go, sacrifice 7 lambs and 1 bull to atone for what you did to me".

No. In true God-Fashion: Go and Wait.

(Acts 9:7 NKJV) And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

I can't imagine seeing a light, but not a person belonging to the voice. "hear the theme from the twilight zone?"

(Acts 9:8 NKJV) 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.

Saul stood up blind which is ironic considering how blind he really was before this trip. I actually like the phrase "but they led him by the hand..." seems like an appropriate picture of instant meekness and humiliation (that is humility) that Saul experienced, probably, for the first time in his pride-filled life!

(Acts 9:9 NKJV) And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Fasting; praying; trying to make sense of what just happened. Was it even real?

(Acts 9:10 NKJV) 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."

Ananias = Hananiah = LORD of Grace.

(Acts 9:11 NKJV) 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.** (Acts 9:12 NKJV) 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."

(Acts 9:13 NKJV) Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. (Acts 9:14 NKJV) And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

(Acts 9:15 NKJV) 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.** (Acts 9:16 NKJV) For I will show him how many **things he must suffer for My name's sake.**"

2 Corinthians 11:23-30 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. (24) From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. (25) Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; (26) in journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; (27) in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— (28) besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

(Acts 9:17 NKJV) 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.**"

And so, Saul was saved. By grace; not other reason would suffice; no other reason would satisfy; no other reason would ring true; this chief-of-sinners, without any rational explanation was saved from the hell-fire he deserved. AND, he knew it!

Ephesians 2:1-10 And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, (2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, (3) among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in

the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (5) even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (6) and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, (7) that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Saul, the Pharisee, tried to destroy the “Way” and the path of salvation was now proclaiming to all who would hear, Jesus IS the Son of God and the savior of ALL mankind!!!

(Acts 9:18 NKJV) **Immediately** there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

(Acts 9:19 NKJV) So when he had received food, he was strengthened. **Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.**

We don't know how long “some days” were. Saul had much to learn. The rabbi, the teacher of the law and the traditions of the Fathers was now a student; He must have had a gazillion questions! And these who were not formally trained, they were disciples, who were armed with the TRUTH. “Saul, you were fodder prepared for the fire”; Jesus died for that sin so that you can live...and not just live, but live for Him!

(Acts 9:20 NKJV) **Immediately** he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

Armed with this new revelation, he preached the Christ, the Messiah in the synagogues – remember, there were no formal churches (home groups for sure). Saul felt an immediate need to reach his brethren! And what was the Message? This Jesus who we crucified WAS the Son of God just as He claimed and He proved it by his resurrection!

(Acts 9:21 NKJV) Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose?, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

Now the listeners found themselves in the Twilight Zone. How could the destroyer become a proclaimer!

(Acts 9:22 NKJV) **But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.**

Jesus used Saul's strengths with which he was graced. Then Jesus “supercharged” him with the gift of the Holy Spirit and the infilling of His power. John Gill wrote of this strength:

Not of body, but of mind; his gifts and graces, and spiritual light and knowledge increased; his abilities were greater; his fortitude of mind, boldness, and freedom of speech, every day increased: he got more, and new, and fresh arguments, by which he himself was confirmed, and he confirmed others in the truths of Christ. Some copies read, "he was more strengthened in the word"; either in the word of God, having a clearer understanding, and being more confirmed in the truth of it; or in speech, being more ready and powerful in speaking it.

(Acts 9:23 NKJV) Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. (24) But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. (25 NKJV) Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down

through the wall in a large basket.

First:

And after that many days.... This phrase is used by the Septuagint on [Exo 2:11](#) for a considerable length of time, for many years. here it signifies three years, as it also does, [1Ki 18:1](#) where it is said, "and it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year"; and such a space of time is designed by the many days here; for when the apostle had stayed a little while at Damascus, and preached Christ in the synagogues, he went into **Arabia**, where he continued about three years, and then returned to Damascus, where what is related happened to him; [Gal 1:17](#).

[Galatians 1:16-17](#) to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, (17) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

This is when the Jews plotted to kill him

The Jewish leadership was infuriated as those were in Jerusalem: Both Stephen and Saul provided proof that Jesus was Messiah – but, they refused to believe! I think you know when a religion is just a man-made religion: they get threatened by the Truth! Their power and authority would be called into question. But wait, Judaism was God-Given at Mt Sinai. How can it be man-made? We talked about this before: Jewish religious leadership, the Pharisees in particular, adopted a lot of man-made law, ordinances, statues, and commandments that they believed that God gave Moses on the Mountain – the Oral Law. All it did was place barriers between God and His people, not to draw them closer in humbleness of spirit seeking to be His people as He sought to be their God.

But God preserved Saul and the disciples lowered him in a basket in one the walls of the city to escape those who wanted this traitor dead!

More humiliation!

[\(Acts 9:26 NKJV\)](#) And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

Saul then went to Jerusalem to meet the disciples there. But predictably, they were not buying it and thought that Saul was trying to infiltrate to spy on them and arrest them.

[\(Acts 9:27 NKJV\)](#) But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. **And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.**

We first met Barnabas at the end of Chapter 4:

[Acts 4:36-37](#) And Joses (Joseph or perhaps Josiah), who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, (37) having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

It is thought by some that Barnabas was in Damascus and met Saul there and believed the “conversion” story and the results: Saul became a bold witness for the risen Christ!

So, Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles,....

Galatians 1:18-20 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. **(19)** But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. **(20)** (Now *concerning* the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

Barnabas told Peter and James, how Jesus had appeared to him in person and in blinding light, as he was on his way to Damascus. He told them about how Jesus told him about Saul's persecution of Him told him go into the city, where someone would tell him what he should do:

Then Barnabas explained how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus; how he had shown courage and greatness of mind in preaching Christ at Damascus, both as soon as he was converted, and then upon his return there after his trip to Arabia.

Baranabas' testimony of Saul convinced them of the veracity of Saul's conversion.

(Acts 9:28 NKJV) So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.

United with the apostles, he was not "kept in a corner" but went in and out of the city and the Temple.

(Acts 9:29 NKJV) And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and **disputed against the Hellenists**, but they attempted to kill him.

It was thought that he disputed with the Hellenists because they had their "Greek" backgrounds in common. It is also noted that these may have been the same men who disputed with Stephen.

And like Stephen, they wanted to kill him as well!

(Acts 9:30 NKJV) When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and **sent him out to Tarsus**.

The brethren saved him by putting him on a boat in Caesarea.

(Acts 9:31 NKJV) Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

And with Saul now united with the Apostles and disciples, the churches once again started to grow in Judea, Galilee and Samaria....

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So, we know that the greatest story every told is about Jesus. If I might, I'd like to suggest that the next greatest story is about Saul who became known as Paul.

This man who was known for his zeal in arresting Jewish Believers came to understand that, in a God-like twist, Jesus had done the same to him....

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that **for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me**.

The phrase "laid hold" also means "seized"!

Not every conversion story is as dramatic as Saul's. Not every conversion story need be. Some of us might say that your coming to Jesus was quite boring. I've heard people say that...

But no matter how you came in this world, there was something else going on elsewhere in God's world. A fierce battle raged on and on perhaps even before the foundation of the world. The battle for your Soul and Spirit was waged in the heavenly realms and in the realm of your heart. Sin, Self, Satan fought against Someone who they thought would simply let go of a wretch like you. BUT GOD! God loves wretches! So much so that He decided to save you just as He saved Saul!

Ephesians 2:4-9 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (5) even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (6) and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, (7) that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast

Romans 5:8-10 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (10) For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Rabbi Saul, had to unlearn all that he was taught by his teachers. Rabbi Saul, had to relearn, rethink, reconsider EVERYTHING because of the Light that Blinded Him and because of the voice that said "I AM JESUS".

**O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!**