

The Conversion of Saul

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn in our Bibles to the passage of Scripture which we read in the Book of Acts, Chapter 9.

And as God would help me, I'd like to concentrate on verses that we'll read again, verses 4 to 6 and then also verse 22 maybe.

Acts chapter 9 at verse 4, and falling to the ground, this is Saul of Tarsus, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And he said, who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. That rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do.

I'll also read verse 22, that Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

[1 : 22] Obviously, we're going to look at the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Christianity.

We often think that the atheist is the most difficult person to convert, but it's not really. The most difficult person to convert is the died in the wool religious bigot.

And that's what Saul of Tarsus was before his conversion to Christianity. Saul of Tarsus was a religious fanatic.

He was brought up a pure Hebrew. There was not a drop of Gentile blood in his veins from either period.

As he said himself, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. A religious Jewish zealot he was.

[2 : 35] His education was very strictly Jewish and of course religious. He was highly educated. He was very, very intelligent, but he was also very highly educated.

Those who study these things say that he had the equivalent of two PhDs before he was 21.

Think of that. When we speak of Saul of Tarsus, the apostle Paul, we're not speaking about some moron, some rookie, very intelligent, highly educated.

equivalent of two PhDs before he was 21. You could tell Paul absolutely nothing about Abraham. He knew it all. You could tell him nothing about Moses, the great leader of the Jews. He knew all about Moses.

[3 : 36] He knew all about David. And believe it or not, believe it or not. You could tell him very little about Jesus Christ.

But, but he had his own interpretation about Jesus Christ.

He had his own interpretation about all these Jewish leaders. You couldn't alter them. You couldn't convince them. He had a deep, deep knowledge of Bible writings and the Hebrew scriptures.

He knew these inside out. His outward life, it was blameless, you could say. He was actually very, very good living and he was actually a spiritual man.

He was fastidious about the Ten Commandments, fastidious about keeping them. But he had one huge problem.

[4 : 46] He had one huge problem. He had an inveterate hatred of anything, not Jewish, especially of anything that opposed the Jewish culture.

And he had this conviction that it was his duty to destroy anything which opposed the Jewish religion or culture.

So you can understand, can't you? Now, from this new religion, or as it's called here, the way, when Christianity began to grow, you can understand, can't you?

How he considered it his duty to eradicate it from off the face of the earth. That was his duty, he felt called to do that.

Talk about Islamic state terrorists. That's exactly the mindset of Saul of Tharsis. That's the person he was.

[5 : 56] How did his duty to destroy anyone belonging to this new religion? We read there how he went on his way to Damascus with documentation in his pocket to at least imprison, if not execute, all that belonged to this new religion.

Therefore, isn't it very difficult for us to imagine this man ever being converted to Christianity? Never mind being converted to Christianity, suddenly. Not to speak of him then becoming the great apostle Paul, the greatest missionary, Christian missionary that ever lived possibly.

Now, we need to understand, before his conversion to Christianity, before Saul of Tharsis conversion to Christianity, he was a very strong, stable individual who did not lack the courage of his convictions.

Some people, some of us in the room, the life to confess, I'm one of them, sometimes lack the courage of their convictions.

[7 : 26] This is not for us, we lack what's wrong with us. Why Christianity is not advanced with what we believe is we lack the courage of our convictions.

You could never ever ever see that about the apostle Paul. What he had to do was examine his convictions.

What kind of convictions had he? Islamic state terrorists, they've got the courage of their convictions. That's the problem.

The problem with their convictions. Hitler, he didn't lack the courage of his convictions, he had to change his convictions.

Saddened in saying the same. That was a kind of person pause. He had courage, the courage of his convictions to do something about it.

[8 : 21] It was his convictions that went wrong, that were wrong. So we ask a question, how was this man changed?

Well, two short words describe it. How was he changed? He met Christ.

That's how he was changed. He met Christ on the Damascus Road on his way to destroy Christians.

On the Damascus Road, he recognised that day who Christ Jesus really was.

Not who he thought he was, but who he really was. Saul of Stars discovered on that Damascus Road that Jesus was who he claimed to be the Messiah of the Jews.

[9 : 26] And that's why I read verse 22. He increased all the more and strengthened and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

You couldn't do that. You couldn't convince him before he met Christ. You couldn't convince him. He knew a lot about him. He knew a lot about him.

But he had his own interpretation of who he was until he met him.

Now have you heard of Christopher Morley? He was a very famous English poet and he could actually see the same.

What did Saul of Tars discover when he discovered Christ? I want to just briefly look at that. What did he discover when he discovered Jesus Christ?

[10 : 36] Well, first of all, when he discovered Jesus Christ, he discovered God. Immediately you meet Jesus, you meet God.

Jesus himself said, he who has seen me has seen the Father. Previously Saul knew about God. But when he met Christ, he met God. He never knew God. He knew about him.

But he never knew God until he met Christ. Now I mentioned Christopher Morley because he said he was an atheist. He was a Christian English poet, but he was an atheist.

And he said, I had a million questions to ask God when I met him.

[11 : 41] But when I met him, they all fled from my mind. The million questions disappeared.

And here's the thing he said, it didn't seem to matter. You know what it's like, you meet someone and because of it you say, oh, I'm meant to ask him that.

There was none of that. The million questions he had to ask him when he met him were not important. They were insignificant. They were utterly irrelevant when he met God.

And what you and I do need is to meet God in Christ. That's what made the big change in Saul of Tarsus' life on Christopher Morley and everyone else with him met him.

When you discover Christ, you discover God. When you meet Christ, you meet God.

[12 : 52] That's something else you discover. Something else Saul discovered when he met Jesus. He met truth. He met truth.

Previously, Saul was convicted of what he believed. Now he was convicted of the truth. You see, Jesus said, I came to bear witness to the truth.

We were telling the children, why did Jesus come and dwell on that little small planet earth? I came, he said, to bear witness to the truth.

I am the truth. You see, what does people ask rightly? What is truth?

Truth is what reconciles to Jesus. Truth is what reconciles to God. And you can't discover truth until you discover God in Christ.

[14:01] You and I are the same. We need to discover Christ to discover truth. Truth is what reconciles to God.

You see, it's a great saying today in a postmodern society, there is no such thing as objective truth. I can't remember if I've said this before, here or not.

But that is absolute nonsense. No such thing as objective truth. What utter nonsense.

It doesn't work with my banker. I go to my banker and I say, I am sure I put that hundred pound check in last week. Oh, at least let's prove it.

You go along, man. There's your account. There's the payments. There's what you've taken out. There's what you've paid it. What do you mean there's no objective truth?

[15:04] People say truth is what it is to you. It's nothing of the sort when I go to the banker. There's the facts. It doesn't work when I go to my doctor.

And my doctor says, you've got cancer. I said, I don't feel a thing. I haven't got an ache or a pain. Oh, well, he says, well, take a biopsy.

What do you mean there's no objective truth? It's a biggest lie that's going around on the 21st century. No objective truth. Of course there is.

Truth is object. Truth is what reconciles itself to God. That's important.

Very important to remember. Pilot asked, and I was always disturbed that Jesus never answered pilot when pilot said to him, ah, what is truth?

[16:07] Why did Jesus not answer him? Because pilot was not genuinely asking the question, what is truth? He was simply saying, ah, what's truth?

I will never know that in this world. There's not a genuine inquirer. The very opposite, in fact. But Saul discovered that day.

He discovered that day. When he discovered Jesus, he discovered God. When he discovered truth. But he also discovered the real warfare. You see, Saul, as I said already, had the courage of his convictions. He knew there was a spiritual war on, and he was fighting that spiritual war.

He knew there was a devil to oppose. He didn't realise, though, that he was fighting against God. [17:08] What a frightening position to be in. Fighting against God. Are you in God's sight?

People say, is God on my side? What a small question. What a self-centred question. Listen, there's a spiritual war on, but it's not between Satan and you and me.

There's spiritual war is between God and the devil. And both parties want us on their side.

The question is not, is God on my side? The question is, are we on God's side fighting against evil, fighting against Satan, fighting the devil, fighting wickedness?

Are we on God's side? That's the real question. Paul himself had to write later on, there is such a thing as zeal without knowledge.

[18:22] And Christ says so solemnly in chapter 16 of John verse 2, predicting the future, Christ said in John 16 to indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

Isn't that frightening? Someone will kill you and he thinks he's obeying God. That will solve the problem. On the Damascus road, he had the documentations in his pocket to prove it.

Islamic state terrorists think they're serving God by killing Christians. It was all predicted, nothing is happening in the world that isn't known to God and wasn't predicted by God.

What a frightening state to be in. How we need our eyes opened. And only Christ can open our eyes.

And I want to see this most of all with regard to what it says, when he discovered Christ.

[19:45] When he discovered Christ, he discovered forgiveness. When he discovered Christ, he discovered rest, peace, freedom.

He discovered all that when he discovered Christ. Are you searching for forgiveness? Are you searching for peace? Are you searching for rest, for freedom?

Find Christ. Find Christ. And you find forgiveness, you'll find rest, you'll find God, you'll find peace, you'll find truth, you'll find freedom.

He would ask Saul of Tarsus, as he was before he became the apostle Paul. You see Saul, why are you kicking against the pricks?

Why are you kicking against the pricks, Saul? Saul, why are you afraid? Why are you afraid, Saul? [20 : 55] Saul, why are you so insecure? Why are you so insecure? Saul, why are you so angry?

You're an angry man, kicking against the pricks. Why, why Saul? Well, you could ask that question you could, but listen, listen, that anger which he had, that unrest which he had, that dissatisfaction which he had, that insecurity which he had, it was all put at rest.

The moment he met Jesus, the moment he met Jesus, the peace, the calm, the freedom.

You see, as we said before, he was a meticulous Jew. He was very, very religious.

His law-keeping, as I said, was meticulous. He was absolutely paranoid about minor points of the law.

[22 : 09] He was burdened with the minutest details of religion because he could never be sure, these people could never be sure if they'd ever done enough.

But when he met Jesus Christ, he saw that everything was done already by Jesus.

It was all done already. Jesus kept the law for us and he set us free.

Give us true liberty. If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed, Jesus said.

And Saul discovered that when he discovered Jesus. His fear went away, his anger went away, his insecurity disappeared because he'd met Jesus.

[23 : 09] And that's what you need. And that's what I need. That's what everyone needs to discover before we leave this world.

Well, our time is essentially up. And I close with just this very important point.

Do you and I need a Damascus Road experience like Solve Toshers?

Well the answer is it all depends what you mean by that. We do not need that experience with regard to seeing lights, hearing voices, having physical encounters.

That's not the important point. Now listen, Paul's conversion was real and it was true.

[24 : 14] But you know this? It wasn't actually a typical conversion. It wasn't actually a normal conversion. Paul's conversions are not the only type or kind of conversion to Christ.

It has to be a conversion to Christ. It does not need to be sudden like his. It does not need to be dramatic like that.

All there needs to be convictions. There needs to be a relationship with Jesus. There needs to be a lifestyle that conforms to Christ's lifestyle.

But that change, that transformation, need not take place in an hour. It need not take place with vivid experiences, voices, lights and bells ringing and what have you.

It might do. God can still do that. But that's not normal. And that's why we're given so much detail and information about it. He had a special conversion because he had a special work to do, a special missionary, the apostle to the Gentiles.

[25 : 30] It is important to realise that faith can come by hearing. The Bible tells us faith comes by hearing, by the persistent hearing of truth.

How do I get faith in the truth by persistently subjecting yourself to the teaching of hearing? That's why it's so important to regularly read the word, regularly hear the word, regularly meditate on the word.

Because faith comes by constantly hearing it, constantly seeing it, if you like.

An illustration that I found extremely helpful. I remember being asked once, was I a Christian? I said no, I'm not a Christian.

And they asked me why? Well, I said, there's such a difference, I don't believe I'm a Christian, I think, because there's such a difference between darkness and light.

[26 : 39] Don't tell me, I said, don't tell me I can go from darkness to light and not know it. Come on, I said. The difference is so vast, how can that possibly take place without knowing it?

Well, I said, there's a lovely elder, he said, I would have to tell you what, George. Stay up tonight, don't go to bed tonight.

And you look out the window into the darkness, and you give me a phone call the moment it becomes light, very second.

Darkness, the dawn comes gradually, slowly, over time. You can't put your finger on the very moment when you put it, it's no longer dark and it's light.

It's so gradual. God does that every day in the natural world. And it's this normal way of working in the spiritual world.

[27 : 50] You must go from darkness to light when exactly you cross that line is not important, but that you see the light is vitally important.

And as I said, having dramatic, sudden experiences is good and helpful, but not absolutely necessary. But what is indispensable, what is absolutely essential is to have convictions about Christ, who He is, is He who He claims to be.

And this is what Paul in verse 22 says, he confounded the Jews by proving Jesus was the Christ. He was the savior of the world. He was the promised Messiah. He knew a lot about Him before, but he wasn't convinced of that.

You must be convinced that Jesus is the savior. He is the only one who paid God for the sins of those who be in glory. Sin has to be paid for in blood, either your blood, our blood, or Christ's blood.

[29 : 08] And Christ shed His blood. He shed His blood. Do you believe that? Have you that conviction?

Have you that conviction in this book? Is the Word of God? That is indispensable.

Your conviction that you're a helpless, hopeless sinner, deserving punishment forever, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

You need, whatever you need, you need convictions about Christ. You need a relationship with Christ, a relationship of love, a relationship of obedience.

You see, a relationship with love, you see Paul had a relationship with Christ before his conversion.

A wrong relationship, a terrible relationship, a relationship when Paul said, he's got to go.

[30 : 14] You have to have a relationship of love with Christ. And can't you love Christ for coming into this world, this small, small planet?

What for? To pay the price of the sins of many, of all who be in glory, of all who put their trust in Him.

That's the Gospel. May God, the Holy Spirit, make His Word effective to everyone else. Let's just bow our heads.

Our Father in Heaven, be pleased to take the things of Christ and make them ours. Bless us around your world, we humble pray. Keep us in your love, keep us in your fear and all for Jesus' sake.

Amen. We'll conclude our worship by singing to God's praise from Psalm 31.

[31 : 25] Psalm 31 verse 21. It's actually on page 243 of the Scottish author, if you're looking at that. I gave the wrong address to our printer, the wrong page number, I mean just page 243.

Psalm 31 verse 21. All praise and thanks be to the Lord, for He has magnified His wonderers love to me within a city fortified.

Psalm 31 verse 21. All praise and thanks be to the Lord, for He has magnified His wonderers love to me within a city fortified.

For from my eyes, God's all fire, I in my midst have said, My voice yet hurts, I went to Thee, with Christ my Lord I hate.

Oh, love the Lord, all He has said, because the Lord the Thou art.

[33 : 10] Oh, love the Lord, all He has said, because the Lord the Thou art.

Thee of good courage and His strength unto Your heart shall say, All ye who's open confidence, that on the Lord He pain.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen.