

From persecutor to
preacher of the gospel Acts
9:1-20

Conversion of Saul

- I am studying through a large portion of the book of Acts.
- So far, I have looked at a church on fire, I have looked at a church under fire, and I've looked at a church that fights fire with fire.

FAILURE OF HIS FORMER RELIGION

- But, what does an individual look like who goes from having no fire to being on fire?
- Today, we are going to look at one of the greatest events that ever took place in history of Christianity and that is the miraculous conversion of a man named Paul.

The miracle near Damascus

- It is not short of the mark to say that of all the conversions that has ever taken place, his is by far the most famous.
- Having “a Damascus Road experience” is a cliché used even in the non-Christian world.

SET ON FIRE

- The story of how this man was set on fire is repeated three times in the Book of Acts.
- It occupies more space in the New Testament than any other record except the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

- It is not surprising when you understand that the two greatest events that have happened since the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the coming of the Holy Spirit and the conversion of the Apostle Paul.
- Why is his conversion such a history changing, life impacting, spiritually transforming event?

Unbelievable

- Perhaps, a stark historical analogy can make the point.
- Can you imagine this headline being on the front page of every newspaper in the world in 1944?
Hitler Converts To Judaism!

- It is extremely significant that in such a short book, which is attempting to cover the expansion of Christianity from its small beginnings in Jerusalem to a faith that filled the entire Roman Empire that one man's conversion would be so greatly emphasized.

DIVINE CALLING

- That only gives a slight impression of what happened, somewhere around 33 A.D. in the country of Syria.
- Paul was, at the time of his salvation, the least likely person on earth to be converted.

- He was Jewish by birth, a Pharisee, and a Hebrew blue-blood.
- He was Greek by learning, steeped in the world's philosophy having studied in the finest university in the world –under Gamaliel.

The man on fire

- He was Roman by citizenship and an intellectual elitist in the pagan culture.
- He was the immoveable object whose heart couldn't be budged one inch until he met the irresistible force; the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

- When he did, he became a “Man on Fire”.
- As we study this “man on fire” today I want to ask you a question.
- It is the question that every follower of Jesus Christ would do well to ask every day of his or her life, “Is my Christian faith a raging fire or a dull habit?”

- We are going to see today the things that made Paul's Christian faith a raging fire and can make yours one as well.
- Even though Saul's conversion was you might say, one of a kind, nobody else has ever been saved by being struck by divine lightning, seeing a bright light, hearing their name called out in Aramaic, or struck blind.

- At the same time, there are characteristics of Paul's ignition that is true of everyone's ignition.
- Here is what we need to do and here is what we will do when we are set on fire

See The Light Of God's Truth

- “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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.” (Acts 9:1-2,)

A WITNESS TO STEPHEN'S DEATH

- To put this in context, the first time Paul is mentioned his name is Saul.
- He was a witness at the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian church, who was stoned to death simply for bearing witness to his faith in Jesus Christ.

SAUL'S APPROVAL OF STEPHEN'S DEATH

- He is holding the clothes of those who are throwing the rocks and Acts 8:1 simply says this, “And Saul approved of his execution.” (Acts 8:1,)

GEARED TO STAMP OUT CHRISTIANITY

- Now we are abruptly introduced to Saul again and his blood is boiling.
- He is on a 150 mile journey north from Jerusalem to Damascus with one focus and one goal- to stamp out the fire of Christianity and to snuff out the light of the Christian faith.

BREATHING MURDER

- We are told he is literally “breathing murder.”
- He has become the Jewish hit-man.
- It is interesting to note that at this point in time, Christianity is simply referred to as “the Way.”
- Most likely, because Jesus declared Himself the only way to God.

DETERMINED TO DESTROY CHRISTIANITY

- Paul is determined to make that way a dead-end street.
- Then, something happened literally in a flash that would not only change his life forever, but the entire course of human history.

INWARD CHANGE

- “Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.”
(Acts 9:3)
- All of a sudden without warning Paul was bathed in “Sunlight” that was brighter than “sunlight.”

- What else would you expect? Didn't Jesus say in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12)
- It wasn't what Paul saw, but it was what He heard next that changed everything.

FAITH SURRENDER

- “And falling to the ground 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.’” (Acts 9:4-5)

PAUL HAD NEVER MET JESUS IN HIS LIFE

- There are a couple of things here you can't miss.
- Keep in mind Paul had never met Jesus in his life.
- He just knew he hated Him.

JESUS IS ALIVE!!!

- He wanted to wipe out His followers, His faith, His family, and His fame from the face of the earth and yet, the first thing he calls Him is, “Lord.”
- Immediately, this one thought flashed through His mind, “Jesus Christ is alive!
- He is not a dead liar. He is a risen Lord!”

Its all about the resurrection

- We see it again and again all through the Book of Acts and all through the New Testament.
- The game changer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- It wasn't the virgin-born Jesus that changed Paul.
- It wasn't even the crucified Christ that changed Paul.
- It was the resurrected Lord that changed Paul.

You have been persecuting Christ

- At that moment, Paul changed his mind about everything – about God, about Jesus, and about the church.
- When Jesus said to him, “You haven’t been persecuting the church.
- You have been persecuting me. You have not been hurting the church.

- You have been hurting Me. You have not been against the church. You've been against Me.”
- Do you know why that is true? Because, the church is the body of Christ and Christ is the head of the body.

DOING IT FOR JESUS

- I want you to listen carefully. When you are really set on fire by the Holy Spirit, when you have seen the light of God's truth, you will no longer separate the church from Jesus.
- When you give to the church you give to Jesus.

DOING IT FOR JESUS

- When you support the church you support Jesus.
- When you affirm the church you affirm Jesus.
- When you love the church you love Jesus.
- That is what happens when you see the light of God's truth.

The word of GOD is the light

- An unbeliever might say, “Well if I saw the light that he saw I would believe too.”
- Understand, we have a light today that is just as bright, if not brighter, than the light that Paul saw.
- We have the light of God’s Word. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my

Peter and the light of GOD

- Peter said something incredible about the light of God's Word.
- Remember, Peter lived with Jesus three years.
- He saw His transformation.
- He saw His resurrection.
- He saw his ascension.

- Listen to what He says in 2 Peter 1 :19.
- “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19)

Have you seen the light

- My question to you is,
- “Have you seen the light of God’s truth?”
- The truth that says just like Saul was in need of a Saviour, so were you.

- The truth that says Jesus died on the cross for Saul, just like He did for you and the truth that says Jesus Christ is alive and you should surrender to Him as Lord.
- When you see that light you will be on fire.
- The second part of being on fire is

You Receive The Life Of God's Spirit

- Now Saul has been blinded by this light. That is where we get the phrase, “Blinded by the light.”
- Paul's companions take him by the hand and bring him into Damascus to the house of a person named “Judas” which is kind of ironic if you think about it.

Lord spoke to ANANIAS

- He lives on a street called “Straight.”
- I did my research and found out the reason why called the street “Straight” is because it was a straight street!
- God tells a disciple in Damascus by the name of Ananias to go to Saul and lay hands on him so that his sight can be restored.

God spoke through a vision to Ananias

- You can imagine Ananias is not real thrilled with this assignment.
- He says in essence to the Lord, “You mean Saul the terrorist, Saul the persecutor, Saul the murderer?”
- He then says, “I’ve got a headache.
- Can you send somebody else

- Can you blame Ananias? Here is a man who we are told later in the Bible, “Persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.” (Galatians 1:13)
- Probably some of Ananias’ own friends and family had either been imprisoned or even killed by Paul.

- He knew what Saul had done to the church, but what he didn't know was what Jesus had done to Saul.
- Now comes the second stage of a Man on Fire. "So Ananias departed and entered the house.

Being addressed as brother

- 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.’” (Acts 9:17)

Filled with the holy spirit

- Do you see the phrase “filled with the Holy Spirit?”
- You could put three words there, “Set on Fire”.
- You could put one word there, “Ignited.”
- What happened?
- Paul saw the light. Paul gained his sight. Paul received God’s might.

- Once again, we have to ask the question, “How do we know that Paul was really filled with the Spirit?”
- How do we know he was really set on fire?
- How do we know the ignition took place and the ignition took hold?”
- The same way you will know it in your life.

You Share The Love Of God's Son

- “And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’
- 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?’

Saul proving who Jesus is.

- And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?
- “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.” (Acts 9:20-22)

From man of hate to man of love

- Saul, the man of hate, had become Paul, the man of love.
- The supreme love of his life was the Lord Jesus Christ and he wanted to share that love everywhere that he went.

A convert to Christianity

- How cool would it have been to have been in the synagogue that day.
- This man walked in and his reputation preceded him.
- The synagogue was packed out.
- They thought Saul the persecutor had walked in.

Paul preaching the gospel

- They gave him the chief seat and handed him the scriptures. A hush was across the building.
- He would now give them what they came to hear – a blistering denunciation of this heresy called “the Way” and a smack-down once and for all of this so-called Jesus of Nazareth.
- What they heard was not Saul the

Jesus became the LORD of his life

- What a adorable moment it was when Paul opened his mouth and said, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God risen from the dead and He is Lord!” that scene was to be repeated all across Asia, from the marketplace of Ephesus to the Acropolis in Athens.

Opened the door for the Gentiles

- His theology became the foundation of what the church believes and his mission took the Christian faith from a circle of a few Jews to a Gentile world that now numbers over 2 billion people.

History Changer

- Outside of Jesus Christ himself no other human being in history is more responsible for the life, the love, and the liberty of the church of today than this man named Paul.

ONLY BE A CHRISTIAN TO WITNESS

- Amazing! He never took a course in missions, never read a book on church growth and never attended seminary.
- He did it all simply by being a man set on fire by the Holy Spirit and filled with the love for the One who came back from the dead.

CONCLUSION

- When you see the light of God's truth and you receive the life of God's Spirit you will share the love of God's son, because that is simply what a fire does that burns.
- **ONE BURNING HEART SETS ANOTHER ON FIRE**