

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).

The Conversion of Saul – Part 2

Acts 9:19b-31

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Charles Spurgeon, the great prince of preachers of the mid 1800's made this observation concerning the conversion of a person to Christ saying, *"We use lights to make manifest. A Christian man should so shine in his life, that a person could not live with him a week without knowing the gospel. His conversation should be such that all who are about him should clearly perceive whose he is, and whom he serves; and should see the image of Jesus reflected in his daily actions."*

This is exactly what we find in the life of Saul. Upon his conversion to Christ, his life immediately begins to shine with the glories of Christ. And it would seem that it didn't take a week for others to hear the gospel from his lips. Oh that this would inspire us to let the glories of Christ shine forth in our lives; to have the words of Christ uttered from our lips; that everyone would readily know of our devotion to and wonder of Christ.

In his biography of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who served as the pastor of the Westminster Chapel in London, Iain Murray recounted the testimony of a godless woman, who had been invited to join her nephew in attending the Chapel for a Sunday evening service. After hearing the Welshman preach about the awfulness of sin and the grace of God to deliver one from such sin, she commented to her nephew on the way home, "I love the darkness." Later, however, and unbeknownst to her nephew, she began to attend the Chapel on a frequent basis, and it was not long until she stopped loving the darkness and started loving the light!

Beloved, never let us underestimate the power of the Word of God to change and transform hearts and minds. Lives are transformed by the gospel of the grace of God alone and, like Saul of Tarsus, even those who once rejected the gospel, perhaps with great animosity and/or violence, are given a heart to love and proclaim Christ. The trajectory of Saul's life moved

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in a completely radical direction upon coming to Christ. If you can imagine taking the planet Jupiter and moving it into the orbit of Mercury, such would only scratch the surface of how Saul's orbit had changed. Oh, for the blessed and divine Mover to radically change our orbits to better shine the wonders of Christ! Paul alludes to the radical nature of a person's conversion and change of orbit when he wrote in Colossians 1:13, "**For [God] rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.**"

This was the experience of Saul; a life transferred from darkness to light and he shone the light. The darkness of Saul was gloriously transformed into the light of Paul. When you think of the life of Paul, how can you not help but see him as a bright light; this one who tirelessly sought to know Christ, to win the lost, to start churches, to train leaders, to give direction to churches, to write Scripture, to go on missionary journeys, and to boldly proclaim the gospel even in the face of fierce opposition? And let me remind you that Paul literally lost his head because of his commitment to Christ. What is it that explains such radical commitment? What have I done for Christ? What have you done for Christ?

I know what some of you are thinking, "Slow down, Pastor! Obviously the explanation is that Paul was a super-saint and had the rare mixture of temperament and talent to be so bold. Really? Do we want to give human nature the credit for bringing such glory to God? May it never be! To be sure, God prepared him and gifted him for his ministry; but the same God has prepared you and gifted you to equally bold for Christ.

In Iain Murray's biography of Lloyd-Jones I mentioned before, he notes that Lloyd-Jones believed that the reason the church in the UK was in such a sorry condition in his days (from 1940s-1970s) was because the average churchgoer was simply that: a churchgoer rather than one who had assurance that he had been and was being transformed by the gospel of the grace of God. Lloyd-Jones believed a major reason that fueled the historic spiritual revivals of the past was an expressed confidence and assurance of salvation by Christ alone. Beloved, if a person is unsure whether he is saved, he cannot live with any kind of true spiritual authority. But the person who is transformed by grace is also made keenly aware not only of Christ's past work on the cross for his soul, but also of Christ's continued work in his soul bringing conviction, confidence and bold confession of Christ. In other words, the more confidence we have in the past work of Christ on the cross in bringing us to salvation should result in a bolder confidence to proclaim that work of salvation to others.

Having looked last week at the events orchestrated by God to bring Saul to faith in verses 1-19a, this morning we see the results of his coming to Christ; his assurance of salvation that resulted in this bold confession of Christ. We ought to long that such be increasingly evident in our own lives. So then, let us walk through the text and not six things that Saul experiences upon coming to Christ. And then, let us ask ourselves how these things may be our own experience.

I. Saul Affiliated Himself with the Disciples (19b)

Our text begins in the second half of verse 19 where we read, **Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus...** Apparently and instantly we find the one who had been hunting down Christians now hunkered down with Christians. He affiliated himself with other believers. He desired to be with other believers. He knew he belonged with other believers and found delight in spending time with them. The point is clear, that those whom Christ saves desire to be in the company of other believers and will go to great lengths to do so. John MacArthur makes an important observation on this point saying, "That does not mean, of course,

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that Christians are to have no contact with unbelievers. But a professing Christian who prefers the company of the people of the world is probably still one of them.”

In Saul’s conversion, and this would be the grand testimony of the saints throughout church history, there is an unashamed affiliation and connection to other believers. Saul’s confession of faith included his joining himself to an otherwise despised community. He connected and subjected himself to a community of disciples there in Damascus. Saul was no maverick, no loner, and no isolationist. We find him communion with and committed to a local community of believers. Do you know how risky this was for both Saul and for the church to affiliate with one another?

Beloved, if we are not willing to affiliate ourselves with God’s people then we have no right to make judgments or to presume to instruct God’s people. John Calvin said, “No man is fit to be a teacher in the Church save only he who willingly submitteth himself, that he may be a fellow disciple with other men.” Are you willing to affiliate yourself with disciples of Christ, not just on Sundays, but notice, for several days running?

II. Saul Advanced Opportunities to Make Disciples (20-22)

But Saul not only wanted to be with other believers for the sake of fellowship and comfort, but next we see that as a result of his conversion, he sought to advance opportunities to make disciples. In verses 20-22 we read, **20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” 21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?” 22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.**

Did you catch that first key word of verse 20? Upon coming to Christ, Saul **immediately** started preaching Jesus; and not just in some comfortable congregation of believers, but in the very synagogues of the Jews.

The church today has come to believe in a fabrication of what I call, “casual Christianity.” Casual Christianity is the notion that knowing about Christ, and going to church, and living just a little different from the rest of the world is what it means to be a Christians. Living radically for Jesus is just a theory for the casual Christian. He can quote a few verses, participate in a few church projects, but day by day he does little for Christ and His kingdom because he knows little of Christ.

When Saul was saved, Jesus became more than theory, Jesus become his totally reality. And when Jesus is as real to you as He was to Paul, there is an innate confidence and need to profess, to speak about, to make known the person and work of Christ on behalf of sinners. John MacArthur refers to this as a “courageous compulsion.” And when we wonder why it is our congregation is small, or why churches in NW Arkansas and indeed even in the nation are not really growing, may I suggest that it is because unbelievers (your neighbors, your coworkers, your fellow students and even the man begging for money in front of Wal-Mart); that these are simply waiting in their ignorance for we who confess Christ to confidently profess Christ with courage and conviction, seeing in us an uncompromising resolve of commitment, consistency and utter loyalty to Jesus and His ways; to Jesus and His Words; to Jesus and His work. They need to see in us that Jesus is everything to us.

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This was Saul's experience upon coming to Christ. May I ask you, "How did you behave immediately after your conversion?" I remember upon my own coming to Christ in 1984, I immediately wanted to be in the Word; I immediately longed to be in church; and I was immediately compelled to speak to others about Him. But another question comes to mind that I will ask myself, but I want you to consider how you would answer for yourself and it is this, "How do I behave in light of my conversion to now?" Do you and I still have that sense of immediacy? Or have we become casual and silent witnesses of Jesus? Saul proclaimed Jesus on the enemy's turf; and argued the case for Jesus continually and with passion. He advanced opportunities to make disciple. Lord, grant us the grace to do the same in NW Arkansas.

III. Saul Allotted Himself to the Disciples (23-25)

Next in our text we find that Saul allotted himself to the disciples. By this I mean that he gave himself to other believers; putting his very well-being and his very life into their hands. We read in verses 23-25, **23 When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.**

We learn that some time, "**many days**" passed from Saul's first coming to Damascus until this plot of the Jews to kill him (v. 23a). We might be inclined to think that "many days" may be a week or so; however we learn from Paul's own testimony to the Galatians, in Galatians 1:11-21 that this reference to "many days" was a period of three years.

During this three-year period, Paul was alone with the Lord being prepared for his ministry of apostleship. I find the time frame interesting because it means that Paul was literally, just as the other apostles, disciplined by the Lord Jesus Christ for about the same length of time. During this time Paul was immersed in the Word of God. But, as our text informs us, he returned to Damascus and once again subjected himself to their care. Once back, the Jews plotted to kill him. His walk with Christ would be no easy stroll in the park. Of this experience of Saul, John Calvin wrote, "*He who of late ran headlong against Christ with furious force, does now not only submit himself meekly unto [Christ's] will and pleasure, but like a stout standard-bearer fights even unto the utmost danger to maintain [Christ's] glory.*"

Saul laid everything on the line for Christ and Christ's church. What do we lay down for Christ and Christ's church? It would eventual cost Saul his head. What cost are we willing to endure for the exaltation of Christ and the edification of Christ's church? Both Saul as well as the congregation were taking huge risks for one another. And the church saw Saul to safety. Saul allotted himself, gave himself into the care of a congregation. Do we give ourselves into the care of one another for the exaltation of Christ and the edification of the church?

IV. Saul Associated Himself to the Church and to Christ (26-28)

This brings us to the fourth experience of Saul as found in verses 26-28 where we see that he associated Himself to the church and to Christ. It stands to reason that if you are going to entrust your very life to Jesus as His people, that you would associate yourself with them. We read beginning in verse 26, **When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he**

The Church Alive

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had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

Knowing that both the church in Damascus as well as in Jerusalem belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ, and having been run out of Damascus by the Jews, Saul headed immediately for Jerusalem. When he arrived, he was not seeking to be some kind of lone ranger Christian, but rather was to associate, that is be united and glued to the church.

There is an important side note here and it is this; for Paul, church membership, that is being formally received by a congregation, was such a priority that he persisted, verse 26 says he "was trying" – meaning, he kept after it, seeking persistently, never giving up. MacArthur points out that "the imperfect tense of the verb translated "was trying" suggests that repeated attempts by Saul to join the fellowship were rebuffed." What was Paul trying to do? He was trying to "associate with" – a word which means to be stuck like glue. He wanted to be glued to the church!

Now it is understandable as to why the believers at Jerusalem were more than just dubious about Saul. He might have simply staged his conversion so as to infiltrate the church and work the persecution from the inside out! What a dilemma, having escaped the plot of the Jew to murder him in Damascus, now he finds that he must prove himself to the people of God! Of course they did not persecute him, but it was clear that they did not trust him.

But notice the providence of God. Remember that God brought along Ananias of Damascus to receive Saul at his conversion in verses 1-19? In a similar fashion, in verse 27, God gave a man by the name of Barnabas the insight and courage to befriend Saul at this next important moment in his life. Notice as well that Saul never gave up on up trying to join the church even when it spurned him. He knew the importance of church membership and therefore he was all the more diligent to get connected! Beloved, a local church may not always be easy to connect with, it may not always appear attractive but we are still called to be a part of it!

Let us never forget that immediately upon becoming a disciple of Jesus, Saul sought out fellowship with God's people. Why, because our Lord Jesus stressed the importance of the church in His teaching. How important is the church to Jesus, beloved! Important enough to have died for it according to passages like Ephesians 5:25; important enough for Him to be purifying according to Ephesians 5:26-27; important enough for He Himself to be building according to Matthew 16:18. He what John Gill has said about the church, "*It is the duty and interest of every gracious soul to join himself to a church of Christ, which consists of the disciples of Christ, who have learned Christ and the way of life and salvation by him. . . . To be joined to a church is to become an open subject of Christ's kingdom, a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, one of the family of God, and a member of the body of Christ visibly.*"

Why is the church important? Because it serves as a primary means of instruction and purification in the life of the believer. If we are desiring to grow in Christlikeness then we will desire to be connected or glued to one another willingly and as deeply as possible. To put this another way, if the apostle Paul recognized the need to be glued to other believers, then certainly we should recognize how great is our need! How do you glue yourself to this local body? Or, rather to you find yourself coming unglued far too often! I charge you, with the persistence of Paul, get stuck on one another at Hope. The church at Jerusalem had a seemingly legitimate reason to spurn Paul, which Paul might had used as justification to go somewhere else or even to try to start his own church, but he was committed to getting glued. Let us each have the

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persistence as well as seeking to do all we can to help other believers who come to us to become a part of the fellowship. Let us associate ourselves to our local church.

V. Saul Argued the Case for Christ (29-30)

Next, beginning in verse 29, we see Paul, having become part of the church as Jerusalem, now arguing the case of Christ among the inhabitants of the city. Right out into the streets he went. There was not thought in this mind that said, "Maybe I should tone this down and lay low because when I argued Christ in Damascus, I was almost murdered!" No, regardless of the danger, Saul was determined to make Christ fully known in Jerusalem so that others might be saved. We read in verses 29-30, **29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. 30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.**

Who is Saul proclaiming Christ to? To the Hellenistic Jews! Saul appears to have picked up right where Stephen left off. Can you imagine the shock of these Jews to hear Saul saying the same things that Stephen had been saying, the very things for which Saul previously persecuted and had Stephen killed for saying!

When we read in verse 29 that Saul "was talking and arguing", do not take it to mean he was out to win a debate. His purpose was to simply proclaim the truth of who Jesus is and what Jesus did. Saul, by his own experience, knew the power of God to transform his life and his thinking about Christ. He knew that by simply proclaiming who Christ is via the Scriptures, God would do the rest. Oh that we would have the same confidence. Let the Word of God speak! Saul came to the conviction that he had a responsibility to tell others about Christ.

This is every believer's responsibility. If we have been saved by Christ, our duty and delight is to be His witness, as Acts 1:8 so pointedly reveals. Beloved, we must speak of Christ, not of ourselves. Too often when we give a testimony of our coming to faith, we fill it with too much of self and not enough of Christ. Hear the insightful words of John Stott who wrote, "Testimony is not a synonym for autobiography. To witness is to speak of Christ. Our own experience may illustrate, but must not dominate, our testimony." Jesus is to be the grand subject of our testimony, of our conversations and indeed of all that we do!

VI. Saul Agitated the Church (31)

This brings us to our final result of Saul's coming to faith in Christ. I have stated it this way, "he agitated the church." I know that does not sound all that positive, but let us look at verse 31 and then I will show you what I mean by this. We read, **So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.**

It might be easy to read this verse and come to the conclusion that because Saul had been saved, and since he was no longer threatening the church, that because of this, the church experienced peace. It may mean that, but when this verse is understood in light of all that we just read, it may be conveying a different thought. Let me ask you, according to what we read in our text, why were the church in an upheaval. Was it because Saul was persecuting them? No! They were in an upheaval because Saul had been saved and the Jews were trying to kill him wherever he went (see 9:23-25, 29). The reason why the churches enjoyed peace according to our text was what? They sent Saul away to Tarsus, his hometown in Asia Minor. But the influence and testimony of Saul would stay with them as verse 31 tells us as a conclusion that the

The Church Alive

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church was **“being built up.”** This in part because of the wild whirlwind of Saul’s conversion. Additionally, the church was growing and increasing! Christ was growing His Church, whether Saul be there or not! It is Christ’s church and He will build it with any means He desires! The Church is not dependent upon any one person, save one, the Lord Jesus Christ. But Saul left his mark and he would be back. In Acts 13 we see the beginning of his formal missionary ministry. But realize this, whether present or not, Saul had agitated, stirred up, and provoked the churches to a greater dependence upon the Lord.

This all reminds me of Hebrews 10:24-25 where we read, **“24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”**

You have heard this before, but the word “stimulate” in the text literally means to provoke, to stir up, to agitate. This is one of the few ways in which it is godly to be provoke others, when we seek to provoke them on to love and good deeds. This is what Saul had done for the churches in Syria, Samaria and Judea. How might you and I do it for the people here at Hope as well as for other believers we might influence?

And never forget that your influence is only a seed for which God to use as He determines. No ministry, not church is to be dependent upon one family, or the pastor, or some elders to glue them together. Jesus is our glue. Robert Murray M’Cheyne was an extraordinary believer who died at the young age of 29. Yet God used him mightily in Scotland and beyond. God used his ministry to grow not only M’Cheyne’s church but also the churches throughout Scotland. But what is sometimes missed in this account is that the greatest growth and spiritual revival of his own church and that region came while he was away on a missions trip in Palestine.

When word finally reach him of what was taking place in Scotland, he gave thanks to God not only for the conversions, but also that he was not there so that no one would be able to give him the credit. All the glory and praise belonged to God alone. The truth of the matter is this, whether we speak of Saul, Lloyd-Jones, M’Cheyne or others like them, one could not last a week, or sometimes even a day or hours before these men pointed others to Jesus Christ. May it be our resolve to make Christ known to those we come in contact with as soon as possible. Let us blurt out Christ if needs be, but let us make Him known. People need to know and to see our new relationships to God, to the church and to the world. John Stott closed out his thoughts on this passage this way saying, *“If these three relationships—to God, the church and the world—are not seen in professed converts, we have good reason to question the reality of their conversion. But whenever they are visibly present, we have good reason to magnify the grace of God.”*

May I ask you, are you glued to the church? If not, why not? Are you seeking, trying to be glued to others in the congregation? Do you love the brethren (1 John 3:14)? Are others aware of your relationship to Jesus, to His church and to the world? May they be in ever-increasing fashion to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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