

Saul's Conversion | The Power of A True Conversion

Acts 9:1-31

INTRO

Good morning! I'm Kyle, one of the Pastors at SCBC. Today we'll be looking at one of my fav passages in the NT, the dramatic and powerful conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Some would say Saul's conversion is comparable to a terrorist or an Isis leader meeting Jesus today.

By the way, Saul is also known as Paul. I'll be referring to him as Saul, but if I slip up and refer to him as Paul, you'll know what I mean. Saul's conversion often thought to be the moment he begins being referred to as Paul, but that doesn't take place till later (Acts 13:9).

Today, focus on the power of a true conversion. But, before we go any further, should pray.

Pray! Lord speak through me...

MY STORY

I thought it might be helpful to share a little of my story as it connects to our passage.

Grew up in a religious home/Church (rules: do the right things)

- I understood God was holy and that I was a sinner.
- I struggled to believe I could be good enough to be saved. Works based understanding of salvation. I had to try harder to be better to earn God's favor.
- Eventually I was tired of trying hard but still not feeling like I was good enough.
- I walked away from church, ultimately turned my back on the Lord.
- Shortly after H.S. joined military, married H.S. sweetheart, started having kids, deployed overseas/combat.
- In the military I was a firefighter/EMT for 10 years.
- Exposed to continuous trauma, death/war, some of the darkest evil the world has to offer.
- I "worked hard" to succeed and be good at my job. Things were great!
- Problem was although had worked hard for this "great" life, still felt empty.
- I remember the night like it was yesterday. Britt and I had been having deep conversation about life. All we had been through with many extended hospital stays (daughters health), deployments, loss of friends to suicide, deep pain/loss. The kind of pain feel deep down in your soul.
- Britt said something to me about not caring if she lived anymore...crushed me.
- Ended up in our room confused, moved to my knees (Lord was drawing me to himself). I began to pray. Crying out to God. Experienced God's presence!

-The Lord spoke to me that night. He began showing me all my sin and how it was affecting not only me but my family. I was allowing the enemy to have his way in our home. Felt a great/heavy weight as a result of my sin.

-But in the very same moment, I felt love, grace, and forgiveness like I've never experienced.

-Lord showed me a vision, which he used in powerful ways including getting Brittany's attention. Changed the course of our lives.

-There was a radical change/transformation that took place. It was profound and more impactful than anything we had ever experienced!

Tie personal conversion to Saul's

In a similar way to my story, in our passage today we're looking at Saul's miraculous conversion. We'll see how Saul goes from persecutor to the persecuted. Saul's conversion is arguably one of the most significant conversions in the history of the Church and even the world! It would be difficult to overstate the significance Saul's conversion has had.

Charles Spurgeon said, "The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was one of the most remarkable facts in Christian history. Perhaps there has never happened an event of equal importance since the days of Pentecost. It was important as a testimony to the power and truth of the gospel."

Big Idea: Encountering Jesus leads to true conversion.

Defining Conversion: Not just working harder at being a better person. We can't change ourselves! It's only by the power of God that we can be truly changed. Conversion is a life transformation. Ephesians talks about it as going from death to life.

- As an Firefighter I had to perform CPR more times then I would have liked. That moment where someone is lying lifeless. Not asking for help...From death to life.

We'll also see in our passage, conversion tends to follow a bit of a pattern: **Enemy of Jesus, Encounter w/Jesus, Encounter people of Jesus, Changed by Jesus, Sent by Jesus.**

With that, dive into text and see what the Lord wants to reveal to us. Starting Acts 9:1.

9 Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest ² and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

- This is the first time in Acts Jesus followers are described as belonging to “the way”. Greek ho(a)dos - A road or a highway. Following Jesus is a way of life!

³ As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. ⁴ Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

1) ENEMY OF JESUS V. 1-4

- We all start out as enemies of Jesus. Saul is an enemy of Jesus. Persecuting.
- Saul thought of himself as a godly man. Religious. He was a student of the Scriptures, yet he was blind to his sin, anger, & the darkness in his heart.
- The default posture of humanity is rebellion against God...Enemy of God.
 - Some of you may think you’re a “good person” or you and God “have things worked out,” but if you’ve not encountered Jesus, status is still enemy
- Relating to idea of being an enemy. Enemies don’t want to be around each other.
 - Combat. Enemies we captured...medical care. Bully...
- To go from being an enemy to friend takes something big. A drastic measure, like a miraculous encounter with Jesus!

Picking back up verse 5...

⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” Saul said. “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting,” he replied. ⁶ “But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one.

- I’m so curious about these men traveling w/Saul. We don’t know what happens to them, but I believe that they were affected by this experience. I remember when the Lord changed me. The people around, coworkers, friends, family, were shocked. The Lord uses our transformation to have an impact on those around us.

Cont. verse 8...

⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. ⁹ He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

2) ENCOUNTER JESUS V. 5-9

- Saul had a powerful encounter w/ Jesus on the road to Damascus. An encounter that he wasn’t expecting. An encounter that radically changed his life forever.
- He doesn’t understand it all yet but he knows it’s big.

- This was drastic! Big enough to make him a friend to his enemy.
- Do you know people? People don't like changing their minds? Hard to see things another way (Hard headed). When Jesus shows up people change.
- Makes me think of training in boot camp.
 - Marching-an about face. Complete 180 to march the opposite direction.
 - That's what happens to Saul when he encounters Jesus.
- Pause for a moment - Encounter-spectrum! Boring story Vs Exciting story -
 - We're not surprised when we hear someone's story about growing up in church. Faithfully following Jesus...
 - But, sometimes question or doubt big/exciting/radical conversion stories...Jesus appearing dreams!
 - We should pray for these conversions. For the power of God to move!
 - Some of you don't have a big radical story **but every conversion no matter how dramatic it may seem is a miracle.**

Picking back up in verse 10...

¹⁰ *There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision,*

- The Lord speaks through a vision-Ananias. We know God primarily speaks through His Word. But in our particular Christian "camp" we can forget that God, the creator of the universe, can speak however he wants.

"Ananias." "Here I am, Lord," he replied.

- I love Ananias' immediate response acknowledging the Lord.

¹¹ *"Get up and go to the street called Straight," the Lord said to him, "to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so that he may regain his sight." ¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

¹⁷ *Ananias went and entered the house. He placed his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ At once something like scales fell*

from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. ¹⁹ And after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some time.

3) ENCOUNTER WITH THE PEOPLE OF JESUS V. 10-19

- Like Saul, when we encounter Jesus we also encounter the people of Jesus. It's a package deal.
- In Saul's conversion we see God using several people.
 - The high priest, other men traveling with him, Ananias...
- The conversion of souls is often a community event
 - We had people fasting/praying for our salvation. People that witnessed our transformation (real estate agent).
- This could be an under recognized part of conversion. God can use a dream/dramatic event to get people's attention, but most of the time he uses the faithful people of God.
- God using "his people" in this way is a gift. It's a miracle. We can't truly and wholly be transformed as Christians without encountering the people of Jesus.

²⁰ Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: "He is the Son of God." ²¹ All who heard him were astounded and said, "Isn't this the man in Jerusalem who was causing havoc for those who called on this name and came here for the purpose of taking them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ²² But Saul grew stronger and kept confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

4) CHANGED BY JESUS V. 20-22

- Fourth point is pretty obvious, but worth stating; *when we encounter Jesus we are changed by him.*
- We see that Saul was changed in many ways.
 - Says he immediately began proclaiming Jesus. His acknowledgement of Christ as Messiah demonstrates a drastic change in his belief system.
 - Also, says he grew stronger. Not referring to his workout routine, getting fit or lean. Referring to him growing in Spiritual power. This is discipleship! Learning/growing/being strengthened in the things of God!
 - Relational status changes: goes from enemy to friend.
- Many of you remember what your life was like before Jesus, don't want to go back there. For others of you, can't remember life without Jesus. But we all have something in common, we have been and continue to be changed by Jesus.
- Again, no matter how big or dramatic our conversion, being changed by Jesus is nothing short of miraculous.

²³ After many days had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plot. So they were watching the gates day and night intending to kill him, ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the wall.

²⁶ When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple. ²⁷ Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that the Lord had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰ When the brothers found out, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹ So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

5) SENT BY JESUS V.23-31

- Saul is sent out to tell the world about Jesus!
- Jewish leaders were out to get him. They wanted him dead.
 - Think about that for a second. Saul, the persecutor, was now being protected, by the same men he was out to get just a few verses ago. He was now escaping murder himself.
- And he is sent out to take the good news. Says he spoke boldly about Jesus.
- Just as Saul was sent out, we too are sent out, to take the gospel to the ends of the earth...
 - Used to pray for opportunity to talk to others. Now pray for opportunity and conversion...
 - Opportunity is within my ability to manufacture, but conversion is 100% God's.
- Our going is likely to look different then it did for Saul. But, like Saul, the Holy Spirit will strengthen and empower each of us in unique ways to go.

Turning A Corner book of Acts

If you remember in Acts 1:8 it says, “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*” At this point in Acts, we’re wrapping up the Jerusalem, Judea, & Samaria part of taking the message of the gospel out and moving to the, being witnesses to the ends of the earth. We are sent by Jesus to be his witnesses to the world.

GOSPEL

But before we can confidently take the gospel out to the world, we have to understand why such a message would be taken out to the whole world to begin with? It's not just any message. The gospel is the greatest, most powerful, transformative message to ever be told. The gospel is a miracle that transforms lives.

When we understand that we are sinners who have rebelled against our creator. That we deserve eternal separation from a holy God, but that he made a way for us in Christ to be forgiven, to be saved, that truth changes everything. Jesus lived a perfect life, died a sinner's death he didn't deserve, and then rose from the dead to live and reign forever making peace between God and man, if man will simply acknowledge that and place their faith in him.

When a person is changed the way the power of the gospel changes us, the message can't not spread. There is no option but to tell others of God's goodness and grace in Christ.

APPLICATION

I want to wrap up our time this morning with a few things for us to consider...

Have you met Jesus? Have you truly experienced life transformation?

- If you haven't, then I plead with you to open your heart and mind to the wonders of God's awe inspiring, unconditional love. To his abundant grace and powerful life changing forgiveness. Receive his grace today and trust in him for eternal life.

For those maybe with a less dramatic conversion...maybe you've had doubts.

How can I know that I'm truly converted/Saved?

Ephesians 5:8-9 says that we were once darkness, but we are now light in the Lord.

That the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

A converted Christian lives in the light; marked by humility, truthfulness & repentance. We will live our lives differently, changed, transformed. Not saying perfectly...but different.

For those confident of their status in Christ...Praise God!

How is Jesus currently changing/working on you?

- If you are a follower of Jesus, you should constantly be changing/growing/being strengthened. We're disciples of Jesus. Students of the way! (Remember hodos: on the way)! We haven't arrived yet. This is the Christian life, to continually be shaped by the Lord. The only way we grow is through the power of God, and by being open to the fact that we are blind to our own sin. God uses his Spirit and his Spirit empowered people to help us see.

How is Jesus calling you to go out and be a witness for the gospel? On mission!

- Lots of ways this can look..."We're not all called to cross international borders, but we're all called to cross the street." I would love to help...

For all of us, there is one thing we must know/understand. God alone can do a miracle in our lives, our family members lives, our neighbors lives. Jesus is in the business of converting souls. No one is too far gone/out of reach of the power of God. Look at Saul; a terrorist, an enemy of God. If anyone could be too far gone it was Saul. Yet he wasn't. Who are you praying for to be saved? Keep praying boldly and expectantly knowing that it's only by the power of God and through a miracle of God that a soul can be saved.

Pray!

CLOSE

Grateful for our time together.

As we go I want to mention if you're a believer in Jesus but haven't been baptized we will have an opportunity for that in a few weeks (11/22). We would love to talk to you or you can head over to scbc.do/baptism to learn more or sign up to be baptized.

Also, if you need prayer...

Speaking of prayer, if you would like to help w/prayer team.

- Interest meeting 11/22.

Benediction

²³ Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have a blessed week!