

THE LORD CALLED SAUL AND HE CALLED YOU!
THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL
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Acts 9:1-22

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. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 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. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. 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." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 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? 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.

Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

I. INTRO

Today we commemorate the conversion of St. Paul the Apostle. But what do we know about him? Well, actually we know quite a bit about him. Paul was born as Saul and in the city of Tarsus. His father was a Roman citizen and so he was born as a Roman citizen. But he was also of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul had dual citizenship. This allowed him to move freely around the civilized world. This would become handy for Paul was a tent maker. He would have known the trade routes and all the highways and byways of the world. Chances are that he had even traveled to the Far East to purchase the fabric for making his tents. Being a tent maker also meant that Paul would have had an extremely strong upper body. He had to; handling large amounts of fabric took strength. These tents were not like our little camping tents; these were dwellings, portable homes made of fabric.

What else do we know about Paul? We know he was a Pharisee. Not just any Pharisee, but a Pharisee amongst Pharisees. He studied Jewish law in Jerusalem under the famous teacher Gamaliel (*Acts 22:3*). Paul had equivalent to a doctorate in theology. He could properly divide the Word of God. He knew how to apply the Law to show sin. He could also point one to the Word and Sacraments of the Old Testament to bring relief from sin. Being a Pharisee meant he knew the Scriptures concerning the coming of the Anointed One, the Messiah. Paul was a man of great religious conviction.

II. THE ZEALOUSY OF MAN

No one questions his zeal. Paul is a pietist, full of conviction, full of religiosity. Paul is willing to

die for whatever he believes, even more; he's willing to kill for it. Paul's even gotten permission and documentation from the temple authorities to hunt down, persecute or prosecute and even exterminate these followers of the Way – followers of Jesus. In the Book of Acts we read about how Paul is present at the stoning of Stephen. He even holds the coats of those stoning Stephen to death. This is a man who earnestly believes he's on a mission. And that mission will take him to Damascus where he has heard that a band of the followers of the Way now live. Paul will make disciples out of these Christians, or kill them. How arrogant and narrow of them to call themselves the Way.

II. CALL TO REPENTANCE

Saul considered himself to be a keeper of God's Word. He was convinced he was doing what was right for the church by seeking to destroy these followers of Jesus. But on that road to Damascus the Word made flesh comes to Saul. This Jesus whom Saul sought to stifle now speaks boldly out to him in a brilliantly blinding light. How ironic! Saul who was spiritually blind now becomes physically blind. He that sought to preserve the Word now comes to him to preserve him. The one that Saul sought to destroy now comes to save.

Does Jesus say, "Great job Saul, love your determination?" No! Does Jesus say, "Love how you have kept my commandments, keep it up?" No! Does Jesus share any words of encouragement for how Saul has lived his life or worshipped or served God? NO, NO, NO! Please notice what Jesus does say. ***"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*** In other words, Saul why are you sinning against me! Saul why are you killing my children and trying to destroy my church? Saul why are you an instrument of destruction and divisiveness? Notice that Saul hasn't met Jesus before. How could he be persecuting Jesus if they had never met? Let me remind you what it says in Matthew 25:40: ***'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 doesn't start with the Gospel He starts with the Law. Saul considered himself pious, holier than thou, a man full of wisdom and scriptural knowledge, a very religious sort of guy. Saul needs to learn the truth, "HE IS A SINNER!"

If Jesus shares the Good News this way shouldn't we? If the Lord of all creation points to man's fallen nature, his sin, his corruption, his arrogance towards God, isn't this where we lowly creatures should likewise start our dialog with others about the faith.

But there's a second point to Paul's call from sin. What things in your life do you consider so important that they become the LAW by which you judge others? We are all like Paul. We are all pietist, full of legalism and religiosity. We all have those things that we are willing to die for, but even more, willing to kill for. Oh maybe not physically, but we kill verbally, we fight with words and maybe sometimes even with our fist. Beliefs whether right or wrong that we think are the most important things of faith. Maybe it's how we serve our church here on the premises or out there in public, maybe it's how we share our faith or our feelings about how other don't, maybe it's how we worship or think others should. In other words, we like Saul want others to conform to what we think is right whether it is or not!

To you Jesus comes today and says: ***"why are you persecuting me?"*** In other words, why are you sinning against me! Why are you killing my children and trying to destroy my church? Why are you an instrument of destruction and divisiveness? What makes you think you are better than the brother or sister sitting next to you in the pew? (Pause)...

III. RESTORATION

If God had left Saul there on the road blind, broken and alone it would be a tragic tale indeed. But God is gracious and good. He doesn't leave Saul there! Saul was led to Damascus ***"And for***

three days Saul was without sight, and neither ate nor drank”(Acts 9:9). Sometimes it takes time for God’s Law to work its way on man. Three days Saul waited, wondered and most likely worried about what was going to happen. And finally on the third day Saul was ready to receive the grace God would provide.

Acts 9 verses 10-15 please listen carefully. **“Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”**

Here are some lessons for us to learn once again.

IV. APPLICATION

1. When we share the Christian faith we need to start with sin. Share the Law it shows our sin. **Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?** Matthew 5:48 **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”**. Romans 3:10 **“As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;”** Are you perfect? Are you righteous? Only perfect righteousness will save you. Have you sinned against God in thought, word or deed? Have you? -----wait----- -----pause-----
2. **“And for three days Saul was without sight, and neither ate nor drank” #2:** Let God’s Law work its way on the unrepentant sinner. Sometimes it takes time. Remember God’s Law, His Word has the power to move sinners, you don’t. Speak the Law then shut up, wait and watch.
3. Acts 9:17 **“So Ananias departed and entered the house. 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.”** #3: God uses others to bring restoration. Ananias according to Christian tradition was the bishop of Damascus. He didn’t want to go see Saul but he did. You may not want to share your faith with others that’s the natural man exercising self-preservation. Ananias didn’t want to go. He was afraid that Saul would kill him. That’s the risk we all take. God uses others to bring restoration. And He wants to use you.
4. Acts 9:18 **“And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;”** Paul’s restoration was not completed until his eyes were opened and he was baptized. 1 Peter 3:21 **“And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”** God brought Ananias to Saul to bring him into the Kingdom of God through Holy Baptism. Saul became connected to the Word of God, the Word made flesh, to Jesus in a very physical way. On that day Saul’s eyes were opened physically and spiritually and he would never be the same. Through the waters of baptism Saul was drowned and Paul was born. It still works that way today. God brings people into His kingdom through baptism. In baptism the old man is drowned and the new creation is raised in Christ Jesus. If it was true for Paul then it’s true for you as well. To profess any other way is a matter of divine arrogance and a denial of God’s means of Grace.
5. There in Damascus Paul stayed with the disciples. **“He ate and was nourished and regained his strength”**. No doubt learned the important truths of God’s Word. Paul was in church, with the saints in Damascus. Hebrews 10:25 says: **“Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as has become the habit of some, but encourage one another; and all the more, as**

you see the Day drawing near". So our final lesson is this, "for faith to grow we, and others need to diligently attend worship." To share the Law and Gospel, to be baptized is all great and wonderful and necessary. But without active church attendance, without regular Bible Study, faith atrophies.

Let me summarize what we can learn from this text. 1. When sharing the faith start with the Law. God requires perfect obedience and the Law shows our sin. 2. Speak of the Law and then shut up. Let God's Word work on the hearts of the unbeliever. Wait for them to ask what can be done BTW, the consequences of sin is death, which is eternal damnation. Let them know that! 3. God uses others to bring restoration. Don't think you need to do everything. You cannot! Yours may just be to share the Law and not the Gospel. It doesn't mean you're legalistic if you point to God's Holy Law. To share the Gospel right away might be the wrong thing to do. Share what you can. Don't be afraid to say I am a sinner too! This is how I know that God abhors sin. Remember even Ananias was afraid. So be bold, HE (✝) is with you. 4. Restoration is only completed through God's appointed means of grace. Restoration follows repentance. Baptism is how God deals with our sin today. We are connected with Christ through the Water and Word. 5. Without regular interaction with the saints in His (✝) Church our faith will atrophy.

Bring people to church. This is where they can hear Law and Gospel. Here they can repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, the filling of the Holy Spirit. Here they can become a child of God and fed on His (✝) true body and blood, the food of immortality.

For here in God's house they can know, and you can know, that all your sins are forgiven for Jesus sake, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For even as the Lord called Saul He has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

All praise, honor and glory be to God, Father – Son – and Holy Spirit, In Jesus name, Amen and Amen!

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.

