Adversary to Apostle

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[0:00] The book of Acts, and we are in chapter 9.

! 1-31, but tonight we're going to cover verses 1-19. And this is a passage of Scripture that you all are, I'm sure, very familiar with.
This is the conversion of Saul, the Pharisee, who became Paul the Apostle. So let's read verses 1-31, and then again we'll really get into verses 1-19 tonight, and then we'll cover the rest next Wednesday, Lord willing.
Okay, beginning in verse 1. 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 shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?
[1:27] 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. 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.
[2:31] 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 day he was with the disciples at Damascus, and immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue, 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. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him.
[3:35] But their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and led him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

And when he came to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the

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apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.
So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists, but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.
So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up, and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. I don't know if any of you have ever heard of Tony Morita.
He's a pastor in South Carolina, and he's also a teacher, a preaching teacher at Southeastern Seminary. And he came and spoke at the men's conference that we went to just a few months ago down at Falls Creek.
[4:48] And I can't remember if he shared the story there or if I heard him share it another time. But either way, he tells a story about he works a lot with church planners, especially church planners overseas, and particularly in Ukraine.

And so there's a man who he had been discipling who was a drug addict. And so he took this man to the map, and he was showing him all over the world in these different pins where different church planners were located that he was working with.
And he talked to him about a man in Kiev, Ukraine, whose name was Emmanuel. Emmanuel, and Emmanuel was this big, burly, hulking guy with tattoos all over his arms and all over his fingers and just a super tough guy, right?
And he was also a drug dealer, and he'd spent a lot of time in prison. And so Tony Morita said that the only contact that Emmanuel had with the Bible in prison was that he used its pages to roll up and smoke cigarettes.
And so then he talked about how God had saved this man, and now this man who had once used the Bible to smoke his cigarettes was now preaching from God's Word because he'd been saved, he'd been called to be a pastor, and he was planning a church.
[6:05] And so we see, like in Emmanuel's case with the Apostle Paul, that God can take the most vilest, the most sinniest of sinners, right?

And he can completely transform them. He can bring them out of death into life and do something amazing through him and only the Lord Jesus Christ is able to do that in a person.
So this is a major before and after meeting here with the Apostle Paul, or Saul as he's known at this point in time. And again, such transformation that we see, it's called conversion.
And you guys are all familiar with that term, I'm sure. In Acts chapter 9, we read of perhaps the most famous conversion in the history of the church.
Again, this is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. And it's actually one of the most important events in the history of the church as well. Probably, you could argue, one of the most, if not the most important thing in the history of the church besides the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
[7:14] This was a major event for the church in its history because the Apostle Paul was an amazing instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit. And so his conversion plays a monumental role in the advancement of the gospel across the nations and throughout the centuries.

God continues to use the work that this man did back then in tremendous ways still today. This passage not only reminds us of God's saving grace and ability to redeem, again, the vilest of sinners, but it also reminds us of the various trials that will accompany believers as they seek to be obedient to the God who has redeemed them, right?
So just because you're converted, it doesn't mean that you've hit the finish line. No, really, the journey is truly just beginning, right? And as a part of that journey, just like a race, as you are running it, pursuing the prize, you are going to come across obstacles and trials, as we see was the case with the Apostle Paul soon after his conversion and all throughout that man's life.
So here's the main idea that I want us to get tonight, that this passage reminds us of God's saving grace and ability to redeem the vilest of sinners.
And so in verses 1 through 19, again, which we're going to cover tonight, we see Saul's epic transformation.
[8:47] Now if I say, I'll intermingle the names Saul and Paul, you know who I'm talking about, okay? It's just going to happen, I'm telling you right now. This passage begins with Saul's persecuting the church intensely.

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He isn't content with merely persecuting the Christians in Jerusalem. He wants to extend his campaign to everywhere these Christians are at. And so he asks for letters to go to Damascus so he can continue to persecute those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.
And so only the spilling of Christian blood will satisfy this man at this point in time in his life. Saul has an intense hatred for all things Christian.
He hates Jesus at this point in time. He hates followers of Jesus. And so he is armed with arrest warrants that, again, he's received from the high priest. He heads to Damascus, and his hope is to carry out this mission.
He wants to exterminate and eradicate the name of Christ anywhere he can go. If you remember, Saul was present when Stephen was martyred.
[9:53] Do you remember that? We weren't there all that long ago. He was there. He was watching the coats. He was in agreement with what was happening there. And there's no doubt that as he's going to Damascus, his hope is that the Christians there will suffer the same fate that Stephen suffered not that long ago.

He's hoping that these Christians will either be arrested and put away forever, or probably he's more hopeful that they'll die, that they'll die at even his hands, at the hands of those who are going with him.
So we've got to understand that this guy hated the church. This guy hated Jesus. And so in verse 2, we see that Christians at this point in time, they're called the way, and that might be confusing for some people, but we believe that this was the first title that Christians gave to themselves.
They didn't call themselves Christians right off the bat. They said, we're followers of the way, and where do they get that from? Well, Jesus, because he said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. So that's how they knew themselves, or defined themselves.
They were followers of the way. But something happens, obviously, on the road to Damascus. As Paul is going to arrest Christians, the risen Christ arrests him instead.
[11:07] Saul is blinded by the glory of the Lord as he's confronted by the Holy One. People during this time would have traveled during the day, right, for obvious reasons, because you can see better during the day.

And it's safer back then to travel when the sun was up. So obviously, they didn't have headlights for their camels. They didn't have street lights or road signs to light their path.
And so they traveled during the day. And what's amazing about this is that as the sun is shining, its light is swallowed up by a greater light, the glory of the risen Lord Jesus.
That's pretty awesome, I think. And so he's terrified, and he's traumatized by what he is seeing and what he is experiencing. And so he falls to the ground.
And that's a similar response to what we see in many of the Old Testament, the prophets, those who had visions of God as they fell down in terror. And Saul is doing the same thing.
[12:10] And then he is called by name. He is summoned by name. And so he asks to know who it is that is speaking to him. And the voice identifies himself as Jesus, who then he says is the one that Paul was persecuting.

Saul had been of the belief that he was on God's side up to this point. He thought that all that he was doing was for God and for his glory.
He thought that he was on the right side of things. And now he's realizing that his mission was, in fact, not a righteous one at all. And this is a reminder to us that you can be zealous for something and have a strong belief in something.
But just because you're zealous for it, just because you have a strong belief in it, doesn't mean that it's right and it doesn't mean that it's true, which is obviously the case that we can compare that to the terrorists who carried out those attacks on 9-11.
They were zealous for what they did, right? And they thought they were on the side of right, but in reality, they weren't. And so we see that you can be zealous for something.
[13:20] You can think what you're doing is right, but that doesn't make it right. It doesn't make it true. Such was the case for Saul. And so he's aware for the very first time that he's actually on the wrong side of things, that he is opposing the God whom he claims to be serving.

And here he learns that to persecute the church is to persecute Christ, and to persecute Christ is to persecute God the Father. Now, again, you've all, I'm sure, heard this story before, and you know this story well, but do as best as you can.

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Try to imagine that you're reading this for the very first time. Try to imagine that you're reading this for the very first time. Saul's desire was to put an end to the church. Again, it says there, he's breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.
He wants these people to die. He's threatening the bride of Christ. And now, the bridegroom appears to him and has him dead to rights.
And so if you were hearing this for the very first time, how would you expect the Lord would treat such a man in this instance? You would think, yeah, he's got to obliterate this guy.
[14:35] He's going to completely extinguish him, vanquish him, wipe him off the face of the earth. He can make an example of him to deter any other enemies of the church. This guy is breathing threats against his bride.

And so that's what we would expect, reading it the first time. Oh, yeah, okay, God got the bad guy. But he's going to do something different with him than we would expect. Saul is quivering on the ground.
He's terrified. His worldview has been demolished. The violent, arrogant terrorizer of the church that he was is now at the mercy of Jesus and at the mercy of the next words that he will utter.
What will Jesus say to him? What will Jesus do to him? What does Jesus say? Rise and enter the city and you will be told what to do.
And so with that, the self-righteous persecuting Pharisee is about to become the Christ-centered apostle. Many of you guys, I'm sure, are well familiar with D.L. Moody.
[15:38] D.L. Moody is a great pastor and theologian. And he is well known for famously saying this. He said, the world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him.

By God's help, I aim to be that man. And with no disrespect to Mr. Moody in any way, he was wrong. He was wrong when he said that because the world had seen it.
And the world had experienced what God could do with such a witness. And that man was the apostle Paul. God used this enemy of the church in a mighty, mighty and tremendous way.
And so we see that the risen Jesus here commissions Saul. In verse 11, And as he had seen in a vision, a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.
And so Saul is waiting. He has this vision of this man who's going to come to him and pray for him that he will regain his sight. Now, sometimes we read the Bible and we see things like that and we think, well, that's awesome.
[16:43] And it is, but it doesn't happen like that anymore. Well, I'm going to tell you a story that we heard down at the convention that will testify to you that God still operates in this way when he needs to.

And David Platt, who you guys should be well familiar with because you're here on Sunday night and you're a part of counterculture and you're loving it. Right? Everybody's nodding their head. He's sharing that. And he's currently the president of the IMB, the International Mission Board, though he has stepped down and they're looking for a replacement. But he's done a tremendous job.
But he shared his report of the IMB. And I can't remember what country he was talking about, but it was a Muslim country where there's intense persecution against Christians.
But there was a church missionary there. Now, some of these people, they were at the convention, but their faces were darkened. We couldn't know who they were or what their names were for their protection.
[17:46] And so he was sharing a story that one of them had shared with him. And so this missionary, they had witnessed to a gentleman, shared the gospel with him.

He came to faith in Jesus Christ. And he drove his motorcycle all over the place, all over town. That was his primary mode of transportation. It was going to rain really bad that day.
And apparently he had a jacket that he didn't want to get wet. And so he asked the missionary if he could give him something to wear over his jacket. And the only thing he had was a white T-shirt.
And so he gave this man a white T-shirt. And he put the white T-shirt on over his jacket. And he rode his motorcycle to as close as he could get to home before it started raining. Then he had to pull over.
And he just happened to pull over in one place. It was some people's home. They had a little front porch where he could get cover from the rain. They saw him. They invited him inside. And while he was there, he shared the gospel with them for about an hour or two.

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[18:46] He gave his testimony. He shared the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ with these people. And at the end of him sharing the gospel with them, he said they were so eager to believe it.

And he was taken aback like this because he didn't realize, you know, he was wondering, do they know what this means in this country? Do they understand that receiving Christ means that now you've got to bear a cross and that it's not going to be easygoing for them?
And so he tried to explain that to them because he thought they're just too eager to receive this news. And so it's an amazing story. They said to him, no, you're the one who doesn't understand. For the past week, we have had dreams of a man in white telling us to be looking for a man in white who would explain to us all that we need to know.
And so, of course, they were eager to believe it because, you know, their prayers had been answered. And God had sent this messenger to them with the good news and they were saved. It's an amazing story.
[19:52] And so it happened then. It's still happening today. And there are good things happening in the IMB. And so we need to continue to pray for our missionaries because what they're doing is incredibly, incredibly important.

In contrast with the Ananias that was mentioned in chapter 5, if you remember him and his wife, this Ananias in verse 10 is a different man, obviously, because that last man is dead at this point in time. And he is a faithful follower of Jesus. However, understandably, he has some questions to ask God when God tells him what he wants him to do.
You're going to go to Saul. You're going to go to this guy. And he knew who Saul was. And he knew what Saul was doing. And he knew what Saul was on his way to Damascus to do. So no wonder, probably, he was in hiding somewhere because he knew that Saul was on his way.
And he knew what Saul wanted to do. And so this man, who was a good follower of the Lord, was understandably unsure of what God was asking him to do at this point in time.
[20:58] And so he says, in a way, you know, Lord, do you know what you're talking about? Are you sure that you know who this guy is? Because maybe there's some things that you don't know about him.

I can fill you in on what he's here to do. This is one bad hombre. And I think that we should probably just leave him alone. But God obviously knows what he's doing.
And so he tells Ananias to go. And so Ananias here, I think, is one of the unsung heroes of the Bible. Because, again, could you imagine if this was you? And God was telling you that you need to go to this man who wants you to die, to be arrested at the least, right, at the worst.
He wants you to be dead. And so I try to think, what would that be like? And I thought, well, it would be similar to a Jew in Nazi Germany being told to go talk to a Nazi officer.
Because they knew that that Nazi officer is going to put them in some kind of concentration camp. He doesn't want anything good for that individual. And so Ananias, I think, is an unsung hero because he's obedient to what God calls him to do.
[22:08] He had faith in God. And he trusted that he wasn't entering into some kind of trap. He knew that God was good. And he trusted that God knew what he was doing. Even when it seemed like a really bad idea, he still went.

And you've probably been in a situation like that before, haven't you? Where God put it on your heart to do something and you thought, that's a really bad idea. I don't think you know what you're doing. But hopefully you went ahead and you did it and you realized God knows what he's doing.
And so Ananias knew what God was doing. The Lord calmed his fears by describing Saul's new identity in its entirety. God had a purpose for this man. He said, he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.
And so we go through the rest of this book and we see that that's precisely what happened. That's precisely how the Lord used Paul. The Lord also tells Ananias that Saul must suffer for the sake of my name.
And again, that also proved to be true as well. He would be slandered. This man would be beaten. This man would be shipwrecked. This man would be imprisoned. Ultimately, this man would die for the sake of Jesus Christ.
[23:19] And so you think, well, you could think, well, maybe this is God's way of getting back at him. Right? Because he caused Christians to suffer. I'm going to call this guy.

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I'm going to make him miserable. But if you're a student of Scripture and you've read the words, right, the inspired words of the Holy Spirit that came through this man, you see that that was not the case.
Let's look at 2 Corinthians 4, 7 through 11. There, the Apostle Paul, again, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says, But we have these treasures in jars of clay that show the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.
We are afflicted in every way but not crushed. Perplexed but not driven to despair. Persecuted but not forsaken. Struck down but not destroyed. Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies.
For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. Later on, 2 Corinthians 12, 10, he says, For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.
[24:33] For when I am weak, then I am strong. And so, Paul's sufferings made him even more joyful.

Made him love the Lord even more. Now, that seems, that's perplexing to those who don't know Jesus Christ, right? To suffer, to be persecuted is a good thing.
But to be known and to be so closely associated with the Lord in that way that you suffer for His sake. And we see that His suffering was not in vain, obviously.
God had a plan in all of it. And so, when He was weak, He was strong. And it should be the case with us as well as Christians. When we suffer in this world for the sake of Jesus Christ, we rejoice because that means the people in this world are closely associating us with our Lord and Savior. Who suffered more than will ever suffer ourselves. Dying on the cross in our place for our sins. Enduring God's wrath towards our sins so that we might have eternal life.
[25:42] So, Ananias goes. He lays his hand on Saul who's waiting. And the first things that he says to Saul were this. He calls him brother. Brother Saul.

What a comfort that would have been for this man. He's blind. His worldview has been demolished. He realizes that all along he's been on the wrong side of things.
And now this Christian comes. This guy who he would have, prior to meeting Jesus, arrested. Again, tried to have murdered. But instead, now this man calls him a brother.
Brother. So, what a comfort that the first words he hears from this follower of the way that he once persecuted was that he called him brother. In that moment, Saul realized that not only had he received a new identity in Christ, but now he recognized that in Christ he also had received a new family.
Becoming a follower of Jesus means coming into a family of brothers and sisters in the faith. Ananias then reported why he came to Saul.
[26:47] Saul was to regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And just like that, everything for Saul changed. He could see again. And then he gets wet.

He gets baptized. He was baptized. This would be news that you couldn't imagine hearing back during this time. This would be like hearing today that Nancy Pelosi was switching over to the Republican Party.
Or it would be like hearing Rush Limbaugh was now a champion for liberal politics. Right? You'd think that those things don't fit.
This would be even more shocking than either of those scenarios. Here you had Saul, the persecutor, becoming Paul the Christian, the follower of Jesus Christ.
It would have completely shocked them all who heard it. Saul of Tarsus, who once despised Christ in this church, is now being buried with Christ in baptism and is being raised to walk in newness of life.
[27:50] From this point forward, he would be identified only with Christ and with Christ's people. The adversary became the apostle. No longer corrupt but cleansed.

No longer a foe of the church but part of the family. This is amazing grace. Before I continue on, I skipped a blink. The risen Jesus commissions Saul.
So all those things that I just said, go back to that point. The risen Jesus commissions Saul. He confronts him, then he commissions him. While Paul's conversion and commissioning are unique, we can still learn several lessons about all conversions by studying this one.

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And so there's ten things here that we can learn about all conversions that we get from analyzing this one conversion here. The first thing that we see is that salvation is by God's amazing grace. Salvation is by God's amazing grace. Instead of executing Saul on the road to Damascus, Jesus shows him unspeakable grace.
[29:01] Paul became a theologian of grace. He understood it so well probably because he had been such an amazing recipient of it. In Ephesians 2, 1-10, this is what he writes about this amazing grace.

He says of himself in speaking to all Christians prior to their conversion. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.
But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.
By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.
For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
[30:27] The good news of the gospel is that God pursues sinners. Saul was not on a quest to find salvation. He was on a quest to persecute.

Yet God confronted him, and then he called him by his sovereign grace, and he brought this man from spiritual death into spiritual life. And that's true for everybody who undergoes conversion, who is transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ and the hearing and receiving of his good news, the gospel. Number two, all conversions involve a life-changing encounter with Jesus. All conversions involve a life-changing encounter with Jesus.
Not Buddha, not Zeus, or anybody or anything else, just Jesus. Some people have dramatic conversion testimonies, but for others their conversion happens in a much less dramatic fashion. We'll get there soon in Acts, well, probably not soon, but at some point in time, in Acts chapter 16. The Philippian jailer, remember his conversion, the earthquake, the cell doors flung open, and he runs out, afraid that all the prisoners have left, and he's about to plunge his sword through his stomach, and Paul stops him, and he asks him, what must I do to be saved, and he's baptized.
[31:52] That's a pretty dramatic conversion. Not too much before that, we had the conversion of Lydia. In Lydia, it says she just heard the gospel, and she repented, and she believed.

And so we see for some, their conversion story is this major dramatic ordeal. For others, it's very simple and much less dramatic.
In either case, both individuals were changed after an encounter with Jesus Christ, and that's the same case for every person who has been converted by the Lord.
I've noticed as a youth pastor, teens are riveted by those kind of dramatic testimonies. Oh, they are just in awe whenever somebody shares one of those stories like Emmanuel, who I spoke to you about.
They're much less excited about Christians who share their testimony about, well, I grew up in the church, and I heard the gospel in Sunday school class, and I believed it.
[32:52] They are much less excited about those things. However, we've got to understand that all conversions are miraculous. For in each and every case, the Lord, like he did with Lazarus, calls to the dead and brings them out of the tomb, bringing them out into the light, removing their grave clothes, and they are born into newness of life.

So don't ever be ashamed of your conversion story. It's an amazing work of God that only he could do. And so if you, you know, weren't like Emmanuel, you didn't use the Bible to smoke cigarettes, don't start now, right?
Just let that be his story. You have your own. Thirdly, all conversions involve a surrender to Jesus Christ. All conversions involve a surrender to Jesus Christ.
Jesus really humbles Saul. He shows him the truth, namely that the resurrection was a reality. This Jesus whom Saul once thought was a phony revealed himself in an awesome splendor and in

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tremendous power.
Jesus also humbled Saul by blinding him. Then he humbles him by having to be led by a hand to Damascus where he has to wait further instructions.
[34:10] All of this helps Saul to realize that he's no longer in control, that he serves a new king now, and his king is the Lord Jesus Christ. Saul can only surrender, and such is the case with all of us when we are called to believe.

Fourthly, while one may have the same blinding experience as Saul, the metaphor of blindness to sight, darkness to light applies to every Christian theologically.
While one may have the same blinding experience as Saul, the metaphor of blindness to sight, darkness to light applies to every Christian theologically. Saul's blindness pictured the spiritual darkness and ignorance in which we had been living ourselves prior to knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.
God showed him the glory of the truth about Christ, and Paul writes about this very thing again in 2 Corinthians, this time chapter 4, verses 4 through 6. There he says, In their case, speaking of the world, And one thing I thought about as I was preparing this study today, it's interesting that Saul wasn't by himself.
There were others with him on the road to Damascus. They heard, but they didn't see. And so I think that's an interesting thing about conversion as well. Paul heard and he saw.
[35:54] They only heard, but they did not see. And so we are called to go to all people to the ends of the earth, and to share the gospel with every man and woman and child, but we can't force them to see.

Only the Holy Spirit enables a person to be able to see and receive this truth. Fifthly, sincerity alone does not save anyone.
Sincerity alone does not save anyone. Saul truly believed that he was righteous, yet he couldn't have been more wrong. All of his good deeds, all of his careful rule-keeping, in the end, amounted to absolutely nothing.
He was sincerely wrong about Jesus, and that made all the difference, because salvation is in no one else. So you can be sincere about something, but just because you're sincere about it doesn't make it right, and it doesn't make it true.
Abraham Lincoln once was asked by a reporter whether or not he thought God was on the side of the north or the south. You've probably heard this before. A reporter asked him, Who do you think God's side is on?
[37:02] Is God on your side, the north, or is he on the side of the south? And he famously replied in this way. He said, Sir, my concern is not whether or not God is on our side. My greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right, and such should the case be with us always.

No matter what the world might try to tell us, no matter what the world might try to force us to believe, our job as followers of Christ is to always make sure that we are on God's side.
How do we do that? How do we know that? Well, we're students of the Bible. We know God's word, and when we know God's word, we know where to stand. Six, conversion involves the receiving of the Spirit.
Conversion involves the receiving of the Spirit. Again, not that long ago, we were talking about Simon the sorcerer, who was an example of a false convert. He was baptized.
He claimed to believe. He said he was a follower of Christ, but the truth was revealed by his fruits. He had not received the Spirit. And so we see again what Jesus said, a bad tree doesn't produce good fruit.
[38:11] Saul received the Spirit, so does every Christian who truly repents and turns to Christ for salvation. How can you know you're truly saved? You'll know them by their fruits. You'll know by your own fruits.

Is the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life? If it's not, you have a problem. Seven, God can save the worst of sinners. God can save the worst of sinners.
Again, this is a shocking thing that God would save Saul. Shocking to us, at least. You try to figure out how can you compare it? How can we be shocked in a similar way?
You think, what if an ISIS terrorist came to faith in Jesus Christ and then went back to his jihadist former buddies and shared the gospel with them?

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It would be something like that. It would be something as shocking as that. God can save the worst of sinners, and so that means we must pray for even that person who you think, there's no way that God could ever save that person, would ever want anything to do with that person.
[39:13] Even the worst of sinners can be saved by the Lord. Eight, when you become a new person, you also receive a new purpose. When you become a new person, you also receive a new purpose.

All Christians are sent on a mission to preach the good news to the spiritually blind and offer hope to sinners. Saul was elected not just to salvation, but also for mission. With the privilege of receiving salvation comes the responsibility of making much of Jesus in this world, in deed and in word.
Nine, conversion involves receiving a new family. Conversion involves receiving a new family. It doesn't mean that you abandon your biological family, right?
You want to obviously share the gospel with them if they are unbelievers. But what it means is that when you are saved, you are brought into the body of Christ. You plug into a church and those people become your brothers and your sisters in Christ.
And so as a church, we view ourselves as a family. And so as a family, sometimes we don't see eye to eye.
[40:30] As a family though, we realize that God has brought us together. And so we seek unity and we seek to love one another as Christ has loved us.

And so even when we don't see eye to eye or when we see one of our brothers and sisters in Christ struggling with the way that they are following the Lord, we don't gossip about them.
Our first response isn't to meet in private and kick them out of the church, right? We follow Matthew 18. We go to our brother and sister and we point out to them what we see with the hope what?
Not that we throw it in their face and make them feel dumb, but that we have our brother or sister restored. We do it because we care about them, because we love them, because we don't want them outside of the fellowship.
They're our family. And so we want them alongside of us as we serve and worship together as a family of Christ. And then 10. Those who are saved should be baptized.
[41:31] Baptism is not, or I should say it does not impart salvation to anyone. You look at the thief on the cross. Jesus said to him, today you will be with me in paradise.

There is obviously no physical way where that man could be baptized. He was hanging from a cross. However, when you're saved, you should enter the waters of baptism.
And there's many reasons why that is. Jesus himself was baptized as an example for us to follow because of the symbolism in it when you enter the water and when you come out. And also it's a public testimony to the world.
This is who I am now. This is what God has done in my heart and in my life. So a person who is saved should also enter the waters of baptism.
And I want to end by saying this. God saves sinners and he wants to reach others through you. God saves sinners and he wants to reach others through you.
[42:34] There is no excuse. You can't say that you are too bad. God, you can't use me. Look at all the past sins I've done. Okay, look at Saul. I don't think anybody in here has ever tried to arrest Christians.

And hopefully our chief of police has never done that, right? Of course. But you know what I'm saying. You can't use that excuse. Just look at the Bible. Look at the messed up men and women whom God has used.
You're not too bad for God to use you. You haven't committed too much sin. You also can't count on your religious efforts for salvation. Again, we look to Saul to prove that.
You who have received God's grace must seek to show and share that grace by making much of Jesus as you let your light shine in this dark world. So let's all do that together.
Amen? Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ. That he was willing, Lord, to come.
[43:35] That he was, Lord, willing to go to the cross. And there he was willing to die in our place and for our sins.

Lord, our good deeds are like filthy rags compared to your holiness, compared to what is required for salvation. We could not save ourselves.

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Nobody can. It is only through Jesus Christ that a person can be saved from their sins and have eternal life. And Lord, we thank you that you have given us this truth that you have called people like the Apostle Paul.
You, Lord, have used that man and many other men and women like him to continue to share the wonderful news of your Son, Jesus Christ.
And God, we know that here today we live in a world, we live in a time where people are in desperate need of the church being the church that you've called it to be. People are in desperate need of seeing the church behave in the way that you've called it to behave.
[44:42] People are in desperate need of the church going, Lord, and doing what you've called us to do, being on mission, letting our light shine, not being afraid of what might come as a result of that, Lord, but only wanting you to be glorified, only wanting the name of Jesus Christ to be made known, to be famous throughout the world.

And so, God, we pray that we would be those types of people. Lord, we thank you that you have saved us, and God, we pray that as we live our lives in this world until that time comes where you come for us or we go to be with you, that we would be found diligently doing the things that you have called us to do.
We love you, and we thank you for the privilege of serving your great name. In the name we pray of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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