

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 4-10-16 AM NOTES  
"THE CONVERSION OF SAUL"  
ACTS 9:1-31  
# 13 in Series

Transform—to change somebody or something completely

**Jeremiah 17:9 (NASB)** "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

**Ezekiel 36:26 (NASB)** "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

**2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)** "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Introduction (vv. 1-2)

**Acts 26:9-11 (NASB)** "9 So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."

"His giant intellect, his fierce emotions fired to white-hot passion, and his iron will all fused together in a determined hatred of Jesus. No man could have reasoned with him in such a mood—no man on earth, that is. But there was a man with nail prints on His hands about to stand astride Paul's path and bring about a miracle greater than raising Lazarus from the dead."

—John Phillips

I. The Manner of Saul's Conversion (vv. 3-9)

A. Contact (v. 3)

B. Conviction (vv. 4, 5b)

C. Conversion (v. 5)

**Romans 10:9 (NASB)** "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

**Isaiah 64:6 (NASB)** "...and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment..."

**Philippians 3:6-8 (NASB)** "6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ."

D. Consecration (vv. 6-9)

**Acts 22:10 (NASB)** “And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’”

**Philippians 3:12b (NASB)** “...I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

**1 Corinthians 6:19b-20 (NASB)** “<sup>19</sup>...you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

II. The Measure of Saul’s Conversion (vv. 10-31)

A. Prayer (vv. 10-12)

“This is the first mark of a Christian; he begins to pray. He recognizes that God rules, and there is a relationship between man and God, and so he begins to pray.”  
□Ray Steadman

B. Purpose (vv. 13-16)

**2 Corinthians 11:23-28 (NASB)** “<sup>23</sup> Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. <sup>26</sup> *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; <sup>27</sup> *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches.”

C. Power (v. 17)

D. Placement (vv. 18-19)

**1 John 3:14 (NASB)** “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”

E. Proclamation (vv. 20-22)

F. Perseverance (vv. 23-30)

Conclusion (v. 31)

**First Baptist Church Powell 4 10 2016 AM**  
**Sermon 13: The Conversion of Saul**  
**Series: The Spirit, the Church, and the World**  
**Acts 9:1-31**

How can a person be changed – not in a surface sort of way, but changed down to the core of their being? Perhaps a good word to describe this change would be “transformed.” The dictionary defines transformed – “to change somebody or something completely.” The world system puts forth lots of methods and practices that claim to bring genuine life change and real transformation. One Hollywood star said that her facelift had transformed her life. The advertising world would have us believe that toothpaste, mouthwash, or driving a certain type of car will transform your life. Some mental health professionals say that lasting change, transformation, comes only through long term therapy by a trained professional. When we look carefully, all that the world has to offer for true transformation makes only surface changes at best. The reason that none of the world’s methods can deliver when it comes to transformation is the outward behavior or thinking is not the real problem.

The Bible describes the root problem in Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” Someone described it this way: “The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart.” The heart, as it is used here, refers to the core of the person, who we are at the very center of our being. Behavior modification and certain counseling techniques may change outward behavior, but only God can change the heart. Only God can give a new heart. In Ezekiel 36:26: God says, “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

History gives us many examples of men and women that have been transformed through conversion to Christ. At conversion, a spiritually dead person becomes a new creation in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” Perhaps the greatest example of drastic change brought about by conversion is when Saul of Tarsus was converted and then became the apostle Paul. Warren Wiersbe says that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus is the greatest event after the day of Pentecost in church history. I really don’t think that is an overstatement.

### **Introduction (v 1-2)**

It seems that Saul, an ambitious young Pharisee, was the leader in seeking to wipe out this new movement of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see Saul/Paul’s own description of what he did in Acts 26:9-11:

So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

One Bible scholar has speculated that Saul’s logic for the hatred in his heart would have sounded something like this:

Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Do you expect me to believe that a crucified nobody is the promised Messiah? According to our law, anybody who is hung on a tree is cursed [Deuteronomy 21:23]. Would God take a cursed false prophet and make Him the Messiah? No! His followers are preaching that Jesus is both alive and doing miracles through them. But their power comes from Satan, not God. This is

a dangerous sect, and I intend to eliminate it before it destroys our historic Jewish faith.

[Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, page 438]

Saul of Tarsus was a man on a mission and nothing could stop him, that is nothing until He met the resurrected Christ he hated so much.

It seems likely that Saul was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin – the ruling body of the Jews. They wielded great authority not only among the Jews in Jerusalem, but also with the pockets of Jews in cities where they had been scattered. One such city was Damascus. Saul heard that there was a sizable number of disciples of Christ in the thirty or so synagogues in Damascus, and they were proclaiming to the synagogue members that Jesus was the Messiah that they had been waiting for and He is alive. As soon as Saul got permission and authorization from the Sanhedrin, he headed out on the 200-mile journey to Damascus to kill or imprison the disciples there.

I love John Phillip's description of what was about to happen:

His giant intellect, his fierce emotions fired to white-hot passion, and his iron will all fused together in a determined hatred of Jesus. No man could have reasoned with him in such a mood – no man on earth, that is. But there was a man with nail prints on His hands about to stand astride Paul's path and bring about a miracle greater than raising Lazarus from the dead.

[John Phillips, *Exploring Acts, Volume One*, page 175]

## **I. The Manner of Saul's Conversion (v 3-9)**

The fact that there were already a good number of believers in Damascus is evidence of how quickly the church had spread. At this point in time, the believers would have all been of Jewish background and would have still affiliated with a synagogue. We find Saul and the men with him charging ahead to get to Damascus quickly to carry out their murderous intentions.

### **A. Contact (v 3)**

There are two other times in Acts when Paul shares what happened that day on the road to Damascus. Piecing all three accounts together, we see that this all took place about noon. He tells us in another place that the light was brighter than the noon-day sun. While the men with Paul only saw the light, he saw the glorified Savior, a fact he alluded to often. We don't know if Paul ever had an encounter with Christ before He was crucified, but he got to see the resurrected, glorified Christ. One of the requirements to be an apostle was that the person had seen the resurrected Christ.

Notice that it was God who took the initiative in this contact on the road to Damascus. Saul was dead in trespasses and sin; his mind was blinded, and his soul was darkened and his ears could not hear until God did a work in him. While we should not minimize man's responsibility, salvation is initiated by God.

### **B. Conviction (v 4, 5b)**

At one moment Saul was riding high in the saddle. In his prideful state, he saw himself as "large and in charge." Suddenly, he is prostrate on the ground. When Jesus speaks, Saul knows that it is Him. Jesus makes it clear that when someone persecutes His people, they are in reality persecuting Him. Suddenly Paul's spiritual eyes are opened; his ears that were deaf to the voice of God, now hear the Savior speak. Now he realizes that it was all true. Think about all of the truths that started flooding into Paul's mind now that his spiritual eyes are open. Jesus is alive! Suddenly he saw himself in a whole new light and it wasn't good. Instead of being a self-righteous law keeper, he saw that he was a lost sinner separated from God. Paul thought he had been serving God, but now he sees that he had been persecuting the very Messiah that he had looked for.

### **C. Conversion (v 5)**

I am convinced that Saul's conversion took place right there on the road to Damascus. I base that conclusion on one word – "Lord." The word means master, owner, possessor, or one with absolute authority. Later when the Roman government began persecuting Christians, they tried to get Christians to bow before a statute of Caesar and offer a pinch of incense and confess "Caesar is Lord." The Christians refused and instead responded "Jesus is Lord." This confession resulted in a large number of Christians dying. I am convinced that when Saul confessed Jesus as Lord, he was saved. He would later write in Romans 10:9: "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Suddenly with eyes that could now see, he saw that all of his efforts at righteousness were like filthy rags (Isa 64:6). As he looked back on this time in his life he wrote in Philippians 3:6-8:

as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.

Laying on the road to Damascus, everything changed. The one described as "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" would take the Gospel to the Gentiles. The persecutor of the church would now become the preacher of the Gospel to the lost. The one who was prideful of his own merit would become the proclaimer of grace.

### **D. Consecration (v 6-9)**

From the account of this same incident in Acts 22:10 we see further evidence of Saul's conversion. Acts 22:10a: "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?'" Some thirty years later Saul/Paul described this event in Philippians 3:12b: "I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." The New Testament knows nothing of the view that says one can receive Christ as Savior and, as an option, may later choose to surrender to Him as Lord. You don't receive Jesus as anything. You receive Jesus, and He is Lord! At salvation, Saul's question was "What shall I do, Lord?" He saw his salvation as the Lord Jesus laying hold of him. That word in Philippians 3:12 translated "laid hold" means "to overtake and to seize." Paul never saw his life as his own anymore. He said in 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20: "... you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

Paul experienced complete humiliation in his conversion. He had planned to go into Damascus like a gripping north wind causing fear in the heart of every Christian, but instead he was led by the hand – blind and unable to get along without the help of others. In Damascus, he spent three days fasting and no doubt praying to get to know this one that he had persecuted. Saul's whole world had been turned upside down. He needed this time with the Lord to re-orient his life. He had to now learn to see the whole Old Testament that he had studied all of his life in a totally new way; he needed to see it as all being about Jesus.

## **II. The Measure of Saul's Conversion (v 10-31)**

What were the immediate evidences that Saul displayed after coming to Christ? While the circumstances may differ, I believe that these evidences follow all true conversions to Christ.

### **A. Prayer (v 10-12)**

At this point in the narrative, a previously unknown character comes into the picture. His name is Ananias. It is interesting that his name means, "the Lord is gracious." Ananias was available and God used him in Saul's life in a tremendous way. When verse 11 tells us that Saul was praying, it was probably the first time in his life that he had truly prayed. Prayer for the Pharisees was a ritual of just

reciting memorized prayers. Now, Saul is actually talking to God! Saved people pray! This simple statement that Saul is praying is evidence of his salvation. Prayer to a child of God is like breathing. For a person in Christ, to not pray is like holding your breath. Ray Steadman has a good word on this truth. “This is the first mark of a Christian; he begins to pray. He recognizes that God rules, and there is a relationship between man and God, and so he begins to pray.” [Ray Steadman, Sermon: *Beloved Enemy*, page 5]

Ananias is evidence that God can use any available saint. When I think of Ananias, I am reminded of a simple Christian who was mightily used of God named Edward Kimball. On April 21, 1855 he led one of the young men in his Sunday School class to Christ. Little did he realize that that young man would turn out to be the greatest evangelist of his time – Dwight L. Moody. You never know how God is going to use that child or that young adult, that you share the Gospel with, to bring glory to Himself.

### **B. Purpose (v 13-16)**

When the Lord tells Ananias who he is to go see, he is taken aback. He expresses his concern in verses 13-14. In effect Ananias is saying, “Lord, do you know what you are asking?” The Lord’s answer seems to satisfy Ananias. The Lord says in verse 16 that He has a purpose for Saul. For those who are saved and surrendered to the lordship of Christ, God has sovereignly determined His purpose for us. God had called Saul to a special purpose. God’s purpose for Saul was first to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, and second he would suffer for the Lord’s sake. When we read the book of Acts, and the Pauline Epistles (the books of the New Testament that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write), we see that God fulfilled the first part of that purpose. He truly was God’s chosen instrument before the Gentiles. But what about his suffering? Listen to Paul’s testimony toward the end of his life in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28:

Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches.

I think the part about suffering was fulfilled!

### **C. Power (v 17)**

Paul had already received the Holy Spirit at the time of his salvation. This was the norm after Pentecost. Paul had already seen the Spirit convicting him of sin and convincing him that Jesus is Lord. Paul had experienced the Spirit converting him and calling him to witness to the Gentiles and to suffer. Now God is showing him the power to do all that he has been given him to do – the power of the Holy Spirit when He fills (controls) our life.

### **D. Placement (v 18-19)**

In verses 18-19 we see Saul placed in the church with other believers. The fish scale like material covering his eyes is removed. Paul is then baptized and placed into the fellowship of believers at Damascus. He is having fellowship with, and being taught by, the very people he came to imprison and perhaps even to kill. His enemies became his friends. Those he once loathed, now he loved. One sure evidence of genuine salvation is to desire to be in fellowship with other believers. 1 John 3:14: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”

### **E. Proclamation (v 20-22)**

We saw in the last message that after salvation there is a desire in our heart to tell others. Saul/Paul begins to proclaim the truth to others. The shock this must have caused in Damascus among believing and unbelieving Jews must have been beyond words. The topic of conversation in Damascus was likely, "Saul is now seeking to bring people to Jesus – the same Jesus he hated." The man who was trying to stomp out Christianity was now trying to convert the lost to Christ.

### **F. Perseverance (v 23-30)**

Paul is now getting ready to discover what it is to become the hunted instead the hunter. To save Paul's life from plots to kill him, his disciples end up lowering him down the wall of Damascus in a giant basket. Perhaps Paul's toughest trial however came when he got back to Jerusalem and sought fellowship with the Christians there. The problem is that they were afraid of Him and thought it was just a ploy to root out believers and kill them.

One of the ways that Saul/Paul was able to survive and thrive in the Lord was through Barnabas, the encourager. We read about it in verses 27-28. Here is the bottom line. One of the marks of a person who has truly been converted is perseverance.

### **Conclusion (v 31)**

I want to learn so much from the life of Saul, but I also what to be available and bold in my witness like Ananias. I want to be like Barnabas who takes a new believer under his wing to encourage and mentor. With Saul no longer spearheading the persecution, the church enjoyed peace, there was a heightened fear of the Lord, they were being built up, growing in the Lord and growing in number. Oh the power of God to rescue the church by saving their major enemy and making him a part of the church.

I want to encourage you to pray for big things. Who is it that you have a burden for their salvation? Does it seem impossible that they would be saved? They may seem so cold and so far away from God. Pray! If God could save Saul of Tarsus, He can save anyone. In my prayer journal, I have a list of people that I am praying will be saved. Humanly speaking it seems impossible, but with God, all things are possible. I also want to pray that God will bring about the conditions of Acts 9:31. I want to see this church enjoy peace, be built up in the Lord, and going out of here to their assigned place in the world to minister with the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. When we do that, the church will increase in every good thing.