

Saul's Conversion, Part II

Main Text: Acts 9:1-8

Introduction:

Last time, we had begun to consider the setting within which, Saul was converted. And we found him, not going toward Christ (in any respect), but rather, breathing out threats and murder toward the church, and preparing to head all the way up to Damascus, so as to bind men and women in chains, who were of "the Way," in order that he might bring them back to Jerusalem, to be imprisoned. Having gotten letters from the high priest, he was on his way to the synagogues of Damascus, hoping to flush out the light of the Gospel, which, following the great persecution that had started in Jerusalem, has begun to spread throughout all of Judea and Samaria.

This morning, we find Saul, stopped, right on the road to Damascus, by a glorious vision of Christ, who arrests him, only to set him apart for His own service, in spreading the Gospel throughout the Gentile world; the ends of the earth! Saul leaves Jerusalem, an insolent persecutor of the church, and when he returns, he will be a most zealous Apostle, subject to the same kinds of persecutions (and worse), which he himself had once orchestrated.

I. Saul's Conversion

"As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven" (vs. 3).

I tried to imagine something like one of those large "Grand Opening" light beams, which shoot up into the sky, at the introduction of the opening of a large business somewhere. And people from far away see the beam, and travel to the location, to see what is going on. Only, in this case, the beam, much brighter, shines down from the sky and beams right at Saul, upon him and surrounding him. It is so powerful and blinding, that it overpowers his senses; his eye lids immediately shut, so as to protect his eyeballs from harm, and he immediately falls to the ground, face down.

"Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" (vs. 4)

Perhaps his immediate thoughts are, "How does this majestic voice address *me* in such a personal way, as if to know me well? And how am I persecuting Him? I am zealous for God, at this very moment, seeking to contend with those who are opposed to His Law. What can this mean? Could everything I have lived for, up till now, be a lie? Who is this that speaks, and whom I have offended in some way?"

"And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' (vs. 5a) Bowed down before him, by the compulsion of the bright light that has struck him, he asks who it is that is speaking, and not without attributing great honor and respect, in the asking of this question: "Who are You, *LORD*?" And at that moment, at least in the immediate sense, he hears the words that he would most *not* want to hear:

"Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads'" (vs. 5).

Here, we find that wonderful and comforting truth, affirming how deeply Christ, the Head, resonates with His Body, the church! When she hurst, He feels it, as it were. And though He is sovereign over her, and over all things; and though He ordains her sufferings for her sanctification and good, and for His glory, He sympathizes with her sufferings, to the point that He can state, with all sincerity, that to offend or harm her, is to offend and harm Him. A direct assault on the church, is a direct assault on Christ! What a comfort to know then, brethren, that we are never alone or out of sight, with respect to our Head. We are the very apple of His eye, and all who harm us, harm Him. And what, "we do for the least of these, His brethren," we do for Him. "Peter, do you love Me?" "Yes Lord, You know I do!" "Feed my lambs/sheep!" Do you love Christ? Love His church! You cannot love Christ, without loving His church! Our expression of our love to Him, is to be manifested in our love for His church! James, the brother of our Lord, might say it this way: "Show me your love for Christ apart from loving Christ's church, and I will show you my love for Christ, by my love for Christ's church!" In the persecuting and imprisoning of the Lord's sheep, Saul was persecuting Christ, Himself!

And furthermore, we are told here, that it was hard for Saul to "kick against the goads." [This may not be in the original here, but it is certainly a part of the later reiteration of his testimony, in Acts 26]. And what does this tell us? When an animal is goaded or jabbed at with a sharp stick (of sorts), by its owner, it is to compel it to move in a particular direction. But sometimes, the animal would stubbornly stand its ground, and refuse to cooperate/move, leading

to stronger disciplinary measures, having to be taken. Well, apparently, the Holy Spirit had been pressing Saul with the reality of the Gospel, and smiting his conscience a bit, concerning the persecutions that he was leading and with which he was involved. God was tugging at Saul before this, but he stubbornly clung to his own self-righteousness and dug his heals in, refusing to give heed to the Spirit. And he continued to contend with Christ and His church. But there was some struggling going on within Saul, up to this point. And now, stronger measures would be taken, to lay hold of his heart, which belonged to Christ.

And brethren, see here, that the Holy Spirit's role in convicting the world, is not limited to Christians or even to those who will most certainly be saved. He does convict even the non-elect, adding to their condemnation, when they resist him. We saw this earlier, with Stephen's opponents, who were stiff-necked and resisted the Spirit's conviction, by shutting their ears and drowning Stephen's witness out, with shouting and screaming, before stoning him to death. As we seek to proclaim the Gospel, know that the Spirit is always with us. And though we don't see the results that we desire, we ought not to presume that God has left us to ourselves. The aroma of Christ, coming out of us, is a beautiful smell of life to those being saved, but it is an aroma of death to those who are not.

And how then does Saul respond to this most frightening reality; that he was paralyzed by the glory of the very One, he has been opposing all along? "So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' (vs. 6a).

"I have no defense. I am broken and helplessly condemned by my actions. And I am here before you, at Your mercy, King Jesus. What would You have me do, at this point? I am ready to do whatever You say, Lord."

Is it not amazing that there are many in our day, who have supposedly embraced Christ by faith, and yet, fail to exercise this type of subservient humility before Him? Let us see here, that one who claims to know Christ in truth, ought to with Saul, cast their whole selves at His feet, asking the question, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" When Christ arrests the soul, everything else in the world that once arrested you, loses its luster and value. He is that Pearl of Great Price, which leads the sinner to sell all else (every other hope and dream), in order to obtain It! The vision has changed; the ideals have changed; the goals have changed...it is the experience of a new birth! And yet, so many, having nothing more than a mere profession, know nothing of this. For them, Christ was just another benefit on the road, to be picked up and

carried, as fire insurance, as they move forward, happily on their usual path...perhaps, with a little more morality.

"Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (vs. 6b).

Saul is on a "need to know basis," and the Lord would have him ponder things a bit, before giving him further instruction. While we might hope that the Lord would lay everything out before us; while we might hope that He would provide us with a full colored map of the journey in front of us, He calls us to walk, daily, by faith. He calls us to walk one step at a time, obeying whatever immediate instructions He has given us. And in doing this, He not only exercises His right as GOD, but furthermore, He stretches our faith, as we are called to wait upon Him, trusting in His faithfulness. Saul's faith would be stretched, right from the outset. He would have to wait, blinded, without food or drink, for three days, before getting further instruction from the Lord. And he would have to trust that, although he was in no position to warrant any blessing from the Lord, whatsoever; that although he had just been plucked out of the fires of hell (and that, at his worst), that God would yet be faithful, according to some large measure of grace, found deep within His own being. Saul must wait, and think, and wait...and pray! One can hardly imagine the inner workings of Saul's mind, for the next three days. But we can assume that there was much sorrow, much regret, much repentance, and much pleading for grace and forgiveness, while he was praying.

"And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one" (vs. 7). The men with Saul, seeing the light, at first, fell to the ground with him, and they heard the voice (spoken in Hebrew), but did not understand it (Acts 26). What happened to these men following this event, we are not told.

"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" (vs. 8).

The glory of Christ ("brighter than the sun"--Acts 26) literally blinded Saul, so much so, that the men, who were with him, had to take hold of his hand, and lead him into Damascus, where Saul would remain blind for three days.

Certainly, that blindness pictured well, Saul's unconverted state, and the position within which he remained as a self-righteous Pharisee. And it continues to represent all who are unconverted, and outside of Jesus Christ! And the glory that blinded Saul, reminds us of the

purity and holiness of Christ, who is not only a loving Savior, but also God Himself, in the Person of the Son! We ought not to take sin to be a light matter, when we consider this reality. Let us be warned against the loose, "God loves everyone regardless of their sin," Jesus, whom many proclaim today. The Lamb is holy! He is gracious, but He is also holy! [See Revelation 1:12-18]

AMEN!!!