

Acts 9:1-19 ACTS-[22]-SAUL'S CONVERSION

PRELIMS. The Church is growing in Jerusalem and there has been a revival under Philip's ministry in Samaria. Philip has been called away to minister to one individual, the Ethiopian Eunuch. He goes on his way rejoicing, while Philip goes on a preaching tour up the coast to Caesarea! There have been disappointments – Simon the Sorcerer, and opposition from the Jews including this young man called Saul!

The phrase “*breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples*” reminds me of a **dragon breathing out fire** from his nostrils! That is the image I get when I read these verses! Paul was truly filled with **venom** against Xns and he did his best to apprehend them all!

Saul was a Pharisee and the degree of hatred and determination to wipe out Xnity is seen in the **unusual** step of going to the “*high priest*” asking “*for letters*” because the high priest was always a Sadducee! The Sadds and Phars actually did not get on well – the NT **appears** to unite them but that was **only** because of their mutual/joint **hatred** of Jesus Christ!

Saul had made a name for himself! The very **mention** of his name and **fear** came over the Xns! I remember being in the company of Xns at a Conference and someone mentioned that 'So & So' was present! The 'fear' that came over some of them – and yet this man was of the same denomination! Here, those who “*belonged to the Way*” no doubt were filled with fear when they heard that Saul was in the vicinity!

“*Meanwhile*” ie as Philip was “*preaching the gospel*” up the coast [8:40] Saul was doing his thing! **APP** Two **opposite** things can be happening at the same time! **Evil** and **good can** be going on at the **same time**. I remember reading about evil times and that at the apex of the evil, someone great was born who would deliver people from that evil.

The conversion of Saul is perhaps the most well-known of Xn events. He was so evil it was thought **impossible** to convert him – thus we have the grace of God coming into play. It was as difficult for Xns to believe in Saul's conversion as for us to believe that Osama bin Laden was converted! Would **you trust** him if he announced he wanted to worship with **us** next week at Den's Road? So **suddenly converted?**

That brings up the issue – **why** did Luke tell us about Paul's conversion (3 times in Acts)? Was it because this is the **normal** way to be converted

– or because it is **not** the normal way? I heard a recording saying that the Puritans named **10 steps** in conversion – various stages and depths of conviction of sin and unworthiness, and then seeking the Lord from wrong motives! All for a very **good reason** - to ensure that there was a **genuine** and **real** interest in Christ – **not superficial!** All to **avoid** the **Simon the Sorcerer** type of profession! Modern evangelicalism would do well to take note of some of their concerns!

Well, commentators say that Paul here has **14 steps!!** So, have the characteristics here to be followed in order to have a genuine conversion? Emphatically 'No!' We do **not** have to see a shining light, **nor** hear an audible voice, **nor** be blinded! Fact: God is **sovereign!** There are **no two identical** conversions. Although the features of our faces are all the same, yet all our faces are different! The **means** of bringing us to faith is not important – what is important is that we **are now** believers, **trusting** in Christ! **How** we were converted is **not** important at all!

The **important** thing: has the **seed** of God been planted in us? Apostle John sad that 'no Xn can continue to live a life of sin “*God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God*”[1J 3:9] Peter makes the point that when you are born again something is put into you, viz the seed of God “*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God*”[1 Pet 1:23] It was by the **Word** it happened

The **only/best** way of knowing you are saved, that is **not** by referring to an **experience** (although that is often the case), for there are many who can claim an experience but have proved by their lives that there were not children of God! Paul put it “*They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him*”[Tit 1:16] “*The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him*” [1J2:4] The **proof** of our salvation is in our **response** to the Words of God! Paul certainly **responded** and his **life afterwards** was so evident!

Look: Suddenly a light shone around Paul – he fell and heard a **voice** “*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?*”[4]! He called out “*Who are You, Lord?*” Paul asked 'Who?', yet he knew it was the **Lord!** He probably meant was it God **or** Jesus (although the doctrine of Trinity was a reality, it had **not** yet been formulated in people's understanding. “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*” **APP** So one obvious teaching from

this is that when we **hurt** a child of God, Jesus feels the pain! That should make us cautious how we treat Xns! If we **insult** a Xn, we insult Jesus – and He **does feel** it! Xns are the 'Apple of God's Eye'. They are precious to Him. That is why it is **dangerous** to **miscall** brethren! Malcolm: 'If you refuse to acknowledge other children of God, God will not acknowledge your children!' It is true!

Although this **appears** to be the **first** time X spoke to Paul it was **not** so! X spoke often to Paul before this. **APP** You know, Jesus speaks to us far more often than we think. Even in OT times Jesus was speaking and working in people's hearts! Listen to what Himself says “*Abraham rejoiced to see My day...and was glad*”[J8:56]. And Paul: the Israelites drank from a Rock “*and that Rock was Christ*”[1Cor 10:4] Peter tells us that “*the Spirit of Christ was in them*” ie, the OT prophets! Hebrews tells us “*we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did*”![Heb 4:2] So Christ and the **challenges** of the gospel **confront** more often than we think. Jesus meets with us and challenges us in our daily lives!

Paul tells us about himself. When he addressed King Agrippa he informs us that Jesus said “*It is hard for you to kick against the goads*”[26:14] **APP** You see, Jesus is the **Truth** “*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*”[J14:6] so when we are confronted with the Truth, we are really confronted with Jesus! All truth is God's truth. Although we might not realise it, it's Jesus we are resisting! Paul often did this! And so have we?

Here again we have an example of the **same event** bringing **different** responses “*The men travelling with Saul...heard the sound but did not see anyone*”[7]! For Saul, this event was the most important event of his life – it changed everything for him! For those right beside him – it meant absolutely **nothing**! Just like sermons! What's the reason?

This: conversion is **God's work**! Look at how Paul himself describes it “*But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace was pleased to reveal His Son in me...*”[Gal 2:15] **God** revealed Jesus to Paul! It was **not** Paul's idea that he should be converted, that Damascus Road should happen! It was God's doing entirely! **Pure grace**!

Paul was **blind** for 3 days and fasted![9] He was **compelled** to be **humble**! Sometimes God does that. He puts us in a very humble position so that we cannot boast! Paul is so concerned that we would grasp the nature of salvation – it is a gift we are given “*so that no one can boast*”!

Once again we have God working at **both ends**! God told Paul to “*go into the city and you will be told what to do*” and then God telling Ananias “*Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul for he is praying*”[11]! **APP** Notice the cue to identifying a new believer – he is **praying**! Prayer is the **breath** of the living soul! When God breathed into man it was then he became a living soul! No such thing as a prayerless Xn! Constantly breathing prayers!

A **natural fear** came on Ananias at hearing about Saul! “*I have heard many reports...and all the arm he has done to Your saints...and he has come here with authority to arrest all who call on Your name*”[15]! However, the Lord was able to assure Ananias about Saul.

“*This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel*”[15] Here again we see how God has planned the future – read in Revelation – the gospel is to become dominant multitudes too large to number, even with computers, will praise the Lord from every nation and culture! God is not sitting up in heaven wondering what is going to happen if Iran or Korea use their nuclear weapons or what Osama bin Laden is going to do next! God has His “*chosen instruments*” to overcome **all** the evil in the world!

Then God says a strange thing. He wants to **encourage** Saul and **prepare** him for **service**! But look at how He does it! “*I will show him how much he is to suffer for My name*”[16]! **APP** If you were going to appoint someone to an important office/position, would tell him the **worst** things about the job? Well, God's ways are not our ways. While I love optimism one of my pet **hates** is 'over-optimism'! I dislike Xns assuring people that they will have no problems once they become Xns!

Ananias did a **lovely** thing! He went to the house “*Placing his hands on Saul... Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you... has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit*”[17]! In our culture – a good hearty handshake! Saul must have '**felt at home**' when he heard “*Brother Saul*”! It must have been music in his ears – for he had been blind for 3 days and he must have been **deep** in **thought**! And **repentance**! To have a Xns **accept** me so **soon** as a brother in Christ! (Of course God had revealed it to Ananias!) Nothing for it now but to become an **official** believer in the **Church**—he “*was baptised*”[18]

He made use of **means-** Church and **food** so *“regained his strength”*[19]