

Acts 9:1-19

“Saul’s Salvation”

Ch 9 of the book of Acts gives to us the account of that head on collision of Christ with Saul of Tarsus which resulted in Saul’s salvation. Saul 1st surfaced for us back in ch 7 when at the time of Stephen’s stoning he was found guarding the people’s coats that were stoning him as he was consenting to his death. and We read that at that time a great persecution arose against the church that was at Jerusalem of which Saul was the spearhead. We’re told that Saul made havoc, or laid waste the church going from house to house entering in and dragging off both men and women committing them to prison.

Now the result of the persecution was to scatter the disciples like seed, they just dispersed everywhere fleeing for their lives, but the net affect of that was that wherever they went they carried the gospel with them. Which only compounded the problem for Saul, because now the message of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ was spreading everywhere.

We saw in ch 8 a couple of different incidents of just that, Philip being one of those who fled went down to the city of Samaria where revival broke out and multitudes were coming to Christ. Then God told him to go down south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, and you recall that he encountered the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading out of the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before is shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” the eunuch says to Philip, “Who is this man speaking about, himself or another?” and We’re told that Philip opened his mouth and beginning at that Scripture he preached Jesus to him, the Lamb of God slain for the sin of the world. and By the time Philip was finished that Ethiopian had given his heart to Christ, was baptized and went on his way rejoicing.

You see the gospel was beginning to go out to the Gentiles, which brings us back to Saul, who is better known as Paul who would become the foremost apostle to the Gentiles. The timing is right, and he’s about to have an encounter with Christ that will change his life forever, and such is the case with all of us, its impossible that you should have an up close and personal encounter with Christ and not be changed. If Stephen’s stoning marks the profound pivoting point of church history, Saul’s salvation is no doubt the single most significant aspect of it. and Saul’s salvation is dawning just on the horizon, but as for now, he’s just livid, the gospel is going forth, and he’s going after it, its as if he considers it his personal mission to uproot, stop, and stomp out this Jesus type movement. (Vs 1-9)

Vs1-2

We spoke a # of weeks ago of how Stephen’s death seemed to only set Saul off like a shark that gets it’s 1st taste of blood sending it into a feeding frenzy. I mean this guy refused to stop, Stephen had been martyred, he was dragging off men and women left and right out of there very homes, having them imprisoned and put to death, the church had been scattered, and was but a remnant at best in Jerusalem now having gone underground, but here we find him *still breathing threats and murder* against the disciples of the Lord.

Though your KJV says that he was “breathing out” actually the word translated means, “breathing in” meaning that destroying the church became his life breath, he lived to eliminate the church from the face of the earth. Its as though in his mind, it had become the reason for his existence, and he pursued the destruction of the disciples with a passion.

You really weren’t going to find someone who was more against Jesus than Saul of Tarsus. Now there’s a couple of different applications that we can draw from this, #1 We realize that Saul being a Pharisee was a very sincere religious individual, he considered the Law of Moses and Temple paramount in one’s service and approach to God.

But the disciples would say that Christ is the end of the Law for all who believe, that the law was never meant to show us how to be outwardly righteous, but to show us how inwardly unrighteous we are and how desperately we’re in need of someone who could save us from our inward depravity of heart. That the Law serves like a tutor that leads us to Christ, and once we’ve received Christ, He becomes our righteousness in the sight of God by faith. They would say that God doesn’t dwell in temple’s made by the hands of man, but that the temple of the Holy Spirit is the heart of man, and that God wants to take up residence in your heart and in your life, He wants to know you and be known by you.

Now to a guy like Saul statements like that were blasphemous, coming against Moses and temple, he couldn’t see how that Christ wasn’t the abolishment of the Law, but he fulfillment, all he’d ever known of a relationship with God revolved around the Temple. Now blasphemy was punishable by death, so to him, he’s doing God a service in eradicating the world of these blasphemers, so he pursues it with all that he has in him as an act of his service to God! He was radically sincere in his devotion and service to God, but he was spiritually blind. You’ve heard it before, he was very sincere, but unfortunately sincerity doesn’t save anyone and you can be sincerely wrong, that was Saul.

How many people believe that as long as they’re sincere in what they believe, that God will honor that more or less indicating that sincerity will save them. Sincerity will not save you, nor will sincerity justify you. If you sincerely thought the speed limit was 55 mph when in reality it was 35 mph, the fact remains you broke the law and it doesn’t matter how sincere you are. and Regardless of how sympathetic the officer may be to your position, the penalty of a broken law remains in tact.

You see; if sincerity was enough to save a person, than why would Jesus be so foolish as to remove Himself from Heaven, the Omniscient having to learn His abc’s taking on flesh and blood, only to have Himself beaten beyond recognition, filleted open to the bone around His torso by the cat of 9 tails tearing into Him 39 times, His beard ripped out of His face, a crown of thorns beat down on to His head, and nailed to a cross that He might know the most excruciating form of capital punishment ever devised of man as He suffered and died having the sin of the world placed upon Him, separating Him for a moment in time from His Father? Wouldn’t that be foolish if all you had to do to be saved was be sincere in what you believed?

But as Jesus was contemplating the cross, that time of separation from His Father, He said, *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”* Matt 26:39 What happened? Did the cup pass from Him? No, do you think the Father was saying to Himself, “Well, there is this one option, sincerity, but You’ve come this far may as well finish it now!” No, there is no other way for man to be saved outside of the finished work of the cross of Jesus Christ The shedding of His blood for the remission of your sin, Him being made sin for you that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. and As Peter said, *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* Acts 4:12 So the 1st thing we see here is that sincerity won’t save you, there was none more sincere in his desire to be pleasing to God than Saul of Tarsus, but he wasn’t saved.

2^{ndly} I would have you take heart in the fact that there is no one so adamantly opposed to Jesus Christ but that God can’t confront them, convict them, and convert them. Because I don’t think you would do very well in your quest to find people who are as adamantly opposed to the person of Jesus Christ as Saul of Tarsus was, there are a lot of people who don’t want to hear it, and may even grow hostile against it. But they’re not adamantly and vehemently seeking to stamp out Christianity from the face of the earth, but that’s what Saul was doing. Yet in a single moment in time God confronted him, convicted him, and converted him.

I point that out because it could be that you have a friend or a family member who seems so adamantly opposed to Jesus and all that He stands for. and You just wonder with in yourself if there’s really any hope for them, there’s hope for them. You just continue to pray for them, demonstrate the love of God to them, God can do the work, often times its those who are convicted the most who lash out the most vehemently. You’ve heard the phrase something to the extent that if you throw a stone into a pack of dogs the one that yelps the loudest is the one that got hit. Their dealing with the pain and the weight of what was tossed their direction and they’ll often react in a negative kind of way. That’s what happened with Saul to the nth degree, he heard the message through Stephen, and it goaded him, it stuck him right in the heart. But it went against everything he’d ever known, so he responded like a cornered wild dog, he just went on the attack. But the *word* of God was working *in* him, the *Spirit* of God was working *on* Him, and now the *Son* of God is about to *save* him and he never saw it coming, he wasn’t looking for Jesus, but Jesus was looking for him.

All he’s looking for is those who were of, “The Way” that is the way of Jesus Christ that’s what people who were in the church were called before they were called Christians, “Those who were of The Way.” and I like that, I think it’s a cool label, because Jesus is the way, He’s the door that opens the way into the sheepfold, He’s the Good Shepherd who leads His sheep in the way that they should go. In the volume of the book it is written of Him, it points us even in the foreshadowings to the way of which He’s the fulfillment. He is the way to forgiveness, the way to righteousness, the way to rest for our souls; He’s the way that the deep/dry recesses of our hearts are able to drink to the full the living waters of everlasting, age abiding life.

Jesus Himself said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* John 14:6 Now that kind of takes us back to the sincerity issue, you can be as sincere as you like but if you aren’t coming to the Father through Jesus Christ than you aren’t coming at all. and John tells us that this is condemnation, that light has come into the world but men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Which is to say that to reject the way that God has provided (in Jesus Christ who is the light of the world) is to invite condemnation upon yourself. So I guess the question that confronts you is where do you stand in relationship to Jesus Christ? Having received Him as the Way, or rejected Him as the Way, Saul was seeking to eliminate, eradicate, and erase those who were of the Way from the face of the earth.

Vs3-6

Now in Acts ch 26 Paul, recounting his conversion sites that this happened at mid-day, or right around noon. So even though the sun is shining bright, this light that engulfs, or envelops him is overwhelmingly brighter than the sun, and notice it happens suddenly. It’s like a flash of lightning, it just happens so fast, the light hits him and he hits the ground, absolutely terrified. We read in the book of Ps, *“O LORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.”* Ps 104:1-2 The bible tells us that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. Saul, overwhelmed by the shekinah glory of God (who’s getting up close and personal with him) is just laid out. Brought low in the sight of God, and he hears a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?” Saul says, “Who are You, Lord?” (Very important question by the way, you might want to underline that one.) Then he hears, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” He probably never swallowed harder in all of his life; can you imagine the dismay and fear that must’ve been coursing through him upon hearing those words? How could you not think that you were a dead man, after all the vehement animosity with which you sought to destroy everything Jesus stood for?

But notice a couple of things here, #1 We just read that it’s God who clothes Himself with light as with a garment, that God is light and in Him there’s no darkness at all. Yet here the owner of this voice identifies Himself as Jesus, do we have a contradiction? Not at all, simply more proof text that Jesus *is* God.

But then also #2 I want you to see how closely Jesus identifies Himself with His church. Did Saul ever lay a hand on Jesus physically? No, yet in vs 4 Jesus didn’t say, “Why are you persecuting *My church*?” He said, *“Why are you persecuting Me?”* Isa 63:9 *“In all their affliction He was afflicted,”* Zech 2:8 *“For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.’”* Leave the book of Acts, turning quickly to Matt 25 (Vs31-46)

Remember when Jesus was praying, *“I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one”* John 17:23 and Herein lies a mystery, the body of Christ being one with Christ, it’s no wonder that Paul would later write, *“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.”* Eph 5:28-30 To the Corinthians he wrote, *“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”* 1 Cor 12:12 and He goes on there in Cor to describe the unity in diversity of the body of Christ. He understood the spiritual union that knit Christ together as the Head, with His body the church. Jesus made that real clear right here, in Saul’s persecution of the Lord’s people, he persecuted the Lord.

Now there are 2 quick sub-points to consider under that main point, when people speak out or act out against you for His name’s sake, they’re in reality speaking out against the Lord. and Great will be your reward, God told Samuel, *“It’s not you the people are rejecting Samuel, its Me.”* Jesus said, *“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”* John 15:19 and Jesus said in Matt 5 that great will be your reward when you are persecuted and reviled and suffer all manner of evil falsely for His name’s sake.

But the next thing isn’t quite as encouraging to consider, and that is when you or I speak in a manner that’s untrue, or unjustified, or full of bitterness and resentment, when we speak in rude and/or ugly ways about our bros and sisters, guess what? We’re speaking that way of the Lord, and you begin to understand why the scriptures say things like, *“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”* Eph 4:29-32 and Again, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”* Col 3:16-17

The Lord said, *“It’s hard for you to kick against the goads”* to go against the grain of the convictions of your conscience. He knew what the Word said, he heard what Stephen said, and it was just stabbing into him yet, he just couldn’t turn his back on everything he’d learned his whole life. Oxen can be difficult to guide, but their very profitable when harnessed and heading in the right direction. and When they’re in a non-submissive mood they can get feisty, and should they kick in rebellion they’d find for themselves the goads, or these pricks that they were kicking against, but in reality they were only going to hurt themselves. That’s what’s happening here with Saul, *“You’re kicking and fighting and going against the grain of what your heart tells you is right but in reality you’re only hurting yourself.”* and Anytime we resist God’s direction and desire for our lives we’re just doing damage to ourselves, how much better to let Him lead?

Now quickly notice these 2 questions Saul asks, they both need to be underlined in your bible. “Who are You, Lord?” and “What would You have me to do?” Saul was confronted, then he was convicted, and now he’s converted. and He spent the rest of his life in pursuit of the answer of these 2 questions, Who are You, Lord? He told the Philippians *“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”* Phil 3:7-11 How important it is to know Jesus, to pursue His heart, personally and intimately. But Saul/Paul also understood that there was a reason that Christ apprehended his life, and he was passionate about pursuing that for which Christ pursued him. He continued on there in Phil, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”* Phil 3:12 Why has Jesus laid hold of your life? He has a plan and a purpose for you, what would He have you to do, and are you doing it?

The 1st thing Jesus told him to do was simply to go on into the city and there he would receive further instructions. We discussed this in Ch 8, we want to know everything at once, but God’s way is more to give us one step at a time, and when we’ve been obedient to that one step, then He will give us the next one. God didn’t tell him yet what exactly he was to do with his life, just go into the city, and you’ll be briefed there.

Vs7-9

He’d been spiritually blind for all these yrs, now he’s spending a little bit of time in the dark literally. and I can’t even imagine what must’ve been going through his mind, scriptures that were beginning to make sense, the guilt of going against the heart of God all this time, the damage he had done, the grace by which he’d been saved apart from the law, all these things, now what? Here he is, in the dark, Jon Courson makes a comment here, “What happened to Saul is a perfect picture of what happens in photography: Film, coated with light-sensitive salts and chemicals, is kept in darkness. When the shutter opens, light pours in, and whatever is seen in the light at that second is printed on the film. Then it’s quickly returned to darkness, lest it be overexposed. Finally, it is taken into a darkroom, where it is placed in a chemical solution and fully developed. When Saul was persecuting Christians, he was in spiritual darkness. Suddenly, on the road to Damascus, the shutter release was pushed, and he saw the Light. Then he was returned to darkness through physical blindness in order for the image of Jesus alone to be permanently imprinted upon his heart and developed within his life.”

Vs10-19

A few things here quickly, #1 Notice that Ananias isn't anyone special, he's not a preacher, or an apostle, elder or evangelist, just a disciple, and after this event he drops from the record entirely. God loves to use ordinary people in extra-ordinary ways. Can you imagine having fruit like the apostle Paul's in some way attributed to your account? You just never know who it is that God is using you to influence, it was April 21st 1855 that a man by the name Edward Kimball led one of his Sunday school students to Christ, the name of the boy, Dwight L. Moody. In England in 1879, he awakened evangelistic zeal in the heart of a pastor of a small church Fredrick B. Meyer, F. B. Meyer, preaching to an American college campus, brought a student named J. Wilbur Chapman to Christ. Chapman, engaged in YMCA work, employed a former baseball player, Billy Sunday, to do evangelistic work. Billy Sunday held a revival in Charlotte, N.C. A group of local men were so enthusiastic afterward that they planned another evangelistic campaign, bringing Mordecai Hamm to town to preach. During Hamm's revival, a young man named Billy Graham heard the gospel and yielded his life to Christ.

Now, who's heard of Edward Kimball? Don't think that because you're simply an average ordinary Christian that God can't do amazing things through your life.

I thought that it was an interesting observation that having lived his life all crooked, that now that he's saved Saul can be found in a house on the street called "Straight." and God calls Ananias to go and minister to him for, "Behold, he is praying." Saul had never prayed before, he'd recited prayers, but never prayed, and God says, "Now he's seeking after me, desiring to commune with Me and seeking direction from Me." It's almost as though the acid test of his salvation is found in his supplication, behold, he prays. How's your prayer life, if you have no desire to be in communion with God, seeking after the heart of God, you have cause for concern regarding your relationship with God.

Ananias offers up an excuse to God as to why it might not be so wise for him to go, but God doesn't generally accept our excuses does He? Moses could tell you all about that, God doesn't accept excuses; He eliminates them. He said, "Go for he is a chosen vessel of Mine." Jesus said, "You didn't choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit." and Of course this brushes us up against the doctrine of election, but as I said Wednesday evening, election is always others oriented. Why was Paul chosen? For the sake of others; to bear the name of Jesus before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Why did God apprehend your life? Because He wants to use your life to reach others, that you might bear the name of Jesus Christ to before your friends, your family members, your classmates, and co-workers.

We'll stop here for now and perhaps comment just a bit more on this portion of the text next time. But let me encourage you to inquire of the Lord in a manner that reflects Saul's salvation, "Who are You, Lord? Reveal to me your heart, personally and intimately, that I might know You more." and "What do you want me to do? God why have you apprehended me specifically, I know that You want to use me generally, but how can I be of service specifically." It's a brave question really, but ask God to purpose in your heart to be ready and willing to comply in obedience when He reveals *to* you what He desires *of* you.

Prayer points: God we want to know You, and be obedient to You, teach us who You are, and show us what You desire us to do and give us a compliant, and obedient heart. That we would learn what it means to be a people of prayer and be sensitive to our bro's and sisters knowing that whatever we do or say even to the least of us, we do, or say to You. Help us to speak those things that are necessary for the building up and edifying of the body.

Perhaps you won't experience a dramatic Damascus road conversion, but perhaps Jesus has flashed before your eyes and your heart today in a way that you've never really beheld Him before. He wants His image to be permanently imprinted upon your heart. Jesus went to the cross to lay down His life for you because there's no other way by which we could be saved. Jesus is the way the truth and the life, and no one will come to the Father but by Him, so if He's knocking on the door of your heart today, why don't you let Him in?