



TEEN TREE OF LIFE

The Conversion of Saul Part 2

September 26, 2021

Before you begin, ask yourself a very important question: Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on The Cross for all of your sins? If you answered yes, you will need to be sure that you are filled with The Holy Spirit. How do you do this? You name your sins to God The Father in His Son's Name. This is called Rebound. As a Christian, you must rebound any time you sin. This is taught in 1 JOH 1:9: *If we confess [name] our sins [directly to God], He [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Now, if you have never believed that Jesus Christ died on The Cross for all of your sins, all you have to do is say to yourself that you believe in Him and you are saved! The Bible verse which teaches us this is ACTS 16:31: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."*

We closed last week's study with Saul's encounter with The Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus which appears in **ACTS 9:3-7 (New International Reader's Version)**: *On his journey, Saul approached Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground. He heard a voice speak to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you opposing me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus," he replied. "I am the one you are opposing. Now get up and go into the city. There you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there. They weren't able to speak. They had heard the sound. But they didn't see anyone.*

The effect of this event on Saul was life-changing and immediate. He would refer to it in his future ministry as the point at which he changed from a persecutor of the disciples of Jesus Christ into His most passionate and accomplished follower.

ACTS 9:8-9 (New International Reader's Version) tells us what happened next: *Saul got up from the ground. He opened his eyes, but he couldn't see. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind. He didn't eat or drink anything.* Can you imagine all the things that were going on in Saul's mind as he picked himself up off of the ground and realized he couldn't see? Instead of boldly coming into Damascus as someone who came there to triumph over the Christians he despised, he now had to be led by the hand.

At the same time, Our Lord was giving instructions to another believer who lived in Damascus whose name was Ananias. **The Lord called out to him in a vision. "Ananias!" he said. "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. Ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying. In a vision Saul has seen a man come and place his hands on him. That man's name is Ananias. In the vision, Ananias placed his hands on Saul so he could see again."** (ACTS 9:10-12 New International Reader's Version)

It's interesting when you consider the fact that Ananias was not an apostle – nor is there any indication that he was anything more than just a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. His instructions were very precise, telling Ananias to go to the street named Straight – which is still a major street in modern Damascus – and ask at the house of Judas for a certain man clearly identified as Saul of Tarsus. Ananias' mission was to lay his hand on Saul so that he would regain his sight. The only other information given to him was that Saul was praying. You can imagine the faith Ananias would need to follow The Lord's Instructions! Ananias was familiar with Saul of Tarsus as we learn in **(ACTS 9:13-14 New International Reader's Version): "Lord," Ananias answered, "I've heard many reports about this man. They say he has done great harm to your holy people in Jerusalem. Now he has come here to arrest all those who worship you. The chief priests have given him authority to do this."** Undoubtedly, those who had fled Jerusalem not only spread the word about having faith in Jesus Christ, but also about Saul of Tarsus and his persecution of Our Lord's disciples. Apparently, Ananias had heard all of this, including the news of Saul's mission in Damascus. He hadn't known about what had happened to Saul on the trip to Damascus; so as far as he knew, Saul was still a grave threat.

As the Scripture tells us, Ananias is told that Saul was praying but it probably didn't give Ananias much comfort. The Pharisees were always praying in public. He would have no idea that, at that point, Saul's prayers had changed into a sincere conversation with God – not just a religious show. Any of us would have been hesitant to follow through with The Lord's instructions – but remember – The Lord Jesus Christ is All-Knowing and because of this, He told Ananias what he needed to be motivated into action: **"Don't argue. Go! I have picked him as my personal representative to non-Jews and kings and Jews. And now I'm about to show him what he's in for—the hard suffering that goes with this job."** (ACTS 9:15-16 The Message Bible)

So now, Ananias was convinced that Saul would not be a threat because either he already was or would soon become a disciple of Jesus Christ. After all, God had chosen Saul to bear the name of Jesus Christ. The Lord even revealed the specifics about the particular ministry that Saul would have. He would be the instrument of choice that God would use to take The Gospel to the gentiles, as well as to the kings and the Jews. In the process, Saul would suffer a great deal in Christ, Jesus' name. The persecutor would become one of the persecuted.

What happens next indicates that Ananias got over his hesitancy: **So Ananias went and found the house, placed his hands on blind Saul, and said, "Brother Saul, the Master sent me, the same Jesus you saw on your way here. He sent me so you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."** No sooner were the words out of his mouth

than something like scales fell from Saul's eyes—he could see again! He got to his feet, was baptized, and sat down with them to a hearty meal. (ACTS 9:17-19 The Message Bible)

Later on in **The Book of Acts**, Paul reveals what Ananias said to him right after he gained his sight: **"The God of our ancestors has handpicked you to be briefed on his plan of action. You've actually seen the Righteous Innocent and heard him speak. You are to be a key witness to everyone you meet of what you've seen and heard. So what are you waiting for? Get up and get yourself baptized, scrubbed clean of those sins and personally acquainted with God."** (ACTS 22:14-16 The Message Bible)

Now, Saul had been contemplating and praying for three days about the sinful things he had done and Who had confronted him on the road to Damascus, and once The Holy Spirit came upon him, Saul was a radically changed man who would become the apostle, Paul. He immediately did just as Ananias had said. Even though he had not had anything to eat or drink for those three days, the first thing Saul did, after receiving back his sight, was to be baptized.

It's important to note again that Ananias was not an apostle, nor is there any indication that he was even a church leader – yet he is the one chosen to explain The Gospel to Saul. He is the one that is told to lay hands on Saul by which The Holy Spirit came upon him, enabling Him to regain his sight. This is another important reminder that the ministry of the church belongs to the people of the church. The church has structure and is to have leaders that meet certain qualifications, but ministry is not reserved just to the leaders. It belongs to all followers of Jesus Christ.

Paul would eventually become known as the apostle to the Gentiles. He was instrumental in spreading The Gospel of Jesus Christ far and wide. He addressed, and fixed the problems which arose as the early Church grew and became established. Paul worked tirelessly to extend Christianity beyond the Jewish world.

Paul's conversion was dramatic. He not only stopped persecuting Christians, but he changed his whole life to reflect the teachings of Jesus Christ, making a career out of sharing those teachings with as many people as he could. Paul found grace, love, and mercy so deep, that it reached even him – the famed persecutor of Christians.

Paul's conversion resulted in a significant and sincere change of heart. It also resulted in a significant change of direction in Paul's life. When Paul received the Grace of God, he was forgiven and became a new man.

All Christians are called to conversion. We are called to a change of heart. We are called to recognize our own sins. We can be forgiven and become new again. This is not a one-time event. It is on-going throughout our lives. We must work constantly to change our hearts to be more open to God, so that we can align ourselves to Him. Nothing can separate us from God's love! And no matter what we've done of of His Plan, we can get back in by merely acknowledging our sins to Him in His Son's Name.

{to be continued}