

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 9 – Part 1****SHOWDOWN****Acts 9:1-8**

The most well-known salvation experience in all of the New Testament is that of Saul of Tarsus, the murderous menace of Christians who later became the model minister of Jesus Christ. Had a list been made of those least likely to humble themselves before the Lord Jesus, without question, Saul's name would have been at the top.

But God took hold of Saul's life and turned him around full circle and the persecutor became a preacher of the gospel, the greatest missionary of all time, and the most prolific writer in the Bible. This classic conversion of Saul of Tarsus took place at high noon. He tells us in Acts chapters 22 and 26, that it was right at midday when his life-changing experience took place.

As we review his salvation experience we may learn some new things about the crisis of conversion that parallels our own experience. As we consider the result of the showdown at high noon when Saul was confronted by Jesus himself, let us to do so by thinking about the vocation that he had, the visitation that he received and the veneration that he gave.

I. THE VOCATION THAT HE HAD. Acts 9:1-2

"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

The church today looks at Saul, later known as Paul, as one of the greatest of all saints. We read his letters and heed his advice. But prior to his conversion, he was one of the most notorious persons around. However, that does not mean that he was ignorant. He was a scholar, he was brilliant, and he was also a zealot who despise the very name of Jesus and did all he could to put to death all who followed Jesus Christ.

We first met Saul in Acts chapter 7 as he held the coats of those who stoned saintly Stephen. Saul was a murderer! The stoning of Stephen was merely the beginning of the great persecution against the church and Saul was right in the middle of it, in fact he could be said to have been one of the major leaders in the persecution of Christians as Acts 8:3 indicates: *"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."*

To summarize, Saul, as a devout and zealous Jew, was vehemently opposed to this very new movement led by Jesus Christ. Therefore, he relentlessly persecuted and laid waste the church, disregarding the sanctity and the privacy of homes and having no regard for distinction of sex. Ruthless cruelty marked his career as a persecutor of the church as he

dashed forward, fiercely determined to pursue and persecute the church where ever it might take root and this is how we find Saul the day he met Jesus Christ as he journeyed toward Damascus.

You may be saying, "Well, I wasn't that bad a sinner before I was saved." That may have been true, as far as outward actions were concerned, but every sinner at heart is a rebel against God. *"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled...."* (Colossians 1:21) All are sinners by birth, nature, choice and practice. *"There is none righteous, no, not one."* (Rom.3:10) One has to be a sinner to qualify as a candidate for God's grace salvation. Saul received God's salvation, have you?

II. THE VISITATION THAT HE RECEIVED. Acts 9:3-6

While Saul was tracking down the followers of the Lord Jesus, the Lord was tracking him down and waiting for just the right moment to confront him and that moment came at high noon. Notice the word *"suddenly"* in verse 3.

That is the way it often happens -- God does things suddenly. Recall the visitation you received from the Lord that led to your salvation. Perhaps you were listening to a sermon when suddenly you were smitten with conviction; or you were listening to a song that pierced your conscience; or perhaps you were reading the Bible or a Scripture portion and the Holy Spirit spoke to you very forcefully.

I remember a young man in our community, where I was pastor of a church, who was cutting a Christmas tree in the forest when he suddenly became aware of his need to receive the Christ of Christmas as his Savior and he did so right there. While pastor of another church in another community I received a telephone call at two o'clock on a Monday morning. A gentleman who had been in the Sunday services at church had heard something that disturbed him. He could not sleep and had gone out to burn trash in a barrel – at 2:00 in the morning! He saw the flames of the fire leaping up and suddenly he realized that he needed his sins forgiven or he would spend eternity in hell where the fire never ceases to burn. He phoned me to tell me of his decision. Suddenly, unexpectedly, God confronts us as He did Saul.

As Saul with a band of soldiers journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus, which was a seven to eight day journey on foot, he was suddenly enveloped in a heavenly light and beheld a glorious figure surrounded by blinding radiance. What did Saul do? Acts 9:4 tells us that *"he fell to the earth."* Saul beheld the vision glorious and heard the voice grand!

"Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." (Acts 9:4–5)

The sight and the sound caused Saul and the soldiers with him to fall to the ground, shaken and quivering with awe and wonder. Saul, crouching upon the ground, shuttered at the majesty and magnitude of the voice that said, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* There was authority and judgment in that voice. With trembling voice, Saul replied, *"Who are*

you, Lord?" The answer came which he would never forget: *"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."*

Up to this point Saul thought he was persecuting Christians, but now he was made aware that he was actually persecuting Jesus Christ instead! What a surprise that must have been. These Christians were right after all -- Jesus was alive! Saul learned that day that Christ and Christ's people are one. He realized that day the truth of Matthew 25:40 *"Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me."*

Every shackle that he had fastened upon the wrists and ankles of the Christians, he had fastened upon Jesus Christ! Every flogging that he had given a Christian, he had given Jesus! Every time he had jailed a Christian, he had jailed Jesus! Every stone that was thrown at Stephen was thrown at Jesus Christ! Is it any wonder that Saul later declared, *"I am less than the least of Saints"* and *"the chief of sinners"*?

Have you been guilty of injuring a brother or sister Christian by acts of unkindness, by wounding words? Saul repented of his mistreatment of Christians and consequently, of injuring Jesus as well. Have you?

III. THE VENERATION THAT HE GAVE.

"He fell to the earth...." (v.4) And he said, *"Lord."* (v.5)

Falling to the ground, the once proud and unyielding Saul now hears himself spoken to by the One he had sought to resist, but when face to face with deity there is no argument. The antagonism is gone. All of the hatred and vengeance in his zealous heart melted. This fiery inquisitor had met the force irresistible and yield he must! Therefore, prostrate and overwhelmed, he surrendered and trembling with astonishment said, *"Lord, what do you want me to do?"*

He had bowed and acknowledged Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord -- something all must do eventually. Later he wrote in his letter to the Philippian church: *"At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow of things in heaven, of things in earth and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father."* (Phil. 2:11)

There is no doubt that from this moment onward, Saul was a changed man. No longer was he a religious policemen incarcerating Christians; he was a redeemed preacher enlisting and encouraging Christians.

Illustration: Lord Lyttleton was a British lawyer who was convinced that Saul had faked his conversion. He said that Saul had acted out his salvation experience in order to call attention to himself and ensnare Christians.

Lyttleton believed that if he could discredit Saul's conversion the remainder of the New Testament would be worthless. Therefore, he made an exhaustive study of Saul's life in order to accomplish his objective. The results of his research are given in his book, *"Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul."*

He came to the conclusion: "The conversion and apostleship of Paul alone, duly considered, is of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." Lord Lyttleton himself accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior as a result of his investigation. Because God so radically changed the course of a man's life, as he did Paul's, no one can afford to ignore his testimony.

SUMMATION

This was the showdown at high noon near Damascus between Saul and the Savior. But what does that traumatic encounter centuries ago really mean to us today? Several things can be said about it:

1. Religion will never meet the need of our souls. Saul was a very religious man, but he was misguided, bitter and very much in need of a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. God's love is persistent love. It does not give up, but constantly pursues us. The last thing Saul ever wanted was to know Christ in a personal way, but in one brief meeting all of that suddenly changed. People today still flee from Him, and though He may not blind us with a dazzling personal appearance, He still pursues relentlessly.
3. Jesus Christ is the only one Who can give true meaning and fulfillment to life. Saul had it all -- prestige, power, acceptance, status - but later he said, "*I count it all but dung.*" (Phil2:8) and, "*For me to live is Christ.*" (Phil. 1:21)

Life begins when we meet the Lord Jesus Christ and humbly surrender to him. Saul really began to live the day he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. It was on the highway to Damascus that he discovered the highway to heaven!

No two salvation experiences are exactly alike, but all who surrendered to the Savior experience the same blessed result: forgiveness of sin, acceptance into God's family and peace that passes all understanding!

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