

*Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## *The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus, Pt 1*

### **Acts 9:1-31**

**Keywords:** Paul, Conversion, Sovereignty of God, Resurrection

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** none

**SermonAudio Blurb:** In Acts 9 we see the power of God to take a heart bent on murder, hatred and anger and convert it to one who loves Jesus Christ and changes a man's whole direction in life and purpose. We see Saul, breathing threats against believers be confronted by the risen Lord and the end result is a man named Paul. We explore who Paul was to appreciate how even in his unbelief God was directing his life in such a way that he would be a key part of the early Church and the spread of the gospel.

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Read Acts 9:1-9.
- B. We come to a major pivot in the book of Acts.
  - 1. Up to now, primarily focused on the early church in Jerusalem. Initially seen as a subset of Judaism. You had the Pharisees, Sadducees, the Zealots and the Essences. Those who followed Jesus were at first seen as just another group.
  - 2. In chapters 4-7 we saw that patience quickly wore out regarding these people because of the message centered fully on Jesus.
  - 3. All of this creates great tension. Many are coming to believe in Jesus as the Christ. Power structures are threatened and the typical reaction takes place
- C. There was a single verse in chapter 7 where we read that those who were doing the stoning of Stephen laid their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul.
  - 1. And in that moment of murder so many in the Church began to flee.
  - 2. But more importantly, as this persecution arose, the people fleeing left with the gospel of Jesus Christ on their lips.

*Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

3. So the church was actually being sent out into the broader world through this persecution..
  4. But how? And by whom? And it is here that we see the mind of God working in ways we do not expect. He chose to use one of the greatest enemies against the gospel as His chosen vessel.
- D. So today I want to introduce you to the person of Saul, whom you know as Paul and then make some initial comments on our passage.

## **II. The Person of Paul.**

- A. Paul of “Tarsus.”
1. Acts 21:39.
  2. Although Saul was “brought up” in Jerusalem, he returned to his home city of Tarsus after his conversion (Acts 9:30). Paul was hence well acquainted with pagan “high culture”—an acquaintance that, when sanctified, would thrust him, not Simon Peter, forward as the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13). Roman citizenship and life in a university city, after all, did have its privileges. This background would aid him enormously during his apostolic ministry— particularly in a city like Athens.
  3. Uniting both Eastern and Western cultural and intellectual life, the institutions of Tarsus were uniquely suited to mold Paul’s mind.
  4. Cicero, the famous statesmen, philosopher and scholar was governor of Tarsus in the mid-fifties BC. It was here that Mark Antony met Cleopatra in 41 BC.
  5. We know that he was a tentmaker.
  6. Although being a citizen of Tarsus was helpful and good, there was another citizenship that Paul enjoyed throughout his life to which we will now consider.
- B. Paul a “Citizen of Rome.”
1. Acts 16:37.



*Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- d. Hillel's position ultimately became the preeminent view within Judaism. But during the time of Paul there was still a lot of controversy and a lot of public and private debate.
  - e. For Paul, many of the Hillelites were Jews who had compromised the Torah, what we would call the Old Testament. They were the "liberals" of our day.
5. These two positions affected how the various Israelites or Jews would live in their world and view that world.
6. 'Zeal' for the Shammaites would mean much the same as Jihad for the militant, fundamentalist Muslim.
7. In Acts 22:3 Paul says that he had been educated under Gamaliel, so there was certainly the influence of the Hillelite position in his life. But as we consider the other information that I have spoken of it appears that though Paul respected Gamaliel he would have rejected aspects of the man's teaching in relationship to a Jew should relate with Gentiles and the strictness of the Law.
- (1) But the promises still remained and built into them was the key promise that one day God, Yahweh, would reign on earth.
  - (2) A key passage that would be typical of this is Isaiah 52.
  - (3) And for the Shammaite, this was not something that they were to wait for passively.
8. This was the zeal of Paul, when he was still named Saul. This was a man who sought to magnify God's Name and even defend the honor of that Name. And this zealousness for God did not end at his conversion.

### **III. The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus.**

- A. Here we now begin to see Paul, the "Christian."
1. Remember Romans 10:2, his burden for his fellow Israelites who have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.
  2. Note, they were zealous.

*Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

3. And this is who Paul was in Acts 9. He is burning with rage against these followers of Jesus Christ and he is going to put an end to it all. But it was all based off of wrong information.
- B. Acts 9:1-9.
1. We see the depth of this zealotry in the first verse. We see him getting letters of approval from the high priest so that the various synagogues would not prevent him from doing his work.
  
  2. Note the words of Christ (4, 5b).
  
  3. Note the words of Paul (5).
    - a. For Saul, there was a massive theological shift that occurred then. For he saw that the “new age” of the reign of God had truly already come. That Jesus Christ was the king.
    - b. He realized then that the true enemies of Israel—sin, death, and Satan were defeated foes.
  4. The first thing Jesus does is command him (6).
    - a. The Lordship of Jesus immediately expresses itself in calling to you to follow, love and obey.
    - b. These are not how you are saved. You are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But that faith will always show itself in a willingness to obey the commands of your new Lord.
  5. Note then that not everyone was saved on that day (7).
  
  6. Note the initial cost of being confronted and converted (8-9).

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## **IV. Conclusion.**

- A. And so we leave our passage with those thoughts. A proud, religious man utterly destroyed by a single vision of the glory of God.
- B. A man plucked out of a life of rebellion and converted to become a useful instrument in the hands of his Creator.
- C. We have here the kindness and the severity of God and we must learn to be content with both. May each of us walk in a manner that reflects humility before our God and a love for His Church.

## **Benediction**

**Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever.  
Amen.**