

"A Converted Life" | Rev Josh Keller | July 18, 2021

Old Testament Reading [Isa 55:6-9](#)

55 ⁶ "Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near;
⁷ let the wicked forsake His way, and the unrighteous man His thoughts; let Him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on Him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.
⁸ For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD.
⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Reading From the Acts of the Apostles

[Acts 9:1-6, 9-19](#)

9 ¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And He said, "**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.** ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

⁹ ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "**Ananias.**" And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "**Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.**" ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to Your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "**Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name.**" ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened.

Gospel Reading [Matt 18:1-4](#)

18 ¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" ² And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "**Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.**"

Introduction

The Book of Acts is about God's conversion of the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ; Chapter 9 covers Saul's conversion. To answer what conversion is, we'll focus on three things: (1) The Way, (2) Saul and (3) Ananias.

Background

1. The Way.

- Early Christians were people who belonged to the Way; not just of beliefs but of a story and a way of life and rituals. This is important because our world is not neutral, it is a world of ways. We are already on our way. Is it the right way?
- A fanatical Pharisee, Saul is on a religious way; a Jew of Jews. He was going to Damascus to do "God's work," to end this Jesus heresy. This was Saul's way.

2. Saul

- Saul, praying for God to say that his way has earned His Glory, instead is confronted by Jesus asking him "**why are you persecuting Me?**"
- Saul's way was going in precisely the opposite direction of God and he didn't realize it. He was going in the wrong direction; that's where his way was taking him.
- For Saul, conversion to Christ meant that everything about him needed to change. He needed a new way of life, he needed to learn a new story, new rituals.
- Saul needed to become like a little child, desperately dependent on Someone else to save him. He enters the Kingdom weak, blind.
- Saul and his story have to die; his "death" lasts three days, like the number of days Jesus spent in the tomb in His death before His resurrection.

3. Ananias

- Ananias is already on the Way, while also being more fully converted into Christ.
- Ananias had already known the Way and knew that conversion into Christ is not a one-time event; it's a constant giving over of ourselves and dependence on Christ.
- Ananias became the living embodiment of Christ's presence, forgiveness and acceptance when he laid his hands on Saul, healing him to renewed sight and telling him that he now belongs to a new Way through the Holy Spirit.

Discuss

- Josh said the Way was not just beliefs but a story, way of life and rituals. Discuss.
- As modern-day, "practicing" Christians, can we be assured we belong to the Way?
- What would you say are the essential elements of Christian conversion?
- Do you think Christian conversion is best facilitated by someone? Who? Like Ananias?
- How would you say Ananias was being "more fully" converted into Christ?
- Is converting into Jesus the same as or similar to sanctification?
- Can true Christian conversions result from "tragic blessings?" (e.g., death of a child)
- How is Saul's conversion similar/different from the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion?

Conclusion/Application

- Are you converting into Jesus? Does His character leak out of you when you are under pressure? Is His story and His Grace what gives you strength?
- In All Saints, we live the story of conversion in our words: what we say to each other, what we say to Jesus in our hearts. Then we go out converted more and more into Jesus, into His Way so that until our stories are the stories of a good God who takes enemies and sinners and makes them into His friends. Until Jesus comes out of you in every situation, until His goals are your goals, His life your life. Until you can say with gratitude and joy, thank God, Jesus is changing me. This is the Way, the Way that leads to eternal life, the Way that leads to Jesus. May we so be converted and walk in it.