

# Acts 9:1-19

## Conversions Storyline

### Image Church // Study Through Acts #8

MPT: Jesus calls an enemy to be a chosen instrument for the continuation of His message and ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit to the gentiles, kings and Israelites.

MPS: God's design in Saul's conversion is to give the hope of Salvation to ourselves and to others.

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### Update from last week:

Well good evening Image Church, I hope you have had a great weekend so far! We had an exciting weekend last week as we hosted our *first Preview Service* that started the journey building up to our launch Sunday in January.

Many of you invited people last week who joined us for the very first time, and because of your intentionality, we had a total of 94 people in attendance last week!

- ***Can you put your hands together and celebrate that!!***

And even more exciting, *some of those people that joined us for the very first time last week are back again this week!* Image Church, God is doing some incredible things in and through each one of you. We have said from the begging, "it is not me, it's we" and you lived that out this past weekend!

At the end of the day, we do not want to be a church full of comfortable Christians we want to be an army to be mobilized for the Kingdom! We want to be faithful to live on mission and ask God do even more in and through Image Church!

You have heard me say it before but we are in an exciting season as we build toward our official launch, and these Preview Services like

we had last week, only serve s catalysts for the culture that we want to create at Image Church.

We want to be a church that's actively and intentionally engaging people and inviting them to be part of our community!

- ***Can you join me in praying together as we thank God for what He is doing here at Image Church?***

### Introduction:

***Well, if you have your Bibles go ahead and turn to Acts chapter 9***

We're going to continue our series through the book of Acts as we look to the first church as a model for us to follow together.

What we've seen so far is that it's clear that Christianity is a movement that's continuing to grow and expand, but not because of politics, social standing, power, armies, money, or skill set.

And this movement is gaining a lot of attention because the on looking world is seeing ordinary people coming together and a new community emerging that looks and lives different.

And as this is happening, you have people hesitant, people resentment, and people even intimidated. The thing is, that really not a whole lot different than the way people view Christianity today.

In the early 1990's (back when Jnco's were cool) the ***New York Times*** had a full-page ad for Columbia University [***a prestigious Ivy League School in upper Manhattan***]. The article advertised seven fields of study that a person could get a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies: AMERICAN STUDIES, ANCIENT STUDIES, EAST ASIAN STUDIES, ISLAMIC STUDIES, JEWISH STUDIES, MEDIEVAL STUDIES, AND SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES.

A man named Richard John Neuhaus [*a prominent Christian writer*] saw this ad and wrote an editorial about it, asking, “where is CHRISTIAN STUDIES?”<sup>1</sup>

**He thought through 4 possible reasons for that and then he settled on this one:**

*Nervousness is caused by the awareness that there are an awful lot of people who really believe in Christianity. The university is a cosmopolitan space where "religious traditions" can be subjected to critical examination but are not to be taught as though they might be, well, you know, true. Even in religious studies departments, faculty members who are Hindus, Buddhists, and believers in Mystical Crystals can quite openly profess their faith. Muslims and, usually, Jews can, too. Nobody raises a question about their "proselytizing" [the attempt to convert someone from one religion, belief, or opinion to another]*

*[That's] Not so with Christians. The fear is, that Christianity might be taken altogether too seriously. The absence of Christian Studies in the Columbia program, it turns out, is not an insult to Christianity. Those of the other faiths, however might have reason to be offended.*

The point he's making is that people are intimidated by Christianity not because so many people believe in it, but because the people who do believe in Christianity, believe it has direct implications that are true for everyone... So, the result, Christianity get suppressed.

**Why?** Because Christianity teaches actively and intentionally perusing people with a message that brings conversion...

Christianity's always been a converting religion, not a passive complacent religion that keeps to itself. Tonight, we're going to see that firsthand as we look at the conversion story of a man named Saul.

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<sup>1</sup> This example was found from John Piper: Overflowing Grace for all who believe; The Conversion of the Chief of Sinners. Sermon: 1991

And my hope tonight, is that **Saul's story will give you hope for your story-** that you will see why Christianity is about conversion as we examine some key observations that I believe have direct implications on your life!

**Acts Chapter 9:** *If you don't have a Bible with you tonight, the verses will be on the screen behind me.*

- **Follow along with me as I read:**

### Acts 9:1-19:

**9** Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest **2** and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

I need you to understand the hate in this man. He is breathing out threats... this literally means that he is so convinced and dedicated to his mission against the disciples of the Lord that it's his life's breath.

**3** As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. **4** Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

I want you to notice how Jesus responds to the persecution of His church: He says, **why do you persecute ME!** This is personal for Jesus.

The Church isn't an "it", or a "Building", a "tradition" or an "event."

See, Jesus tells us that the church is His Bride... and in the same way in marriage the 2 become 1, the church is one with Christ. There's no separation between Jesus and His Bride the Church- they are one in the same.<sup>2</sup>

**There's something for us to see in this:**

<sup>2</sup> Thoughts influenced by JD Greear: Sermon; Acts 9:1-19 SENT #12

You can't claim to love Jesus but disassociate with His Bride, the church... You're like "that's not me I'm here today."

Listen, just because you attend a wedding doesn't make you the Bride! In the same way, *just because you attend church doesn't make you part of the church.*

We say here all the time that ***the church isn't an event, it's a group of people.*** If you're not living life with people in the church, if you're not serving with the people of the church, if you're not part of the mission of the church... you have to ask yourself are you *really* part of the church?!?

To love Jesus is to engage with the church- to be committed to His church locally with other believers... Is that True for you?!? Are you ***part*** of the church?? The Bible explicitly points to being engaged in a local church... Some of you need to do that.

Practically here at Image the way that you can do this is by committing to us through membership, engaging with us in serving and by living life with us through Community groups...

*Let's keep reading and see how Saul responds to Jesus:*

**5** "Who are you, Lord?" Saul said. "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting," he replied. **6** "But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." **7** The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one.

When Saul encountered Jesus they people around him noticed. They may not have understood what all ha happened, but they know something was different!

**8** Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. **9** He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

Saul who stood powerful and mighty- was face before God. Saul, who was leading a charge against the Church, was now being led by the hand. Saul who was driven and determined to wreak havoc was now shocked and stunned by what had just happened to the point where he couldn't even eat...

**10** There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." "Here I am, Lord," he replied.

**11** "Get up and go to the street called Straight," the Lord said to him, "to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. **12** In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so that he may regain his sight."

**13** "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

**14** And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

**15** But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. **16** I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

**17** Ananias went and entered the house. He placed his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

**18** At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized

OK let's take a look at 4 key observations that we can see in Saul's story...

## 1. A Religion that's not what you think

Here's the deal, Saul thought he knew God, he thought he knew what God was like and what God wanted...

And he thought there was no way that a man *like Jesus* could be the Messiah... And so, he made it his mission to oppose Jesus and go after anyone who followed Him.

See, Saul was expecting the Messiah to be a powerful King, born in royalty and riding in on a white horse with a sword ready to fight for the people of God. Slaughtering nations and establishing His kingdom.

But Jesus did the opposite, he was born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough, and his dad was a carpenter. Instead of coming in as a king, he said he came in to serve. And instead of riding in on a white horse, He rode in on a donkey. And instead of carrying a sword to conquered the nations, he took the sword and died for the nations.

Jesus was the exact opposite of everything that Saul thought... but listen, that's because Saul was following after a God that *he wanted to exist*<sup>3</sup>... *Instead of following after the God who does exist.*

- Ultimately in Saul's assumptions he had decided what God was and was not... he created a god in his mind that was not the God of the Bible.

But then he's confronted by the God *who is*... and that changes everything for him.

### Apply:

There are some of you here today that have created a god that you want to exist, a god that makes the most sense, one that's convenient for you, a god that caters to what you think God should be like.

- But the problem is, that kind of god can't bring change in your life, it can't bring you value or give you worth.

**Tim Keller says:** *The only God that can overcome your heart has to be one that isn't the product of your heart.*

Listen, what we see in Saul's story is that when you encounter the God *who is*, it changes everything!

- **The question is:** have you encountered Him? Have you taken a step back and looked at the God of the Bible for who He really is and not who you want Him to be??

Because when you do, you'll see a God that's been perusing you since the creation of the world, and in the same way that God came after Saul, you'll see He is coming after you!!

Listen, Christianity is a religion like no other, it's the only religion where God peruses his people, Saul is an example of this. For some of you, you need to know that God is perusing you tonight and you need to surrender to Him!

*Let's look at the second observations from Saul's story.*

## 2. Sin that's worse than you realize

I am sure Saul thought he was a pretty good guy, he grew up in the temple, he followed the rules and laws of the land, and now he's on a mission hunting down people who he and the religious leaders thought were bad, taking a stand for what's right!

And Saul's on a journey to get the "bad guys", all of the sudden he encounters the glory of God, and immediately he's blind... In that moment that Saul felt the weight of his sin... in the presence of the Glory of God.

He's in shock, he doesn't even eat or drink for 3 days, he just sits in total darkness.

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller: *Converted by the Resurrection*

Can you imagine what he was feeling, the weight of all the people he had persecuted, all the people that had died... See, Saul came face to face with his sin, **he understood who he was, in light of who God is, have you??**

Listen, Saul's physical blindness is a picture of people separated from God.

We're blind from who God is because we are so consumed with who we are. Our natural instincts are self-centered- resulting in us going after what we want despite what God says, and the Bible calls that sin.

And that sin separates us from God... you need to feel the weight of that...

- I was leading a Bible study one time and we were in a passage where it listed out a bunch of sins and one of the guys spoke up and was like, that's not me, I am not really that bad...
  - Let me give you an example to help you see how you really look to God: **Drone over Alkida...**

No one would say, "what a great guy" because we see him for who he is and we know that depth of his wickedness... **that's how we look to God!**

God sees us for who we are- He knows your thoughts He sees the actions no one else does, He knows your motives.

**No matter how great or how small you think your sin is, we are all equally separated from God...** no 1 sin separates you further from God than another, and "lesser degree sins" keep you closer in your separation... Separated is separated.

We have to understand the weight and reality of our sin and acknowledge that we've committed it, and recognize where that puts our standing with God...

We stand separated from God because we chose our way over His way...

Now there are some of you that think the solution to this is "being religious" ... you're being blinded by the assumption that if you can follow a set of rules, and do the best you can to live right then God will accept you.

- **Example:** Mission trip to NYC Global gates: Muslims says they have to be good enough like a scale... the good has to outweigh the bad...

Some of you have taken this principal and applied it to your life and you're working as hard as you can to "follow the rules of religion." And so you're trying to check boxes left and right- I go to church, I read my Bible every once and a while...

*"I will just live my life the best I can and leave it up to God."* Here's the thing, **Gods already made his decision, your best efforts are not good enough for Him.** His standard is, and always has been perfection- it has to be or He would not be God!

What you need to know is that regardless of how hard you try, In the same way that Saul was an enemy of God, you and I are enemies of God- that's our standing... And Eph. 2 says the result of our sin is that we're children of wrath... because of our disobedience to God.

And that is exactly how God could have left things and He could have wiped us all out... He could have wiped Saul out... but He didn't!

*Let's look at the 3<sup>rd</sup> observation from Saul's Story:*

### **3. A Savior with more grace that you can comprehend**

The risen Jesus confronted Saul making Himself known. See, it's through Jesus that Saul's relationship with God would be restored. Jesus was the one that would mediate for the sins of Saul.

Not long before this, Jesus was put on a cross for sins that he didn't commit and he was executed. And in that moment God unleashed his wrath on Jesus, but not because of what Jesus had done, but because of what we have done.

Jesus came and met God's standard of perfection and then hangs on a tree in the place of you and me... He took our place, he exchanged himself for us. We deserved death but Jesus offers us life in Him.

#### ***Listen to the rest of Ephesians 2:***

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by **grace** you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his **grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by **grace** you have been saved through faith.

And you know who wrote that?? **Saul did**... and 3 times he pens the word **grace**- See, he realized what Jesus had offered him... it was nothing less than immeasurable unattainable GRACE!

- Have you experienced that Grace? Have you placed your faith in that Grace??

**D. Martyn Lloyd Jones (an old protestant preacher) says:** *The ultimate test of our spirituality is our amazement at the grace of God.*

Are you amazed by the Grace of God in your life?!? You have to understand that we never get beyond this! Saul never did, he went on to write 13 books of the very NT that we are reading!!

We have to be diligent to preach this message to our selves every day. **Martin Luther said:** *"To progress is always to begin always to begin again"*

We have to begin everyday remembering the grace we have been given. Some of you need to remember that Grace you have placed you hope in tonight!

*There is a final thing that we will see from Saul's story:*

#### **4. A mission for you to join**

**Look again at V. 15** "Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites."

Saul, one of the greatest enemies of the church—a murderer, a crusader against the people of God— would be placed before kings as an instrument for the very kingdom he stood against!

Saul would become one of the greatest missionaries to every live- a man that was a murderer is now on mission for Jesus!

Here's what you need to see in Saul's story, your sin doesn't disqualify you from God's grace! You not useless in the future because your sinfulness now...

In the same way that God saved Saul to use him, he can save you and use you regardless of who you were or what you've done!

In fact, that's God's plan! See, the beauty of the gospel is that you're saved **from** something, **to** something! You become part of something- You join with Saul in continuing the ministry and message of Jesus!

**Let me ask you thought, what is it that is making you feel disqualified tonight?**

- Made a really bad mistake in your past? Been in prison? Bad marriage? Don't feel good enough because you keep falling prey to your flesh?



**One pastor says:** *Those things that make you bad are the very things God intends to use as instruments of redemption!*  
*Sometimes the sin you struggle with and the pain you go through make you uniquely qualified to speak redemption to others in the same condition.*<sup>4</sup>

Your life is a display of God's grace that God will use just He did with Saul! **To receive the grace of God it to become part of the mission of God!**

- There is no separation there... it's not optional-

Do you realized that if you have trusted in Christ, you have a mission to be part of?? Saul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14: **The love of God is what compels us!!**

**Is God's love compelling you???** Has your walk with the Lord been stagnant, do you feel distant from God? Are you not motivated to share the gospel???

You need to Remember the love of God that perused you when you didn't deserve it, and bask in the grace that he has offered you!! Let that fuel you to live on mission- don't try to manufacture it on your own!

## Conclusion [VAMP Behind]

Listen tonight we've looked at the story line of what a conversion means, of what a conversion is... we have seen before our eyes a man go from perusing the people of God to harm them, to becoming part of the people of God that would bring harm to him!

What I want you to see is why this account is in the Bible... it's not just a really enlightening sweet story to warm you heart...

I want to reading to you something that Saul would go on to write about his story in **1 Timothy 1:15b-16:**

**"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them. <sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life.**

What I want you to hear is tonight is that Saul's story is for you!!! It is here as an example for you...

For some of you, you have lost the *wonder* of God's grace, and what he has saved you from... and tonight you needed to be reminded of **your** story by looking a **Saul's** story.

- Some of you need to reflect on your salvation tonight because it has lost it's "awe factor" in your life.

There are some of you here that are spiritually stuck- Saul's story is for you to remind you that getting out of this stagnant season doesn't come from anything you can do, it come through reminding yourself of what Christ has done!

For others, you need to know that God can save the person you have been praying for- He is still mighty to save...

Some of you need to be baptized... 3<sup>rd</sup> time we have seen this.

Then there is another group of you here that need to make a decision to follow Jesus for the very first time, because as you step back and look at your life you never see a time where your life was converted, where it changed direction and lordship.

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<sup>4</sup> JD Greear: Sermon; Acts 9:1-19 SENT #12

See the Bible is clear that there is a time when you go from death to life, where you realize who God is and what he has done.

- You say you want a date and time?!... no, but you should be able to point to a season in your life when this happened, otherwise you have to ask the question, has it really happened?

Saul's story is an example to you- it is showing you that there is a time of conversion, and you either have a conversion story or you don't... for some of you tonight is your conversion story.

You need to let go... stop trying to hold on, surrender to Jesus...

### **Invitation:**

Would you bow your heads with me...

Respond to what God is pressing on your heart.