

"Arrested!"

Acts 9:1-9 (ESV)

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." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Slide 1

Tarsus (use map: Apostles' Early Travels (Acts) - Tarsus Location)

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"Religion is the invention of the devil. He convinced creatures who were designed to enjoy love from God and to love God and others that there was something better: CONTROL. Personal desire became central and we were blinded to the fact that our deepest desires would be fully satisfied only in the presence of God's glory, with Him in the center. We became fools and the god of convenience combined with the god of cooperation to produce a most satisfying religion." (Larry Crabb, *Soul Talk*, p. 78)

Slide 4

Religion is humanity's attempt to control God. It is the lie we keep telling ourselves that as long as we work hard to please God, get things reasonably right, life should go reasonably well, but our incentive for pursuing God is not communion with God, but happiness and blessing here and now.

Slide 5

Religion challenges us to pursue our own visions/dreams/plans and when all goes well, we feel pride and call it "gratitude." When our plans don't go well, or we experience the natural results of living in a fallen world, we feel defeated and wonder why God is silent, we feel justified in walking away from faith.

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Damascus - (use map: Apostles' Early Travels (Acts) - Damascus Location)

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Use The Apostle by John Pollock.jpg

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Questions for Small Groups

1. What stood out to you from today's message?
Personal comments/observations

2. What did you learn about Paul's background?
Personal comments/observations

3. When did Saul become Paul?
At the same time he was named Saul! At his naming ceremony when he was eight days old and was circumcised

4. In what ways did Paul's background shape his life and thinking?
He was raised as a Hebrew of Hebrews in a Roman city. His great grandfather (most likely) was given citizenship by Pompey and his family was very well off. He was familiar with Greek and Roman philosophy, mythology, and poetry. At the age of 12 he was sent to Jerusalem to become a disciple of Gamaliel, Israel's most famous and esteemed Rabbi, where he was trained to be a ruler of Israel (as a Pharisee and as a lawyer). Could he have been the rich, young ruler Jesus encountered in Mt 19:16-29//Mk 10:17-30//Lk 18:18-30?

In what ways has your life been shaped?
Personal comments/observations

5. What drove (motivated) Paul? What drives (motivates) you?
Religious zeal - he probably believed he was doing God a favor - may have been looking for the same kind of ataboy Phinehas received in Numbers 25:11-13

6. What is religion?
most basic definition is "the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods" (Google defs) - a more accurate definition is "humanity's attempt to control God" and is driven by the pursuit of happiness/blessing here and now (not necessarily communion with God) - it is believing the lie that as long as we work hard to please God and get things reasonably right, life SHOULD go reasonably well for us"

Do you agree or disagree with the descriptions given, and why?

Personal comments/observations

7. What do you expect from God?

Personal comments/observations

Are those expectations realistic?

Personal comments/observations

8. What elements of Paul's testimony apply to your life?

Personal comments/observations - the record of Paul's experience is descriptive, not prescriptive (Luke tells us what happened, not what should happen to everyone) - conversion stories are as unique as the individual telling it, but certain elements are consistent 1) personal encounter with who Jesus is (not a visitation, but a realization of the truth of the gospel); 2) a response of surrender in repentance and faith; 3) incorporation into a body of believers (foreshadowing to next week's message)