

Series: **The Original**  
Today's Title: **"The New Saul"**

August 22, 2021 – Acts 9:19b-31

---

**Objective:** To encourage us that Christ transforms your life when you come to faith in Him!

---

*Opening prayer*

Last week we talked about Saul's conversion to become a follower of Christ - and how his conversion was against all odds.

This week we will see the dramatic and thorough change that takes place in his life - a transformation that seems sudden - immediate.

**Turn to Acts 9:19-31**

When we see something / someone go through a dramatic change - its impressive.

- An old car restored.
- A house given a complete facelift and transformation.
- A person totally out of shape transforming their body.
- A company in bankruptcy makes a dramatic turnaround to profitability.
- A team goes from last place - to winning the championship.

These kind of dramatic turns - these total transformations - intrigue us and often cause us to take notice and wonder how it happened.

In our passage today we will see Saul's dramatic change - his transformation from the enemy of the Church to the great ally of Christians and as he begins to plant churches in the region.

**Read vs. 19-22**

**Saul's quick transformation and service.** vs. 19-22

Saul stays in Damascus "for some days".

We don't know exactly how long this was, but it was long enough to get busy proclaiming Jesus.

**What is your 'before' and 'after'?**

How are you different today - than before you became a Christian?

Saul's change was dramatic.

It was so dramatic that it confused many people! (vs. 21)

He starts to teach / proclaim "Jesus in the synagogues".

The synagogues were familiar territory.

Saul was a rabbi - a teacher - this is what he did before his conversion. He taught the rules and regulations of Judaism - of the O.T.

Now he is a Christian - Christians accept the O.T. as the inspired and authoritative word of God - so the big change for Saul is he starts teaching about Jesus - using the Scriptures (O.T.) to prove the Jesus is "the Son of God."

**How could he start teaching so quickly?**

He just came to faith days or weeks before...and now he's teaching about Jesus and proclaiming Jesus?

3 important things to note here...

**First**, Saul had heard others (Stephen, Peter, other Apostles?) teach about Jesus - proclaim the truth about Jesus being the Messiah - the Son of God. Saul was not unaware of the beliefs of those who followed Jesus.

Part of debating someone and trying to convince them of your belief is knowing what they believe and trying to point out the problems, inconsistencies or falsehoods of their beliefs.

So, after he saw the resurrected Christ and was converted, he already had the arguments in his head. He didn't need to start at 'square one'.

**Second**, Paul had a deep and vast knowledge of the Scriptures (O.T.) and the history of Israel. He had spent his life studying and learning these topics.

**Third**, He was already a teacher. He knew how to study and organize his thoughts and how to communicate those ideas and truths.

He was a gifted communicator before his conversion - and he was a gifted communicator after his conversion.

The biggest difference is now he is filled with the Holy Spirit - and his subject is Jesus and the very truth of God which gels perfectly with the entire scope of his studies of the Scriptures in his pre-conversion life.

**Now it all makes sense...**it all fits together - how the temporary nature of the forgiveness received in the sacrificial system of Judaism points to Jesus - the greater sacrifice which offers eternal forgiveness.

**Now it makes sense...**that the Law points out our sins - it's not capable nor designed to get rid of our sins - we look to Jesus for that.

**Now it makes sense...**the mission of God through the ages to redeem the nations to Himself - which is why God will send him to the Gentile world with the Gospel.

**Now it makes sense...**that Abraham and everyone after him are not saved by works but by faith - “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Rom. 4:3)

Saul's conversion and transformation catch many of the Christians by surprise. Those who heard him were “amazed”. *‘Is this the same guy who was putting followers of Jesus in prison?’*

**vs. 22** - “Saul increased all the more in strength” - not a reference to him hitting the gym.

He's not lifting weights - the reference here to the increase in strength is regarding his evangelistic abilities and his ability to debate with those who didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah.

He is quickly becoming a stronger witness for Jesus.

The Jews in Damascus who likely requested Saul come up and get rid of all these Jesus followers - are now “confounded” by the man they thought would help them.

**The hunter becomes the hunted.** vs. 23-25

**Read vs. 23-25**

“When many days had passed” - Luke gives a very vague time reference here.

Last week - I talked about Saul’s entire life framework - his world view - his theological beliefs - his view of Scripture - everything was crushed the moment he saw the risen Jesus.

Everything he was living for - his passion to protect Judaism and get rid of all the followers of Jesus - crushed in an instant.

He did a lot of praying and thinking during the 3 days he waited until Ananias showed up and restored his vision and baptized him.

Then he starts teaching - proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God.

His life-long study prepared him for this - gave him a solid foundation - and he was putting some of the pieces together in his mind.

But there was so much more to know and understand.

So, notice the first reference to time Luke gives in **vs. 19** - “for some days”. Once again - a vague reference from Luke.

And this reference in **vs. 23** - is also vague.

Saul would later fill in some of the details for us.

About 10-15 years later, Saul writes his letter to the Galatians (48-50 A.D.?). In **Galatians 1**, he’s looking back and recounting what happened after his conversion on the way to Damascus - and also his first trip back to Jerusalem after his conversion.

**Galatians 1:15**

“I did not immediately consult with anyone; 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.”

So, Saul - “for some days” (vs. 19) was in Damascus after his conversion - and “immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

Then, at some point he leaves Damascus - probably to gather his thoughts - to study - to put the remaining historical, theological and Scriptural pieces floating around in his head together.

He goes to “Arabia”.

This is not Saudi Arabia - but a kingdom in the 1<sup>st</sup> century called the Nabatean kingdom.

It covered a vast area of land to the east of the Jordan river - and Damascus was in its most northern point.

We don't know where Saul went - but he probably went somewhere for solitude - to pray - to read - to think.

Of course, he probably taught about Jesus during his time in Arabia when he had the opportunity because it seems the king - King Aretas - isn't a big fan of Saul - as we'll see in a minute.

After spending some time in Arabia - he comes back to Damascus.

Once he's back in Damascus - he picks up where he left off - going to the synagogues and proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God.

**Read vs. 23-25 again...**

Later - in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians - he would give some additional details to this episode.

**2 Corinthians 11:32-33**

“At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.”

Picture - Traditional site of the house/window Saul used to escape Damascus.

King Aretas IV was a Nabatean king - whose jurisdiction extended north - up to Damascus. He was Herod Antipas' father-in-law. (1<sup>st</sup> century Soap opera!) Herod is the Roman-appointed ruler (king) of Israel - the land west of the Jordan - so their 2 kingdoms were next to each other.

There was some bad blood between these 2 because Herod had divorced Aretas' daughter to marry Herodias who was formerly the wife of Herod's ½ brother. This is the marriage that John the Baptizer spoke against - and led to John being murdered by Herod (Matt. 14, Mark 6, Luke 3). We know all of these events happened prior to 40 A.D. because Aretas IV's reign ended in 40 A.D.

The governor of Damascus - under pressure from the large Jewish population in Damascus - and possibly following orders from the king - seals the city gates and places guards at various exits to the city.

When they catch him - their plan is to kill him.

25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

Saul escapes Damascus - and makes his way to Jerusalem - a 160-mile walk.

But...when he gets there - he finds more difficulty - from the people he was hoping would help him.



## Read vs. 26

### Saul finds no friends in Jerusalem. vs. 26

It's easy - from 2,000 years away - to find fault in the disciples in Jerusalem for not welcoming Saul into their company.

But it's also easy to understand why they didn't - as Luke tells us: "...they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple."

We are about 3 years after Saul's conversion.

No doubt that word of his conversion made its way back to Jerusalem.

I would be surprised if word of his preaching and confounding those in the Damascus synagogues didn't make it back to the Jerusalem disciples.

**But - even with that knowledge - it wasn't enough to dispel their fears of Saul.**

Remember...some of them might have lost family members - friends - to Saul's zealous persecution.

"He attempted" & "afraid of him" Gr. - imperfect tense – which means repeatedly, over and over again.

We can try and figure out - beyond what Luke tells us - why they wouldn't welcome Saul - but that would be a waste of our time.

Luke tells us what we need to know. They were "afraid".

The important point is that Saul was not welcomed - the disciples in Jerusalem were suspicious of him and his conversion.

**Barnabas helps Saul / The Apostles protect Saul / The Church thrives.** vs. 27-31

**Read vs. 27-31**

Barnabas - the encourager - comes to Saul's rescue.

*This would become a close and productive friendship between these two.*

This was Saul's ticket 'in'.

I'm sure Barnabas would hold this over Saul's head and tease him: *'If it wasn't for me - you would never have met the Apostles!'*

Barnabas seems to be more aware / confident of Saul's conversion account - and his preaching in Damascus - and he brings Saul under his wing - and vouches for him to the Apostles.

Saul would later write:

**Galatians 1:18-19**

**18** "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

**19** But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother."

Saul meets and spends time with Peter and James - and he's with them for 15 days.

Once he was 'in', he does what he does best - proclaim Jesus with boldness.

**vs. 28** - Since Saul was a Hellenist - that's where he goes - to the Hellenist Jews - in their synagogues - just like Stephen did.

**vs. 29** - The same thing happens in Jerusalem that happened in Damascus - "But they were seeking to kill him." That's pretty strong preaching!!! If the people don't repent - they want to kill you!!!

Since the kingdom of God - taking the Gospel to the nations - is a long game - the disciples (Apostles?) convince Saul to leave.

His life is in danger - God has a job for him - to take the Gospel to the Gentiles - and so far, he's getting a lot of the Jews mad - but there's more for him to do.

**vs. 30** - they "brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus."

They don't presume on God.

They don't toss aside wisdom in favor of machoism.

Saul likely takes a ship to Tarsus since Caesarea was a major sea port in its day - as was Tarsus.

The Apostles send Saul to Tarsus for his protection - to avoid the threats to his life.

When he arrives in Tarsus and the surrounding area, he continues to do what he was doing in Damascus - and in Jerusalem: *preach Jesus*.

He keeps teaching about and proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah - the Son of God.

He doesn't stay in Tarsus but moves to the surrounding area - Syria and Cilicia. Tarsus was the chief city of Cilicia.

Map of Cilicia - Syria - Tarsus

**Galatians 1:21-24**

Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. And they glorified God because of me."

**Acts 15:40-41**

"Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

How did those churches get there?

He planted churches in those areas when he left Jerusalem!

Everywhere he went his dramatic transformation from enemy to ally was a cause for joy and glorifying God!

More background from Saul's testimony years later - as he is giving his defense before his fellow Jews in Jerusalem - when he was arrested.

**Acts 22:17-21**

“When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw Him (Jesus) saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’

19 And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in You.

20 And when the blood of Stephen Your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’

21 And He said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

Wild times for Saul - and tremendous volatility for the early / Original Church.

Yet Saul remained faithful - he continued to preach about Jesus.

vs. 31 - The Church remained faithful.

God gave them “peace”. The main persecutor is gone!

They were “being built up” - strengthened.

They were “walking in the fear of the Lord in the comfort of the Holy Spirit”. (notice: “fear” & “comfort”)

Result: The Church “multiplied”.

***Apply it...***

How have you been transformed?

How is your life different - how are you different because of Christ being in you?

Tell others about Jesus - that He is the Son of God.

Tell others about Jesus dying on the cross and being raised from the dead.

Tell others that He loves them - He paid for their sins - tell them to put their faith in Jesus.

Be bold...but not foolish or unnecessarily bold.

Trust God.

Know when to speak - but also when to be quiet and live so your good works will cause them to see God in you.

**1 Peter 2:12**

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

*Close in prayer*