

Unstoppable Kingdom

With Diversity: Gloriously Converted

Acts 9:1-19

One of the most pivotal moments in our study through the book of Acts and the Unstoppable Kingdom is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus who would become the Apostle Paul.

Primary Text: *“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. 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.”” **Acts 9:1-19***

Main Idea: All Conversions are Glorious in the Unstoppable Kingdom

I. Life Before Christ – Acts 9:1-2

Paul stood over Stephen as he was stoned to death, and now Saul was breathing threats & murder against the disciples. He secured a “hunting license” to go 150 miles to Damascus to drag them back to Jerusalem.

*“Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Do you expect me to believe that a crucified nobody is the promised Messiah? According to our Law, anybody who is hung on a tree is cursed. Would God take a cursed false prophet and make him the Messiah? No! His followers are preaching that Jesus is both alive & doing miracles through them. But their power comes from Satan, not God. This is a dangerous sect, & I intend to eliminate it before it destroys our historic Jewish faith!” **Saul of Tarsus (Wiersbe)***

*“The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the leading persecutor of the Christians, was perhaps the greatest event in church history after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.” **Warren Wiersbe***

*“Saul’s experience on the road to Damascus is the most famous conversion in church history.” **John Stott***

*“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.” **Acts 26:9-11 (Paul)***

As a young disciple of Jesus, I struggled with testimonies like Saul’s. I was raised in a very devout Christian home & was saved at 11 years old. There was not too much time to do drugs, join a gang, go to prison, or to even persecute Christians around the world like Saul of Tarsus. I wondered if I had really been saved, because the ‘change’ didn’t seem as apparent in me.

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” **Galatians 5:16, 19-21***

Some think they are too bad for God to save. Not possible. But, some feel that they are too good to need saving...also not possible. Everyone in the world has lived or is currently living their Life before Christ...everyone!!!

II. Coming to Christ – Acts 9:3-9

The appearance of Jesus knocked Paul to the ground, blinding him and rendering him unable to go on without assistance. There’s such a contrast here. The hunter was always the hunted, then in an instant Paul was caught by a bigger, stronger, more ferocious hunter: Jesus had been pursuing him...

*“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” **Psalms 139:7-8***

*“So the proud persecutor, who was going to Damascus as a conqueror to crush the saints of God was, himself, led into the city as a captive, to be forever afterward a slave of Christ.” **Charles Haddon Spurgeon***

Testimonies of coming to Christ are so varied. Some have dreams and visions (in the Islamic world), others just read the Bible, some are very emotional, others are quietly contemplative, some are in a large gathering, others are all alone...don’t get caught up in the methods & miss the message.

*“The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” **Mark 1:15***

While there are many ways that people come to Christ, one thing is true for Saul of Tarsus and Steve of Staten Island: Humility!

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6b

III. **Life with Christ** – Acts 9:10-19

God always provides someone to guide and disciple a new believer. As God was saving Saul, he was also calling Ananias to step into Saul’s life at the right time. Because of Saul’s notorious persecution, Ananias was less than enthusiastic to begin with, but...

“So Ananias departed & entered the house...” Acts 17:a

Ananias is one of the unsung heroes of the early church. Odds are that he had prayed with widows whose husbands had been killed by Saul. Perhaps more than a few children in Damascus had been orphaned by Saul’s violence against the early Christians. No doubt, Ananias had strong feelings. And we would certainly understand if he acted like Jonah and ran far away!

“...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 & be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, & he regained his sight. Then he rose & was baptized; & taking food, he was strengthened.” Acts 9:17b-19

If you are new to following Jesus or considering it right now, I can’t stress this enough...you need your Ananias and Barnabas (we will meet Barnabas next week). You need that person who can step into your life with encouragement, gentle instruction, and wisdom that you just can’t get from books, podcasts, and large church services (all those are fine) alone. You need to have your Ananias and you need to be an Ananias to others!

While our life before Christ will be wildly different, and the particulars on how we come to Christ will be varied...we all will have a commonality about our life with Christ because it is designed to be lived together...

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:16-17

The visual of Stephen’s stoning never left Paul. Instead of dealing with his doubts he plunged himself into the violent work of finding those ‘blaspheming’ members of ‘the way’ in Jerusalem. Yet, he couldn’t break them. Rather than reflecting on the claims of Christ, he became fiercer as he chased them all the way to Damascus. **What we see with Saul’s conversion is not a sudden conversion, but a sudden surrender.** What about you???

Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *Word Pictures in the New Testament* – A.T. Robertson (1933)

- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)
- *The Kingdom Agenda* – Tony Evans (1999)