

All Things New Acts 9

Have you heard of a lady who was coming out of a beauty shop and she saw a lady at the door and she said, “Oh, Mary Jones! Mary, what a joy to see you. Mary, it's been years since I've seen you. Mary, you look different. Why you've slimmed down. You've lost weight. You've fixed your hair different. You've made your face different. Oh, you even look taller than you used to look.” “Well,” she said, “I'm not Mary Jones.” The lady responded, “Oh, you even changed your name!”

The apostle Paul got saved, so saved he changed his name. His early name was Saul, and now he becomes Paul, the greatest missionary, the greatest preacher, the greatest evangelist, I believe the world has ever known. He was changed by the grace of God, and what God wants to do for you what He did for him, if He hasn't already done it. I want to tell you how God can give you a brand new life.

Paul wrote, *“If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creation. Old things are past away, behold all things are become new.”* 2 Corinthians 5:17

Paul wrote, *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”* 1 Timothy 1:15-16

Paul is saying here, “My conversion experience is a pattern for everybody else in the future who will believe.” Isn't it amazing how people always remember the bad things you've done? The world remembers the bad things that we have done. Acts 7-9 tells us the storyline of one of the most dramatic changes in history. That changed how history would remember him, but he changed the course of history on 3 continents.

Nature forms us. Sin deforms us. Schools inform us. Prisons reform us. But only Christ transforms us. In Christ, we become new. A Christian is not just somebody who's become nice, he becomes new. He doesn't just turn over a new leaf. He receives a new life. We are changed radically and dramatically.

Saul was a brilliant, well-trained young Pharisee. He had deep passionate emotions, and he had rigid standards. He had his philosophy of life all worked out. He had a bitter hatred against Christ and the church, and he was persecuting the church.

Acts 7:58 introduces Saul as a young man overseeing the execution of Stephen. This establishes his initial role as a zealous protector of Jewish tradition.

“They dragged Stephen out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Acts 7:58

Saul's "approval" signals his transition from a bystander to an active leader in the campaign against the early church. The brutality of Saul's persecution is shocking. He moves from public execution to systematic house-to-house searches and arrests.

“And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.” Acts 8:1-3

Acts 9 says, *“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”* Acts 9:1-2

The word “still” means that he is acting like an animal in spite of some inner gnawing at his heart. Something is going on inside this man. Something is happening on the inside. There is a sense of doubt. Sometimes the people who are the most antagonistic of the faith are that way because down inside of them they are grappling and trying to deal with some inner doubts. He has an inner conviction that he needs to change.

To get to Damascus, he would have to pass by Calvary, where Jesus was crucified. He had heard the stories. Was he there the day Christ died? He never tells us in his writings that he was. Did he have any lasting memories? He had to pass by the place of the crucifixion to get to Damascus. He was going the wrong way, but he would have to trample over Calvary to do it.

The phrasing "breathing threats and murder" portrays Saul as a man consumed by his mission to eradicate the Christian movement. He had letters from the high priest to arrest Christians, to put them in bondage. Caiaphas was the high priest who had helped put Jesus to death and was High Priest through 36 or 37 AD, so he is most likely the high priest whom Saul went to for permission to persecute the Christians. It was high noon when Paul was on the road to Damascus, and suddenly there is a blazing light.

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” Acts 9:3-5

The defining moment in his life came when he settled what his relationship to Jesus was going to be. He had hated Him. Ignored Him. Resisted Him. Doubted Him. Run from Him. It all changed in that one moment when he believed in Him and received Him.

“It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.” Acts 9:5 was a Greek proverb, but it was also familiar to the Jews and anyone who made a living in agriculture. An ox goad was a stick with a pointed piece of iron on its tip used to prod the oxen when plowing. The farmer would prick the animal to steer it in the right direction. Sometimes the animal would rebel by kicking out at the prick, and this would result in the prick being driven even further into its flesh. In essence, the more an ox rebelled, the more it suffered. What the Lord was saying was, “Why don’t you stop resisting me? Why don’t you stop running? You are hurting yourself and others by resisting me! You are making it so hard on yourself.”

“Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.” If you burn a candle when the sun comes out, the candle looks dim, but the noon day sun was blazing, and it looked dim in the light that shone around the Saul. It was so bright, it blinded him.

- He Saw the Light.

A blinding flash of light knocked him to the ground. God had gotten his attention. God knows how to get our attention!

- He Heard a Voice.

When that voice came from Heaven, Saul knew this was no ordinary voice.

This same voice had spoken the world into existence.

This same voice had called to Adam in the Garden.

This same voice had spoken to Lazarus and raised him from the dead.

This same voice had raised the widow’s son at Nain.

This same voice had caused the soldiers to fall backward in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This same voice had cried out, “It is finished.” as He paid the price of redemption on the cross.

This same voice cries out to us today – “Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I

will give you rest.”

This same voice will someday say to us, “Well done, My good and faithful servant.”

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” Acts 9:7-14

The Lord finds a man named Ananias and says, “I have a job for you to do. I want you to go to the house of Simon and find a man named Saul. I have a message I want you to deliver to him.” Ananias may have said something like this. “Lord, there's another man named Saul. He's the one who is persecuting the Christians. It's interesting they have the same name.” “Not another man, Ananias. It's the same man.” “Well, who's going with me?” “No one, you're going by yourself.” Now every word that he said came from his heart because his heart was in his throat about that time. He said, “Alright, Lord, if You want me to go, I will go and deliver Your message to this man.”

In the episode with Ananias and Saul, we find five marks of being made new.

1. You Have A New Lord

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me.” Acts 9:17

When Saul first met the Lord Jesus he asked the two greatest questions that anybody in this world could ever ask. “*Who are you, Lord?*” and “*Lord, what would you have me to do?*”

The Apostle Paul spent the rest of his life finding the answer to those two questions. “*Who are you, Lord?*” and “*Lord, what would You have me to do?*” Everyone should ask and have the answers to those questions. “Who is Jesus?” And “What does Jesus want me to do?” The first indicator of a person made new is that he's under new management.

Jesus had become his Lord! Paul didn't ask, “Lord, what do You want others to do?” And he didn't ask, “Lord, what do others want me to do?” But, “*Lord, what would You have me to do?*”

The Bible doesn't put the emphasis on receiving Christ as Savior. The Bible puts the emphasis upon making Jesus Lord. When you make Jesus Christ Lord, He is, therefore, your Savior.

The Bible mentions Jesus as Savior 24 times, and it mentions Him as Lord 433 times. When they spoke of the Lord Jesus, they called Him the Lord Jesus. Nobody is saved who has not made Jesus Lord. You cannot have what He gives - salvation, unless you receive what He is, and that is, Lord.

Romans 10:9 says, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Someone wrote these words, “You call me Master and obey me not. You call me light and see me not. You call me way and walk me not. You call me life and desire me not. You call me wise and follow me not. You call me fair and love me not. You call me rich and ask me not. You call me gracious and trust me not. You call me noble and serve me not. You call me mighty and honor me not. You call me just and fear me not. If I condemn you, blame me not.”

Is He your Lord, the Lord of every thought and action? Your Lord in speaking, writing, giving? Your Lord in all things to obey? Is He Lord? The apostle Paul said on that Damascus road, “*What would you have me to do, Lord.*” He's under new management.

2. You Have A New Perspective.

“*Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.*’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again.” Act 9:17-18

He was able to see. The Psalmist David said, “*The Lord is my light and my salvation*” Psalm 27:1

When you receive the Lord, you also receive a new light. You are able to see things that you've never seen before. This was in the physical realm. Saul was literally blinded, and then he was literally healed, supernaturally healed, of blindness. We see it here to give an illustration and an emphasis to the greater fact that Jesus is the light of the world, and unless a person is born again, he cannot see. Jesus told Nicodemus, “*Except a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” John 3:3

You can never argue anybody into being a Christian. There needs to be a miracle. When a person comes to the Lord and surrenders, God just removes the scales from their eyes and they see things they never saw before. He understands things that he could not possibly understand apart from the Lord.

Saul was stunningly brilliant. He had the equivalent of a double PhD. He spoke many languages, and he had saturated himself in the Scriptures, but he didn't know Jesus. When the scales fell from his eyes, he saw in the Bible things he'd never seen. He put the Old Testament into his knapsack and went into the Arabian desert. When he came out of the desert, he had Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Romans in his heart. He looked into the Old Testament, and in the tabernacle, he saw Jesus. In the Levitical offerings, he saw Jesus. In the ceremonies, he saw Jesus. In the law, he saw Jesus. In the prophets, he saw Jesus. The whole Bible was full of Jesus, but he'd never seen it before.

When you get saved, the Bible will come alive in your hands, and you'll be able to see with the light of the Lord Jesus the things you've never seen.

3. We Receive a New Power.

“*...has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.*” Acts 9:17

2 Corinthians 3:17 says, “*Where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.*” He received power. Here was a man that had been blinded by the law of sin and death. He'd been struggling, He'd been trying. He was religious. He was like a man in quicksand. The more he struggled, the deeper he sank.

He said in Romans 8:2, “*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*” There is a new liberty that comes through the Holy Spirit. When you make Jesus your Lord, God infuses us, God energizes us, God puts His power within us.

The Christian life is not just a changed life. It is an exchanged life. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “*I have been crucified with Christ, yet I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*”

His divinity has inhabited my humanity, and now I am filled with the life and the power of God. So many people say, “I'd like to be a Christian, but I just don't know that I have it in me to live a Christian life.” I don't and you don't and they don't and we don't and nobody does. The Christian life is what God does through us and in us. He's the one who gives us liberty. He's not asked you to do the impossible. He has just simply said, “You come to Me. Let Me be your Lord, let Me be your light. I will be your liberty. I will give you strength. I will give you power.”

The Spirit-filled life is not for the super saints or those who have lived a long time in Christ. The Apostle Paul, at this time, wasn't the mighty apostle. He was a little baby Christian, and Annaias said to him, *"Be filled with the Holy Spirit."* Acts 9:17

Every Christian ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit. If you have been saved and you're not filled, you ought to be filled.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:18, because of what God had done in him, *"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."* That's not a request or a suggestion. That is a command, to be filled with the Spirit. It is useless to try to do God's work without being filled with the Spirit.

How can you be filled with the Spirit? It's not complicated. We're not talking about visions and ecstasies. We're not talking about weird feelings. If you will say what Paul said and mean it, and surrender fully to the presence and purpose of Jesus, you'll be filled with the Spirit. Say, "Lord, what do You want me to do. I am available to You." What we surrender, He takes. What He takes, He cleanses. What He cleanses, He fills. What He fills, He uses.

"Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized." Acts 9:17

4. We Have A New Love.

"And after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." Acts 9:19-20

In Acts 9:1, *"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples."* A few days ago, he was threatening them. He was breathing out *murderous threats*. His heart was filled with bitterness and meanness toward those who are called Christians.

Now those he once loathed, he loves. He is with them. He is blind. The eyes, the scales fall from his eyes. The first sight he sees is the face of Annaias. The first words he hears are these, *"Brother Saul."* Isn't that wonderful?

He receives love. He receives fellowship. Some people get the idea that you can get saved and be a Christian without loving the fellowship, without loving the saints of God, without loving the church. If you love Jesus, you're going to love what Jesus loved.

The nature of God is revealed in 1 John 4:7-8 this, *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

How can I have God in me and not have love in me? You can't do it. God is love. It's the nature of God. It's the nature of the church to love. The church is the body of Jesus. Love the Body of Christ!

When the apostle Paul was on that road and Jesus appeared to him, Jesus said to him, "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Do you know what Saul could have said? "I don't know who you are! Whoever you are, I want you to know I, I haven't got anything against you, I'm persecuting the church. It's not you I'm persecuting, it's these Christians I'm persecuting." When you persecute the church, you persecute Christ, because Christ is the head, and the church is the body.

When the body suffers, the head suffers, and to persecute the Church is to persecute Jesus. To ignore the church is to ignore Jesus. To honor the church is to honor Jesus. Some people say, "I love the Jesus but I don't love the church." There's no such thing. It is the nature of the Christian to love, and it is the nature of the church. The church and Christ are not identical, but they are inseparable, like a head and a body. You cannot love Jesus without loving what Jesus loved. It's important that we have this new love. He was with the disciples, and he was made strong. We need one another.

In California are the giant sequoias. The General Sherman sequoia is the tallest of them all at 275 feet. It has a 70-foot circumference. It's been growing since the time of Christ. You would think a tree that big would have deep a tap root, that it would go down deep to keep it standing so tall for so long. The sequoias don't have deep tap roots at all. Their roots grow very close to the surface. The experts say the reason they have survived and grown so tall is that they grow only in groves. Their roots all intertwine with the others. When the winds come, they hold one another up.

We have the same in the fellowship of the church. We are intertwined. When we love one another and care for one another, we are strengthened. The church that the apostle Paul once persecuted, he now fellowshiped with.

5. We Have A New Purpose.

“At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, ‘Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?’ Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.” Acts 9:20-22

What had been his purpose? To destroy the church. What was his purpose now? To build the church. He became an evangelist. He's a soul winner. A person that has been saved will want others to know what he has received. The apostle Paul meets the Lord Jesus and there's such a change in him that others say, “Who is this?”

He once destroyed the church, and now he's building the church. He was once persecuting the church, and now he's preaching Christ and proving that Christ is the Son of God.

The greatest persecutor of the Church would become the greatest preacher of the Church. The thing that he is remembered for is not the bad things he did, but the good he did. He becomes the preeminent church planter and writes half of the New Testament.

There may not be another apostle Paul, but we can all have the same passion that Paul had. We can all have the same love, the same desire. Billy Graham was preaching in Hollywood, California. An actor named Stuart Hamblen came and heard Billy Graham preach. He was saved. He found his good friend John Wayne and said to him, “John, I want to tell you what happened to me,” and he witnessed to John Wayne. He said, “John, you ought to give your heart to Jesus.” Then he looked John Wayne in the face and said, “John, it's no secret what God can do. What he's done for others he'll do for you.” John Wayne said, “Stu, that's a beautiful phrase. You ought to make that into a song,” and he did. “It is no secret what God can do. What he's done for others, He'll do for you.” He wrote that into a song. What the Lord did for the Apostle Paul, He'll do for you.

“Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Roman 10:13

Romans 10:13 is one of the central pillars of our theology, emphasizing that salvation is a universal, immediate, and a personal promise from God. The word “whosoever” or “everyone” signifies that no one—regardless of race, past sins, or background—is excluded from God's reach. “Calling on the name” involves the full authority, power, and character of Jesus. His name has power to heal and deliver in the present moment. “Shall be saved” means this is not a “hope-so” salvation. It's a “know-so” salvation. A sincere call results in an assurance of being saved.