

**"The Road to Redemption"**  
*Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"*

Acts 9:1-22

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**Acts 9:1-22**     **Saul's Conversion**

*(New International Version 1984, ©1984)*

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

<sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup> "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

<sup>13</sup> "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

<sup>17</sup> 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 so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

**Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem**

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. <sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> 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?" <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. <sup>[a]</sup>

**Footnotes:**

a. [Acts 9:22](#) Or *Messiah*

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**Introduction.**

The NFL playoffs come to a climax today, and the teams from the NFC and the AFC will be decided this weekend to see who will play in the Super Bowl on February 4<sup>th</sup>. Two of the quarterbacks in this



year's playoffs have had amazing seasons, but not too long ago there was a question as to whether either of them would even be playing in the NFL this year.

Ben Roethlisberger was arrested in Atlanta last March and charged with sexual assault. Michael Vick served time in prison for a conviction related to an illegal dog-fighting ring, and he was out of football for two years. Both players were suspended and reinstated after a time away from the game, and each of these men did some deep soul searching along the way.

One might say both Ben and Michael have been on the road to redemption. They were headed in the wrong direction making a lot of bad choices. Then they experienced a tremendous downfall which knocked them out for a while. But along the way they experienced a conversion which set them on a whole new path. It is a story that is as old as Saul on the road to Damascus.

### **I. The Purpose of Saul's Journey.**

The text tells us that *"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"* (9:1,2).

Luke has already mentioned Saul 3 times in his book so far, and each time he is presented as a bitter opponent of Jesus Christ and His Church. Luke tells us that at the martyrdom of Stephen, his killers laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul and he was there giving his approval to Stephen's death. Luke then tells us in chapter 8 that Saul began to destroy the Church, making a house-to-house search for followers of Christ, and he dragged them off to prison. Now Luke continues Saul's story by saying he was breathing murderous threats against followers of Jesus.

Saul wanted to pursue fugitive believers who had fled Jerusalem to Damascus and extradite them back to Jerusalem to stand trial. There were several synagogues in Damascus which served a large Jewish population, so he left Jerusalem with written authority from the high priest to the Damascus synagogues that if he found any anyone who belonged to "the Way," an early reference to Christians, he could take them as prisoners back to Jerusalem.

Saul was not interested in the claims of Christ. His heart was filled with hatred, and later in Acts 26 he would say that a raging fury obsessed him (26:11). If we had met Saul as he left Jerusalem and told him that before he reached Damascus he would too become a follower of Jesus Christ, he would have ridiculed the idea. But Saul was in for quite a surprise on the road to redemption. As John Calvin once observed, we can see God's amazing grace "not only in such a cruel wolf being turned into a sheep, but also [later] in his assuming the character of a shepherd."<sup>i</sup>

### **II. The Events of Saul's Journey.**

If we put together the 3 accounts of this event in the book of Acts, here and in chapters 22 and 26, we discover that Saul and his companions, perhaps members of the temple police, set out from Jerusalem to go to Damascus, a journey of about 150 miles. It would have taken almost a week to travel the distance. As they neared Damascus around noon, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around them, and Saul fell to the ground. A voice called out and said, *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"*

Saul asked, *"Who are you, Lord?"*

And the voice answered, *"I am Jesus, who you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city. You will be told what you must do"* (Acts 9:3-6).



The people traveling with Saul were speechless. They heard the sound, but they didn't see anyone. When Saul got up from the ground, he was blind, so the men with him had to lead him by the hand into the city, and for three days he didn't eat or drink a thing.

Saul thought he was doing God's will. He thought had it all figured out. Saul was someone who was very much in charge. He was a command-and-control kind of guy. He knew where he was headed, and he wasn't about to let anyone get in his way. But on the road to Damascus, God stopped him dead in his tracks and He knocked him off his horse. Instead of coming to Damascus to arrest Christians, Saul found himself arrested by Christ whose light shone in his heart for the first time and swept over him like a flood.

### **III. The Effect of Saul's Journey.**

Luke goes on to relate the events that took place in Damascus. He turned from the causes of Saul's conversion to the consequences of this dramatic experience, and we see a transformation in the attitude and character on the man which had an immediate impact. Saul's relationship with God was transformed, and he fasted and prayed for 3 days and gained a new reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ. His relationship with Christians was affected, too, and Ananias spoke words of healing when he placed his hands on Saul and gently said, "Saul, my brother." And Saul's experience affected an unbelieving world. Immediately he began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God, and he confounded the Jews with his persuasive arguments.

The effect of Saul's conversion was powerful. He was never to be the same again, and neither would the world. This Jewish rabbi, a Pharisee of the Pharisees and former destroyer of the Church, would go on to be the greatest missionary in the early church. He would write nearly half of the books of the NT, and he served as the primary architect of Christian theology. In the end he would take the gospel to the halls of power in the capital city of Rome, where eventually he was martyred for his faith.

When you study Saul's conversion, it becomes apparent that he made 3 discoveries on the road to redemption. The first discovery was the tragic extent of how lost he really was. He thought he had it all together, he thought he was headed in the right direction, but on the road to redemption he came to realize just how lost he really was.

I've got a pretty good sense of direction which serves me well most of the time. But on occasion that confidence can get me into trouble, and there are times when I get hopelessly lost, especially here in the Hill Country. Sometimes we need to discover just how lost we really are, and that's not only true when we are driving but also when we are on the road of life.

The second discovery Saul made was that Jesus was in fact alive. Before he was convinced that with the crucifixion of Jesus that was the end of this false prophet from Nazareth, but on the road to Damascus Saul discovered the risen Christ was in fact alive. Jesus spoke to him and took hold of his life, and he would never be the same. How many people come to church every Sunday and act like what we are doing in worship is simply remembering the life and words of a dead man? Do you know Jesus is alive today? Have you had an encounter with Him recently yourself? When was the last time you heard Him speak to you?

The final discovery Saul made on the road to redemption was he had a mission. *"You will be told what you must do,"* Jesus said. Saul thought he had a mission. He believed he was on the right path, but he was dead wrong and it wasn't the mission God had for him. He was doing what he wanted to do, and Jesus made it clear that now he would be told what he must do.



Have you made these three discoveries yourself? Do you realize just how lost you are without Christ? Are you aware that Jesus really is alive and He wants to be active in your life today? And are you prepared to accept whatever mission God gives you as you seek to follow Him in the coming week?

Some of us can name a day and a time when we made a decision to give our lives to Christ. We had a Damascus Road experience ourselves, and we can mark the moment. Others of us can't point to a specific time when we became a Christian, and we just grew up in the faith and never questioned the truth of Christianity. But all of us who claim to be followers of Jesus need to make these three discoveries ourselves along the way if we want to experience the life God promises us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion/Application.**

Are you on the road to redemption yourself this morning? Has your world blown apart recently, and is God trying to get your attention? Have you been knocked off your horse in recent days, and how will you respond? Have you been headed in the wrong direction, and does the Lord want you to turn around? Learn from the life of Saul, and ask the Lord what He wants you to do.

Will you be an Ananias to someone this week? Who is there you know needs a healing touch or a healing word? Ananias laid his hands on this broken man, healed him of his blindness, and spoke the gentle words, "Saul, my brother." Who needs to hear those words from you this week?

There is a famous painting by Holman Hunt of Jesus knocking at the door. It is a metaphor taken from Revelation 3:16 which says, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hear My voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him.*" In the painting Jesus is knocking on the door, holding a lamp in the night. There is no door knob on the outside implying that we are the ones who have to open the door to let Jesus into our hearts.

A theologian once saw this painting in an art gallery, and he had been studying the life of Paul and was gripped by the grace of God which came crashing into his world. He stood there looking at the painting and finally burst out and said, "No! This isn't the right picture! It is not Christ standing on the outside knocking with no door knob. Rather, it is man on the inside with the door locked, bolted and double bolted, and furniture stacked up against the door. Christ is on the outside and takes the cross, and He smashes the door down, rushes into the man's life and says, "You're Mine! You're Mine!"

Our God is the sovereign God of the universe, and He reached down into human history and claimed Saul of Tarsus for Himself. He can do the same for you on the road to redemption if you let Him. It's a road we all need to travel if we want to know and follow the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. I, p. 256.

