

“A CHANGED LIFE”

Acts 9:1-9

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTROSUCTION

“This changes everything.” Have you heard that expression? So it is true here.

****This event is one of the greatest “apologies” for Christianity--next to the resurrection of Christ himself.**

People speak much about “mid-life crises”; emotional and mental crises many go through. My mother used to talk much about her “change of life”—physical changes.

*Saul of Tarsus went through a powerful life change from **a proud persecutor to a humble preacher.** And this change took place when he was only about 35.*

The cause of the change was a “face to face” encounter with Jesus Christ in all of His glory. Compare the transfiguration, Stephen, John in Revelation.

This event was a direct answer to Stephen’s Prayer.

Its importance is emphasized by the fact that it is repeated **3 times in Acts** (9, 22, and 26) and a couple times in Paul’s epistles (Gal. 1; I Tim. 1).

In a less dramatic fashion but in just as real an experience, **every one of us needs “a change of life.”**

If you are a believer and do not have a changed life, you need to become genuinely saved (II Cor. 5:17).

I. THE PROUD PERSECUTOR

A. Background

1. Tarsus (capital; university)
2. Israelite (Benjamin; Pharisee; Gamaliel; commission of the Sanhedrin; righteousness of the Law)
3. Roman (Citizenship by birth)
4. Trade—“Tent-maker”
5. Spiritually dead

B. Breathing (1-2)—“Threats and slaughter”

- This is the very “atmosphere” in which he lived and breathed; compare 26:11—he was “furiously enraged.”

- How could this be true of a pupil of mild-mannered Gamaliel?
- Concerning his zeal for the Law, cf. the Maccabees and Elijah.
- Saul's extreme animosity was likely a cover for inner insecurity; note the contrast with the serenity of Stephen.
- His action was against the "disciples of the Lord"—those learning from Him. They are also called "The Way"—cf. Jn. 14:6.
- The letters from the High Priest would convey the authority of the Sanhedrin.
- There were many Jews in Damascus; Christians were considered part of them.
- Damascus was an extremely important city; **the oldest continuing city in the world**. Later, the 1st Christian city taken by Islam.
- Intensity of his violence is seen in the edict being against both men and women.
- He intended to bind them and bring them to trial in Jerusalem.

Saul had almost reached his destination and was about to carry out his design when something very unusual and totally unexpected suddenly occurred!

C. Blinding (3-7)

1. The Light from Heaven "flashed around him." (3) Could this be the Shekinah? Startled and shaken he fell to the ground (4).
2. The Voice (*Not a TV program!*) For the light and voice, compare the Transfiguration and the burning bush experiences.
 - Called Saul by name—knows him.
 - Emphatic by repetition: "Saul, Saul"
 - Shows the "mystical union" of Jesus with His disciples—"persecute ME"
 - The present tense shows the persistence of Saul's persecuting work. Saul, totally confused, yet knowing that some kind of Heavenly contact was taking place says, "Who are You, Lord?" "Lord" is more than "Sir".
3. The Identification (5)
 - He was totally unprepared for the answer: "I am Jesus."
 - "Whom you are persecuting" again shows both the continuance of Saul's activity, and His identity with His people.
 - How could this be "dead Jesus"? He would have to **be alive!** Then, **could He really be the Messiah?**

Obviously Saul does not know what is happening, and certainly does not know what to do next! The Lord steps in to help.

4. The Instruction (6)

- “Rise”—The Lord was not going to pick him up!
- “Go into the city”—how, he cannot see?
- Someone will give him instructions there.
- Saul would not be given “divine suggestions” but commands: “What you **must do**.”
- Note, that Saul here did not receive the Gospel. (See Gal. 1:12). Saul was certainly overwhelmed, but what about his traveling companions?

5. The astonished companions (7)

Some see discrepancies here:

- “Stood”—see 26:14 [Recovered from their fall so that they could now assist Saul.]
- “Hearing the voice”—see 22:9. [Did not “hear”—understand—the voice.]
- “Seeing no one”—see 22:9 [Saw the light—but did not see Jesus.]
- These variations are all from Paul himself; they show the natural variations in recounting a story again and again. Sign of genuineness! Saul did get up and opened his eyes, but he could not see.

6. The Sightless Saul (8a)

*The stubborn, violent, independent, rebellious Saul was now in a position of total helplessness. **God had him right where He wanted him.***

II. THE HUMBLE PENITANT (8b-9)

A. He was led by the hand (8b)

- He who would lead Christians to judgment (v. 2) was now being led by others.
- He was helpless and humbled.

B. He was Waiting in darkness (9)

- The Lord “let him stew” for a time in total darkness—representing the darkness of his soul.
- He had plenty of time to think about his circumstances, his lost state, and his hopelessness.
- The time (“three days”) can be compared to the time of Christ’s burial.
- Undoubtedly during this time Saul was **pondering** and **praying**.

- How WRONG he had been; how FOOLISH he had been; how WICKED he had been. How HOPELESS he was; how LOST he was.
- He had no desire for even food or drink (9b)

CONCLUSION

Yes, Saul saw the risen Christ (I Cor. 15:8; 9:1)—in order to become an apostle this was an absolute necessity. But, even more important, he had to meet the risen Christ in order to be saved and for his life to become transformed.

Saul met Christ—have you?

Saul was changed—have you?

As a professing Christian, is your life different than it was before?

If not, get truly saved! If you are truly saved, get your life right with the Lord!

Do you have a fervent desire for God and for His people?

Do you serve the Lord—without sorrow or complaint?

Saul did, once his life was changed.

“Things are different now.”

“There’s been a great change.”