

**March 22, 2020**

**The conversion of Saul**

**Acts chapter 9 verse 1:**

**Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.**

**Saul had held the coats of the witnesses while Stephen was being stoned. Now he has decided to really persecute the members of the Way. Look at what he's doing:**

**He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found there any who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.**

**Just to show you how determined Saul was to persecute members of the Way let us look at the distance, using an Israeli map to Damascus the distance as the bird flies is 136 miles. The distance today by car is 1849 miles! We must assume that they could travel more closely by foot or by mule than by car. However what I want to make you aware of is that it was a long journey. So let us look at what happened:**

**As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.**

**Saul would have been traveling with companions in order to make sure that he arrived safely in Damascus. This light that suddenly appeared must have frightened the group greatly.**

**Let us read what happens:**

**He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”**

**I want you to pay close attention to what is happening here, Saul is a raging lion, however he is well versed in the law. In another Scripture he references to himself as a Pharisee of Pharisees, which means he was well taught in the law and upheld the law to the letter. Saul is so sure of himself that he makes this next statement:**

**“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.**

**Saul was not persecuting anyone else except those involved in the Way. So his statement of “Who are you Lord,” he could answer himself. However Jesus answers it for him:**

**“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” He replied.**

**Now he has absolute fact that he is wrong and he has been condemning people that are indeed better than he is in terms of their relationship with God. Notice what happens next:**

**“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”**

**The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.**

**These are the witnesses that will testify to what happened to Saul. So, Jesus is going to give him time to think about this. Notice what happens:**

**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.**

**Here is this roaring lion in Jerusalem, being led into Damascus by the hand like a shepherd leading a sheep. Notice how long he has to think about it:**

**For 3 days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.**

**3 days he has to search his soul, trying to determine what is going to happen to him next, meanwhile:**

**In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias.**

**The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”**

**We see the Lord working with his servants in the same way we should be able to work with him. Let us continue:**

**“Yes, Lord,” he answered.**

**As did Saul, Ananias called out “Yes Lord” and is waiting in reverence for what the Lord wants to tell him. He does not expect what is coming. Let’s look at that:**

**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.”**

**Ananias is being asked to go into the lion’s den with a roaring lion named Saul. Have you ever had a dream or vision that you thought came from the Lord that asked you to do something that you considered to be a problem for yourself? This is what Ananias is facing:**

**“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.”**

**Is his answer exactly what we would say today, we would tell the Lord all about what He is asking as if He didn’t really know the size of the problem it would make for us! The Lord knows all things, so why would we need to remind Him of the problem He is asking us to accept, just do it! Notice what the Lord says:**

**But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instruments 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.”**

**There is also a lesson here, Saul will be given the opportunity to minister for Jesus Christ, the very person he was persecuting before. Also Jesus is going to tell him that he will suffer just as others have suffered from his hand; to work in the harvest field for Jesus, saving souls and healing people.**

**Amen?**

**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.”**

**First of all he obeyed. I wonder how many times he practiced the comments he just made to Saul, probably none. He just let the Holy Spirit guide his words as he obeyed. We need to take a lesson from that.**

**Let us read on:**

**Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again.**

**He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food he regained his strength.**

**Now, the Bible doesn't say the additional conversation that went on between Ananias and Saul. But since he was baptized, you know a great amount of conversation happened.**

**But see what he does:**

**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.**

**Remember, he is preaching in the name of Jesus whom they have crucified and he is doing it to the very Jewish people who probably were in Jerusalem during the Passover. Read on:**

**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 comes here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?**

**Ah yes, now he has to overcome what he was before and prove to them that indeed Jesus is the Messiah.**

**Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.**

**And how did he do that? The same way that Peter and John did; through the Holy Spirit within him.**

**So Luke continues to write to Theophilus as follows:**

**After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plot.**

**Day and night they kept close watch on the city Gates in order to kill him.**

**As you think back to the sermons of the last few weeks, the Jews answer to this problem is to kill everybody. How can they believe that that is of God? Let us continue:**

**But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.**

**Now Saul must make the long trip back to Jerusalem, I am sure his entourage went with him. Let us read on:**

**When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.**

**And why wouldn't they be afraid of him? When he left he was a roaring lion against them, and he probably came back with the same men who went with him to bring back prisoners from the Way to Jerusalem. But someone stood up for him:**

**But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.**

**He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.**

**So, from a witness he has been exonerated and is accepted into the way. Let us go on:**

**Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.**

**We could say, just as Stephen did.**

**He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him.**

**This particular Jewish sect is very violent and is continuing to try to kill everyone believing in the Way.**

**When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.**

**The distance from Jerusalem to Tarsus is 356 miles. So, you can see that the gospel is being spread to a much wider area. Let us continue:**

**Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened.**

**What this Scripture would tell me is that they are learning to live in the Way and being careful not to create undue persecution. Let's continue:**

**Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it (the Way ) increased in numbers.**

**So, here in this passage of Scripture, we learn that a man just like us, male or female, was called by the Lord to be a minister to the Gentiles. This should also tell us that there is nothing special about Paul that is not in each one of us, if we are indeed filled with the Holy Spirit, baptized, and committed with zeal to the Lord.**

**As we continue next week and following we will begin to see Peter, and others, doing the will of the Lord Jesus Christ and doing many signs and wonders all things that are within our power through the Lord Jesus Christ to do. Think about it as you read the Bible and pray; realize that there is nothing special about them that we cannot be, providing our obedience, faith, and over all desire is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. It allows us to do these same things that they did. Amen?**