

THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

Acts 9:1-22

I. After our Lord, St. Paul is probably the most influential person in the New Testament.

- A. Wrote more New Testament books than anyone else
- B. Took Christianity to more places than anyone else

II. Early life of St. Paul

A. Born in Tarsus

- 1. A bustling and sophisticated Roman colony
 - a. Strong intellectual community
 - b. Active transportation hub
- 2. Paul's first language was therefore most likely Greek, the language of the New Testament and the *lingua franca* of the day, which he would use for mission work.

B. Well Educated in Jerusalem and Growing in Influence

- 1. St. Paul defended himself to the people after arrested in the Temple with his impressive resume
 - a. **Acts 22:3** *"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day."*
- 2. A dutiful Jew under the Old Testament Law
 - a. St. Paul counters the argument of those who claimed some reason for boasting in the flesh with his own credentialed religious history
 - i. **Philippians 3:4a-6** *If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*
 - b. Similarly, he tells the Galatians that he was no flunky in Judaism, but was advancing quickly within the religion before his conversion
 - i. **Galatians 1:14** *And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.*

C. Persecuted the Church

- 1. Persecuted the Church in Judah
 - a. At the martyring of Stephen

i. **Acts 7:58** *Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

b. In the outbreak of persecution that followed

ii. **Acts 8:1** *And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

2. And he was determined to take the persecution beyond Judah

a. **Acts 9:1,2** *But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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.*

III. His conversion

A. He was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there

B. A light from heaven flashed around him

C. He fell off his horse

D. Christ asked him why he was persecuting Him

1. **Acts 9:4** *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”*

a. Christ had warned that the Church would be persecuted just as He was

b. Persecution of the Church, though, is also persecution of her Lord

E. For three days he was without sight

1. Time to think about what he'd done and what was happening

2. The same duration of time as the resurrection

F. He didn't eat or drink in that time

1. Perhaps he was so unsettled that he simply couldn't eat

2. Fasting is also a biblical sign of repentance

G. God revealed to Ananias His plan for St. Paul

1. **Acts 9:15** *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.”*

a. He would bring God's message to Gentiles and kings

b. He would proclaim God's message to Israel

2. **Acts 9:16** *“For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”*

a. The persecutor would be persecuted

- b. In a triumph of the Word, he would be persecuted for the sake of the very Name he had tried to discredit and eradicate

H. Christ healed him through a member of the very church he sought to persecute

- 1. God works through means
- 2. The Church, in the end, is always the victor through Christ
 - a. **1 Corinthians 15:57** *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I. Paul regained his sight

J. He was baptized

K. He ate

L. He began proclaiming Christ in the synagogue and debating the Jews

- 1. The Lord used Paul's training and former zeal in the service of the gospel
 - a. **Acts 9:21** *And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"*
- 2. St. Paul continued to improve in the task entrusted to him by the Lord
 - a. **Acts 9:22** *But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.*

IV. Application

A. We too need to be knocked off our high horse by Christ sometimes

B. We too need new sight (spiritual) and a new worldview through Christ

C. We too receive God's blessings through means

- a. And so we seek out, respect, and honor His ministers
- b. And so we hear His Word preached
- c. And so we are baptized
- d. And so we stay active in sacramental life

F. We too have changes that must take place in our lives if we are to live the faith

G. We too have that same powerful Word that won St. Paul for the Faith

- a. For the preservation of our faith and direction in our lives
- b. For the preservation and life of the Church

H. We too have a message of sins forgiven for sinners in need of forgiveness

