

**June 30, 2013**  
**“Supernatural Transformation”**  
**Acts 9:1-31**

We are going to be looking at Acts 9:1-31 today and we will be reading portions of this chapter as we go along.

Saul was also known by the Greek equivalent Paul, or perhaps since he was born a Roman citizen, meaning that his father also must have been a Roman citizen, Paul was part of his Roman name. In addition he was given the Jewish name, Saul.

His Jewish heritage meant more to him than his Roman citizenship. While born in Tarsus, the southern part of modern day Turkey, he was brought up in Jerusalem, taught by Gamaliel (guh MAY lih el), a very well respected rabbi of his day. Saul's parents wanted their son to be well-grounded in the traditions of Jewish orthodoxy. And indeed Saul had great zeal for the Jewish law.

That zeal found an outlet in his assault on the early church. To Saul Jesus was a blasphemer because He claimed to be God. To Saul Jesus suffered and died a death cursed by Jewish law. To Saul the survival of Israel depended on wiping out Jesus' followers. To Saul when the first martyr of the church Stephen was stoned to death he consented to it.

And then Saul went on his own rampage persecuting, arresting, and even killing Christians; Until God stopped him dead in his tracks on the way to Damascus.

The transformation was a humbling process as he was blinded and didn't eat or drink for three days. When Ananias, a Damascus believer, laid hands on Saul and prayed, Saul received both his sight and the gift of the Holy Spirit. New life emerged as Saul (who was later known better as Paul) immediately started to share his new-found faith in Christ. Ironically, it was precisely because of Saul's conversion that his own persecution began.

Today message reads like a testimony of how Paul went from his old way of life, to his conversion and transformed life, to a new way of life:

### **1. The Old Way of Life**

#### **a. Persecuting and killing Christians (9:1-2)**

Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

I wonder why believers in Jesus were called “followers of the Way?” Perhaps it is because of what Jesus claimed in John 14:6 Jesus told him, “I am the way...No one can come to the Father except through me.”

Perhaps the believers in Jesus, not yet known by the name Christian, called themselves followers of “the way” (notice THE WAY) since Jesus is THE WAY and the only way to salvation, and following Him was THE WAY of life, the way to live life, and THE WAY, the only way to eternal life.

Paul was so against Jesus and His followers that he was threatening, persecuting, and eager to kill believers in Jesus. He asked for letters from authorities so he could arrest “followers of the Way.” He gave his own testimony of this in **Phil 3:6a I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church.**

Paul was so obsessed with anger, and hatred, and with destroying this group that believed in Jesus that he was on his way to Damascus to find any followers of the Way of Jesus that had escaped Jerusalem and went there to Damascus. He didn't want them to get away, and he didn't want them to preach this Jesus in Damascus.

But things were about to change drastically in Paul's life that would cause him to regret how he treated believers.

I had a buddy in the Army named Benny. I met him in Basic Training and the Army kept us together all through-out our time in the Military. When I got orders for Viet Nam I told him, “Benny, I got bad news for you. You are going to Viet Nam.” He said what do you mean, I didn't get orders for Viet Nam.” I said, “Benny, you know if they're sending me they're going to send you.” The next day he got orders for Viet Nam.

Then one morning, just before being ship to Viet Nam my orders were changed to Korea, but Benny's were not changed. He was down, but I told him, “what are you worried about, if they changed my orders they're going to change yours.” That afternoon after lunch, he got his orders for Korea. We were together the whole time in Korea also.

One night when we were overseas Benny had duty all night at Headquarters. That could be a boring assignment so I stopped in late at night to see him and to hang out with him for a while.

When I saw him he was in a very serious mood and I could tell he had something on his mind that he had been pondering. Then he told me that some ROK soldiers came in earlier (ROK stands for Republic of Korea. They were Korean soldiers that served with us). He told me that they were talking to him about Jesus. I said to him, “what are you listen to that stuff for, people who believe that are wackos” (of course I used a little different language then). Benny said, “no, there was something different about these guys and what they had to share really got to me.” Again, I told him not to believe that junk and I changed the subject.

Benny and I kept in touch after we got out of the army, he was even in our wedding party when Ann and I got married. Then we kind of drifted apart for a few years. But when I became a Christian I got in touch with him and told him I wanted to get together.

He was glad to hear from me and invited Ann and I to his house that he and his wife had just moved into.

While the girls chatted upstairs, Benny took me downstairs because he wanted me to see the awesome bar that came with the house. That was my opportunity to share Christ with him. I had forgotten all about the incident in Korea, but he brought it up and said, "Hey don't you remember that night those ROK soldiers spoke to me about Jesus, you said not to listen to them."

Then I remembered, and said "I was so wrong." But it was hard for Benny to believe what I was saying when in the past I had been so negative about it.

I am certainly not comparing myself with Paul, but my life and view had changed. In God's mercy He took this persecutor of the church and made me a wacko for Christ. But Benny had a hard time accepting the message of Christ from me.

## **2. The Transformation of a Life**

### **a. The light and the voice (9:3-6)**

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

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

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

Saul was on his way to persecute Christians when he has this encounter with Jesus. He wasn't seeking Jesus, he had not believed anything he had heard about Jesus, rather he hated Jesus and those who believed in Him, yet he has this encounter. Not everyone comes to Jesus in the same way. Some have a powerful encounter with Christ, some accept him gradually over time. Some come to Him in a spectacular manner, some in a quiet manner.

My experience was a little of both; for a year or more people were telling me I need Jesus. I started reading the Bible, even went to Bible studies, but didn't want to change, didn't think I could change. I told my wife, I don't want to hear about God, or the Bible any more, and I'm not going to any more Bible studies, because I don't think I can live the way these Christians live, yet I knew it was right. Then one night I was "tricked" into going to a movie at the church on a Friday night. An altar call was given, my heart was pounding, I wasn't exactly sure why, but I knew I was suppose to go up to the front of that church. I did, and I had an encounter with Jesus that instantly changed me.

I can give you a moment and a date even an hour of that encounter; But I know others who attended a church for a long time, and they could not tell you when it happened but they too became followers of Jesus.

Knew couple, the husband was brought up Catholic his wife was brought up Jewish. They came across a Bible, they began reading it together and they came to conclusion it was true and Jesus was Messiah. He said, "what we do now?" and his wife said, "I guess we should go to church." So they started attending our church... I was always amazed at that.

I've heard of others with similar experience of Paul. They were in a jail or a their bedroom and the room filled with light. They fell on their knees and asked Jesus to forgive and save them.

Don't let anyone tell you there is a right way to come to Jesus or that you have to follow a certain formula or have a certain experience. The right way to come to Jesus is however God decides is best to work in your life.

I can bring three people up her now and they would all share very different experience of becoming a believer and follower of Jesus.

When you come to conclusion that Jesus is the Savior and the Lord and you want to be forgiven and become His follower your life will be transformed.

#### b. Ananias's Role (9:10-19)

**10** Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

**11** The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. **12** I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."

**13** "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! **14** And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name."

**15** But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. **16** And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

**17** So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." **18** Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. **19** Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

The Lord calls upon Ananias to go and minister to Saul. And Ananias says, "whoa, Saul? I heard about him, Lord, don't you know how this guy has been treating your believers. It could be dangerous to go to him. Lord, do you know what you're doing?"

And the Lord says, "Go!" Ananias obeys, and Saul regains his sight, is filled with the Holy Spirit, and got baptized in the name of Jesus.

Many of us have probably reacted like Ananias when God prompted us to minister to someone who we considered to have a bad reputation, or someone whose life seemed hopeless, or undeserving of God's grace.

Who is that difficult person in your life to whom God may want you to reach out? Seek them out and determine in what ways you can relate to them, and what tools you will use. God wants to use you and work through you to bring new life to others.

### **3. The New Way of Life**

How is Saul changed? What does the new way of life, a life of faith in Christ look like:

a. Sharing faith (9:20)

And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

When this transformation through Jesus happens you are going to tell others that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.

b. Amazement of others (9:21)

All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?"

Your life will change, people will see it and be amazed.

c. Persecution (9: 23-25, 29, 30)

After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him. They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot. So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

Paul the persecutor became the persecuted. Jerry the mocker of believers became a believer. I don't think anyone ever plotted my murder for being a believer, but when I became a believer there were friends that no longer wanted anything to do with me. I had a co-worker who asked the boss to keep me away from him, before that we got

along fine after he hated me simply because I became a follower of Jesus. It wasn't that I was pushing Jesus on him, he just didn't want anything to do with someone who could believe such things.

Even more incredible is that perhaps like me you have felt unworthy to be used by God, yet when we look at Saul's incredible transformation, this should smash all of our misconceptions. God transforms and uses the most unlikely persons in a supernatural way. What are some ways you have felt unworthy to be used and how can you now push past that?

Three things:

1. No matter who you are or what you've done; you may have hated Jesus, hated the church, you may have persecuted believers, you may have been a violent person, consenting to violence even murder. It doesn't matter, God loves you and Jesus can have an encounter with you that can humble and save you.
2. No matter who you are or what you've done God transforms and uses the most unlikely persons in a supernatural way. God used Paul who had hated Jesus and was persecuting the Church. If He can use Paul, He can and will use you.
3. Like Ananias God may be asking you to do something that brings fear. Pray for boldness, obey what He asks of you, and you will be blessed by the mighty way He will use you.