

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Wed. Eve. Bible Study - 3/16/16

Growing In The Christian Life

First Steps In The New Life

Scripture Portion: Acts 9: 1-31

Saul's Conversion

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and 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. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." ⁷The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. ¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹¹The 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. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." ¹³"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." ¹⁷Then 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." ¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹All 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?" ²²Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. ²³After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. ²⁶When 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. ²⁷But 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. ²⁸So Saul stayed with

them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews,^[a] but they tried to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. ³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

In the verses before us we have the dramatic account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who was so wonderfully brought face to face with the risen Lord Himself. Saul's conversion was striking, it was sudden, and there is a very real sense in which it was a sample conversion; it is an example of the kind of thing that God can do and is doing today - look up the last phrase in **Acts 2:47** "praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

It is the post-conversion experiences of Saul that we are to study, the things that happened immediately after his conversion. What was the first thing that happened after he became a Christian?

1. HE MADE AN OPEN CONFESSION OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Verse 18 tells us that "he got up and was baptized...□" Some few years previously John the Baptist had baptized in the River Jordan, and he baptized the Lord Jesus (Matthew 3: 13-17). The disciples of Jesus baptized (John 4: 1-2), and before He went back to Heaven the Lord Jesus said - Matthew 28: 19. Consequently, on the Day of Pentecost, when those who had been convicted by Peter's preaching asked: "What shall we do?" (Acts 2: 37), Peter replied - Acts 2: 38; and the result was Acts 2: 41! Thus, in obedience to the Lord's command, believers were baptized; they believed first, and then they confessed their faith in Christ by baptism - look up Acts 8: 12 and 36-39; 9: 18; 10: 47-48; 16: 14-15 and 30-34; 18: 8 and 19: 5. This is not a denominational matter; it is a New Testament matter - look up John 14: 15. How quick Saul was to confess his new-found faith in Christ!

2. HE LINKED UP WITH THE LORD'S PEOPLE

Verse 19 indicates that immediately after his conversion he united in fellowship with the Christians at Damascus, and then later on with the Christians at Jerusalem; and right on through his Christian life, wherever he was, Saul of Tarsus, Paul the apostle, sought the fellowship of God's people. It is God's plan for His children to unite with a local assembly of His people for the enjoyment of worship and for employment in His service. Some Christians do not believe in joining a church, but God does not want us to be spiritual gypsies. He would have us follow the example of the early Christians, as recorded in Acts 2: 41-47.

3. HE PREACHED CHRIST WHEREVER HE WENT

We are told, in verse 20, that immediately after his conversion Paul "at once began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God", and afterwards he did so wherever he went. He had looked upon the Lord as an imposter, but now he proclaimed Him as the risen and exalted "Son of God"! It is the privilege and responsibility of every new-born soul to make known the saving grace and the keeping and satisfying power of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is an interesting thought here. Those who heard Paul preach Christ were amazed and said: "Isn't he the man who caused

havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name?" (verse 21). What is the answer? It was the same man, and yet it was not - look up **2 Corinthians 5: 17** "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

4. HE GREW IN GRACE AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS LORD AND SAVIOUR

We are told that "Saul grew more and more powerful" (verse 22), and the reference is to spiritual strength. (Compare verse 19, where he received physical strength.) How important it is for the new-born soul to grow in grace - 2 Peter 3: 18! There is one reference which gives us a clue to the amazing rapidity with which this man grew - look up **Galatians 1: 17-18** "I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days."

All those whom God has used greatly have had an "Arabia" experience. Think of Joseph, Moses and Elijah - and of the Lord Jesus who spent thirty years in Nazareth before the three years of His public ministry. We must not neglect prayer and Bible study, otherwise we will never grow!

5. HE ENCOUNTERED TERRIFIC OPPOSITION AND PERSECUTION

Look at verses 23, 24, 25 and 29, and see what the Lord said concerning His servant in verse 16. If we are going to be really faithful to the Lord it will cost us something - look up **Luke 14: 26, 27** and **33**, and compare **Matthew 5: 11-12**; **John 16: 33**; **Acts 5: 41** and **2 Corinthians 11: 24-28**.

6. HE HAD TO FACE AND OVERCOME INTERNAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Verse 26 tells us this. It was one thing to be misunderstood and persecuted by those who were not Christians, but here were God's people holding him under suspicion - yet how natural it was! Can we not picture the Jerusalem assembly as Paul, who had so recently been the enemy of the Church, came in to take his place at the Lord's Table? Thank God, large-hearted, generous-hearted Barnabas was there! - see verse 27. Paul was eventually welcomed into that fellowship of Christians at Jerusalem, and in verse 28 we have a picture of real fellowship. Look up **1 Corinthians 1: 9** "God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Where else can we find such wonderful fellowship? Nowhere else in the world!

7. HE WENT BACK TO TARSUS, THE HARDEST PLACE OF ALL!

Verse 30 tells us that the Christians in Jerusalem sent him home to his loved-ones and friends - compare **Mark 5: 19** "Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." with **Luke 8: 39** "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him." Have you gone back to your home, your loved ones and your friends and witnessed for your Saviour? That is what it means to begin in Jerusalem - look up **Luke 24: 47** "and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.". Here we are told how to begin the Christian life. Have you made a good beginning?