

# Lessons From Saul's Conversion

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[ 0 : 00 ]    Acts chapter 9, and we'll be reading the first 19 verses. Acts chapter 9, verse 1.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.! He went to the high priest and asked them for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any of those who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied. 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. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing.

[ 1 : 14 ]    So they led him by the hand into Damascus, and for three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias.

The Lord called to him in a vision, Ananias. Yes, Lord, he answered. 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. Lord, Ananias answered, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and he has come here with authority from the chief priest to arrest all who call on your name.

But the Lord said to Ananias, Go. This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. 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.

[ 2 : 37 ]    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.

So why study the conversion of Saul of Tarsus? Well, because it's one of the most important events in the whole book of Acts.

That's not just my opinion or some commentator's opinion. It's the opinion of the Holy Spirit. Because he tells us about it in detail, not once, not twice, but three times.

Kids, when your mom tells you something three times in a short space, you know it's something important, don't you? And when the Holy Spirit tells us three times in detail about this conversion, we ought to sit up.

He does not use vain repetition, as some do. No, there's a reason for it. And so the Lord Jesus would be saying to us here at Grace Fellowship Church, for whom these things are written, this is important.

[ 3 : 52 ] And if you get anything from this book of Acts, don't miss what I did here to this man Saul. And just so you don't miss it, I'm going to tell you about it here in chapter 9, again in chapter 22, and again in chapter 26.

So the question to begin with is, why is Saul's conversion so important? Let me give you several reasons. First of all, this event radically changed the course of this man's life, from what he was before to what he was after.

So if we could chart Saul's life, here's the trajectory of his life, the direction arrow of his life. He's going this way, for the better part of the first half of his life.

And then he comes to Acts chapter 9, in his life. And we notice that the line doesn't just keep on going in the same direction.

But rather, having seen it come all this way, we find that at this point, it turns around and goes the opposite direction. A direction diametrically opposed to the way that he has been living up to this point.

[ 5 : 09 ] Something happened here that forever and radically changed the direction of this man's life. And it begs the question, what is it?

Secondly, this event radically changed the course of church history. We read back in chapter 8 and verse 3 that Saul began to destroy the church.

The church that Jesus Christ was just beginning to build was now beginning to be destroyed, and largely because of the efforts of one man, Saul of Tarsus.

We will find later on, after his conversion, that a period of peace began for the church. Just because of this one man's conversion.

He was, in himself, responsible for this great persecution that was carried on against the Christians. But after this event, in Acts chapter 9, we find him building up the church of Christ that he so feverishly had been seeking to destroy all of his life, at least this period right before coming to Acts chapter 9.

[ 6 : 24 ] Even going so far from Jerusalem into distant lands to advance the cause of Christ's church. Church history reads ever so much differently because of what happens in Acts 9.

Indeed, the rest of the book of Acts reads differently, but so does the rest of church history. A third reason this is so important. This event radically changed the course of world history.

World history. Because during this present age, church history and world history are inextricably bound up together. What happens in the church in this world affects world history.

Indeed, the only reason world history continues another day is not so the newscasters have something to say. The only reason the world spins on another day is because Jesus is not done building his church.

The two go together. The moment Jesus has brought the last stone into contact with Christ and added it to his church, world history will come to a screeching halt as the Lord Jesus returns for his church.

[ 7 : 37 ] So world history has changed because of what happened here. Until Christ comes again, every stone that is built into the church comes from where?

It comes from the world. Oh, so church history affects world history. Church history takes one out of the world and puts it into the church of Jesus Christ.

And the church is in the midst of the world as the salt and light that affects the world and so affects church history. So what happened in Acts 9 not only changed the course of church history, but in so doing has changed world history.

World history. Kids, you study in world history at school? It's different because of what happened in Acts 9.

On the last day of Saul's journey to Damascus, Damascus, this man stopped destroying the church and started building it as a wise master builder.

[ 8 : 49 ] And he traveled as far as present-day Europe to build the church of Christ. And world history in Europe reads quite differently than it would have had this man not taken the gospel there.

And it doesn't end there, does it? Because from Europe, followers of the way came over to this great land and forever changed and shaped the course of U.S. history and so world history.

All because of what happened on that sunny day at noon just outside the gates of Damascus. But it gets even more personal than that because for many of us, these Christians from Europe came with the saving gospel of Jesus just where you live and where I live.

And by trusting in that gospel that came to us from Europe, that came to them from this man in Acts 9, our whole lives have been drastically changed.

Indeed, we might say our eternal history has been changed. In so many ways, God has left fingerprints of this man Saul upon us, every one of us who are in Christ.

[ 10 : 09 ] Have we not profited from his letters? Have we not been changed by his letters through the power of God? So what happened to this one Jewish Pharisee from Tarsus 2,000 years ago is important.

And it's important for yet another reason. It's important because it teaches us important lessons about this important subject of conversion.

Jesus said in Matthew 18, 3, I tell you the truth, unless you are converted, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Conversion is important.

You won't get into heaven without it. In other words, what happened to Saul in Acts chapter 9 must happen to you or you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

You must be converted. What is conversion? We could study it as a topic and go from Genesis to Revelation, but we're given an example of a conversion.

[ 11 : 18 ] And not once, not twice, but three times in this book of Acts. And so it's here for our learning. And I trust this morning we can learn something about conversion from Saul's conversion.

Someone says, but I haven't had a Damascus Road conversion. Does that mean that I'm not converted? Let me just say this. The Lord Jesus saves sinners in different ways.

We saw how he saved the Ethiopian eunuch. There's a lot of differences in the way he saved the Ethiopian eunuch from the way he saved Saul of Tarsus. Some similarities though as well, aren't there?

They were both saved on a road, weren't they? And other similarities. Some things are the same in all conversions. Haven't we seen that in the testimonies that we've listened to of those who've been baptized here?

Oh, how diverse are the circumstances. And yet how same is the way for all the people of the way. They all meet Jesus Christ by faith.

[ 12 : 25 ] So there are some things about Saul's conversion that are unique to him. The flashing light, the personal bodily appearance of the risen Lord Jesus, audibly speaking to him, being knocked to the ground at the splendor of his glory, sudden blindness just for Saul, not for his travelers, a blindness that lasted three days and then suddenly left when someone sent by the Lord Jesus laid his hands upon Saul.

These were unique to Saul's conversion. And I say that because he was no ordinary sinner either. From what we read, this man was in the process of destroying the church.

And so the Lord Jesus personally meets him and stops him in his tracks to save him from destroying the apple of his eye, his people.

This man was a chosen instrument to take the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles and to their kings and to people of Israel as the greatest missionary ever. This man was handpicked by the Lord Jesus to be an apostle born out of due time who had seen the risen Lord and who would write a fourth of our New Testament.

All that to say that we should expect to find certain features in his conversion that we will not find in ours. But don't let these amazing elements unique to Saul distract you from the common elements that are found in all conversions.

[14:03] And so the Holy Spirit has given us this conversion three times. And when we put those three accounts together, we get the full picture, much like you do with the three synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

They don't contradict each other, but each has a bit different detail. Put them together and you get the fullest explanation. So the conversion of Saul.

Let's begin with the word conversion itself. Conversion means a change or a transformation. It's a word we may be familiar with from other things that are converted.

We've had factories around us that give themselves to van conversion, don't we? And so a very ordinary and plain van goes into an assembly line.

You see it going in the back door and it comes out the front door, a living room on wheels. And you step inside and you say, my, is this different?

[15:04] It's not what it was when it went in. Look how different it is. It's been changed. It's been transformed. Now a spiritual conversion to Jesus Christ, according to the Bible, is a supernatural change that God himself works in the soul of man.

It's something God does to a sinner. We don't convert ourselves. We could just as easily create a son out of nothing as convert ourselves.

No, it's a work of God. He radically changes the heart. That's the control center of the whole personality as we think, as we desire, as we choose, and so on.

And he sets that heart in a whole different direction. We come in to the factory of conversion going this way.

And we hit conversion. And we come out going a whole new direction. A change, you see, of our whole being. And its directional arrow is no longer self-word, but now becomes God-word.

[16:15] And this inward change of heart cannot be hidden inside. It must express itself in outward behavior. And Saul of Tarsus himself later explains it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

If any man be in Christ, what shall we say? New creation. Everything is changed. The old is passed away.

All things have become new. Nothing's the same in a converted man. That's what happens when someone is converted.

As one old black slave said of his converted master, he's a new man in his old skin. You look at him, you say, well, that's him, but you stay around him for a while and you come to find out that's a new man inside.

The old guy is gone. This is somebody else. But he's in his own skin. A change, you see. It's more than a little window dressing. It's more than a little rearranging of the furniture and a paint job.

[17:21] It's a radical makeover so that the old man is gone and the new has come and nothing remains the same.

We see everything differently as a Christian. We now see Christ. We now see God. So let's draw some lessons on conversion from the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

First of all, conversion is God changing his enemies into his friends. Now, when the Lord Jesus set out to convert Saul of Tarsus, how did he find him?

Friend or foe? Well, let's remember why Saul is even on this road to Damascus. What do we read in verse one? Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

Oh, we read that back in chapter eight, didn't we, of Saul and the great persecution. Now, here we are in chapter nine. Some amount of time has passed. See, still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

[18:23] This ringleader of the persecution is still burning hot. It's his very breath. It's what his life is all about.

He breathes, as we say. He breathes the murderous threats of God's children, of Christ's disciples. So zealous is he that he's going to take his persecution gig on the road, we would say.

He's going to take it to foreign cities. What's the matter? Have you run out of disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem to persecute? Have too many slipped through your fingers, Saul, and fled that you must now go out and find them?

He'll track them down. Even in foreign cities, he'll arrest them. He'll drag them back to Jerusalem to punish them there. And we know what he means by punish them there because he tells us later on, in raging fury against them, I persecuted them, even to foreign cities, persecuting the followers of this way to their death.

So his intention is clear, this journey. Search and destroy. Search and destroy. He must have received some intelligence from this faraway place in Damascus of Syria that there were some Christians there taking refuge.

[19:51] It's 135 miles away. Now that's not much for us today, but that's the better part of a week's journey on foot. But not too far for Saul.

He doesn't have anything better to do in life than to hunt down followers of Jesus and purify the synagogues. And he's got authorization from the high priest to do so. So he's off and he's got some henchmen with him.

This is the Saul that Jesus met that day just outside of Damascus. An enemy, for sure. And I find that to be one of the most glorious things about conversion that is seen so clearly in Saul of Tarsus that Jesus Christ saves those who don't want to be saved.

Let me say that again. If you learn something from Saul, learn that, that Jesus Christ saves those who don't want to be saved.

That's how Jesus finds him and then he makes him willing to be saved in the day of his power. This is that supernatural power that comes to bear upon Saul in converting him, changing his mind, his affections, his will, and making him willing to come to Christ and trust in him.

[21:14] Saul did not want to be a Christian as he's traveling on the road to Damascus. It's the last thing he wanted to be. To him, the only good Christian was a dead Christian or at least in prison Christian.

That's why he's on this road to Damascus. The Lord says in Isaiah 65, I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.

That's Saul, if there ever was a man. He was not asking for the Lord Jesus that day. Oh, if only I knew where to find him. I would trust him.

In Saul's mind, Jesus was dead and rotting in the ground, and Saul was glad to have him there, forever silenced in the grave where he belongs. But on the last day of his journey, suddenly, with the bursting forth of his divine glory brighter than the sun, the risen Lord Jesus revealed himself to Saul who did not ask for him.

I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me. I was found by those who did not seek me. Hear me, Saul was not seeking the Lord Jesus that day, but he sure found him, didn't he?

[ 22 : 33 ] I was found by those who were not seeking me. He was an enemy of Christ, dead set against him. Wasn't he seeking him? Well, yes, I guess you could say so.

He was seeking to wipe out the memory of his name from earth, if that's what you mean by seeking. He was seeking to kill every follower of him or persecute them, make life miserable for them.

He was seeking to destroy his church, but he was not seeking the Savior. Being an enemy of God, then, is not one of those things that are unique to Saul's conversion, like the bright light, like the blindness and all the rest.

No, that's an element that's true of everyone that he converts. How does he find us? He finds us enemies of God, enemies of Christ. Saul later writes in Romans 8, 7, the sinful mind is enmity to God.

The very mind is set against God with hostility and enmity, and it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. You know, not all show their enmity toward God, like Saul did, by killing Jesus' followers.

[ 23 : 49 ] Not all show their enmity to God, that they're enemies of God by cursing him, by lifting up their face to heaven and cursing God.

No. Some do it in a very genteel way. They just refuse to submit to God's laws. Thank you, but no thank you.

And I'll be very polite about it. I might even be religious about it. I might give him an hour or two here or there in my life. But when I meet one of his commands that does not meet with what I want, thank you, but no thank you.

Good for you, not for me. And on they go on their life. Children, obey your parents. No, they just will not.

Wives, submit to your husbands. Oh, I just... Husbands, lay down your lives for your wives like Christ did for the church. church was too hard.

[ 24 : 53 ] Not willing to let God tell you how to live and live your life. Conversion, you see, is God changing his enemies into friends.

He takes away that enmity that refuses to obey his law. Paul never got over that when he wrote to the Roman church. He said in chapter 5 and verse 10, if when we were enemies, and he doesn't mean we, me and these henchmen of mine.

He means me and you all believers at Rome. Means you and me. If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to him by the death of his son. You see, we're all enemies.

Even though it may be seen more clearly in Saul's conversion, the scriptures say it's true of all conversions. When the Lord sets out in converting grace, he finds only enemies.

Not wanting him, not seeking him. Saul later makes the point very clear in Romans 3 and he says, this is true of all men in sin. Jew, Gentile, no difference.

[ 25 : 57 ] There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. This is Saul who is not seeking the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and now what is he saying?

He said, there's no one that seeks God. There's no one that seeks God. They have all turned away, he goes on to say. He's not making this up.

He's quoting the Old Testament scriptures that say, there is no one that seeks God. They have all turned away and gone their own way. No, we seek God like a fugitive seeks a policeman.

Not at all. We run from him. We've all turned our way wanting our way, not God or his way and that is no small part of our sin.

Just wanting our way. That's the very core of sin that's content to live without Jesus Christ in our face. We'll tell him where he can be in our life.

[ 27 : 02 ] You stay here on this fringe and that fringe but I'm in control here. I'm calling the shots. So it comes as good news that Jesus Christ has come to seek and to save that which is lost.

Did you get the first word? He's come to seek. Isn't that good because we aren't going to seek him. We're all seeking our own way that ends in hell and the good news is that Jesus has come to seek and to save sinners that would never seek him.

Did he not first seek them and turn them? As our hymn puts it I sought the Lord but afterward I knew he moved my soul to seek him seeking me.

It was not I that found O Savior true no I was found of thee. And it was when Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples that the Lord sought him.

Personally stopped him and revealed himself to him and changed him from enemy to friend. God sovereignly works conversion as he will where he will when he will as Saul will later say when God was pleased to reveal his son to me.

[ 28 : 20 ] Tell me Saul when did you become a Christian? When God was pleased to reveal his son to me. Conversion is God changing his enemies into his friends.

Secondly conversion is an act of God's sovereign grace. Grace. Saul did nothing to qualify himself for conversion.

Can I just ask you does breathing out slaughter against the Lord's disciple qualify him? Does that make him commend himself to God for doing him salvation?

No he quickly learned that this did not earn him any brownie points with Christ who took it all quite personally. Saul Saul why are you persecuting me?

Who are you Lord? I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Twice he tells you are persecuting me. Jesus and to his horror he finds the Lord Jesus is alive and he knows his name and he knows what he's doing and that there is such an intimate union between Jesus and his people that what he has been doing to his people is taken as being done to this Jesus who is now before me in dazzling blinding splendor.

[ 29 : 44 ] Very clearly then this persecutor blasphemer violent man had nothing to commend himself to Jesus for one thing good.

The only thing he brought to the deal was his sin and for that he deserved eternal damnation. He should have been vaporized on the road to Damascus and sent to an eternal hell and he knew it at that moment and yet he received mercy.

He received grace. Free grace, saving grace, converting grace, sovereign grace and he never got over. Do you know he starts to call the gospel, the gospel of the grace of God?

What is the gospel? It's the good news about God's grace. He'd been trained to think that he could merit salvation, that the way you get to heaven was do enough good deeds to earn it and suddenly he's face to face with the Lord of glory, the judge, and he realized he's bankrupt.

He doesn't have anything that he's looking for. He doesn't have the slightest thing to offer. And yet casting his bankrupt self upon the mercy of God in Jesus, he's shown grace.

[ 31:01 ] He's forgiven the whole of his sins. And he never got over that fact. And that's why his letters ooze!

with grace and drip with mercy. Oh, we lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another, but when the kindness and love of God are saved, but God who is, I'm sorry, I mixed it, but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

On he goes, we were the objects of wrath, but because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses and sin.

Folks, I was as dead as could be spiritually toward God until that light shone and I was suddenly made alive to the most important reality in life, that Jesus who had died is risen and is Lord of all and he saves sinners, not by merit, but by his grace.

grace, where sin abounded, grace super abounded, and the conversion of Saul tears to shreds all schemes of salvation by works and they are legion in the church, not just Catholicism, but in the Protestant church, people thinking they're going to make it to heaven because of something they have done and it changes from person to person.

[ 32:47 ] This conversion ought to shatter that once and for all. You don't get in by merit, by your own merit, you get in by God's grace. Now last Sunday morning we had Manasseh's great sin set before us and then we saw God's greater grace that saved him.

I would posit that what we have in Acts chapter 9 is a New Testament version of Manasseh. We have an example of a great sinner that we might stand in awe of a greater Savior.

In fact, that's why Saul says he was saved. If his grace can save a Christ-hating, Christian-killing, blaspheming, violent man like me, can't he save you?

In fact, that's the very reason that he saved me. Listen how he puts it in 1 Timothy 1. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason, I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his full patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

[ 34:07 ] I'm an example of grace for the ungodly. Don't let this example be lost upon you. Learn from him that Jesus Christ is more full of grace than you could ever be of sin.

Call on him to save you and then never get over how amazing God's grace is like Saul of Tarsus. Conversion is the sovereign work of God's grace.

Thirdly, conversion establishes a new relationship with Jesus Christ. A new relationship with Christ. It grows out of a new understanding, a new mind that is given. And in his ignorance, Saul had thought he was serving God by persecuting Christians.

And don't be surprised at that. We have people doing it all over the world and have throughout history. They thought they were serving God by killing people. And Saul was one of them. But he's now made to see that heaven has a different view on his work.

And what he thought to be pleasing to God, he now sees as most sinful and wicked. And I would say that the same thing is true of any person that's converted, that they come to see sin in a new light.

[ 35:23 ] Things that they weren't even bothered about before. They did it like a man drinks water. It was just natural to them. They weren't bothered by it. They just did it. And that was the way it was.

And then they were converted. They had a conversion to Christ and their whole mind was changed. And now they see something that they're doing and they say, oh man, what am I doing?

I'm sinning against God. God. And they want to be free from it. They want to be done with it. They confess it. And they see sin where they never saw it before.

Oh, there's a different understanding of sin. There's a different understanding of Christ. A different attitude towards sin.

And you know, the greatest enlightenment for Saul was that Jesus Christ, who had been crucified, was really alive and living in heaven and knew him by name and knew what he was doing.

[ 36 : 24 ] That was the terrifying thing. It was a real meeting with the risen Lord. Some people said he had an epileptic fit and others say this and that.

And over and over again in these accounts of his conversion, we are made to know he met the risen ascended Lord Jesus who had been crucified.

He met him. Jesus introduced himself to him. I am Jesus. And it wasn't a dream. Saul never speaks of this event in any other way.

1 Corinthians 9.1 Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? 1 Corinthians 15.8 He appeared after his resurrection to Peter and James and 500 of the brethren at once.

And last of all, he was seen by me. I've seen him. That was the mind blowing experience that radically changed his understanding of Jesus Christ.

[ 37 : 29 ] From phony Messiah to risen, living, eternal Son of God. And even so, we once saw no glory in Jesus Christ. I don't care how orthodox our views on Christ were, we saw no glory in him that we would want to live for him.

that we would want to trust our very lives into his hands. No glory despised and rejected by men. That's how we treated him. And we didn't give him much room in our thoughts and even less in our lives.

We kept him out here on the edges and self in the center. But when we got a new view of Jesus Christ, no, not a bright light from heaven like Saul, but God who said let light shine out of darkness made his light shine into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We see glory in Christ where we never saw it before. We see beauty, we see loveliness, we see preciousness in Christ that we never saw before. That's what conversion does.

It changes our mind, our understanding, our affections. And once we see him for who he is, we go down, we go down, and we surrender, we surrender to the Lord Jesus.

[ 38 : 55 ] Saul finds himself face planted on the ground before the Lord Jesus, and for the first time in his life, he knows that's where he belongs. Lo, before God the Son.

he's my Lord, he's my master. And we learn from the account in Acts 22 that from the ground, Saul says, what shall I do, Lord?

I'm Jesus. What shall I do, Lord? Those words had never crossed his lips before. He didn't give a hoot what the Lord Jesus wanted him to do before.

But you see, that was before conversion. And now, upon meeting Christ, what do you want? I'm yours. We sang it, take my will, and make it thine, it shall be no longer mine.

What do you want, Lord? Lord, what didn't matter at all before him became the most important thing to him.

[ 40 : 13 ] His whole itinerary and plans for Damascus scuttled. He's not there to drag followers of Christ back to Jerusalem anymore.

Indeed, at the feet of Jesus as Lord, his whole agenda in life was forever changed. Jesus says, now get up and go into the city, and there you will be told what you must do.

And with a changed mind and desire and will, Saul is up and going at the word, at the command of Jesus. Immediate obedience. Even though he's now blind, he's up and going.

Lead me, lead me into the city. That's where I'm going to have other instruction, further commands from my new master, my new Lord. And the word that Jesus gave him from Ananias three days later was also obeyed, even though it meant great sacrifice for Saul.

danger and much suffering to preach the very Jesus he had been seeking to blaspheme and wipe his name from earth. He obeyed, and he was baptized, as all believers in Jesus are commanded to do, showing their identification with him, him whom I hated and pursued as my enemy.

[ 41 : 31 ] I am now his friend. I am now saved by him. And he obeys and submits to baptism, declaring his faith in the Lord Jesus. And the one thing that now trumped everything else for Saul is what does the Lord Jesus want?

I'm glad we sang that song again today, Take My Will and Make It Thine. Because yes, every one of us at our conversion experience said, Take My Will and Make It Thine.

And we take a little bit of it back, don't we? And we need to come again and again. Take it, Lord. Not My Will, but Yours be done.

That's not a one-time prayer. Our Lord Jesus teaches us. That's the very breath of prayer. Have you surrendered your will to His will?

Does His written word set the agenda for your day-to-day? Your life this week? Everything that you will do and will not do? The Lord Jesus calls His disciples to obey everything that His word that He has commanded.

[ 42 : 42 ] And that's all part of this new relationship, isn't it, to Jesus Christ that conversion brings. People converted by Christ obey Him as their Savior and Lord. Well, that three-day blindness was an illuminating blindness.

What I mean is that Saul never saw things more clearly than during those three days that he was blind. He saw, as we said, everything had become new. Sin is different.

He's different. Christ is different. God is different. The Old Testament scriptures that he had been trained, it's all new. It's different. It's an earth-shaking crisis of the soul that he passed through those three days.

I think you can see it by the loss of appetite for all food and drink. Think of all he was sorting through. I thought he was dead. But if he's alive, and he is, then everything he claimed is true.

And those Christians that I've been persecuting, they are right. And I have been oh so wrong. And I've been fighting against God, not serving him as I thought.

[ 43 : 58 ] Life can't go on as it has been. What repenting, what trusting was going on in those three blind days, but illumination of his mind.

He had studied the Old Testament scriptures under Gamaliel, the leading teacher of the scriptures. But he had been missing the key to its interpretation. Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Now he's got the key. And though he's blind, he's thinking those Old Testament scriptures. Oh, I see it now. That one bearing our transgressions, that one dying and suffering the punishment to make us have peace with God, that was Jesus of Nazareth.

You say, how do you know? Because just days later, we'll find him on the streets of Damascus preaching Jesus as the Messiah, convincing them from the scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.

Oh, what light was flowing in upon him those three days of blindness. What repenting, what believing, what sorrow, what joy, what turbulence, what peace, as into the assembly line came this rotten sinner and out came the saint.

[ 45:16 ] Into the assembly line of conversion went an enemy, out came a follower of Jesus, a lover of Jesus, an obedient servant of Jesus. It's the converting grace of God.

There is nothing like it on earth. It works a radical change. A new relationship with Jesus Christ.

And the rest is history. Read the rest of Acts, read the rest of the fourth of the New Testament, his letters, and you'll see what Jesus means to this man. And you'll see what the grace of God means to him.

A new relationship with Jesus. And lastly, conversion sets a man praying. This is what Paul was doing during those three days in Damascus.

In verse 11, when the Lord Jesus would encourage Ananias as he's sending him to Saul, he says, behold, he is praying. King James is better there than the NIV.

[ 46:19 ] Behold, stop, look, here's something to draw alongside off the road and look at. He's praying. Now, what's so staggering about that?

How does that prove a change in Saul, that it's not the same Saul? No doubt before, Saul said many a prayer as a self-righteous Jew, but now for the first time he really begins to pray.

And there's a world of difference between saying a prayer and praying and Jesus knows it and says, behold, he's praying. That guy's praying.

He who knows the heart says, behold, he's praying. For the Holy Spirit was given to him, the Spirit who teaches rebel hearts to pray as we sing.

Listen to what C.J. Vaughn says of Saul's praying. It was the first time he ever prayed with the knowledge of the plague of his own heart. It was the first time he ever prayed that he had seen himself as God saw him, as poor and destitute, miserable and blind, as a man needing a sacrifice for his sins, a mediator to intercede for him to God.

[ 47:31 ] It was the first time he ever prayed as a man to whom all the past is but a heap of worthless rags, as a man whose whole fabric of self-righteousness toppled down and whose one cry was for that all sufficient, merciful Savior to become his atoning sacrifice, his righteousness, the guide of his way and the hope of his end.

You see, it's a new Saul. It's a converted Saul and it's seen by his praying according to Jesus. He's praying. A mark of conversion. As a dead religionist, he was content with the lifeless forms of prayer.

The converted Saul is satisfied with nothing less than communion with his living, risen, exalted Savior and Lord. I talk to him.

It's all the difference in the world with prayer. True prayer, the mark of conversion. It's one of the ways that true Christians are identified. We find that Ananias telling the Lord Jesus, Lord, don't you know this Saul, this guy Saul, he's coming to arrest all those who call on your name.

Who's he coming to arrest? The Lord's disciples. How are they identified? As all those who call on his name. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

[ 48:55 ] And a converted person has called on the name of the Lord to be saved and they go on calling on the name of the Lord. They pray in his name. They talk to him.

They seek his help and forgiveness and guidance and strength and comfort and protection. They call on his name. They need him every hour so they call on him.

Often they're a people who have been reduced to utter dependence upon him. And so in prayer they lift up their voice and say, help me Jesus. No longer leaning on their own understanding but leaning on him.

Do you pray, my friend? Do you really pray? Do you really have dealings with the Lord Jesus? Do you talk to him? He knows the difference between formality and reality.

Can you be described as one who calls on the name of the Lord? Prayer is the Christian's vital breath and if you're not breathing you're not alive.

[ 49 : 58 ] Like the first breath of a newborn baby, Saul of Tarsus is crying out to his Savior. baby Christian Saul.

Behold, he prays. What a change. Remember how he left for Damascus? Still breathing out slaughter against the Lord's disciples.

How is he now that he's got to Damascus? He's breathing out prayers in the name of the Lord. What a change. What a change. It's conversion. Has this Jesus converted you from enemy to friend?

Has he brought you to trust in the amazing grace of God leaning only on mercy, not any of your merit? Has he made you a new person with a whole new relationship with Jesus Christ?

Has he taught you to pray and to enjoy talking with him? I tell you the truth. Unless you are converted, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

[ 51:08 ] Call on the Lord right now. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he's near. For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

And go on calling upon his name until you see him face to face as he returns for you. Let's pray. Thankful we are Lord Jesus for the way you met this enemy of yours on the Damascus road, the way it changed his life and church history, world history and the history for many of us here.

And we pray for others who still are going their own way and pray that you would seek them and find them right now, right here. And turn their hearts to give up the fight, to give up the run, to give up ruling their own lives and to cast themselves upon the mercy of God in Christ.

God be merciful to me a sinner and save me for Jesus' sake. Do it for your praise and glory. Thank you for the way you're building your church and the strongest enemies of it cannot withstand the power of your grace.