

The Ultimate Conversion

by Danny Bond

The sermon explores the ultimate conversion of Saul into the apostle Paul, from a persecutor of Christians to a devoted follower of Christ.

Duration: 44:48

Scripture: Acts 6:10, Acts 9:4

Topics: "Physical Appearance", "Spiritual Conversion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes a man who was physically unattractive and had a funny appearance. Despite his appearance, this man had a great intellect and was used by God in a powerful way. The speaker encourages the audience to not be discouraged by their own physical appearance or shortcomings, as God can still use them. The sermon also discusses the conversion of this man, who was blinded by the light of Jesus and had a life-changing encounter with Him.

Transcript

Father, God in heaven, how we thank you that it's possible for your kingdom to come to be within us here upon earth. And how we thank you, Lord, that you do bow down your ear, as it were, and listen to us. That when we pray to you, we're not sending prayers across to the outer reaches of the universe, but we're speaking right into your ear.

And you hear every word we have to say to you. You even know the thoughts of our hearts. So, Lord, as you know the thoughts of our hearts this morning, look upon them.

Holy Spirit, we ask that you would take your word, make it alive, apply it to our hearts, invigorate our souls, and give us that spiritual food that we need to grow up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Jesus Christ. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

This message is entitled The Ultimate Conversion. It is all about, in Acts chapter 9, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus into the apostle Paul as we know him. I'd like to read through the text in chapter 9, verse 1 down to verse 9. Then Saul, still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and he asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus.

Now, Damascus, you must understand, is 200 miles away from Jerusalem. You may think reading your Bible, it's just down the street. He's persecuting people around Jerusalem and now he's sort of exhausted

all those to arrest and imprison and kill there, so he just wants to go down the street to Damascus.

He needs to go 200 miles now to find more Christians to arrest, persecute, and murder. That's how thorough his persecution has been. He is, you might say, the devil's champion on planet Earth at this point in time.

Without question, he is the devil's champion and he is the most unlikely human being on Earth to be converted because he is the greatest persecutor of Christianity in Jesus Christ. Verse 3, and as he journeyed, he came near Damascus. Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven and then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

It is hard for you to kick against the goats. So he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what do you want me to do? Then the Lord said to him, arise and go into the city and you will be told what you must do. And the men who journeyed with him, a large entourage of powerful men that would be used to help him capture Christians, arrest them, and bring them bound back to Jerusalem.

So it's a large entourage of tough men, temple police soldiers, whatever. These men who journeyed with him, verse 7, stood speechless and they heard a voice, but they saw no one. Then Saul rose from the ground when his eyes were open.

He saw no one, but they led him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. And he was three days without sight and neither ate nor drank. We'll stop there for today because there's so much there.

As I said to you, this is the most unlikely individual to be converted, I think, on the face of the earth at that time. But this is the kind of thing God specializes in. The Lord loves to rescue sinners.

And the whole process of salvation is so marvelous to behold, it really is. How many of you know the hymn Amazing Grace? Do this. Very good.

Do you know who wrote it? You say Amazing Grace, it's a great song, must have been a wonderful saintly man. He was a man by the name of John Newton. John Newton went to sea, like most sailors of his day, at a very young age.

And he worked on slave ships, slave trading ships. He would go back and forth from Britain to Africa and then around to countries where he would sell the slaves. For a while, he worked on slave ships and then he began to be the captain of one himself.

He sank into the lowest kind of debauchery and evil and sin in his life imaginable and became a horrible person. In fact, at one point in a brawl on board ship in a storm, the fellows on the ship that hated him took him and threw him overboard because they hated him so much. Another one of the guys on the ship wanted to rescue him.

So he get this. He took a harpoon and he harpooned him and drug him back onto the ship. We're calling this debauchery because that's what it is.

And in the process, saved his life. He sank so low that eventually he became the slave of slaves and was chained up and ate his food out of what was something like a dog bowl chained to the ground by this person he was a slave to. He finally got free.

And along the way in his life, a couple of women back in England began to pray for him. Then someone gave him a copy of a book by one of those old writers, one of those books that continues to be published. The book is called *The Imitation of Christ*.

The author is Thomas Akempis. He read that book and got all of the knowledge into his head, but he did not come to Jesus Christ. He carried the knowledge around in his head and continued to sink into his sin.

Finally, he was in the storm at sea and the Lord quickened all that knowledge of Christ from Thomas Akempis book to his heart. And he came to know Jesus Christ personally. Then God, in the great wonder of the process of salvation, when he went back to England, introduced him, made the Lord made sure that he became friends with John and Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, William Wilberforce.

And these are the kind of men that he was able to, quote, hang out with the rest of his life. He became a great pastor during that time of the Great Awakening in Great Britain. When it came time for him to die, he said, I want to write the words that will be on my tombstone.

I want to write them myself. And this is the epitaph that he wrote. And it's there on his tombstone today, says this John Newton clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned and then appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.

I look at that account and I can't help but think of the man in our text who is suddenly converted after he had long labored to destroy the faith of Jesus Christ. In this passage that we've read, I see basically four things that happen in a great conversion. First of all, there's the contact with Christ and his people.

Secondly, there's the conviction that happens, then the conversion and then the consecrated life to Christ after contact, conviction, conversion and consecration to him. That's how it happens. Let's talk about it.

First of all, the contact, the contact that Saul of Tarsus had with Christianity and with Christ brought pretty much a violent reaction. And that is because initially of his beliefs, you see, as a Jew, he was a Hellenistic Jew. As a Jew, he believed and was looking for believed in and was looking for a Messiah who would come, who would be a militant Messiah, who would throw off the yoke of the Roman government.

They were all looking for that kind of Messiah at the time of Jesus. That's why they rejected him. So wanting a Messiah who would throw off the Roman yoke.

And knowing that Jesus Christ claimed to be the Messiah and the son of God, to then see him die on a Roman cross in humiliation and defeat made it impossible for him to believe Jesus Christ was the Messiah. It was a contradiction of terms to him, flew in the face of everything he believed. That is the reason he wrote later in writing to the Corinthians that he said to the Jew, the cross is a stumbling block.

That's why, because they were looking for a Messiah who would throw off the Roman yoke and be a conquering king. Instead, he died as a criminal on a cross and weakness and defeat, a stumbling block to the Jews, he said, because it was to him. And he said foolishness to the Greek.

Because who is going to want a Messiah or a savior who can't even, quote, save himself, but that's to misunderstand the heart of God, to misunderstand the cross and to misunderstand the resurrection and to misunderstand who he was and the plan of redemption. So because of his beliefs, he rejected Christ. And you find him in Acts, chapter six.

If you just hold your place, turn back to Acts, chapter six, verse nine. He was disputing. These beliefs in the synagogue that he attended, which was the synagogue of the freedmen.

And there, Acts six, nine, it says there arose some of what is called the synagogue of the freedmen. That would be Cyrenians, Alexandrians and those from Cilicia. That's where Paul was from, Cilicia, Tarsus and Asia.

And they were disputing with Stephen now because Saul was the champion of all these people, the smartest, the fastest and the one who had been tutored by Gamaliel. You know, he would have been the foremost one to dispute with Stephen. And he lost.

He lost the debate. Geniuses are sore losers. Not that I would know personally, but I have known some.

So he lost the debate and it infuriated him. And in verse 10, it says they were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke. And then they secretly induced men to say we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God, and that becomes in Stephen's sermon his answer to all of that, which was all false.

So because of their beliefs, they rejected Jesus Christ and the Christian message. They could not believe and Saul could not believe Jesus was the Messiah and the son of God because he had died on the cross and defeat his beliefs. His beliefs then generated within him his belligerence that was just unbelievable.

This man realized that Jesus Christ in his mind was dead. However, his movement was not. So he made it his life's work to exterminate Christianity.

Christ is in the grave. I'll make sure all other Christians end up dead and in the grave, too. I will personally lead a movement to exterminate Christianity.

And that is what he gave himself to. So in Acts nine, one, you read, then Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus. So if they found any who were of the way, that's what they called Christianity in the beginning, because Jesus said, I am the way, truth and the life, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

He didn't care if you're a man or if you're a woman, he would still seek to bring you bound to Jerusalem and breathing out murder. It says here, bring you to your death. His belligerence knew no bounds.

He was at this point, sadistical, driven by darkness and by Satan himself and gone to the extreme of even going all the way to Damascus. He is such a fascinating man to study, because if you look at his background, he was born a Roman citizen. Cilicia was a Tarsus.

Tarsus was a Roman province born a Roman citizen. Thus, he had the freedom to travel all around the Roman Empire later, born a Roman citizen, but raised his father was a Pharisee, raised in the way of Judaism, even to the point that he was tutored by the greatest rabbi the Jews ever had, Gamaliel. It is said that when Gamaliel died, the reverence for the law of God died with him.

That's very believable, because if you recall, when we studied acts earlier, the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel, was made up of almost entirely Sadducees by the time of Jesus Christ and the Sadducees, as opposed to the Pharisees, did not believe in the afterlife, did not believe in anything supernatural, did not

believe in angels, not believe in miracles. They were utterly liberal. They were the ones that stepped forth to be the rabbis in the future and thus liberal.

So Gamaliel, you remember, stood up among them all. And it was Gamaliel who said when they were taking the apostles and mishandling them and wanting to kill them, Gamaliel said, leave them alone, because if this movement is of God, you want to be careful lest you'd be found to be fighting against God himself. Gamaliel, though not converted to Christianity, had a great reverence for the law.

He tutored Saul of Tarsus. So his background is amazing. He's born a Roman.

He's tutored by Gamaliel. He's a genius. His writings reveal an intellect that is monumental.

Further, to add to this interesting blend, he was schooled in Tarsus at the university there, which was one of the three great universities in the world. You had Alexandria, you had Athens and you had Tarsus. And he was schooled there as a Greek.

Greek culture, Greek education, Roman citizen tutored by Gamaliel, Pharisee of the Pharisees. So he's the ultimate Jew, the ultimate Roman citizen and the ultimate Greek. No wonder he ends up the apostle to the Gentiles.

It is amazing to contemplate how God sovereignly works in your life before you're ever born again, looking toward what he's going to do in your life after you are born again. The truth is salvation begins in eternity past. The truth is we're saved out from eternity.

God knew you from eternity past, the Bible says. We'll study that in the future. You know, talk about predestination for knowledge and so on.

So all those light subjects. Thought I'd toss out a little distracting teaser right here. But you look at the background of this individual and he has this incredible blend and he's so brilliant and he can move in all circles of life and he does in the future.

And, you know, something just before I move on. I just want to say this. If you're born again today, you know, Jesus Christ, you can look back at your life and you can see the hand of God upon your life before you were ever born again, molding and shaping you.

And he's he's using it all now toward what he's called you to in your life here with him on this planet. Salvation is a wonder to behold. His beliefs caused him to reject Christ.

His belligerence caused many people to die and be imprisoned. His background is phenomenal and amazing and was used in the rest of his life in his ministry. One thing I want to mention at this point before we go on to the conviction on the Damascus Road is I don't know how you imagine Paul at this point, Saul, but I look at a guy like this and I look at his background and I look at his influence and I picture a man of huge stature.

Huge. I mean, he's got a gigantic intellect. He is so influential.

I picture a William Wallace type. William Wallace, the great braveheart in Scotland. They say he was seven feet tall.

You say, no, that's legend. No, it isn't. I have been to the Wallace Monument in Scotland and I've stood in front of his Claymore sword that they have in a glass case.

He was seven feet tall. How do you know that? Because they made your Claymore sword by measuring from your chin down to the ground. And that's how long your sword was.

And I have a copy of his sword in my office. So don't ever mess with me. So I imagine this William Wallace type.

The amazing thing about Paul is that he was for ten historians. Give us this information. He was about four ten and he had kind of a hunchback.

So take four ten, bend him over and you get him down around four feet. I mean, he's already funny looking at very bushy hair, which sort of wrapped around his face because he had such bushy eyebrows that they write of him as having one eyebrow. You know, the one eyebrow.

Look, you don't see it too often these days. And I hope we don't have it here. But pick up some tweezers at Walgreens after and get some help.

Anyway, he he's got this bushy hair, this one eyebrow crosses face. They say he had very buggy eyes. He stooped over.

He's four ten. And they said he had really skinny, spindly legs with knobby knees. So just imagine this guy running around through a froggy individual.

That is so amazing to me because he had this huge intellect and yet he was so funny looking and even references that in some of his writings. You know, I'm not this great presence when I'm among you and everybody's like, yeah, tell us about it, you know. So what that says to me is this.

When you look in the mirror, you know, I don't know what your reaction is. A few of you are the beautiful people. You probably love it.

But for the rest of us, when you look in the mirror, you look at your life and you look at what you are, you think, oh, how could God ever use me? Well, look at how God used this funny little man. So funny. And his appearance.

And how touching that later in his life, by the time he died, that little body of his was scarred from head to toe, literally the scars he had from the blows that were meant for Christ that fell on him. Whatever you look like, whoever you are today, God can use you and he wants to. So here's this man and his contact with Christianity.

Let's go to his conviction. He's traveling now down the road, probably went out the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem and down that old road that's been there for so long, all the way back to the days of the Silk Roads that ran back into China and everything else, the trading caravan routes. And he goes down this road to Damascus and he's traveling along and you can just imagine him strategizing.

And he is in his life at the peak of his hatred for Jesus Christ and Christianity. He has never been, in a sense, farther from being converted. So it's not as though he's going down the Damascus Road thinking, you know, maybe when I get to Damascus, I'll check out Christianity, go to a Bible study and think about coming to know Jesus.

No, bear in mind, he's going to Damascus to get people, arrest them, take them back to Jerusalem and see that if he can have them killed, if possible, as he's journeying along in this state, the conviction of God comes to him. By the way, conviction is only something God can bring. Conviction and condemnation are two different things.

Do you know that it's helpful to understand that condemnation is woe is me and nothing but allows. I'm just a crumb. I'll never be any good.

I messed up. God doesn't love me. That's condemnation.

And that's very unhealthy. Conviction is the light of God shining into your soul. A holy God showing you your condition before him.

And always with the conviction of God comes the light to find the way out of your sin into his light and his love. OK, understand the difference. So we come to his conviction and that always has to happen to bring you to true salvation.

He is suddenly, as he's traveling along, bathed in the light of the living Christ, who he thinks is dead. Acts nine three, as he journeyed, he came near Damascus and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven and then he fell to the ground and he heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? He is on a long journey, suddenly interrupted with the light of God, and that is how it happens in life. You're on your journey in your life.

You're living out your deception. You may even have the light of the gospel in your head, but not in your heart. And suddenly Christ comes to you in such a way that it makes all the difference.

It is what you could say the ultimate life changing revelation of Jesus Christ to your heart. And so suddenly he's bathed in the light of the living Christ. He's not dead.

He finds out he's living. You realize, of course, it would be his greatest nightmare to discover that Christ was alive. His greatest nightmare.

I mean, it unravels everything about his whole life now. And now he finds out suddenly this light shines around him from heaven. In verse three, when you read the light shone around him from heaven and then he fell to the ground, that light, as he describes it, because his conversion is described three different times in Acts.

That light is brighter than the noonday sun. Imagine how bright that is. So that light suddenly shines around him and no wonder he falls to the ground and he hears a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me now at this point in time? You have to realize where his mind is at.

He knows the gospel. He knows the gospel. And he we know that he knows it because when they stoned Stevens, he was standing there holding the coats of the individuals who were throwing the rocks.

Remember that Stevens sermon in Acts chapter six is absolutely flawless. It's the longest sermon on Christ in the book of Acts, and it is the most detailed, the most detailed. And he was there and he heard that.

And he didn't just hear it. He never forgot it. You know how I know he never forgot it.

Because who wrote the book of Acts? Luke. Luke was not there in that sermon. Luke was Paul's physician who attended him in his ministry because he was always getting stoned to death and shipwrecked, things like that.

So he had his own private physician. Paul gave that sermon back to Luke word for word to write down in Acts chapter six because he never forgot one word of it. So he had that photographic memory.

He had that kind of brain. You only need one exposure to it and stays there. So he had the sermon word for word of Stephen in his mind with every Christian he sent to their death.

And there it was in his mind. But you know how when you hate something and you want to get rid of it and as you're there, you're just you have that thing in your mind going around, around, around, around, around. The very thing that you don't like is going around and around and around in your head.

Every time he persecuted a Christian to their death, the gospel was going around and around that sermon. It was going around and around. And he had never in his whole life seen anyone die like Stephen.

Never. He sent a lot of people to his death. You know where we read in the first few verses and then saw still breathing out threatenings and murder.

The Greek word there that's translated murder is the Greek word for knows she's 10 times in the New Testament. And it's translated murder in almost every place except Hebrews 11:37. I think it is.

But here's the point. When you put the phrase together that's in the original Greek, it is literally he was inhaling murder. He was inhaling murder.

And so as he is treating God's people like this, it's with the whole time, the whole sermon of Stephen in his head. So when the light of the glory of God and Jesus Christ suddenly shines on him and knocks him to the ground into the dirt, it took that kind of revelation and light from Jesus Christ to take the light of Christ from his head to his heart as he slammed down into the dirt. The truth of Christ is effectively slammed down into his heart.

And finally, he believes it. Finally, he believes it in a moment of time. Thoroughly then convinced of his sin, which was what? Rejecting Jesus Christ.

What is the one sin that will shut you out of heaven? One sin rejecting Christ. So in verse four, says then he fell to the ground and he heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting? My people, does it say that? No, it says me. Why are you persecuting me? You see, that's the point that he realized everything I've been doing has been against him and he's alive.

Not only is he alive, he's right here. He's right above me. And he's just got his face in the dirt.

He's in the ultimate point of brokenness and humiliation. Why are you persecuting me? And so there is the conviction. The moment you come to realize that the greatest sin in your life is rejecting Jesus Christ and that God will hold you accountable for that, that's the moment you can be saved.

And you must, with all your soul, feel the guilt of that sin. Does that make sense to you? Now, follow this very closely. To then design a church where nobody ever goes out the door feeling guilty is to emasculate the gospel.

Because until you feel your guilt through your whole soul for rejecting Christ, you will never be born again. How sad it is today that so many pulpits are designed to keep people from ever really feeling guilty. They're keeping them out of the kingdom of God.

Now, I don't think we should make people feel rotten and worthless and guilt in that sense, send them out the door, you know, feeling like losers. That's a different issue. But we must all feel our guilt of rejecting Christ.

To come to him, be rescued and then cleansed of all that guilt. And then we have the peace that passes all understanding. Salvation, the conviction, why are you persecuting me? You know, there's one other thing here.

And that is when he says, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? That says that Jesus Christ takes the persecution of his people very personally, very personally, so that whatever happens to you from others because of your love for Christ, know this, he feels it. My Bible tells me that Jesus Christ is on the right hand of God and he ever lives to make intercession for me, right? That means his eye is ever on me. He knows everything that's happening to me so he can intercede for me.

Thus, when I am persecuted, when the devil assaults me, he takes it personally because really it's against him. It's because of him. Hebrews 7:25 says, therefore, he is also able to save to the uttermost, to the full extent those who come to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

So when I am persecuted, when I feel the pain of the fiery darts of the devil, when I feel the insults and the rejection and the betrayals of all the Judas types around me in the body of Christ, he feels it, too. I thank God I have a high priest who is not untouched my infirmities, with my pains that I go through and he is able to minister to me. Why are you persecuting me, he says.

And right here, the theology of the body of Christ was born in the heart of this man. And later he unfolds it in First Corinthians and Ephesians. Touch the head to touch the body.

So he is flooded with the light of God, deeply convicted. And you know what the shock of all of it was, I think? To find out that he was fighting God himself. Don't forget here.

This man is you'll never find a more religious man in your whole life. He is steeped and flooded with religion. And in verse five, he said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said to him, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

It's hard for you to kick against the goads. It's really hard for you to deal with that sermon of Stephen that echoes over and over in your head, isn't it? It's really hard for you to see his smiling angelic face as you held the coats of the men that stoned him to death and you watched his blood stain the dirt. It's hard.

You're the most miserable man on the face of the earth. It's hard, isn't it? Yes, Lord, it's hard. And his misery ends at that point because he quits fighting God.

But, you know, he came to realize something very powerful beyond even that. Who are you, Lord? What does he say? Well, I'm from Nazareth and did a few miracles in my day. You may have heard of them.

No. Who are you, Lord? I am. I believe there's a long pause there.

Who are you, Lord? I am. Moses standing at the burning bush. God says, I want you to go to Egypt and be the deliverer.

Well, who should I tell them has sent me? I am. Who are you, Lord? I am. Gamaliel back in the meeting with the Sanhedrin.

Be very careful how you handle these men, lest if this movement is of God, you be found to be fighting against God himself. Who are you, Lord? I am. I'm fighting the I am God.

Jesus Christ is the I am. He is God. And this is why he never refers to him as Jesus of Nazareth.

And his writing, always the risen Lord, always the risen Lord, because this is where he met him. He met him as God, the I am. And he realized he was fighting against God.

The moment you realize you're fighting against God is a moment. You're ready to stop because guess what? Everybody that fights with God loses. Your arms are too short to box with God.

You will lose every time. And he's loving enough to do what it takes to bring you to the point where you can be rescued as Saul was here. And I thank God for that.

I thank God for that. So listen to this. When this individual was most convicted, he was most violent and then he was suddenly saved.

When you're praying for people in your life that you know and love and they seem to be getting worse, Lord, I've been praying for them. All my friends are praying for them. They're getting worse.

Lord, evidently, this person would never be saved. They can't be. They're only getting worse.

They may be the closest they've ever been. So the contact with Christ and his people comes to the conviction. And now the conversion happens.

He has said, who are you, Lord? He tells him now, verse six. So he trembling and astonished said, and here's his profession of faith. Lord, he is now his Lord.

Lord, what do you want me to do? Later in Romans 10, he says, you want to be saved. Believe in your heart on the Lord Jesus Christ and confess with your mouth. He is Lord and you will be saved.

That's what he did right here. He didn't say, who are you, Savior? He didn't say, Savior, what would you like me to do? It's wonderful and fantastic to know Christ as your savior. But he's called Savior very few times in comparison to how many hundreds of times he's called Lord in the New Testament.

Who are you, Lord? He immediately surrendered his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There wasn't any for Paul. There wasn't any.

I'll take you as Savior now. Thank you very much. Put a bumper sticker on my chariot and maybe later I'll make you Lord, you know, get around to some discipleship type stuff.

But I'm just not ready for that kind of commitment now. So, Savior, what would you like me to do? And I'll think about it. It's optional.

I know. No, Lord, I'm yours. Everything I am.

Everything I got, everything I am, everything I'm not. What do you want me to do? And you know something? He never stopped asking that question. And that's why from the day of his conversion to the day an axe flashed in the sun and his head was severed from his body in Rome, the day of his death.

You followed Christ and his will for his life. Would you have me to do, Lord? May God help us to ask the Lord that every day that we live and he will lead us as here. He says, here's what I want you to do.

We'll keep it simple up front. Arise and go into the city and I'll tell you what you must do. Radical conversion.

What do you want me to do? Go on into the city. I'll tell you there. So that's how the Lord changed him.

But what is amazing to me is how the Lord chose him. You may not see this here at first glance. Look at verse seven.

As the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no one saying no one. The Greek word they're saying in the Greek, the word is theoreo means to stare when you stare at a movie, you get our English word theater from it. They're staring and staring and staring.

They see nothing, but they hear a voice. They don't understand it. These men are not converted.

They do not see what he sees. They do not have the experience he has. This is the way God does it in evangelism and salvation.

You can have hundreds of people hearing the gospel. One suddenly sees and understand and is converted and arises and goes forth in Christ. The rest just walk out unmoved.

Let me happen here today. I hope it doesn't happen to you where the person next to you is totally moved and you're just off in La La Land thinking about the burger you're going to order after church as soon as you screech out of the parking lot in your car. They stood hearing a voice, but seeing no one.

Maybe you hear a voice right now, but you do not see Christ. I pray that God opens your eyes and your heart to him. God is sovereign and salvation is what I'm saying, and he does it in his time.

We don't know if they were converted later. We do know that he was the only one that day. And so he says, OK, I want you to now go on to Damascus.

And so after his conversion, this is what always follows. It works like this. You have contact with Christ and his people.

You have deep conviction for your sin that leads to real conversion. And then what always follows in the Christian life is consecration to God. You're separated in your life to him.

Go to Damascus and wait. And God made it very convenient for him to go and be separated to him because, verse eight says, then Saul arose from the ground and his eyes were open. But he saw no one.

Greek word there is blepo. From which we get, I don't know what, but he saw. Just kidding.

He saw no one. What is amazing is that he saw everything. He saw everything.

They stared and saw nothing. He now is looking and he sees everything, though he is blinded. He's blinded because the light of God in the face of Jesus Christ was so bright it affected his eyes.

And after three days, when Ananias comes to pray for him, it's as if scales fall off of his eyes. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. What a scene.

You can see him charging down that road. I am Saul, the persecutor. When I get to Damascus, we're going to arrest some people.

We're going to see some people die. And then now, after charging in front of the entourage, all arrogant. All smart, erudite, influential champion.

Now they're leading him by the hand. A little 4'10 guy hunched over. Oh, thank you.

Thank you. Oh, thank you very much. Then they drop him off at this house in Damascus and take off.

And he's just sitting in there till Ananias comes. So for three days, he has no food and no water. And he's blinded.

You ever have somebody take your picture and the flash goes off and that thing is there, the light? Imagine out of nowhere, the light of God and Jesus Christ goes off right in your eyes. No wonder he was blinded. That's all he could see was the light of that face.

The last thing he saw before he went blind was the glorious living face of Jesus Christ. So for three days, he sat there contemplating what had happened to him, who he had seen. And you know what had to have happened to him.

The Lord not only took him aside for three days, he took him and turned his world upside down. And you know what else he had to have taken him because he took him from darkness to light back across to everything he'd ever learned in the Old Testament from Gamaliel. He had a great reverence for the law, but didn't have the light.

And so when Paul is converted and God gives him the light of Jesus Christ, when he starts to write his epistles, no one can equal him. Peter, who lived three years with Jesus Christ physically on this earth, said, when I read the writings of Paul, some of them are hard to understand. Some of them I can't even understand.

They're so deep. This man, radical conversion, a Jew by birth, a citizen of Rome, education, Greek, completely unique, it seems, but totally suited for what God had called him to not so big physically, but gigantic spiritually. You know what all of this tells me? It tells me this.

God can convert anyone, even you. And it tells me God can use anybody, even you. It tells me that no matter how big or little you are, he can make you gigantic for you.

Paul, the apostle, became gigantic for who he was spiritually. God doesn't want you to become Paul. There'll never be another.

He wants you to become gigantic for who you are. And he has every intention of leading you into that, to where you fill out in your lifetime before your work is done here, the full sphere of your life that God has planned for you, containing all of Christ that you can possibly contain and your life, containing all the works

that he has for you, ordained from before the foundation of the world. For you are saved by grace through faith that not of yourselves, but it is of God, the gift of God, lest any man should boast for you are his workmanship created in Christ unto good works.

And those are the things that you will do for the glory of his name in your lifetime. And they are many and they are wonderful. Let's pray, shall we? Thank you, Jesus, that you are a rescuing God.

Thank you, Lord, that there isn't any sinner so deep in the darkness that you cannot bring them out into the light. And thank you, Lord, for saving us. Lord, for any here listening to this message today that doesn't know you, may this be the day you open their eyes and bring them to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you don't know him today, give your heart to him right now. Tell him, Jesus, take me, I'm yours. And then follow him.

Turn from your sins and follow Christ and he will lead you. Lord, we thank you for this time and we ask you to continue to cause these truths to affect and to alter our lives into your image. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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