

1. 5-1-22

Sermon- Conversion or Decision?

Scripture- Acts 9:1-20, CTW Psalm 30

Hymns- 516, 461, 85

Theme- The conversion of the apostle Paul is one of the most thrilling and inspiring conversions we have ever heard about. Paul truly had a conversion. Today the modern churches talk about DECISIONS, not CONVERSIONS! Is that consistent with the words of Scripture?

I. Introduction

Someone once said to a preacher, "Did you have any decisions last week?" The preacher said, "Yes, I had lots of them. Some DECIDED to stay home and others DECIDED they would go shopping instead of coming to church."

A. When Paul got saved, He did not make a decision for Jesus, he got CONVERTED. Today we recall the story of that famous CONVERSION.

The Point made in this passage is that the church today needs MORE conversions, not MORE decisions!

If you say that you have decided to follow Jesus, the world today will remind you that you can always change your mind, and there is a lot of that going on. In fact whole denominations are changing their minds as to what they stand for in order to accommodate the decisions of the people...

Paul's conversion is a model conversion for us all to examine. It ranks as one of the highest because of several reasons:

Paul was a very devout Jew, and as a Jew he had decided that Christianity was a threat to Judaism, and must be wiped from the face of the earth.

Paul is proof that A person can be SINCERE and SINCERELY WRONG at the same time.

B. The Method Of Paul's Conversion is Therefore Important to Understand.

At the time, Paul was actually on his way to Damascus to find Christians. His plan was follow through on his decision and bring them back to be prosecuted, when God supernaturally intervened.

II. The Plan

The first thing we want to consider is-

A. The Relentless Searching...

Look at verses 1-2. We read, "And Saul, yet breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of these Christians, whether they were men or women, he might bring them to Jerusalem."

We who know the rest of the story, know that after his **conversion**, Paul was a man that had a great love for God's church. He loved the church and prayed for it constantly.

However, before his conversion, Paul had no love for the Christian churches whatsoever.

Paul was determined to put down this religion called Christianity. He sought them out and persecuted them.

After the death of Stephen, the Christians scattered everywhere. But Paul heard that some had fled to Damascus, and he went to the high priest to get permission to find them and bring them back for trial.

Look at verses 1-2. For example, we find him doing two things, and **he literally sounds like a mad man!**

1. He is "...Breathing out death threats and slaughter against the disciples."

2. He is seeking permission from the high priest to go to Damascus and, "...If he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them to Jerusalem for trial."

These are the BIG and horrible PLANS he had, but we see that sometimes God steps into the plans of the ungodly and ruins those plans, because they are the result of bad decisions.

Paul had plans to DESTROY the Christian church, but God messed those plans up, and caused him to become one of the great servants of the church.

He meant the church harm before his conversion, but probably no man who has ever walked on this earth, (other than the Lord Jesus), has done as much for the church as he did after he was converted.

Before his conversion, he went SEARCHING for Christians he could lay hold of, (men or women), and wanted to do as much harm as he could to them.

We need to learn from Paul's total surrender..

B. The Surrender

Look at verses 3-6. We read, **3** As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

4 He 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."

God knows how to get our attention. Sometimes He has to take drastic measures. Sometimes those measures may require that God will have to knock us down.

This is what He had to do with the Apostle Paul. The "Blinding" of Paul becomes an important factor..

C. The Sightlessness

Look at verse 8-9. We read **8** Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. **9** For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Notice that he did not eat or drink for three days.

WHAT HAPPENED TO PAUL IN THOSE THREE DAYS?

Some of you may deal with computers: have you ever loaded a big file in your computer, and later on you deleted that file? Once you hit the delete button, you watched the monitor as hundreds, if not thousands of those files were deleted at an unbelievable rate of speed.

In the apostle Paul's mind was tons of information from Judaism that had been stored. But now God was entering his mind, and in effect deleting all the false information that had been placed there and replacing it with the truth of His Word.

This is a key to conversion as opposed to decision. If you simply make a decision to follow God, your old corrupted files will remain in you.

We have looked at THE PLANS. But once God had deleted all this false information from Paul's mind, we get a glimpse of the incredible preacher which God raised from the ashes. This is something He will do for all of us!

III. The Preacher

A. As a result of his conversion, Paul without a doubt became one of the greatest, if not the greatest, preachers who ever preached on this earth, other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at verses 20-22. We read, **20** At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

21 All 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?"

22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

After his conversion, he is preaching something he never preached before: he is preaching that Jesus, IS THE SON OF GOD.

In fact, the crowd was AMAZED when they heard Paul, of all people preaching **this doctrine**. Imagine my friends from the old days when all of a sudden they found out that I was a pastor... that was VERY hard for some to believe. In fact some of them still try to peel back the layers to see if the old me is still under there...

B. That is the way it is with a preacher who preaches God's Word. People hear him preach, and on the surface they think, "What a great preacher, but in the back of their mind, they wonder...is he for real?" Remember it is the HOLY SPIRIT that convicts!

But in reality, the preacher is just a vessel God uses; the **Gospel** that he preaches from God's Word, is HUGE!

The people heard Paul preach and they were amazed at him. But Paul was not anything. It was the Gospel he preached that was marvelous. That is what God intends!

When preachers preach about the Lord, it is for the purpose of the conversion of the listeners. My prayer to the Lord, for each day I serve Him is "USE ME UP, LORD".

Example: An unknown person wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper, and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "And in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. For the life of me I can't remember a single one of them. So I think I'm wasting my time and the preachers are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. For the life of me, I cannot recall what the menu was for a single one of those meals. But I do know this: they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me those meals, I would be dead today."

The Bible makes what Paul preached about very clear. "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."

IV. But All Is Not Perfect, Even For Those Converted.

As long as Paul went along with the "Jesus Hate Group", the people of his age had no problem with him.

A. But once Paul started preaching that Jesus died and rose again, and that salvation can only be found in Him, he got in lots of trouble.

This is true today. As long as we state that Christianity is only one of many religions on the face of the earth, and that everybody is one day going to die and go to heaven, we will not get in trouble with the lost people.

But more and more in today's society when you start to tell them the truth: that Christ is not ONE of the ways to enter heaven, But is THE ONLY way to enter heaven, then you have to be prepared for trouble.

Years ago a famous evangelist got in a lot of trouble when he appeared on the program called "Night Line", with Ted Koppel. He made a statement about Christ being the Savior, and one of the guests on the television program said, "You are not saying that a person has to believe in Christ to be saved, are you?" The Pastor replied, "**Yes I am saying that AND the Word of God states that very clearly as well.**" This spread like wildfire across the nation. And to this very day, there are those who ridicule him for making such a statement.

But that is exactly what this Bible teaches. The Lord said:

• **I am THE door**, not one of the doors... • **I am THE way**, not one of the ways...

This is the truth that the Bible teaches about Jesus. The lost world needs to hear the **truth** of God's Word. It is the only thing that will do them any good.

When people are dying they need to know that **THEY ARE THE SINNER**, and **CHRIST IS THE SAVIOR!** God converted people like you and me, so that this message would be told...

Paul realized that once he came to know the Lord. The Bible makes it clear that he went everywhere preaching that CHRIST IS THE SAVIOR. **We MUST do the Same!**

Once we understand that God converted us, we MUST "now therefore Go! Amen? Let us pray...