



Acts 9:3-6

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.”

Special Music - Man in the Mirror - One World/One Community

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PivWY9wn5ps>

Who was Saul?

1. Saul of Tarsus

- a. Born around 5 AD
- b. Roman father and Jewess mother
- c. It is commonly believed that the event on the Road to Damascus occurred sometime between 33 and 36 AD.
 - i. I am prone to lean on the latter side since it appears that the following of the Jesus called the seems to be becoming a threat and this wasn't true until after Jesus' resurrection.
 - ii. This event occurs after the stoning of Stephen and the stoning of Stephen occurs after the resurrection. After all, before he dies, Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
 - iii. So, for me, the incident on the Road to Damascus probably occurs around 36 Ad.
- d. Paul described himself in **Philippians 3:4-6** (Reading #1)

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

e. Physical Description of Paul

- i. The only source we have for a description of Paul is believed to have been written by an early church leader, **ONESIPHORUS**, who was one of the 70 disciples chosen by the original disciples to continue to lead the growing church.**
- ii. He is attributed with writing the “Acts of Paul and Thecia,” which is a book found in the New Testament Apocrypha.**
- iii. In the “Acts of Paul and Thecia”, Paul is described as “a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.”**

f. Saul / Paul?

- i. It has been taught so very often that Saul changed his name to Paul with his conversion on the Road to Damascus.**
- ii. In truth, Saul is his Semitic and Paul is his Latin name and it is his Latin name that is used in most texts.**
- iii. He didn’t change his name. His name is just referenced in two different languages.**

g. The first mention of Saul

- i. Acts 7: 55-60 and Acts 8:3 (Reading #2)**

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going

from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

2. On the Road to Damascus

a. Acts 9:1-2 (Reading #3)

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and 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.

b. Saul's state of mind

- i. Saul is firmly convinced that he is doing the work of God**
- ii. He believes, as most Jewish religious leaders do, that Israel is being punished and living within the "law" is the key to the coming of the Messiah**
- iii. He believes that any Jew that does not fully conform to the law is an impediment to appeasing the anger of God and the coming of the Messiah.**
- iv. He feels obligated to encourage others by any means necessary that they should conform to the present understanding of the law as taught by the Sanhedrin.**
- v. He believes that non-Jews are irrelevant. Not friends. Not enemies. Just Simply irrelevant.**

- vi. He believes that Jesus was a rebel who sought only to create non-conformity among the Jewish community and therefore was an enemy to the law.
 - vii. He uses the term “The Way” as a description of the people that follow Jesus of Nazareth into non-conformity.
- c. How do we deal with the moment that we realize that what we thought was a clear vision for our lives turns out to be a tragic misunderstanding of our true purpose? Where the very foundations of what we have been taught and the people teaching us these foundations are called into question?
- d. What do we do when we come to the conclusion that:
- i. The world isn't flat.
 - ii. The earth is not the center of the universe
 - iii. That Jesus might possibly be the real deal
 - iv. That God's grace is free.
 - v. That God loves us no matter what we have done, what we are doing or what we are going to do.
 - vi. That Jesus died on that cross, not because he was a political rebel, not because he challenged the Sanhedrin, not because he didn't meet accepted standards, **BUT**
BECAUSE HE LOVED US ENOUGH TO DIE FOR US EVEN

**AS WE UNDERSTAND THAT WE DID NOTHING TO
DESERVE THAT LOVE.**

3. Life's Defining Moments

a. Acts 9:3-6

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."

4. Saul has a choice to make

a. Do I stay true to the purpose that is so much a part of me? A purpose that I am 100% committed to. A purpose that where I have chosen to murder people to protect it.

b. Or do I seek to examine who I am and listen to this new voice?

5. No one is forcing Saul to go on to Damascus.

a. He could have gathered his friends around him and returned to Jerusalem.

b. He could have chosen to stubbornly stick to his guns and now be the blind avenger for God.

- c. It is to Paul's credit that he doesn't dismiss this as some kind of cheap parlor trick
- d. Instead, he makes the choice, not of commitment, but to at least hear God out.
- e. This is a lot like the agnostic who chooses to take a chance and actually listen to the message of the gospel instead of just outwardly dismissing it as a bunch of mumbo jumbo.

6. God knows how to get our attention

- a. Sometimes He has to hit us over the head with a 2 X 4 to get us to listen
- b. Sometimes, He reaches out to us in more subtle ways
- c. The question is, "Do we take the opportunity to listen and learn more?" or do we choose to just ignore Him and get on with our lives?

7. Man in the Mirror

- a. When God gets our attention, it is He who is hold the mirror for us to see ourselves as we really are.
- b. That reflection that we experience is that moment of blinding light where all the shadows and deceptions are cast away. We are forced to look at ourselves in a raw and unadorned way.
- c. And we make a choice:
 - i. Do we like what we see and say I love me just the way I am, covered in the garbage of how I have been living my life?

- ii. Or do I want to make a change? If I am so valuable to God that He would send His son to die for me and wipe away all that garbage, maybe, just maybe He can take this brokenness that I have been wallowing in, lift me out of place that I'm in so that I can be like Him and lift others in the same way.**
- d. No one is so broken that they cannot be fixed by God. No one is so filthy that they cannot be loved by God. No one is beyond the saving grace of God.**
- e. But we have to start by looking in the mirror and making a choice, even if that choice is just to take time to listen to the rest of the message that God has for us.**
- f. Maybe, just maybe there is a better way to live life. Maybe, just maybe, there is a better truth waiting for us.**