

Saul of Tarsus, How a Pharisee Became a Christian

Lesson Scripture: Acts 22:3-15

Focus Scripture: Acts 22:3-15

Key Verses: (Ananias) said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear his own voice, for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard." Acts 22:14-15

ACTS 22:3-15 (NRSV UE)

3 "I am a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today.

4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison,

5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

6 While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me.

7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

8 I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' Then he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.'

9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

10 I asked, 'What am I to do, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.'

11 Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

ACTS 22:3-15 (KJV)

3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

12 And one Ananias, a devout man according

12 A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there,

13 came to me, and standing beside me, he said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight!' In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him.

14 Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear his own voice,

15 for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard.'"

to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,

13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

Key Terms

- **Heresy** – Teaching as truth a lie that undermines the core beliefs of a faith (system).
- **Excommunication** – Being officially barred/removed from a faith community.
- **Seismic** – A huge, disruptive, transforming event; producing dramatic change.

Introduction

We hear among some Christians a mistaken belief that once God has called them to a task or mission, all will go well. After all, the almighty God who called them,

or approved their mission, can clear their path of all hurdles and hindrances. That

But there is another theory: that the anointing of God is not to put us on an easy road to popularity. Rather, it is to give us the power to endure the hardship and obstacles that God knows we will encounter along the way he has appointed for us.

theory goes through the window when we hit passages like the selected text.

For if we accept that Apostle Paul was chosen and anointed as a special evangelist to the Gentiles, we are at a loss, under that theory, to explain the hardships he suffered from both Jews and Gentiles.

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for us. This second outlook has a footing in verses like 2 Corinthians 12:9 – God's

strength (protection and care) is best displayed when we are weak and helpless to handle what we must face.

Telling the Bible Story

Read Acts 21:40 to 23:35 as Paul's spirited defense against the charges made against him by the Jews from Asia. It was a three-count indictment: that he was preaching against the people of Israel (treason), against the law (heresy and blasphemy), and also, he had defiled the sacred temple (sacrilege) by taking Greeks into the holy place (verse 21:28). A guilty verdict on any of these carried a sentence of a severe beating, long imprisonment, or death. Hence the length and depth of Paul's defense.



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person who follows Jesus' teachings still be faithful to the God of Moses and the nation's forefathers? If we go by Ananias, the answer is yes. The teachings of Christ were but a continuation of the essence of the law with the same God. These references point to that conclusion: Acts 3:13; 5:30; 7:32; Exodus 3:13.

Don't overlook the sharp twist in events noted at verse 22. Up to that

point, the Jews quietly paid attention to Paul's defense. But the reference to Stephen's killing – which exposed their hypocrisy and self-righteousness – along with God's plan to include the Gentiles in the salvation provisions, enraged the Jews. Read Acts 22:21-22 along with Luke 24:46-48 and

If consistency of a story points to truth, then Paul's account of his conversion had the marks of truth. All three versions – chapters 9, 22, 26 – are broadly consistent. The story's core remained the same. At the heart of this matter was whether being a good Christian was consistent with being a good Jew. Could a

Acts 22:7-10, 14. For a people who were so proud of their exclusive links to God, to hear that God was also reaching out to the Gentiles was a bitter pill to digest.

Sankofa

It is easy to see the events involving Paul's attacks and threats of death as

remote. However, when a new revelation or approach arises in church doctrines, accusations of heresy and unrest follow. Such was the case with Martin Luther after his *Ninety-Five Theses*.

The church's official initial response was to brand Luther a troublesome monk. But when he refused to retract, Pope Leo X issued a papal condemnation – *Exsurge Domine* (1520). In the following year came his excommunication – *Decet Romanum Pontificem*. But Luther still would not back off. Hence, then came the final imperial ban – *Edict of Worms*. Thereby, Luther became an outlaw, and his writings were banned. This sparked a dangerous situation for Luther. Anyone could arrest him, detain him, or kill him without legal penalty. One can only conclude that it was by the grace of God working through people like Frederick Wise that kept Luther alive.

Today, Luther's work, once considered heresy, has reshaped many aspects of church life. It just shows that at times,

heresy is just a matter of official opinion.

Case Study

The issue for which Paul was arrested and tried, coming within inches of death, was seismic in Christian theology. It was the dramatic shift from the law to grace-centered theology.

While other contentious issues later in the church community did not reach this

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seismic level, church history shows that divisive subjects have plagued the church at every turn. The availability and free use of the scriptures, the ordination of women, *once-saved* theology, the operation of the Holy Spirit gifts (cessationism), the ordination of divorcees, baptism modes, church

governance structures, communion theology (consubstantiation), are some of the issues that have divided the church community over time. While these issues do not bring the identity of God into question, they highlight how different groups represent what God prefers or demands.

Hot button issues for the current generation include the church's attitude to participation by members of the LGBTQIA community and our attitudes to immigration and abortion. Mobs don't grab people in the streets and stone them as in Paul's day. However, people have been imprisoned and beaten in events that stem from these issues.

Consider your heroes of ministry, and if possible, have a chat with some of them. Invite them to tell you some of the real inside stories of what ministry in this world entails. If any of your heroes are already deceased, research what they faced in ministry and how they dealt with the challenges. Then, as you see fit, adjust your view of what real ministry entails.

Hopefully, church leadership will show maturity in dealing with these issues in a manner that surpasses the barbaric approach taken in Paul's day.

Life Application

Above, we mentioned that some Christians have an "easy street" approach to ministry. They see everything

falling smoothly into place, without periods of stress and struggle. This is your invitation to look at your view of working for God. Look again at Paul's life and the hardships he endured. Is that picture consistent with your idea of what working for God looks like?

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Questions

1. When you hear that a person is anointed for ministry, what images come to mind?
2. Some hold that Paul suffered because he harassed Christians before. Comment.
3. To what extent would you endure hardship for your faith?

Closing Devotions

Closing Hymn: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (AMECH #54)

Closing Prayer: Dear God, lead me not into temptation and deliver me from all evil. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**August 17-23**

Monday	Acts 16:1-5 (A Protégé With Promise)
Tuesday	Proverbs 1:1-9 (Listen to Wise Instruction)
Wednesday	Proverbs 23:22-26 (Learn From Father and Mother)
Thursday	Philippians 2:19-24 (A Worthy and Trusted Minister)
Friday	Deuteronomy 4:9-13 (Make God Known to Future Generations)
Saturday	2 Timothy 1:1-16 (Thankful for Established Faith)
Sunday	2 Timothy 3:10-11, 14-16 (Continue in What You Have Learned)