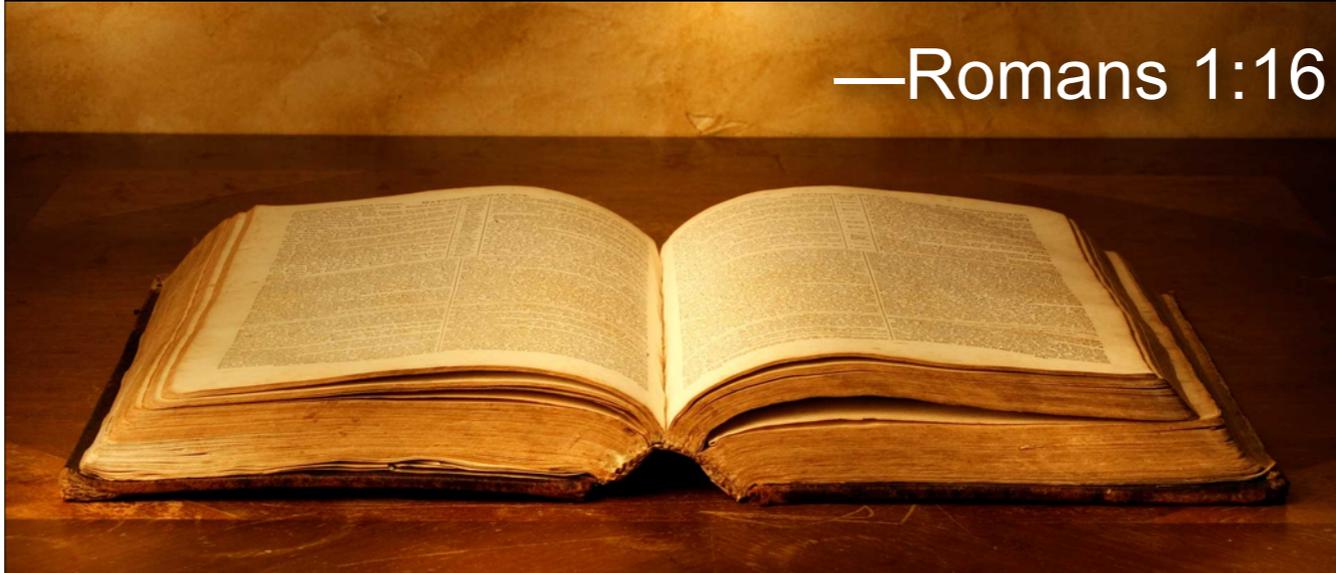


“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

—Romans 1:16



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Leaders of opposition become leaders
in the kingdom when converted

PAUL
The Power of Conversion

November 8, 2015
Terry R. Baughman, Lead Pastor

 **LifeChurch**
www.LifeChurchAZ.net

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*Leaders of opposition
become leaders in the
kingdom when
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Conversion

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God seems to take pleasure in cracking the hard cases. Some of the most unlikely people to be converted in our view are challenged by the Gospel and changed by God's grace.

—We are astounded when the impossible conversions take place before our eyes. Again, we are amazed by His grace!

PAUL

The activist becomes
an apostle,
the Pharisee becomes
a preacher,
the persecutor becomes
the persecuted.

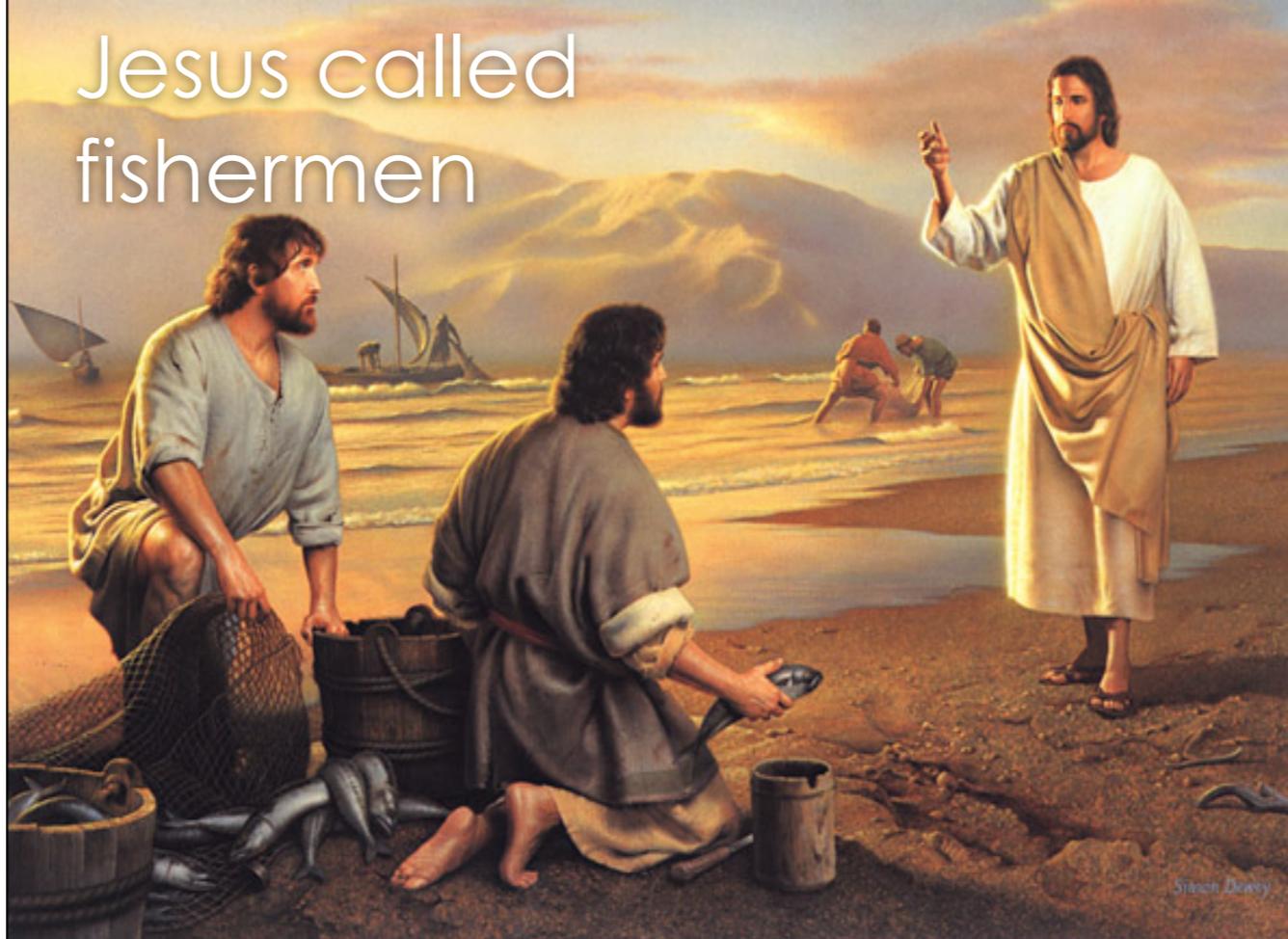


A religious leader finds truth in the very thing he fought.

After a 180° change in his worldview, the activist becomes an apostle, the Pharisee becomes a preacher, the persecutor becomes the persecuted. Conversion to Christ will correct your vision and focus your worldview.

No one is too hard for Christ to reach ...
none are so bad that Jesus cannot save.

Jesus called fishermen



- Fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James, John)
- Tax Collectors (Matthew, Zacchaeus, one who prayed, "I'm a sinner")
- Pharisees (Simon, Nicodemus, Saul)

Our hard cases:

- Do you know some "impossible" answers to prayer?

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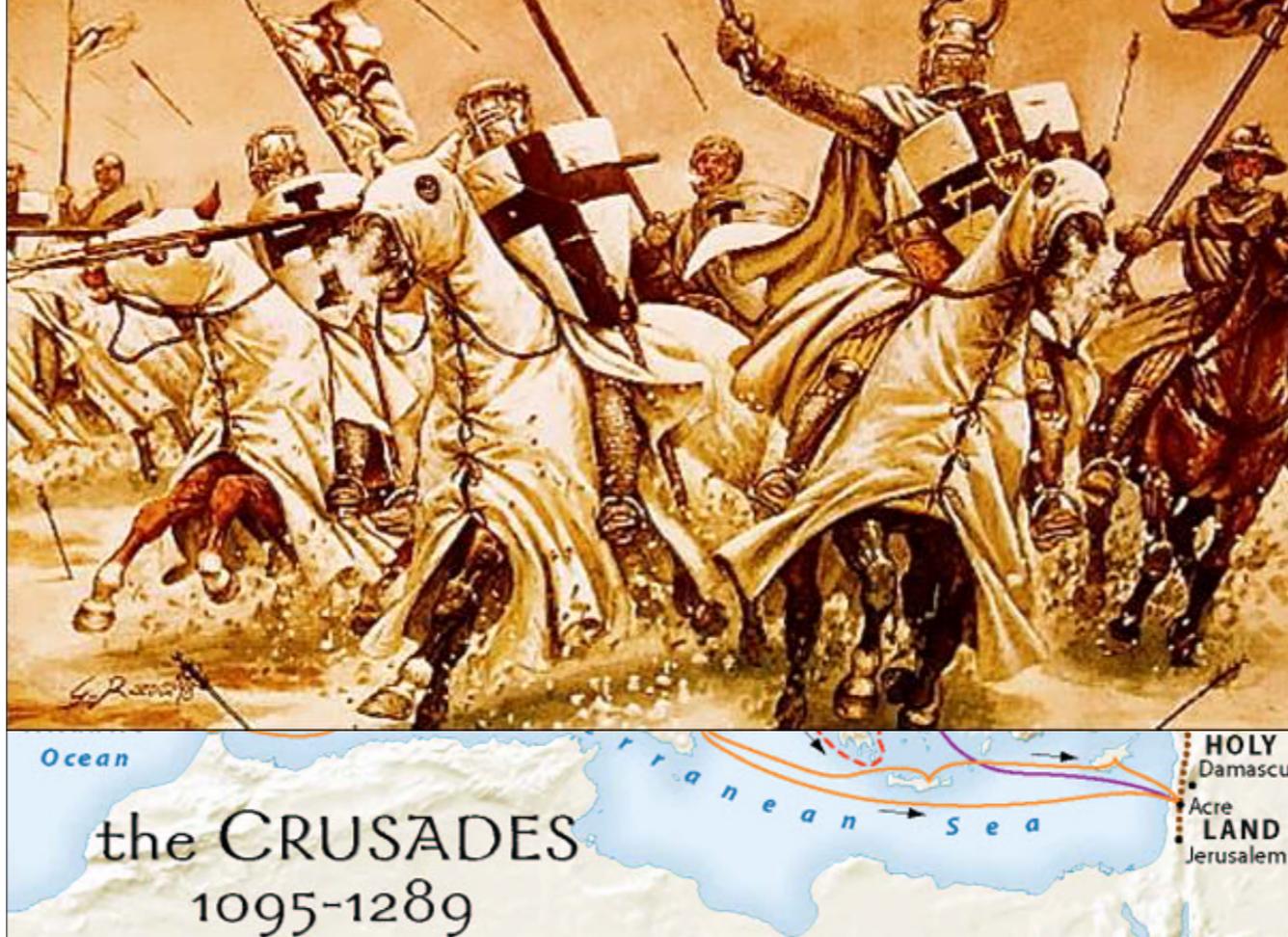
-Pharisees (Simon, Nicodemus, Saul of Tarsus)

Our hard cases:

-Do you know some "impossible" answers to prayer?



Saul was one of the most unlikely to become a Christian. He was a well-trained Pharisee, a learned man of Scripture, and a zealous defender of the Jewish faith. In his view, the followers of Jesus were heretics, disciples of a rogue rabbi, a threat to long held beliefs of the Jewish people, and individuals who did not deserve to live. He saw his work as God's work, his zeal as a godly passion and the performance of his duties as a religious cause.



Some of the most violent conflicts are religious wars. When men fight in the name of their God they are ruthlessly violent, and pursue their cause with passion.

- The Crusades are an embarrassment to Christians today
- Islamic fundamentalists -Terrorist activities called "holy war"
- Arab / Israeli conflict - Goes back to Abraham. Who owns the land?
- Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland



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Northern Ireland vs. The Republic of Ireland



- Protestant
- Red, white, blue, orange
- Loyalist/Unionist
- “No Surrender”



- Green, White, Orange
- Catholic
- Republican/Nationalist
- United Ireland

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Our introduction to Saul was at an execution. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was being stoned to death by the angry crowd who heard him speak before the council. Saul stood over the coats of those who were casting the stones and emotionally participated in the murder of an innocent preacher.
– Acts 7:58–8:1

8:1 At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.
3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

When Saul left the killing of Stephen he was a more determined and callous man. It was almost like the scent of blood invigorated his passion like a shark in the water. He collected evidence against Christians, obtained warrants for their arrest and permission for their destruction. He planned to export his persecution to Damascus. Scripture said that he was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples.”
– Acts 9:1–2

Acts 7:58-60



- And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

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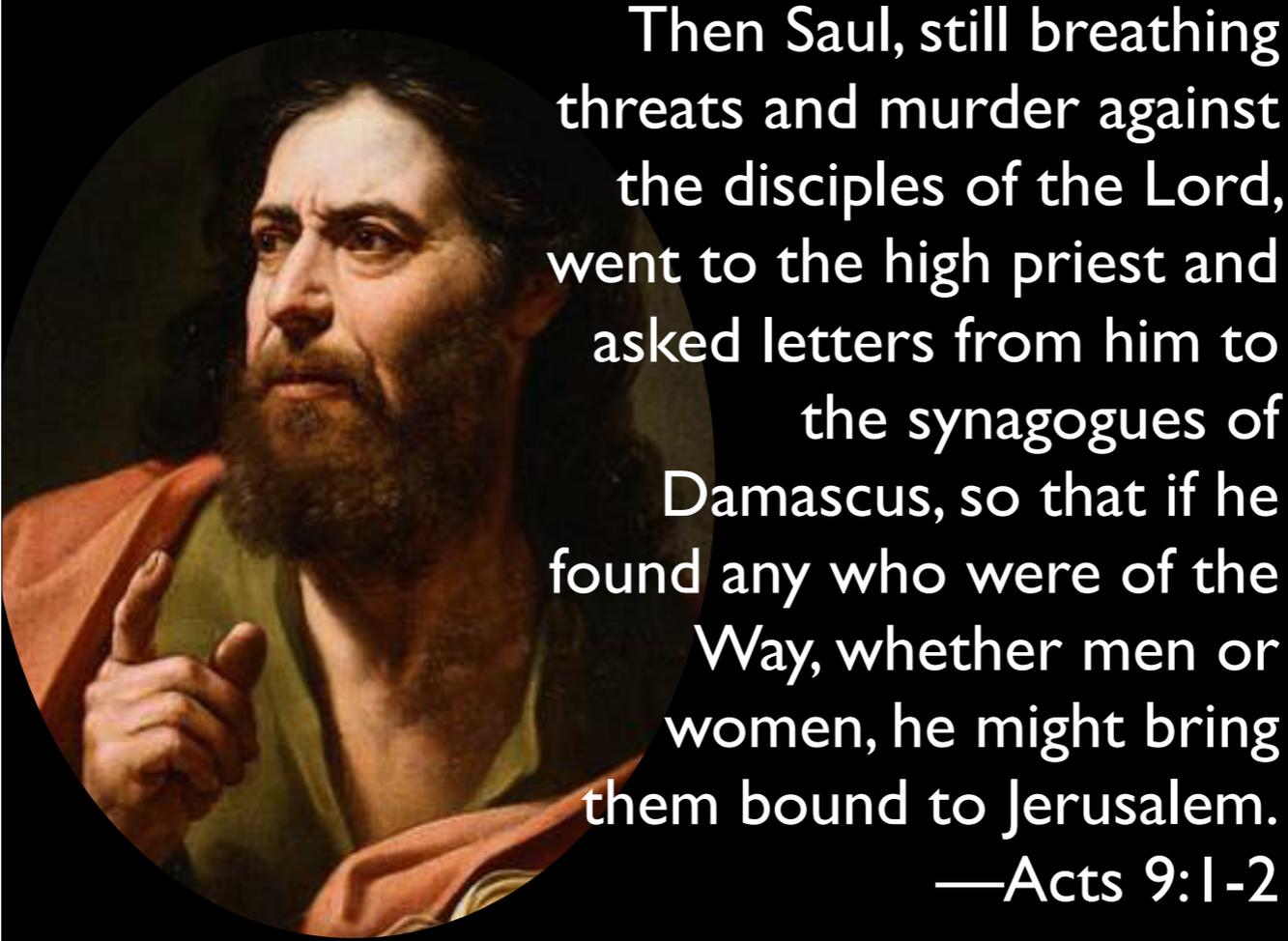
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Acts 8:1-3

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Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
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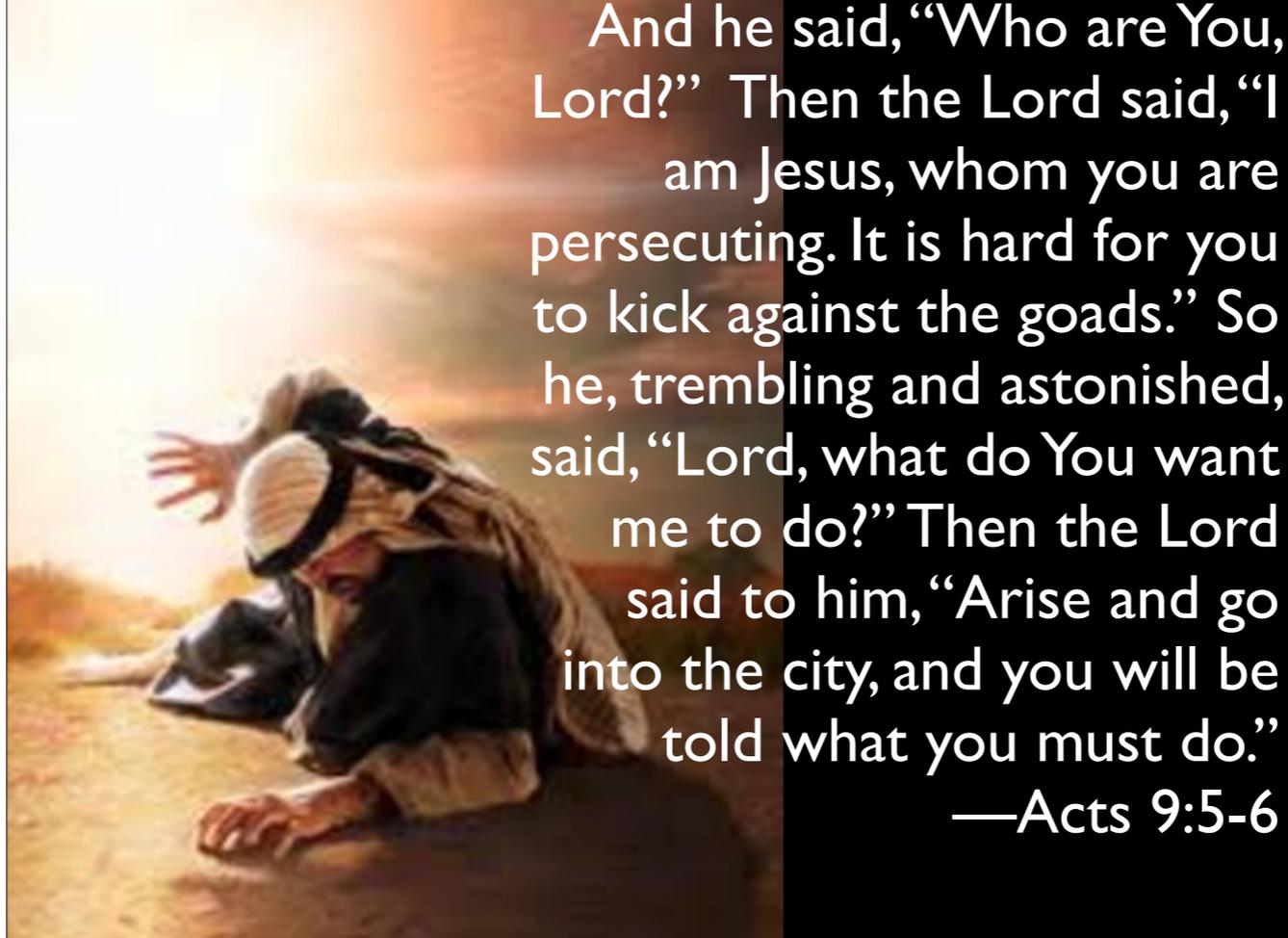
As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

—Acts 9:3-4



– Acts 9:

3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 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?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” 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.”
—Acts 9:5-6

In the process of Saul’s journey to Damascus, he encountered something he had never before experienced. It was a spiritual confrontation, a dramatic vision of God. A blinding light struck him down on the road to Damascus. Words came to him, speaking truth to his heart, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” With amazement Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” Imagine the shock when he heard the surprising response, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”

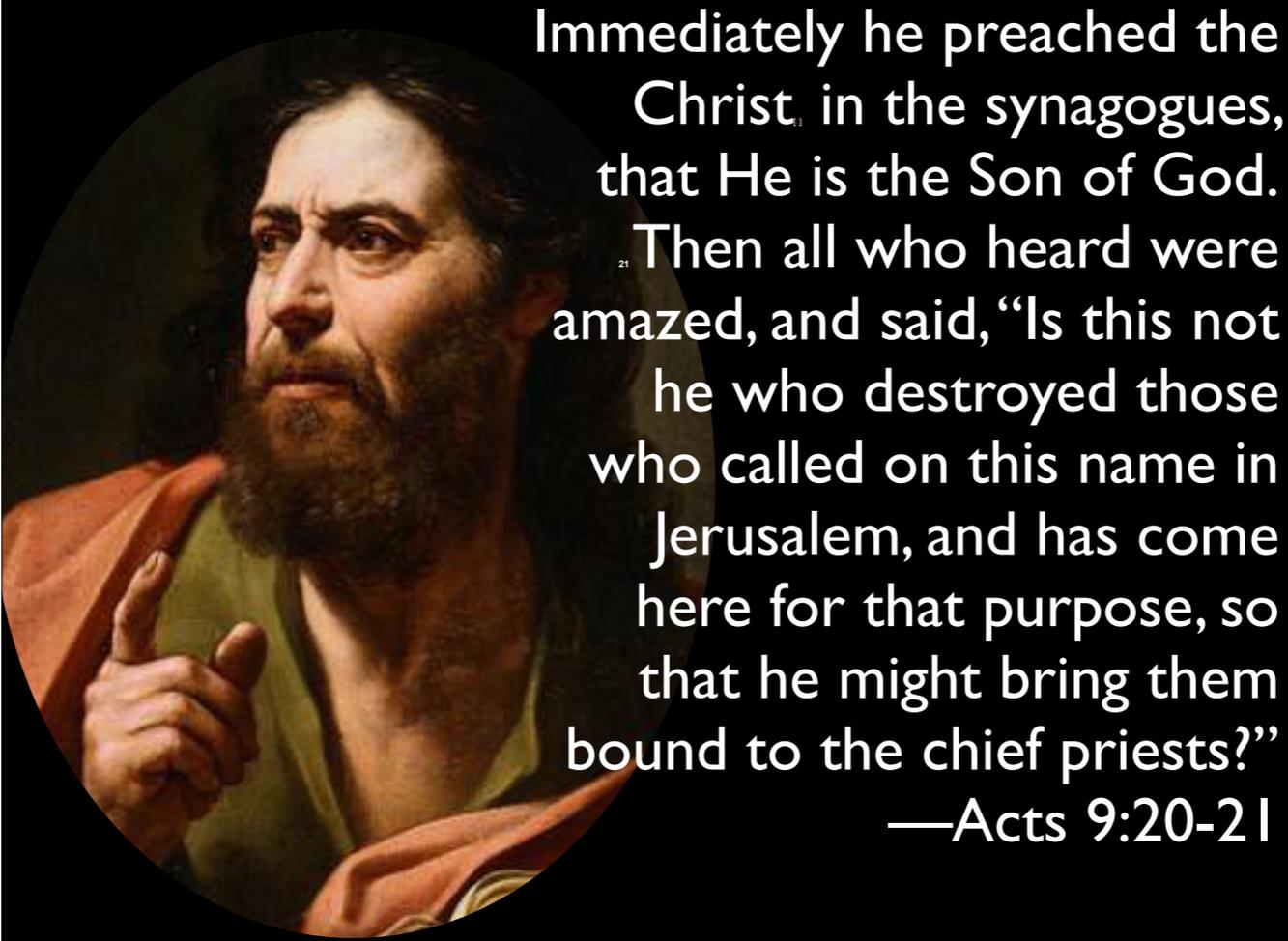
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Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”



Immediately he preached the Christ, in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?”
—Acts 9:20-21

Saul’s world was radically changed. From that moment he became one of the most passionate Christians ever. The passionate persecutor becomes the powerful preacher. The righteous Pharisee becomes a radical Pentecostal. Saul, the ambassador of persecution, becomes Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.
– Acts 9:20–21

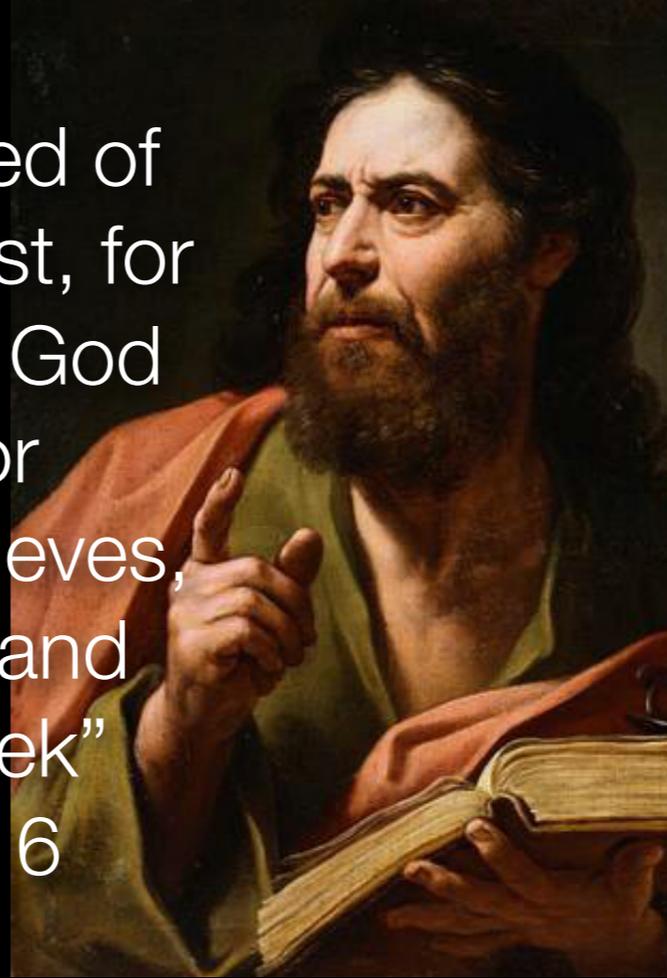
20 Immediately he preached the Christ[c] in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?”

22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

Paul Said,

“I am not ashamed of
the gospel of Christ, for
it is the power of God
to salvation for
everyone who believes,
for the Jew first and
also for the Greek”
—Romans 1:16



Having experienced such great grace, he writes to churches and individuals of the power of the Gospel to change lives. He boldly declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

On several occasions he was able to share the story of his conversion. He believed what Jesus had done for him was available to anyone who would believe!

1 — Repeat your story and exalt Christ in your conversion.

- Testimony of your conversion is your most powerful witness
- Eye witnesses and first-hand experience is the best testimony of God's grace.



INSIGHT – Repeat your story and exalt Christ in your conversion.

The testimony of your conversion is the most powerful witness you possess, the story of the power of God working in your life. Eye witnesses and first hand experience is the best testimony of what God is able to do in a life filled with sin. A leader who has experienced grace in his conversion can lead others to experience it too.

– Acts 9:15–16

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

Conversion is the point of division between life before Christ and life after Christ. Notice the changes in the record of the apostle before and after.

Before Christ:

- Philippians 3:3-4 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:



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Before Christ:

- Philippians 3:5-6 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

25

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After Christ:

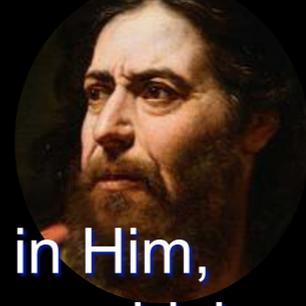
- Philippians 3:7-8 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ



Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

After Christ:

- Philippians 3:9-11 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.



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2— Reject the pride of selfish accomplishment

- Rejoice in the authentic revelation of new life in Christ!
- Only in weakness can one be strong.
- Boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ



INSIGHT – Reject the pride of selfish accomplishment and rejoice in the authentic revelation of new life in Christ!

- Before Christ he was arrogant in his knowledge and training. He was assertive, self confident, and convinced that he was doing God's work. He served God on the premise of strength.
Acts 22:3–5

Before Christ:

- Acts 22:3-5 “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,



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Acts 22:3–5 (In giving the background to his conversion experience)

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After Christ:



- 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.

- After Christ he recognized that only in weakness could he be strong.
 - —1 Corinthians 2:1-5
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 - [ADV] 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human[b] wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

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- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

- Galatians 6:14 “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

After Christ:



- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10
- And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- After Christ he recognized that only in weakness could he be strong.

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After Christ:

- Galatians 6:14
- But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.



- After Christ he recognized that only in weakness could he be strong.
 - Galatians 6:14 “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”
- 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

3— Recognize the truth of our inadequacy and His sufficiency

- It's all in Christ
- **Galatians 6:12 NLT**
“... They don't want to be persecuted for teaching that the cross of Christ alone can save.”



INSIGHT – Recognize the truth of our inadequacy and His sufficiency.
Receive the new reality in self evaluation to develop after your conversion.

“To be converted means to move from self-centered independence to dependence on the Lord and interdependence with fellow disciples. Saul the convert needs the support and encouragement of the church. Today too the gospel witness should emphasize by word and deed that being born again is being born into the family of God, the church.” [Biblegateway commentary online — <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Acts/Pauls-Conversion>]

“All in Christ”

Galatians 6:12 NLT Those who are trying to force you to be circumcised want to look good to others. They don't want to be persecuted for teaching that the cross of Christ alone can save.