

ACTS 9.1-19

FROM MURDERER TO MINISTER

SAUL OF TARSUS

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.

—Acts 22.3

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.

—Philippians 3.5-6

I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

—Galatians 1.14

A VIOLENT AGENDA

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.

—Acts 9.1-2

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord . . .

—Acts 9.1 KJV

All this time Saul was breathing down the necks of the Master's disciples, out for the kill.

—Acts 9.1 MSG



I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

—Acts 26.9-11



And Saul just went wild, devastating the church, entering house after house after house, dragging men and women off to jail.

—Acts 8.3 MSG

For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

—Galatians 1.13 ESV

I stormed through their meeting places, bullying them into cursing Jesus, a one-man terror, obsessed with obliterating these people. And then I started on the towns outside Jerusalem.

—Acts 26.11 MSG



Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life.

—1 Timothy 1.13-16

A DIVINE ENCOUNTER

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.”

—Acts 9.3-6

IN AN INSTANT, SAUL UNDERSTOOD—

- ▶ Those he persecuted were right: Jesus Christ was alive!

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.” . . . And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

—Acts 7.55-56; 8.1

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the Lord replied. . . . “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of Me.”

—Acts 26.15-16

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- ▶ Those he persecuted were, in fact, the body of Jesus
(the indivisible nature and identity of Christ and His Church)

“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.”

—Acts 22.8

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness . . .

—Colossians 1.24-25

A NEW IDENTITY

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is My chosen instrument to proclaim My name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.”

—Acts 9.15-16

“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. “Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from His mouth. You will be His witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.’ ”

—Acts 22.12-15

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation—the old has gone, the new has come.”

- ▶ **A new understanding:** *“But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by His marvelous grace. Then it pleased Him to reveal His Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles.*

—Galatians 1.15-16

- ▶ **New values:** *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . .”*

—Philippians 3.7-9

- ▶ **A new purpose:** *But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.*

—Acts 20.24



I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of Me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

—Acts 26.16-18

. . . the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done. . .

—Romans 15.15-18



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.

—Ephesians 1.3-8

HAVE YOU TRULY ENCOUNTERED JESUS?

- ▶ You know who He is: the Lord Jesus Christ
- ▶ You know that your identity is in Him
- ▶ You know that He is the exclusive purpose and worth of your life

Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with Him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

—Galatians 2.20 MSG