

The Day Saul Died and Paul Awoke

Acts 9:1–9

From the outpouring to the overturning series

INTRO.

This morning, we arrive at a well-known biblical text – the Damascus road conversion of Saul ... For years we've heard Saul's conversion preached as if it were just another salvation experience ... But what is extremely interesting is – there never was – nor has ever been – another recorded conversion experience like Paul's.

Last week I shared with you the conversion experience of the Ethiopian eunuch – which was amazing in itself ... As you recall – his heart was seeking God – he was searching the scriptures in order to gain more understanding ... It was clear that the Father was drawing the eunuch as John 6:44 stated - - “For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me.”

Now we see a completely different situation unfolding – Saul doesn't seem to being drawn by the Father ... In fact – Saul is clearly heading in the opposite direction – actively persecuting the ekklesia ... Think about this – Saul was educated by Gamaliel in the religious system of Judaism ... He witnessed and approved of the stoning of Stephen ... Now he is actively seeking a letter from the high priest and entering synagogues actively looking for people who follow “the way” ... It is pretty evident that he is the enemy of this new faith movement and wants to stop it in its tracks.

This morning, I am going to break down this very familiar text in a manner that I am certain that you have never heard before ... How do I know? ... I have never heard this text broken down in this spiritual and mystical manner ... This text is not telling us the story of a man changing his mind – it is showing us what it looks like when the Spirit overturns an entire identity – so a chosen one can be awoken

Driven by Religious Ego

Acts 9:1-2 New Living Translation

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers ... So, he went to the high priest ... 2 He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, - asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there ... He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

Our text immediately opens – identifying the intent of Saul's heart ... Let's be clear – there was murder in his heart and he expresses that intent with every breath he took ... I want to address something here that I have heard countless times – in countless messages – preached about this text ... I have heard that Saul simply had misguided zeal for the Lord in his heart ... That the Lord was working on his heart – but he wasn't truly understanding that – and was behaving out of confusion ... These types of statements are made in an attempt to reconcile an established ideology – not the actual text ... We understand John 6:44 – the Father's drawing – but the text is pretty clear there wasn't any drawing going on – and if there was – Saul clearly wasn't responding.

Religious Ego

What was truly occurring here within Saul was this – Ego ... Ego is defined as the false self – the constructed identity we build through belief systems – performance – reputation – fear – and pride ... It is who we spiritually believe ourselves to be – which was formed by indoctrination – not by Holy Spirit transformation ... In short – Ego is – identity formed apart from divine revelation – confidence formed apart from divine dependence – zeal formed apart from divine alignment – obedience formed apart from divine union ... Ego is the inner engine of the old man – the self that tries to do God's work without God's heart.

Ego Identifiers

Ego defends what God is no longer doing

If it protects old systems – old beliefs – or old identities ... Saul wasn't defending God ... He was defending the system God had left.

Ego fights people instead of discerning spirits

Saul hunted believers – the very people God was using to bring about the “new thing” He was doing in the earth.

Ego is convinced it's right – even when it's destroying people

Saul believed murder was obedience ... That's how blinding ego becomes ... Spirit brings conviction ... Ego brings justification.

Ego reacts emotionally – Spirit responds relationally

Saul was “breathing threats.” ... That's emotional venting – not spiritual discernment ... When emotion leads – ego is driving ... When peace leads – Spirit is speaking.

Ego masks itself as zeal

Ego loves to call its anger “passion.” ... It calls its control “stewardship.” ... It calls its criticism “discernment.” ... This is why Jesus didn't say - - “Saul, why are you hurting My people?” ... He said: “Why are you persecuting Me?” ... Ego believes it's serving God even while fighting God.

Ego requires validation – Spirit rests in revelation

Saul sought letters from the high priest – human validation ... When you need others to authorize what God did not initiate – you're operating from ego, not Spirit.

Ego produces blindness – Spirit produces clarity

The end result of ego is always: blindness - - hardness - - defensiveness - - spiritual deafness - - inward dullness ... That's why the “scales” had to fall from Saul's eyes ... His ego had to die before clarity could come.

Spiritual Nugget

Ego is rampant in today's society ... This is what led to the martyrdom of Charlie Kirk ... And religious ego is a cancer that is plaguing the Christian church today ... Do you know why people jump from church to church – ego ... Do you know why people fight over doctrine and form like-minded denominations and churches – ego ... Do you know why believers fight – argue – tear other believers apart – ego.

As we continue into our next portion of text – you would think – OK this is how God will deal with an ego-driven person ... But let me remind you – there are millions of ego-driven people ... And yet the Lord singles out Saul ... So - - Buckle up – because this text is about to go even deeper.

The Collision of the Chosen

Acts 9:3-6 New Living Translation

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission - a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him ... 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! ... Why are you persecuting me?" ... 5 "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked ... And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! ... 6 Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Let me begin by laying an important foundation before we go further into this text ... Galatians 1:15 tells us that God had set apart and chosen Saul – while he was still in his mother's womb ... This is a vital concept we need to grasp as we move forward – Saul was "chosen" and set apart by the Father ... Remember a few months back – I preached a message on the difference between those who are chosen and those who are called ... Jesus clearly stated this principle in Matthew 22:14 which states - - "many are called – but few are chosen" ... What I have observed over the years is – the church – and I believe due to societal pressure – has felt the need to create a "sameness" within the congregation ... This concept of "we are all the same in Jesus" – has diminished and dismissed these truths we see in Galatians and Matthew ... But

make no mistake – the Scriptures are clear – we are not all the same – so keep this truth in mind as we further examine our text.

Now catch this – we see Jesus interjects Himself directly into Saul’s plans in a dramatic and violent manner ... He knocks Saul to the ground and confronts him head-on – “Why are you persecuting me” ... Saul responds – and Jesus identifies Himself – then gives Saul a direct command to follow.

Why did this play out this way? ... Let me give you a few thoughts ... **One** – Saul’s ego had grown to a place – where only direct intervention from the Lord would grab his attention ... Saul was so blinded and bound by his own self-righteousness that no human voice – nor even an angelic encounter – could break through to him.

Secondly – this is where the difference between the chosen and the called becomes a factor ... Those who are chosen – from time to time – will find themselves in violent engagements with the Lord ... The Lord will make sure He gets your attention and will do whatever is necessary to achieve His objective ... Put simply – the chosen are not walking away ... No matter how bad Saul’s ego and lifestyle had become – he was still chosen of God – and he was going to be awakened to – and realigned with – his divine destiny.

Thirdly – again we see this distinction concept ... The Lord more often deals with the chosen through divine engagement – while those who are called are generally shaped and guided through the five-fold ministry ... Those who are chosen will often look rebellious to those who are called ... And without sounding offensive – those who are called tend to be tuned into man’s voice – while those who are chosen tend to be tuned into the Spirit’s voice ... Those who are chosen are naturally suspect of the voice of man ... Those who are called are naturally suspect of the voice of the Spirit ... For example – a called person will say: Was that thought from God – myself – or the devil? ... They constantly question that inner whisper – while the chosen tend to trust it instinctively ... I hope this is not confusing – but helpful ... Come to grips that there

are differences in the body ... Come to grips with who God created you to be – and be good with that ... Stay in your lane – you do you – and run your race in the grace He has given you.

Spiritual Nugget

Let me be clear – we all need a divine collision with the Spirit of God ... This is the only way a religious ego is chipped away at and fully destroyed ... This collision with Saul was designed to kill him – in order to awaken and reveal the chosen one

Let me take a moment to challenge another religious ideology concept... We have been misled concerning the principle of salvation ... Religion has reduced the salvation experience – to a specific moment in time – associated with a special – one-time prayer ... Salvation actually begins with a drawing and awakening stage as we saw with the eunuch ... Now with Saul – we see an encounter stage – which unfortunately – many have never experienced ... See this stage – often times is a multi-phased stage – where you experience the annihilation of your self-image ... You experience the death of the ego which you created throughout your life ... Here we see Saul experiencing all of these in one felt swoop ... I am grateful the Lord deals with us in a more gracious way today.

Now – let's look closely at what happened next ... Notice the kingdom collision didn't just impact Saul – it sent shockwaves through everyone connected to him.

True Conversion Sends Shockwaves

Acts 9:7-9 New Living Translation

The men with Saul stood speechless, - for they heard the sound of someone's voice - but saw no one! ... 8 Saul picked himself up off the ground, - but when he opened his eyes, he was blind ... So, his companions led him by the hand to Damascus ... 9 He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

I'll be honest – I could probably do an entire sermon from these three verses as they are so rich ... But what I want to bring to your attention today is this ... True – divine – God encounters always impact the people in your circle of influence ... Those who were with Saul stood speechless at what they heard and saw ... Saul's engagement with Jesus sent a ripple effect into everyone connected to him.

When you have an engagement with the Lord – does it impact those around you? ... Does anything shift? ... Did anyone else notice that something had changed in your life? ... So let me make this personal ... When I got saved – and it was radical – and the people around me could see instantly that something dramatic had happened to me ... I could tell you many stories to confirm that ... But let me share a non-salvation related engagement with you ... One day after being in the bathroom – and for whatever reason I've had multiple encounters in the bathroom ... Anyways – when I came out – I remember Robin looked at me and said, “Are you OK?” ... I actually responded – No ... But then I asked her – “Why are you asking?” ... I don't remember her exact words – but her comment alluded to the fact that I looked visibly shaken – as if something had happened ... Well, something did happen – I had an encounter.

Spiritual Nugget

Divine encounters are never designed to impact only the person who experiences them ... God is far bigger in His intentions ... It was not an accident that this Damascus road engagement happened when it did ... This encounter wasn't just about Saul ... It was also designed to awaken and draw those who witnessed it unto the Father ... Saul had his ego crushed and his self-image destroyed ... But his companions were awakened and drawn by what they heard and what they experienced.

TAKEAWAY

This week – spend some time with the Holy Spirit to specifically address this issue of ego ... Ask Him to reveal the thoughts – the assumptions – the reactions – and the self-images that were formed through indoctrination and not through transformation ... Don't try to fix anything

– simply let the light that knocked Saul off his horse – to shine upon those inner places that still defy transformation.

Each morning before you get out of bed – whisper this simple prayer: “Align me with who I truly am – the one You called from my mother’s womb” ... Let this reality settle into your consciousness before you start your day ... Remind yourself that you are not trying to become someone – you are awakening to who you really are.

And as you walk through this week – stay alert to the collisions ... The interruptions ... The sudden moments where the Spirit redirects a thought – shifts a desire – or stops you – mid-motion ... These are not inconveniences – these are invitations ... These are the gentle Damascus moments that reshape the inner world.

Finally – be aware of the shockwaves your awakening creates ... True encounters with the Spirit always affect those closest to you ... So, carry yourself with a quiet yieldedness – a steady awareness – and a confidence that comes from knowing the old is dying and the new is rising ... Let your life this week become a subtle invitation for the people around you to awaken to their own collision with the Presence.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father – we pause in this moment to breathe in the truth that You are not distant – You are the life within our life ... We allow Your light to settle into every hidden place and bring us into alignment with who we have always been in You.

Spirit – awaken our inner hearing ... Tune us to the whisper that has been speaking long before we ever learned how to listen ... We yield the old patterns – the old reactions – the old noise – and we welcome the clarity that rises from union.

And now I declare over every person – the inner man is awakening – the false self is losing its voice – and the consciousness of Christ is breaking through every layer of the old mind ... You will walk this week with a new awareness – a new sensitivity – and a new resonance with the Spirit who lives in you ... We receive it – we rest in it – and we walk it out ... In Jesus' name – amen.