

An Encounter with Jesus  
Acts 9:1-23  
Presented by Oscar Aguirre 26/ February / 2023

**1. INTRODUCTION: The First Martyr & the Future Leader of the Gentile Church**

I want to start with a dramatic scene described in the book of Acts 7:54-8:2. Here Stephen is stoned to death.

- Stephen was one of the most profound leaders of the early church and he is considered the first Christian martyr (Someone killed because of his/her faith in Christ).
- Acts 7:58 is the verse when Saul was first introduced in the Bible. Saul was at Stephen's death, and he approved it.
- Lessons from Stephen's sacrifice (Becky Harling. A best-selling author)
  - The grace with which Stephen handled his stoning is remarkable and so like Christ's death on the cross.
  - We can look at martyrdom as absolute tragedy and it is for those who suffer at the hands of terrorists and for those they leave behind. However, God's glory often shines through the martyrs in ways we can't explain. He often opens the windows of paradise to give them a glimpse of heaven in their suffering just as he did during the stoning of Stephen.
- Who was Stephen: Acts 6:1-15
  - a. He has a deacon chosen by the disciples in the early church. Acts 6:1-7
  - b. Characteristics:
    - i. Acts 6:3 says he was chosen because he had good reputation, was full of the Holy Spirit and had wisdom.
    - ii. Acts 6:6 The apostles prayed and laid hands on him.
    - iii. Acts 6:8 describes Stephen as a man full of God's grace and power, who did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.
  - c. His primary occupation: He, among six other men, would function as deacon and oversee the distribution of food to people in the body of Christ. Specifically, he needed to make sure the widows of the Hellenistic/Grecian Jews would not be overlooked.
  - d. His task is simple but his faith and role as Christian is strong.
  - e. Stephen, however, was exemplary in both his life and death. In the stoning of Stephen, we are given a powerful example of both how to live a life of grace and how to die with grace as followers of Jesus.

**2. THE DYNAMICS OF THOSE EARLY CHURCH DAYS**

- The Church: At this point the church is young and growing, thousands were coming to Christ. Act 5:14
- The church was wrestling problems.
  - From within with how to best care for everyone's needs. New believers lived together in tiny communities. They did life together and shared their belongings as they followed the way of Jesus. There two groups of Jews the Grecia Jews who spoke Greek and were more Grecian that

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Hebraic and were born another place than Judea. Also, there were the Hebraic Jews those who spoke Hebrew and/or Aramaic were born in Judea and preserved the Jewish culture and customs.

- There were also a great problem coming from without, the persecution of the church Acts 6:8 7:60 this was a growing threat. We can see how they seized Stephen. The Church was persecuted and scattered. Acts 8:1b-2
- According to the NIV Study Bible the church was entirely Jewish in its composition at this time.

### 3. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Who is Saul?

Acts 22:1-3

- Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia
- Tarsus an important commercial center, university city, and crossroads of travel.
- Founded several Christian Churches in Asia minor and Europe from the mid-40s to the mid-50s AD.
- According to Brown (1997), approximately half of the content in the book of Acts details the life and works of Paul. And Fourteen of the 27 books in the New Testament have traditionally been attributed to Paul.
- Trained by Gamaliel (most probably in Jerusalem) who was the most honored Rabbi of the first century. (NIV Bible study)
- Roman citizenship by birth. Acts 22: 27-28
- Circumcised on the eighth day of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee.” Philippians 3:5, Act 26:5
- He could not have had more reason to be confident in his righteousness. And in his misplaced zeal for God, he “intensely persecuted” the followers of Jesus, whom he considered to be dangerous heretics. Paul describes his life before conversion in his Epistle to the Galatians: For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 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 1:13–14
- He was referred to as Saul of Tarsus. Later called Paul – the Greek version of his name.
- Using his Roman name was fitting for the man who proclaimed that he would become “all things to all people,” a Jew to the Jews in order to win the Jews, weak to the weak in order to win the weak, etc., all for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). Adopting his Roman name would allow Paul to approach the Gentiles to whom he was sent and speak to them in their own language, becoming as one of them and setting them at ease. It is also possible that Paul gave up the use of his Hebrew name, Saul, with its regal connotation and chose to use his Roman name, Paul, meaning “little” or “small,” because he desired to become smaller in order to present Christ as greater.

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- Without a doubt, one of the most important figures of the apostolic age.

Saul's Encounter with Jesus

Acts 9:1-9

- Saul meets Jesus and changes the direction of his life with that affects history.
- You might think that someone so strong in their reasoning, so entrenched in a certain way of life, so fully committed to and convinced of a cause would be unreachable. But God had a different plan for Saul.
- As Saul marched down the road to Damascus, in zealous pursuit of the Christians, he had a profound experience.
- Jesus Himself appeared before him as a light from heaven, forcing Saul to his knees.
- The vision of Jesus had left Saul blinded – an appropriate metaphor for his life since he had been blinded up to that point to the truth of the gospel.
- In that moment he believed, and he went from persecutor to humble man/disciple who was just scolded by Jesus.
- There was no wavering, no human reasoning, wondering if what he was doing was right.
- What a contrast with the Vision of Stephen when he was being stoned.
- After encountering Jesus on the Damascus road, Saul was led into the city by his companions who had heard the Sound and yet seen nothing. And there he stayed.
- For three days, he was blind. For three days, he neither ate nor drank. For three days, he was left to consider what kind of life he had led, and what kind of life he would lead from that point forward.
- He spent 72 long hours of deep reflection.
- Consider the contrast of feelings of these two encounters with Jesus, Stephen's and Saul's. Stephen's assurance, peace, joy. Saul's fear, guilt, disappointment.
- Could you imagine what must have gone through his mind?
  - a. "What have I done?"
  - b. "How could I have been so wrong?"
  - c. "What do I do now?"

Have you had an experience where you realized you were wrong? that you did something really wrong?

- Saul found himself in a place of confusion. A place of darkness. A place of wondering about the nature of the world and his own place in it. He was probably beyond repentance and remorse.
- As we read the account recorded for us in Acts 9, we picture Saul huddled in a corner of darkness, hungry and thirsty not only physically to sustain his body but also for something spiritual to sustain his soul: He was persecuting God!

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Ananias call and Encounter with Saul

Acts 9:10-22

- Where would Paul find hope?
- Luke, the author of Acts, provides the answer for us: “There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias” (ACT 9:10). That’s all we get. We don’t have any indication that Ananias had any special education or training. We don’t know if he was young or old, what he did for a living, or what his family was like. We have no idea whether he was a man of great or little standing in his community. THAT IS NOT IMPORTANT TO GOD. We only know that he was a follower of JESUS. Just a regular, old disciple that was READY when the Lord called his name.
- And the Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” ACTS 9:10-15 and his answer was “Yes, Lord”

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER LIKE ANANIAS?

- Ananias was the venue God used to express his love, forgiveness, and anointing to Paul. Also God restored “his Vision” physical and spiritual.
- He was strengthened, spent a few days with the disciples, and began preaching Jesus as Son of God.
- Paul preached Jesus name to the Gentiles, as well as before kings and the children of Israel.

Paul’s Changed life.

- Paul was born again, with a new heart, a new attitude, and a new life. Paul’s message was a declaration of what he himself had become convinced of in the Damascus road: Christ deity and Messiahship Acts 9:20 – Christ had become everything for him!
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- Conversely, Paul had experienced Christ and had a completely new focus in life. His whole heart’s desire was to obey him. His mission now was to “be a servant and a witness of what he had seen of Jesus, to open the eyes and turn the people from darkness to light, from the power of satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus. Acts 26:16-18
- His powerful testimony was: “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” Philippians 1:21.
- This longing for Christ drove him to a deep humility, because he saw that everything he had as a natural person was useless to fulfill his longing. This man who had been so strong in himself, so “righteous,” He said:

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Acts 9:1-23  
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*“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 3:7-8.

- Paul no longer saw himself as someone great, but as someone who needed to be completely changed. Because of this great humility God could now begin the work of transformation in his inner man – so that he could be “conformed to the image of God’s Son Jesus” (Romans 8:29).
- His desire was to fully know Jesus, *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”* Philippians 3:10.
- One of his focuses was the Spirit of overcoming sin in the flesh, so that the life of Christ could become his life. (2 Corinthians 4:10) He testifies to this when he says: *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. **I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**”* Philippians 3:12-14.
- In summary, Paul experienced two transformations in his life!
  - The first was at his conversion, when his heart was transformed. He described this as putting off the “old man” and putting on the “new man” – the act of a moment, an act of faith.
  - Ephesians 4:22-24  
22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.
  - The second transformation was a longer process; the process of sanctification. He daily took up his cross to follow Jesus.

Final Thought:

- Paul/ Saul was best known for:
  - His persecution of Christians and his amazing conversion.
  - The Letters of instruction and encouragement he wrote to the early church.
  - His burning desire that the Gospel be presented to the nations.
  - Representing Christ to the world powers of his day.

How would you like to be best known for as a Christian?