

# Life of Paul

by W.B. Dunkum

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*This sermon explores the life of Paul, detailing his transformation from a persecutor of Christians to a devoted apostle spreading the Gospel.*

**Scripture:** Acts 9:1, Acts 16:25, Acts 28:30, Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 15:58, 2 Corinthians 11:24, Philippians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1, Revelation 2:10

**Topics:** "Apostle Paul", "Christian Persecution"

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## Description

W.B. Dunkum preaches about the life and transformation of Saul of Tarsus, later known as the Apostle Paul, from a persecutor of Christians to a devoted follower of Christ. The sermon covers Paul's upbringing in Tarsus, his education under Gamaliel, his persecution of Christians, his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, and his impactful ministry spreading the gospel. It also delves into Paul's trials, imprisonments, writings of epistles, and eventual martyrdom for his faith, highlighting his unwavering dedication and service to God despite immense challenges and opposition.

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## Transcript

The Sacred scriptures give us an accurate account of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ; also, a beautiful description of the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost upon the apostles before Saul of Tarsus is mentioned. He is first introduced to us as a persecutor of those who followed the Christ; also, we see him assisting the murderers of Stephen in their bloody deed. Saul relates the fact that he consented to the death of Stephen and kept the raiment of those that slew him. No doubt you are anxious to know in the beginning of this discussion as to who was Saul. He is of age. Let him speak for himself. "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cicilia." At that time Tarsus was a very famous city, noted for its magnificence and beauty, the center of culture and scholarship. It was here Saul spent his boyhood days. Most probably he had several brothers and sisters. His father was a Jew, a descendent of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. No doubt he gave his son religious training after the strictest sect of his religion. The young Jew was likewise taught a trade, that of tent-making.

There is a Jewish maxim, "He who teaches not his son a trade, teaches him to be a thief." But Saul was destined for a nobler calling than that of tent making. No doubt the learned people of Tarsus hoped some day to see Saul holding a high position in their midst, as they boasted of having one of the greatest universities of the world, and it is natural for us to suppose that Saul at an early age enrolled as a student in this great university. However, he did not complete his education there, but was sent to the holy city of

Jerusalem to be taught according to the law of his father. Saul's chief instructor at Jerusalem was Gamaliel, a learned Doctor of the law, a man of eminence and ability, whose reputation was great among all people. Prof. Gamaliel is believed to have been the son of Simeon who took Jesus in his arms in the temple and blessed him. Saul makes great progress as a student. Gamaliel was a Pharisee of the strictest kind. No wonder Saul became narrow-minded and could not tolerate any religious sect that differed from his own.

We have no record as to how Saul spent the years that intervened between the time he left Gamaliel's school at Jerusalem until he appeared as a persecutor of those who followed Jesus Christ; but probably he spent it with his parents at Tarsus, where he no doubt pursued the studies of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Law, Arts, Science and Philosophy. At this time the word of God is increasing and number of disciples multiplying at Jerusalem, and there is a company of followers who are obedient to the faith. The enemies of Jesus are being alarmed, and some are resorting to persecution. Saul seems to hate the Nazarenes, and no doubt has only heard of this doctrine in a perverted form. As soon as Saul thought his religion was in danger he left home-- studies and all, but his zeal caused him to do many things contrary to the teaching of Jesus. He abhorred and scorned at the idea that the son of a poor carpenter who had made intimate friends of some fishermen should become the Messiah.

The first martyr was Stephen, one of the seven deacons who was officially appointed to take charge of all money for the relief of the poor as well as preach the gospel and lead souls to Christ. He being a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost did wonders among the people. Stephen preached to different nationalities in the synagogue. No doubt Saul heard him preach, and Saul being a learned pupil of Gamaliel, could not resist the wisdom and spirit by which Stephen spoke. At this time Stephen was taken before the Sanhedrin and false witnesses were called for who testified that he had been blaspheming against God. But at this time Stephen was very calm and steady until those looking at him said his face shone as if it had been the face of an angel. Read Acts 7:55-60. As to the place of Stephen's burial, we fail to find a sufficient account; some have thought Joseph provided a tomb for the mangled remains of the first martyr of the Christian church. Saul was caused to marvel over the courage, love and forgiveness of the followers whom he regarded as an impostor. No doubt the time came when Saul mourned bitterly because he took part in the stoning of Stephen. I like to think that the angelic face of this dying martyr was one of the steps which brought about the conversion of Saul. The smiling face of the dying man haunted him, yet he proceeds to make havoc of the church, entering into every home, and haling men and women, putting them in prison. Perhaps many who were assembled in the upper room after the ascension were put in prison, and many homes in Jerusalem were vacated because they were afraid of the man who thought he was doing God's service. Christianity has had to suffer intensely through past ages because of various persecutors. But one might ask the question, why Christianity has had to plow her way through scenes of suffering?

I. Because of the difference of opinions. Opinions are a part of us and as dear as life and liberty. They are the measure of our influence and the results of experience, thought, study, and observation. My opinion is what I have accumulated, and to attack it is to attack me. Religious opinion has made slow progress as strife and hatred have been bitter against it ever since Pentecost.

II. Because not sustained by law. Most religions, both ancient and modern, have been protected by law, yet some have not.

III. Because of the corruption of the human heart. "The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked."

IV. Because it is undeniable both by history and the Bible.

1. Nothing that is good can be destroyed by persecution. The more you fight it, the more it spreads. If Christianity is eliminated some other method will have to be used aside from persecution.

2. Persecution is a test of its reality.

3. Persecution is worth the cost.

The results of Columbus' discovery are worth all the trouble. Happiness and blessings of Christianity more than compensate for all suffering of martyrdom. A few months after Stephen's martyrdom, Saul went to the high priest and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any Christians he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. His request was granted and he, with others, started for Damascus; and as he would meet groups of people by the way would question them if they were followers of the Crucified One. If they were he would put them in the nearest prison. But some Christians went ahead of him and reached Damascus before Saul, and told the believers that the merciless Saul of Tarsus was approaching the city, hence the disciples of the Crucified One sought places of safety where they might stay as long as this fierce persecutor remained in the city. But listen, it was about noon and the persecutor was in one-half mile of the city of Damascus, tired and broken down, no doubt they were thinking of some place they might rest and find refreshments after entering the city, before beginning their search for the followers of Jesus Christ. Suddenly there shone around him a light from heaven, and he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He said, "Who art thou?" The answer came, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." He trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord said, "Arise, and go into the city, and there it will be told thee what thou must do." He saw the error of his way, and was converted instantaneously. He saw Jesus, heard His voice, and conversed with Him, which stopped him as a persecutor and made him a mighty soul winner. Saul entered his career with uncommon and unusual advantages. He was endowed with talents which fitted him for any vocation in life. He was a bold, independent, competent young man. He was a born logician, and was able to soar into the highest regions of imagination. He was a religionist of the highest order, a young man of irreproachable morals, true to the highest standard of virtue which had been set up by the world. His influence must have been vast. His prospects were unsurpassed and he could have found various fields in which to display his talents had he been in search for such.

After all that could be said about his conversion, we are bound to admit it was sincere, real, genuine and thorough. Every Bible scholar will agree with me that this was a radical change. His influence now seems to extend over his entire subsequent life. He ceased his persecution and became the friend to the cause he had persecuted. He seeks now with all his power to spread abroad throughout the world the religion he has so earnestly opposed. However, he could not undo the wrong he had done, but he uses his every power to establish the work he has tried to destroy.

I. What was the change?

It is substantially the same as that which always occurs in conversion. The change was in his soul, heart, will and affection.

1. Before his conversion there was a regard for the law. This ran through his entire life.

2. Before his conversion there was a rigid conscientiousness; a conscience void of offense toward God and man.
3. Before his conversion he had a zeal for God. And because of this zeal, he was willing to make any sacrifice he regarded divine.
4. Before his conversion he was daring and energetic. These same characteristics he had through life.

## II. What evidence have we of the change?

The tremendous sacrifice -- everything for everything. When a man gives up brilliant prospects with nothing before him as an equivalent, is a proof he has experienced a change of heart below the collar bone. He gave up hopes and prospects as brilliant as ever cherished by any young man to receive hardships and death as compensation in return. Then how absurd it is for the critic to say it was probably a sunstroke he received, or it might have been a flash of lightning, or the explosion of a meteor. Brethren, I believe the account given in the 9th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is true, for it is the Word of God. The companions of Saul were speechless; heard nothing, only saw the light, but did not understand the circumstances at all. When Saul, the new convert, arose from the ground, he was unable to see. His companions, seeing his condition, led him into the city. He remained blind for the next three days. The unbelievers had no sympathy with him. The Christians were afraid of him until they had sufficient evidence of his conversion. Now, we could not blame them when we consider the way he had treated Christians in the past.

When three days had passed, the Lord appeared unto Ananias, a very devout man, and told him to go to the home of Judas who lived on the street called Straight, and call for Saul of Tarsus. At first he hesitated, knowing Saul's reputation as a persecutor. But the Lord said that Saul was all right now and a chosen vessel to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. So Ananias obeyed and went and found Saul just as the Lord had said. He laid hands on Saul and prayed for him that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost, and immediately there fell from his

eyes as it had been scales. Saul received his sight, arose, and was baptized. At once he joined the disciples and began to preach in the synagogues that Christ is the Son of God.

Damascus is still a beautiful, rich city. The street Straight is about three miles long, running east and west. There is said to be on the Street, the identical home which belonged to Judas where Saul stayed three days after his conversion, and in that house is a closet, according to tradition, where Saul stayed the three days he was blind and without food. There is also a fountain of water on Straight street near this house which is believed to have furnished the water for Saul's baptism. Until this day the Christians of Damascus each year walk out in a group to this place of Saul's conversion and there read the history of it; hence to them it is a sacred spot.

Saul did not stay long in Damascus after his conversion and baptism, but went into Arabia and there preached the gospel for three years, after which he returned to Damascus and began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus was the Christ. At this time the Jews became enraged and resolved to kill him. The only safe thing for Saul to do was to conceal himself, as his enemies were on his track. Soldiers were stationed at the various gates of the city to take his life as he left. But the Lord had a mighty work for this man to accomplish, so his disciples took him by night and let him down over the walls of the city in a basket. Without friends to accompany him, and surrounded by dangers, both seen and unseen, he started

on his journey back to Jerusalem. Of course, he had one Friend who never left him by day nor by night, hence he could sincerely say, "I fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

The weary journey was finally accomplished and he entered Jerusalem. But no friends were there to greet him; even the disciples were afraid of him and believed not that he was a disciple. But after he related his conversion, at once their fear was gone and he preached boldly in the name of Jesus Christ. His enemies were about to take his life, so he remained only fifteen days. He now goes to Tarsus to preach to the Gentiles. Some of his relatives had been converted to the faith and no doubt were glad to see him. He no doubt remained in his native city three or four years. It would be a comforting thought to think of his parents and relatives being Christians and giving him a royal reception during his stay. But as to whether they were Christians, we are not qualified to say. From this time on he is recognized as Paul and not Saul. It seemed that Saul was his Jewish name, and Paul his Roman name. From now on he goes by the latter as his work is among the Romans.

After Paul and Barnabas had parted, Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia and onto Derbe and Lystra. At Derbe he met Timothy and chose him for his companion also, and the three journeyed on from city to city as they were directed by the Holy Ghost, preaching throughout Phrygia and Galatia and other cities in Asia. Their aim was to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not. Hence, they went to Troas where Luke, the physician, joined them.

It was here at Troas that Paul heard a voice saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." He obeyed and embarked for Europe taking with him Silas, Timothy, and Luke. They went to Philippi, the capital of Macedonia. Here by the riverside was the first place the gospel was preached in Europe, and the first convert was Lydia. She and her household was baptized and took care of the preacher. It was here Paul healed the damsel. Her mistress became indignant, as they had been making much money off of her, who was sort of a witch. Hence, Paul and Silas were caught, falsely accused, cruelly treated, clothes torn off, beaten with many stripes, and put into a dark, damp, cold prison. Their bleeding wounds and painful position caused sleep to depart from them, so they spent the long tedious hours in prayer. As they waited their doom the next day, Paul and Silas at midnight sang praise to God, when suddenly the Almighty sent an earthquake and the doors were opened and the prisoners set free. The jailer suddenly awoke and realizing what had happened, started to take his own life thinking the prisoners had escaped. So Paul says, "Do thyself no harm, we are all here." The jailer cried, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." He and his family were converted and were baptized. After the baptismal service they made preparation for Paul and Silas to take a bath, and while they did the jailer prepared breakfast for them, and after a splendid breakfast they departed in peace.

Luke and Timothy remained at Philippi in charge of the church there, and Paul and Silas went on to Thessalonica. Here Paul preached boldly in the synagogues and was shamefully treated. A mob was collected and Paul and Silas left by night for Berea. Here Paul won much encouragement because they received the Word with readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Some enemies came from a distance and started false reports; hence Paul goes to Athens, where he preached Jesus and the resurrection. Great masses thronged to hear him. He preached to them from their own inscription, "The Unknown God." Some heard him gladly while others mocked. Paul then left for Corinth where he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla eighteen months, working at his trade and preaching in the synagogues. Here he had many followers. Also, it was at this time that he wrote First and Second

Thessalonians.

At that time a famine was raging and Paul was in need, so Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia bringing him financial help. Some of the leaders of the synagogues were saved which caused a stir, hence he sails for Ephesus. Here he leaves Aquila and Priscilla and goes to attend a feast at Jerusalem. After a short visit in the holy city he makes his last visit to Antioch. After a short stay he directed his course toward Ephesus, and there preached three months in the synagogues which had caused opposition. Paul likely remained about three years in the home of Aquila and Priscilla preaching the gospel, healing many that were sick, but all probabilities are. during these three years he worked for a support. Paul preached the gospel here at first with success, but when he exposed the sin of the temple of Diana until the people were so stirred, it was no longer safe for Paul to remain at Ephesus, so he left the city and went to Macedonia, and from there into Greece where he met Titus who had a donation from the church at Corinth for the poor at Jerusalem. Paul was determined to take it to them, when he found out that some of the Jews on the way were preparing to kill him, so he did not go but went back into Macedonia and on to Troas where he preached until after midnight. One man fell out of the window who went to sleep. Paul performed a miracle and brought him back to life, then had an early breakfast and went on his way rejoicing.

He set sail on the Aegean Sea, stopped at Mitylene, and from thence to Chios and on to Samos. Then to Miletus. It was here the Christians from Ephesus came to meet Paul. He delivered to them his farewell address, kneeled down and prayed, and after a time of weeping, departed in peace.

The once magnificent city is now a perfect wreck. Only a few families left, and they live in vaults. It was the Saviour who accused the church there of having left her first love, declining in religious fervor. He said the candlestick would be removed unless she repented. She did not repent, the light is wholly extinguished until, we are told today, there is not a single Christian left there.

Paul sails to Coos, and from thence to Rhodes and to Patara and on to Tyre - Ptolemais and to Caesarea, then to Jerusalem, where he received a cordial welcome, but after four days a mob was made, and had it not been for soldiers, they would have taken his life. He was brought before the Sanhedrin for trial. It was the same place that Stephen stood before the seventy judges twenty-four years before.

Paul was put in prison to save his life. That night the Lord appeared unto him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul, as thou hast testified at Jerusalem so thou must bear witness also at Rome. "Through the providence of God, Paul was taken a prisoner to Caesarea where he remained a prisoner for two. years, during which time he was visited by the saints from far and near.

He is then sent to Rome a prisoner, but he seems to be the captain of the vessel before he gets there. The desire and purpose he had long cherished had been accomplished. It was not curiosity that made him want to see the capital of the world; not the love of fame, or the prospects of increasing his reputation. But his desire to reach Rome was that he might preach the gospel there. Great cities are centers of influence. The aim of the apostle was that the gospel might scatter into the surrounding regions. From these centers law, habits and customs radiate, hence the necessity of such cities being lighthouses on the sea of time to scatter the good news of salvation.

Paul was brought to Rome in a manner contrary to what he had arranged. He had hoped to go there as an ambassador of Christ, but was sent as a prisoner to be tried for his own life. Very often our desires are accomplished and our prayers heard and answered, but in a manner altogether different from what we had expected. It may come through trials, peril, and disappointment, but He does answer, whereof we praise

Him.

It must have been a touching scene when Paul first entered the capital of the world. There was no one to announce his coming, no multitude to witness his arrival, But the King of kings and Lord of lords was present to lead the band of pilgrims who triumphantly conducted the man of God into the city. Paul was not treated as an ordinary soldier but was allowed to live in his own hired house. Paul said, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established."

For two years he spent his time in preaching and writing; some believed and others believed not. After his trial before Nero he leaves Rome and goes to Jerusalem, and on his way he preached the gospel in many cities as he journeyed. In the eleventh or twelfth year of Nero's reign, he is again prisoner in Rome, yet not permitted to live in his own house, but is cast into the common prison. A city burned may be built again, a country which has been visited by death, is soon fresh and green again, but not so when a great man dies. His place cannot soon be filled. The world has never been able to find a man who can take the place of the Apostle Paul.

Tradition and history both teach us he was beheaded. While he lost his head he saved his soul. From the fact he was a Roman citizen would exempt him under Roman law from death by crucifixion, yet that was the way in which many of his Christian brethren were put to death. Peter had no claim to Roman citizenship, hence he was crucified upon the cross, as was his Master. According to tradition Paul was beheaded two or three miles southwest of the city lest it should attract considerable attention. The execution was under absolute control of military authority. We know not what the dying words of the apostle were. We have no account of the procession from Rome to the place of the execution. We have no record as to whether any of his friends we represent or not, or whether any Christians were present to witness the scene, and to sustain him with their prayers and presence. How interesting it would be if we knew in this critical hour he repeated his own triumphant language, "O death where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory?" Yet Paul did not have to repeat such expression as a proof of his piety. To the martyr death must be gain. Yes, to the rich of earth who have on the garment of salvation "death is gain." If you have made necessary preparation you can go from a mansion below to one above; then "to die is gain. "Though there may be a coffin, a shroud, an open grave, corruption and decay, yet "to die is gain. "Yet heaven is a better, happier and more desirable world than this.

The life of Paul is a part of the history of the world. His history has meant much in helping to make the world what it is. Every great mind helps mold the future. Homer, Socrates, Cicero, and Demosthenes still live. Yet the influence of Saul of Tarsus counts more than all of them together. No man ever lived, (save Jesus Christ) whether orator or philosopher, statesman, poet or legislator, who has ever done as much to effect the permanent condition of the world as the Apostle Paul. Of course, it was the Christian religion that made him what he was. A profound reasoner, a man with unusual eloquence, godly zeal, divine conviction, and a heart so gentle and so tender he could take in the whole human family. His religious character fitted him to affect the destiny of man and general condition of the world. His religious principles were entire, fixed and immovable. No trouble to classify his religion as strictly Christian because he was humble, earnest, sincere, and prayerful. Duty, honesty, integrity and sincerity, characterized his whole life. And all this was connected with an energy that never tired and a love that never grew cold. And when the time came for him to seal his faith with his blood he died a martyr's death. Christ died like a God, Socrates died like a philosopher, Paul died like a Christian.

Paul's enemies resolved to put him to death. Every cruel thing that happened, the Christians were blamed for it. That cruel Nero struck terror into the heart of every Christian possible. A fire raged in Rome six days, destroying much property. Nero blamed Christians for it, but afterwards it was found out that Nero burned the buildings himself because they were not built according to his fastidious taste. The Christians were mercilessly persecuted. Some were burned, others stabbed with forks; some were sewed in skins of beasts and fed to the devouring animals, many were flayed alive; in fact, every species of cruelty was practiced upon them. How long Paul remained in prison the time is not exactly known. He did much of his writing at this time, writing fourteen epistles in all. Paul gives us some of his experience in II Corinthians 11:24-27.

"In the fullness of time," Paul says (II Tim. 4:7, 8). Paul was beheaded about three miles from Rome. Three of the soldiers who were in the company that led him out from the city were converted to the faith and in a few days were put to death by Nero. When entering the sacred spot, Paul cheerfully submitted himself to the executioners and immediately entered into eternal rest. The Christian church lost one of her brightest stars in the martyrdom of Paul, but the blood of martyrs is the need of the church. Pauls are scarce these days. He was a man of faith, devotion, learning, humility, ability, charity, zeal, patience and fidelity which were indescribable. No dangers, or weariness, or toil or pain ever caused him to rest from his labors until his race was run and his goal reached and his battle fought and victory won. But today he rests from his labors and his works do follow him. But he was one who could truly say he took pleasure in infirmities, in persecution, and in distresses for Christ's sake, that he might finish his course with joy. His execution took place June 29, AD. 66, in the sixty-eighth year of his age, and was buried two miles from Rome.

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