

Saul of Tarsus

by Welcome Detweiler

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a real conversion, immediate response to the gospel, and the assurance of salvation.

Duration: 12:31

Scripture: Acts 16:30

Topics: "Responding To Gospel", "Salvation Decisions"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses three individuals to whom the apostle Paul preached the Gospel in the book of Acts. The first was King Agrippa, who heard the message but ultimately rejected it. The second was an awakened jailer, who asked Paul what he needed to do to be saved. Paul responded by telling him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The jailer accepted the message and became a follower of Christ. The third person was Governor Felix, who also heard the Gospel but only trembled in fear without making a decision to follow Christ. The preacher emphasizes the importance of responding to the Gospel and warns against delaying salvation.

Transcript

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul is one of the central figures, especially in the Book of the Acts. A brief history is given of his life, even before he was converted, while he was still Saul of Tarsus. He was a very religious man, occupied with the forms and ceremonies of religion, very zealous and very sincere, and at the very same time he hated Christ, and he hated the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But don't think for a moment that Saul of Tarsus was a wicked man otherwise, except that his mind was set against Christ. He was a true representative of Adam's race. But Paul's history continues in the ninth chapter of Acts, and there we see a proud, religious, moral, educated Pharisee arrested by the Spirit of God on the road to Damascus.

He is smitten by God, his pride is gone, his religion is gone, and he is bowed down in the dust, acknowledging himself as a lost, guilty sinner. And right there he experiences the greatest event in any man's life, and that is his conversion. His conversion was not from a life of gross sin to Christ, but from being a very religious man to Christ.

And may I pause for a moment with this question. It may be that I have friends in my radio audience who are very, very religious, very, very sincere, but you are not certain that you have experienced what the

Bible calls a real conversion. Maybe you can't speak of any time that you have passed from death unto life.

There are such things as counterfeit conversions. That is, there are such things as old conversions that grow upon you. You just gradually go to church, and you read your Bible, you become more religious, and you quit your meanness, and so on, and eventually you feel maybe you have graduated into conversion.

But the conversion that is spoken of in the Bible is a clean cut. You are walking in one direction for one moment, and then you turn around and see in the Lord Jesus Christ your Savior, and you are converted as was the Apostle Paul. The difference between a Bible conversion and a counterfeit conversion is this, that in a Bible conversion you get the assurance of your salvation, and you can say, I know that I have been saved and that I am on the way to heaven.

If you are the victim of a counterfeit conversion, you will not be able to say that. You may get a very happy feeling at the time that you think you are saved, but it won't last very long. Sometimes it lasts a few weeks, sometimes a few months, sometimes it can even be stretched into a year or more.

But eventually you lose your grip on it, and you go back into the same life as before. Paul experienced both the counterfeit conversion in his former days when he became a real Pharisee, and then he also experienced a real conversion when he came to know the Lord Jesus as his Savior. But after he experienced a real conversion, he was able to say, I know whom I have believed.

There are some perhaps in my audience who cannot say, I know, and because of that you are very unhappy. But coming back to Paul in the Acts, after he was converted from being a mere religionist and he became a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, he became a chosen vessel to carry the gospel to Gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel. You have that in Acts 9.15. There is a sense in which every Christian is a witness the moment he is born again.

One of the best proofs of a real conversion is the immediate desire to tell others how wonderful it is to be saved and know it. I must tell my neighbors and my friends. If it's not worth telling, it's most likely just the counterfeit conversion.

After Paul's conversion, he immediately began to witness for his Savior. His message, according to 1 Corinthians 15, was how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. This is Paul's definition of the gospel, which in other words is God's good news of salvation.

Among those that heard the sweet story from the lips of Paul was a governor by the name of Felix. The record of this is found in Acts chapter 24. Of course, the gospel demands a response or an answer, and after Paul preached the gospel to this governor, Felix pondered for certain days, and then he gave his reply, and it says, Felix trembled and answered, Go thy way, for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

Notice Felix trembled. Judgment produces trembling. It causes a person to fear, because as he comes under the sound of the word of God and realizes God knows all about me, and my sins will eventually bring me into judgment, it does cause a man to fear.

But trembling is not enough. It's possible for a person to become so alarmed of their sinful condition that they are in tears and come to God, and they're all upset about their sins. But that's not sufficient, and as

far as we know, that was all the evidence that we see of conviction in Felix.

Felix trembled, but so far as the record is concerned, he was never saved. He wanted to be saved at a convenient season. The devil saw to it that no convenient season ever arrived.

I have met scores of people who want to be saved sometime, when it's more convenient. It may be just before they die. God's time is now.

Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. There will never be a more convenient or accepted time to be saved than now.

God says now is the accepted, the convenient time. The devil says tomorrow is better. He led Felix to hell by suggesting that a more convenient time would eventually come, and thus poor Felix, though he was a prominent man, a governor, no doubt lost his opportunity by simply saying, I want to be saved at a later date.

But as we read through the book of the Acts, we find that Paul again has the privilege of witnessing in this time in the presence of a king, and that record is found in Acts chapter 26. King Agrippa hears the message of the gospel, and Paul puts the question to the king, Believest thou? And his reply is, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. The king stood on the very threshold of salvation, but he never entered, and as far as the record is concerned, he is in hell today.

Why? Because he didn't know how to be saved? Oh, no. The apostle Paul was very faithful in presenting the gospel to him, but he is lost because almost doesn't count. There are no doubt millions of souls in the lost eternity who were almost persuaded to become saved.

That is, they sat perhaps under the sound of the gospel, and the Spirit of God moved them, and there was a voice within that said, Tonight is the night that you ought to trust the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. But the Spirit of God was quenched, and that poor sinner drove away the opportunity. It may be a number of times that the Spirit of God has been pushed away, and the person missed the opportunity of being saved.

And so far as we know, King Agrippa, though a prominent man on earth, lost his soul and perished, even though he had a faithful man to witness before him and ask him, Believest thou this? And his poor reply was, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. Someone has said to be almost saved, or to be almost persuaded is to be almost saved. But to be almost saved is to be altogether lost.

So if you can say, I am almost saved, you are still on the road to hell, because being almost saved won't mean a thing to you in the day when God will bring you to give an account of your stand before him. But then we might say, Paul had a very discouraging life if he preached to the governor, and the governor asked for a more convenient time, and he didn't trust the Savior. Then he goes and preaches to a king, and the king said, Almost thou have persuaded me to become a Christian.

My, it must have been very discouraging. But then you read again in the book of the Acts, and you find this time he is presenting the gospel to an awakened jailer, and that's in chapter 16 of the book of the Acts. And you wouldn't expect a hard-boiled jailer to be interested in the gospel, but this man realizes that he's in a desperate need.

He also is trembling, and he raises a wonderful question. The question is, What must I do to be saved? And Paul is right there on the moment. He's on the job, and he tells him the gospel message in the

shortest possible terms.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. And this jailer, perhaps so far as the eyes of the world is concerned, was a more or less despised man. At least he wasn't as prominent as King Agrippa, nor as Felix the governor.

But he had the opportunity of being saved, and he seems to exercise more wisdom than even the governor or the king. For when he hears the message, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the rest of the story has a very happy ending. The Philippian jailer believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not only that, members of his household also believed on Christ, and they were rejoicing in that wonderful salvation.

So to those of us who preach the gospel, while there are many who say no to the gospel, many who say, some other time, we receive a lot of joy because here and there, there is one who says, yes, I'm ready to be saved. Tell me the story of salvation. Tell me how to be saved.

I want to be saved this very moment. So Paul goes on preaching, and Paul leads many to know the Lord Jesus Christ. I thought you might be interested to notice these three, at least in the book of the Acts, to whom Paul preached, two of them turned down the gospel, but the one received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

The proportion of those who receive Christ is still perhaps in the minority, but we can't do anything about that. We must proclaim the gospel to whosoever will. It may be in my radio audience tonight, two-thirds of you do not want to hear God's salvation.

Well, I'm thankful for the one-third, if there are at least one-third who do know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and are rejoicing before him. May God bless his word, and if there's one who needs to be saved and you feel that God has spoken to you right now, I trust you'll do the wise thing, for I can say to you, if you want to be saved, you need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for your sins on Calvary's cross, and he has made provision for your salvation, and all that God asks of you is that you open your heart's door and say, Lord Jesus, I'm a lost sinner.

I believe Jesus died for me. I believe he rose again for me, and I believe that's the only thing that will save me. I put my complete confidence in him, and if you will do it, God's word assures you that you are the possessor of eternal life.

May God bless you as you do it, and now our closing hymn.

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