

“The Conversion of Croonus Swoonus” (*The Philippian Fragment*, Calvin Miller, IVP, 1982, 52-55)

Proposition

We are taking a journey through the book of Acts, called **Ripples**. We are following the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, as per Acts 1:8.

Church Established – Acts 1 - 7 Church Enlarged – Acts 8 - 12 Church Extended – Acts 13 - 28

Acts records the Gospel’s spread far beyond mere history or travelogue. Last week we saw how the early Church was **scattered** out from Jerusalem by persecution. Acts has something significant to say to us as we communicate the Gospel in our context. Consider Saul’s conversion – **Acts 9:1-31**.

Last Sunday we considered the “Tale of Two Disciples”. Today we could call Acts 9 the “Tale of Two Apostles”. Peter preached the Gospel and healed in Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa – **see vv.32-43**.

But the focus of Acts is on the power and spread of God’s message, not the man! With the conversion of Saul, it extends to Damascus and even to Tarsus. What do we learn for our own spiritual journey from Saul’s spectacular conversion? Here are four steps of transformation.

[1] Condemnation – vv. 1-2

Before Saul experienced a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, he stood condemned for his sin-separation from God. This state of antagonism towards God was powerfully portrayed in his “murderous threats” against the followers of Jesus. “Threatening and murder were the atmosphere which he breathed by which and in he lived.” (*Linguistic Key to the Greek NT*, Rienecker, Rogers, Zondervan, 1980, 280).

What is even more tragic is the fact that Saul’s actions and attitudes were **methodical** and **moralistic**. In other words, he was filled with **religious** zeal, not the Holy Spirit. Though Paul was born into a Romanized/Hellenized world (Tarsus), he was a Hebrew and trained as a Pharisee by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). How often is this fact repeated – people are very religious, yet they are spiritually lost.

[2] Confrontation – vv. 3-9

This situation in Saul’s life changed when he encountered the risen Jesus Christ. Later, to the Romans he wrote, “*there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” (8:1). Now the conversation of Saul is rather well known. Even today, people make reference to a “*Damascus road experience*”. But the central reality of Saul’s story is that he was confronted with the reality and truth of who Jesus Christ is. As a student of the OT Scriptures and an observer of the early Church, Saul had **information** about Jesus – but there was no **submission** until this point.

Saul’s testimony in Acts 22 gives a little more detail: “those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything that has been appointed for you to do.’” (vv.9-10). As G. Campbell Morgan put it, Saul was “the man to be apprehended” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Revell, 1924, 223)

This is what Saul later explained to the church in Philippi – **see 3:7-12**. Note carefully the way in which God reached Saul. It was that he by reason or religion “found Christ”. Jesus confronted him.

[3] Confession – vv. 10-19a

We really need to celebrate people like Ananias! He was ready to obey God's command to help confirm Saul's conversion. Ananias was "a man who was devout by the standard of the Law and well spoken of by all the Jews" (Acts 22:12). He was spiritually attentive and courageous. We learn that at this time Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit. Through Ananias, God healed Saul's sight. Presumably, it was Ananias who baptized Saul and guided him in the first steps of life in Christ.

This was a time when Saul gave confession to the fact that Jesus was His Lord and Savior. His repentance is evident. And throughout his later adventures with Jesus (Acts 13-28) and writing (13 or 14 NT books) he more fully confessed to his new life in Jesus.

[4] Collaboration – vv. 19b-30

Lastly, we discover that in addition to his relationship with Christ, Saul began to relate to the Church. He began to live out "the great truth that Christ and the Church were one." (Morgan, 227) Along with this Saul became acquainted with what would become three great aspects of his life and ministry.

a. Participation in the Body of Christ

Saul was with the disciples in Damascus (v.19b) and became part of the church in Jerusalem (vv.26-28) though it was not without some initial difficulty.

b. Proclamation of the truth Christ

He was preaching in the synagogues of Damascus (vv.20-22) and later in Jerusalem (vv.28-29). Also note, Galatians 1:16-17 reveals that between his time in these cities he spent perhaps three years in Arabia growing in his understanding of Jesus as the Christ.

c. Persecution by the enemies of Christ

Saul experienced opposition in Damascus which became a conspiracy to kill him (vv.23-25) but the believers helped him escape. The same situation developed in Jerusalem (vv.29-30) and again the local church helped him return to his home town of Tarsus.

Conclusion - see Digging Deeper

According to verse 31, this became a time of Church growth throughout the "second ripple zone". This phase is a period of about thirteen years. Alan Kreider writes that the early Church grew because of the virtue of patience – the Church grew not by specific strategies but by "patient ferment". (***Patient Ferment of the Early Church***, Baker Academic, 2016)

It is one thing to tell the story of Paul's conversion, but what about your spiritual story!? How would you share your testimony of faith with someone. Consider how Luke penned Paul's (Acts 13:13ff) conversion. And let's rescue the word "conversion" because it can be helpful.

- ***What was the context of your life when you were living under God's condemnation?***
- ***What was the nature of your confrontation with Jesus Christ as Savior?***
- ***What ways have you made a confession of repentance of sin and acceptance of Jesus?***
- ***What is your collaboration and participation with the Body of Christ?***

For further reflection on the way to tell your testimony, read Paul's testimony in Philippians 3:1-21.