

## **Introduction: Saga of Saul**

A few weeks ago we saw how Saul of Tarsus, a high ranking official in the Jewish religious government, sparked intense persecution against the early church. We then saw how God used this persecution for “good” and that “good” was to get his church out of its Jewish cocoon and into the world spreading the message of Jesus. However, the persecution did not abate in Jerusalem. Indeed, it only intensified as Saul stepped up his efforts to bludgeon the early church. After giving his hearty approval to the stoning of Stephen (8:1) and going house-to-house to apprehend Christians, he is now “breathing out murderous threats” (v9:1) As we continue our Supernatural Church series today we revisit the Saga of Sinister Saul.

## **Saul’s Impressive Resume**

Every generation or so a person comes along that not only climbs the ranks of his organization but takes it to an entirely new level. Saul was that person. He studied under Gamaliel, the premiere theologian of his day (Acts 5:24, 22:3) but he was no dry academic! He added to his intellectual training a religious passion rarely witnessed before. Because he was a strict adherent to the Great Commandment (Love God) and Great Prohibition (no other gods) he became a Pharisee, the pinnacle of religious authority of his time. Intellectual prowess, religious zeal, and cultural sophistication vaulted Saul to prominent places of influence and affluence. Every Jewish mother prayed their sons would grow up and become like Saul. He was a Jew’s Jew which he credentials in places like Philippians 3:5-6:

**5 Circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal and legalistic righteousness, faultless.**

## **Saul’s Zeal**

Believing God revealed himself exclusively through the Jewish religion, Saul became its fiercest defender for two reasons: 1) all other religions were wrong, dead wrong and, 2) he saw his ancestors greatly suffer through multiple exiles because they adopted pagan practices and idol worship. Persistent unfaithfulness to God plagued Israel from the start and Saul was bound and determined to ensure they kept their fealty to him. Thus, he is prosecuting Christians like there is no tomorrow because for him there is no tomorrow if this burgeoning new religion called “The Way” (9:1-2) takes root and starts to grow.

## **Saul’s Supernatural Encounter**

One day, while on his murderous mission he inadvertently bumps into the founder and president of Christianity International. Under the heading, “Didn’t see that coming” Acts 9:3,4 describes what happened during this unexpected encounter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kind :

**3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground...**

While cruising the 140-mile strip between Jerusalem and Damascus Saul, in the words of the poet/philosopher Bruce Springsteen, is “Blinded by the Light” in that he is confronted by the true “Boss.” Blindsided by this out-of-the blue encounter left Saul sitting on his keister on the side of the road pondering metaphysics. His swirling thoughts are interrupted when he hears the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Jesus call him by his first name (v4).

**Saul, Saul**

## **Name-Name**

Remember as kid when your mischief/fun was ruined by that authoritative parental voice calling out your full name? Believe me, I heard “John Richard Guerre” called out more times than an overcaffeinated bingo caller. We love that God knows our names but not so much if we are doing something we shouldn’t. This divine “call out” reminds us of the Burning Bush when Jesus addressed the renegade shepherd, “Moses, Moses” (Exodus 3:4). He likewise did this double call out to people like Abraham, Jacob, and a young boy named Samuel.

## **Saul, Why?**

This booming voice from heaven asks Saul a question we never want to be asked, “Why do you persecute me?” After I picked myself up and dusted myself off, I might answer,

**Lord, I wasn't persecuting you. I was defending the one-and-only-true faith revealed to us through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Besides, I didn't lay a finger on you but on those easily deceived deplorables that are unwittingly breaking the Great Commandment and Great Prohibition by going after false gods.**

Saul, however, doesn't offer any defense or excuse of his wayward actions, but asks one question, the most important one of all, "Who are you?" Jesus answers (v6), "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

### **World Views**

Beliefs lead to behaviors and behaviors justify beliefs. Our personal belief system is rooted in our ideas and formulated, over time, by things like our family of origin, cultural contexts, formative experiences, and what's been modeled for us by people we know, admire, and trust. From such factors we develop a worldview which ultimately becomes the lens through which we interpret life. But what if we encounter new information that casts doubt or proves our worldview to be incomplete, defective, or wrong? It seems to me that we might get a lot of things wrong in life, i.e., politics, relationships, finances, health, etc.,... but we cannot be wrong about Jesus.

Imagine being Saul at the very moment he realizes his view about Jesus was wrong. Add that he was not passively or ignorantly wrong but aggressively and hostilely wrong. Talk about a Chernobyl size worldview melt down! Saul, however, doesn't stubbornly cling to his former way of thinking. No, he is like the old curmudgeon that wakes up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. Because it's dark he walks face first into the edge of his bedroom door. His nose explodes and there is blood all over the place. Woozy, he sits back down on his bed and says, "I got to change my life." Although literally "blinded by the light" Saul now sees Jesus as the Son of God and God the Son, and as the superior person, power, and passion of the universe.

### **Trading World Views**

How do we know that his worldview radically changed that day on the Damascus Road? He converted his passion from persecuting Christ to glorifying Christ. It made him see that his numerous achievements, accolades, and activities were nothing compared to knowing and experiencing Christ. It also transformed him from Church antagonist to church advocate and from its most vitriolic denouncer to its foremost announcer.

### **Conclusion:**

Saul's dramatic conversion reminds us of two incredible things: 1) Jesus can save anyone at any time and, therefore, we just can't give up on anyone. 2) The nature of conversion is trading a defective, incomplete, or wrong worldview for the one that is Jesus centric through and through. In other words, Jesus becomes the lens through which we think, see, and do everything, not just some things but all things! Genuine conversion is not adding Jesus to our current worldview but making him our entire worldview. When we do, our view of God, changes. Our view of others, changes. Our view of self, changes as does our view of everything else. Have you experienced such a worldview conversion?

Let's pray that you do right now!