

## **I. Introduction**

- A. Over the next several weeks we are going to look at a variety of biblical examples that demonstrate God’s continual reach toward us and His desire to encounter us.
- B. Foundational Premise: God didn’t create humanity to live at a distance; He desires intimate relationship with us. Using biblical terms: He made humanity to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6, Rev 5:10)
- C. The entry point to this relationship with Him is salvation through the gospel of Jesus. He greatly desires that all people come a saving faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Peter 3:9).
- D. The power of the gospel is still as potent and rich today as it ever has been. The power of the blood of Jesus is still effective to cleanse us from our sin and deliver us from bondage.
- E. Let’s now look at the Apostle Paul’s conversion as an example of what it looks like when God encounters someone with His power in salvation.

## **II. Saul’s Conversion**

**Acts 9:1** Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. 8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12 And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." ... 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." 17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

**Philippians 3:7** But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. **8** 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 **9** and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; **10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

A. Paul is the only individual in the New Testament who shares his testimony of what He was like before he came to Jesus and how he was transformed after his conversion.

B. Noteworthy details about Saul’s conversion:

1. Paul was being promoted up the ranks in Judaism (Gal 1:14).
2. Jesus’ use of the idiom, “kick against the goads” is very telling
3. Jesus’ invitation to Paul was, “I will show you how many things you must *suffer* for my name’s sake.”
4. Paul’s explained that everything that he had going for himself prior to meeting Jesus was rubbish in comparison to Jesus.

### III. Jesus’ Invitation

**Luke 9:23** Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

**Matthew 10:32-33** "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. **33** But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

A. Jesus never offered “easy believe-ism” as a path to salvation.

B. He was absolutely clear, that following Him would require denying yourself and daily dying to yourself.

C. Furthermore, He requires His followers to claim allegiance to Him when challenged by people in regard to their allegiance to Him.

### IV. The Power of Grace

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast.

A. It is only by the grace of God that a person can come to Jesus. The entire operation of salvation is a work of the grace of God. If God’s extravagant grace were not lavished upon us we would all be completely doomed. Oh the wonder and beauty of God’s grace!

B. At the same time, grace is never to be used as a license for sin. On the contrary, grace instructs and enables us to deny sin and the lusts of the flesh, so that we may live our lives in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus.

**Titus 2:11-12** For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

**Romans 6:1-2** What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

C. What is passing as Christianity in our day and time is often only cultural Christianity that espouses some components of Christ’s morality but lacks intimacy and full devotion to the Lord Jesus.

D. In the West we use terms like “lukewarm” Christian to describe those who claim to be Christians but are not fully committed to Jesus. However, Jesus was clear that those who are lukewarm will ultimately be spewed out from Him (Rev 3:15-16). The issue is that their works did not depict a lifestyle that had been converted and changed.

E. Paul described this tension in **Titus 1:16** They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

F. I’m concerned that we have misrepresented the gospel and thus have preached something that resembles Christianity but lacks the actual power of God unto salvation that the gospel promises.

G. As a result people have ascribed to a version of Christianity that offers them “blessings” without suffering, grace without accountability, glory without tribulation, a savior without a judge, and heaven without hell.

H. Ultimately it’s a cheap counterfeit that has a form of godliness but denies the power (2 Tim 3:1-5).

I. The good news is that the power of the true gospel is still real today. Jesus blood is still powerful and it can still cleanse someone who is stained with sin and set him free. In this truth we rest our hope.