### “Scales Fell from His Eyes” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 4, 2025

**Acts 9:1–11, 17–18**

1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3Now as he was approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” 5He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 Get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” 7The men who were travelling with him were speechless; they heard the voice but saw no one. 8Saul got up, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias. . . Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. . .” 17So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul. . . 18And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized.

**John 21:15–17**

15When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt . . . and he said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

I had a conversion experience in 1972, when I felt that Jesus was reaching out to me. It changed my life, and I began going to two churches in the vicinity of Sunnyvale, where I lived. It was like a light was switched on, and I had new hope, new friends, and new purpose.

Here we have one of three reports about Paul’s conversion experience that occur in Acts. The other two times are when Paul testifies about his experience. Here the narrator tells the story. It’s the story of the beginning of a great apostle’s career, his transition from a persecutor to an evangelist. I think an important part of the story happens in Acts 7, when Saul was present and held the cloaks of the men who listened to the deacon Stephen preaching, and then, when Stephen said that God does not dwell in temples made by human hands (7:48), the crowd turned on him and stoned him to death. I think this event may have weighed heavily on Saul’s conscience. He had been helping to get Christians arrested, but we don’t know of him helping to get any killed. He probably felt complicit in the killing of Stephen.

In any case, when he experiences the risen Jesus, he doesn’t resist in any way, and he doesn’t object to Jesus telling him where to go and what to do. He complies with the instructions, gets himself baptized, and then is instructed in the gospel. He is clearly ready for a change of life, even though some of the Christians, knowing his reputation, are not fully ready to accept him (9:26).

But he promptly goes forth and starts preaching Christ (9:20), energetically arguing that Jesus is the Christ (9:22), and disputing with the Grecians, it says (9:29). He’s not only preaching Christ, he’s ready with arguments and enthusiasm to debate opponents. He seems to be fully convinced of Jesus’ Lordship from the moment when he met him on the road to Damascus.

The blindness that he suffered seems to hold true metaphorically as well as literally. He was blinded by the light, and then the scales fell from his eyes and he saw and understood. If he wanted to, he could have said “was blind, but now I see.” His life was wholly turned around, and he even gave himself a new name, “Paul,” which means “short,” or “Shorty.”

So today’s readings take a look at the two greatest apostles, “Shorty” and “Rock.” Peter, of course, is *Petros*, which is Greek for “Rock.” Jesus nicknamed him Rock, probably using the Aramaic word Cephas, which Paul uses to speak about Peter in First Corinthians (1:12; 3:22) and Galatians (2:9). But Greek speaking Christians evidently used the corresponding Greek word, *Petros*, and that’s what shows up in most New Testament texts, since the New Testament is written in Greek. Undoubtedly he was most commonly referred to as Petros, and so we have that in the four gospels and Acts.

We have the time when the risen Jesus walks with Peter and asks him if he, Peter, loves him. Peter says yes, of course, and he is actually hurt the third time Jesus asks him. I think Jesus was doing it to ensure he had Peter’s full attention so he would really register Jesus’ final statement, “feed my sheep.” That is the job of an apostle and of a pastor, to feed the sheep. That means to nurture believers with spiritual food.

Actually, Jesus gives a similar instruction three times, first saying “feed my lambs,” then “tend my sheep,” and finally, “feed my sheep” (21:15–17). Jesus sometimes used special techniques to get through to people, and here he uses a technique that may seem a bit mean, but I think it’s just to focus Peter’s attention on the punchline sentence, so that it would really be memorable, and be taken very seriously. Peter’s emotions are flaring intensely by the end, and he undoubtedly did take it to heart. In First Peter, he writes to believers “you were like sheep going astray; but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25 NIV). Sheep need to know who their shepherd is, and not to wander away.

Life might sometimes thrash us around a bit, hurting our feelings but getting our full attention, and then comes a worthwhile message. Let us take the message to heart. “Shorty” took the message of Jesus to heart, when he was knocked off his donkey. And “Rock” took the message to heart when his feelings were hurt.

In last month’s issue of *The Upper Room* is a story of a woman who listens for a cardinal’s song every morning. That song is able to cut through all the other noise of television, music, and traffic. The author says that God’s voice also can cut through all the noise, but only if she listens for it with the “ears of my heart, as I would for the voice of a loved one,” she writes. She yearns for it, she listens thoughtfully. “Listening is active,” she writes, “we must allow ourselves to be available and receptive” (*Upper Room* Mar-April 2025, p. 67).

So my message to you is to be an active listener, to *hunger* for the whisper of God’s spirit, to *need* the truth of God’s way. *Seek*, and be ready to find. Let yourself be fed by God, and take it deep into your heart. As Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me” (John 4:34). He takes in the will of God like taking in food. Follow his example. Drink the spiritual drink Jesus offers, the new wine that can burst apart the old containers, the old ways of thinking. He brings new life, new spirit. Let him pour his spirit into your heart.