

PAUL AND EVIDENCE OF THE CHANGED LIFE
ACTS 9:10-31

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

A few of you have perhaps heard that there are a few things going on in Iran in recent days. For a long time there has been discontent among a considerable part of the population. People have been fleeing the country. One of the destinations has been Austria. Migration has obviously been a hot topic in our country. But in Austria an estimated 26% of all the people living in that small country are recent migrants, a much, much higher percentage than what we have in this country.

What gains immigrants a more favorable hearing in Austria, as it sometimes does in our country, is proving that one is a victim of religious persecution. The challenge is to prove that. Ali was a member of the morality police in Iran. (MORALITY POLICE) This police force answers directly to the Ayatollah. Their responsibility is to enforce Sharia law in regard to things like the dress code. They are also on the lookout for Iranians who convert to Christianity, which is regarded as a threat to national security. The morality police have persecuted Christians and had some of them killed .

Ali was part of that police force. He became disillusioned and fled to Austria. (PROJECTOR OFF) In Vienna I had a missionary friend who was reaching out to Iranians. Ali joined one of his Bible studies and decided to become a Christian. My missionary friend Al baptized him and several other Iranians. The Austrian government was a bit harder to convince about his changed life. Ali was turned down twice in requests to gain refugee status. Al went with Ali before a judge the third time. Ali showed pictures of persecuted Christians in Iran and talked about his life in that country as a member of the religious police. He described his own conversion and baptism since coming to Austria. The judge believed his story and granted Ali refugee status. I talked to Al this week by e-mail--- he is now a missionary in Jerusalem--- and he says that Ali has made several trips back to Iran to preach the gospel. He is the real deal.

There are many in the world around us who claim to be Christians. Some of them have lives that are obviously out of alignment with what the Bible says is to characterize Christians. Others are religious people who go to church, have reasonably upstanding lives, are generous to others, and don't have glaring moral problems.

Yet Jesus gave this warning (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 7:20-21) to all who profess to be His followers: **“Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (MATTHEW 7:22) On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ (MATTHEW**

7:23) And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Paul was one such individual who, in the eyes of his countrymen, seemed to know God. He was religious, and he had a very moral life. (PROJECTOR OFF) He prayed three times a day. He went to synagogue regularly. He attended the feasts in the temple. He studied the Hebrew Bible diligently. But he did not believe in Jesus. In fact, he was persecuting the followers of Jesus. Last week in our study of Acts we saw how the Lord dramatically confronted him when he was headed down the road to Damascus on a persecution mission. His life truly was changed.

The historian Luke devotes considerable attention to this conversion of Paul. For Paul will play a key role in the fulfillment of Jesus' command to His disciples to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. This Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, is going to be used of God to bring the good news to Gentiles as well as Jews. Much of the rest of the book will focus on his outreach efforts.

In our passage today we are going to examine the evidence of Paul's changed life. Jesus indicated that we will know true believers by their fruit. So we are going to look for what changes took place in his life. We are going to use these signs as tests to figure out whether people in our sphere of influence are truly Christians and as encouragements for us to keep going in the right direction in our Christian life.

1.

The first evidence of Paul's changed life comes in vv. 10-16. It is A PRAYER LIFE. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1. A PRAYER LIFE) Last week we looked at the story of Paul's conversion in vv. 1-9. We also made reference to additional accounts of this event recorded in chapters 22 & 26. We found out in those chapters that the Lord had specifically told Paul that he was going to be a witness for Christ to the Gentiles in other lands. Paul was also blinded in this encounter with the Lord. In v. 6 in our chapter we saw that Paul was told by the Lord that he would be given further information when he got to the city of Damascus. (DAMASCUS MAP) So we left off last time with Paul in Damascus, still blind, and fasting for three days.

In v. 10, then, we are introduced to Ananias, who is called simply “a certain disciple.” Verse 12 of #22 adds that he was **“a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there.”** We don't know anything else about him from the Bible or tradition outside of the Bible. The encouraging thing is that the Lord often uses otherwise obscure but faithful believers to have important roles in His plan for the world.

Ananias has a vision in which the Lord tells him in v. 11 to **“go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying.”** (STRAIGHT STREET 1) This “Straight Street” is still in existence today. It is a major east-west road in Damascus. In fact there is a site on the west end of this road that is regarded as the location of Judas' house where Paul stayed. (STRAIGHT STREET 2)

Jesus had told Paul that he would receive further instructions in Damascus. I suspect that one of the objects of Paul's prayer was a request for that information. So the vision of Ananias came perhaps partly as an answer to that prayer. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Notice how the Lord calls Ananias to go see Paul in v. 12. He says, **"...he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."** Ananias is going to have some reluctance to go to this known persecutor of the church. So the Lord doesn't simply tell Ananias to go see Paul. He tells Ananias that Paul has had a vision that involves Ananias. The fulfillment of this divine vision that Paul had is dependent on Ananias obeying God.

In vv. 13 & 14 Ananias still expresses hesitation. He has heard about what harm Paul has done to the church in Jerusalem. The fact that he has only heard about it and not had personal experience with Paul's persecution also points to the fact that Ananias is not one of the Christians who had to flee Jerusalem because of the persecution. You might notice, too, that in v. 13 Christians are called "saints" for the first time. "Saint" literally means "holy one." In the Biblical view anyone who is truly a follower of Jesus is a saint.

In vv. 15 & 16 Jesus deals with Ananias's fears about going to Paul. He says, **"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."** Ananias is worried about Paul's reputation for persecuting Christians. The Lord tells Ananias that this former persecutor is going to become one who is persecuted for Christ. The additional information about Paul's mission will also be a further confirmation to Paul about the job of ministry to the Gentiles that Christ has for him.

So one of the evidences of Paul's changed life was prayer. Paul had much experience with prayer before his conversion to Christ. As a Pharisee he was one who prayed three times a day. The thing that is different about the prayer of true Christians is that it has Someone listening and responding on the other end.

Jesus in His earthly ministry had often been critical of the prayers of the Pharisees. In Matthew 18 he told a parable about a Pharisee who went up to the temple and prayed a prayer in which he thanked God for not having made him like the sinners and in which he referred to his own religious good works. Jesus condemned that man. On another occasion He reamed out the Pharisees for their long and pompous prayers.

True prayer, prayer that has Someone listening and responding on the other end, must be based on truth. We have to speak to God on His terms if we want our prayers to be of any value. Paul in his behavior had been opposing God's will. He had been persecuting the followers of Jesus. So prayer by itself is not evidence of a changed life.

But prayer to the true God based on a genuine relationship with Christ is evidence of a changed life. One of the exciting things for new believers is to discover that they actually have access in their prayers to the sovereign God of the universe. If we want to have changed lives, we will make use of prayer often. We will engage in prayer both privately and corporately.

2.

There is a second evidence of a changed life found in v. 17. Paul experiences FILLING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2. FILLING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT) Luke writes in v. 17, **“So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”**

In addressing Saul as “Brother” Ananias acknowledges him as a true believer in Jesus. In #22 vv. 14-16 we learn that Ananias also told Paul, **“The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”** This additional testimony from Ananias confirms the commission that Paul had already received from Jesus Himself. Paul, being a good student of the Hebrew Scriptures, knew that important matters were to be confirmed by at least two witnesses. Here is a second witness.

The term “be filled with the Holy Spirit” means “be controlled by the Holy Spirit.” This is an ongoing process in the lives of Christians. I suspect that in this context being filled with the Holy Spirit referred to the initial entrance of the Holy Spirit into Paul’s life. On the Day of Pentecost the followers of Jesus, including the Apostles, were baptized with the Holy Spirit. That experience was accompanied with a miraculous speaking in other languages and a phenomenon that is compared to tongues of fire coming to rest upon them. When some of the Samaritans later started believing in Jesus, the Apostles came down from Jerusalem, laid their hands on them, and they, too, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now Paul probably has that experience. I suspect that it was accompanied by the phenomena that were present on the Day of Pentecost.

The manner in which the Holy Spirit comes to him through the instrumentality of an otherwise unknown disciple has theological significance later in that Paul was not dependent on the other apostles and, therefore, not inferior to them. He is going to have a position in the church equal to that of the other twelve apostles. The Holy Spirit comes to him apart from their involvement, and his commission comes directly from Jesus Himself.

The coming of the Holy Spirit upon Paul is going to have two results. First, the Holy Spirit is going to strengthen his natural abilities and refine them. His natural will power, boldness, discipline, zeal, and communication abilities will all be strengthened and developed. The second result will be that Paul’s negative traits will be eliminated. His

former hatred toward enemies will be replaced with love, his callousness will be replaced with compassion, and his self-righteous pride will be replaced with God-given humility.

That is the kind of thing that the Holy Spirit does in our lives if we have trusted in Jesus Christ as our Savior and if we continue to cooperate with Him. He will strengthen our natural positive traits, and He will weaken our negative traits. (GALATIANS 5:22-23) Later, in Galatians 5 vv. 22 & 23, Paul will write, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”** If you have seen these qualities being developed in you, be encouraged to know that it is evidence of the changed life. God is at work in you.

3.

Verse 18 contains another evidence of the changed life. **“And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized...”** This evidence is WATER BAPTISM. (3. WATER BAPTISM) As we saw in the case of Simon of Samaria in #8 baptism is not a guarantee of a changed life or even of eternal salvation, but from the beginning of the church it was an outward demonstration of an inward spiritual change that resulted from faith in Jesus.

Apparently this baptism was performed by Ananias. Ananias was not an apostle. As far as we know, he was not even an elder or a deacon or an ordained minister. But some of our notions and traditions about how to do things in the church or about who should do them don't have a basis in the Bible. The example we get from Paul's baptism is that believers should be baptized after they have been converted, and it should happen soon after the time of that belief. The baptizer also does not have to be an ordained minister.

4.

Evidence #4 of the changed life comes from v. 19. It is FELLOWSHIP WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS. (4. FELLOWSHIP WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS) Luke says that **“For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.”** This former persecutor of Christians for the first time experienced togetherness with them. Probably that meant attending the meetings of the church. Probably it meant conversations with Christians in smaller, more informal settings.

I suspect that having Paul come into the community of Christians at Damascus was a bit strange at first. Some of these Christians were Jews who had left Jerusalem because of the persecution that Paul instigated. Paul had come to Damascus to bring them back under arrest to Jerusalem.

Harry Ironsides, a noted Bible teacher from a century ago, tells the story about a young man he met who came from the jungles of New Guinea in the South Pacific. This man became a Christian at an early age. Unlike many of his people he had the opportunity to get a good formal education and even went overseas for college training.

When he first came back to his town, he met on Sunday with the other Christians for church and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. On this particular Sunday he sat next to an elderly saint. Shortly after the service began, another man came into the meeting and the elderly Christian saw his young, university-educated friend straighten up and become tense. After a few minutes, however, he relaxed. After the service the older man asked the younger Christian the reason for his unease at the beginning of the service. The young man replied, **"The man who came in late was the one who killed my father and ate him. But then I realized that he, too, now had faith in Jesus Christ and that I must accept him as a brother."**

Though there may have been some initial discomfort, apparently the Damascus Christians also accepted Paul. Hanging around with people who were once regarded as odd or misguided or ignorant or just religious is an evidence of the changed life. The sad thing is that there are some Christians who think that it is perfectly acceptable to be followers of Jesus and to have little or no spiritual relationships with other Christians. But it is just plain sin to try to live as a "Lone Ranger Christian."

In 1 John 3:14 we are told, **"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers."** It is tough to love the brethren if we don't have some kind of ongoing relationship with them that involves a spiritual dimension. Going to church services is part of that. But smaller Bible studies and midweek meetings and sometimes just informal relationships with fellow Christians is where the best fellowship takes place.

5.

Verses 20 & 21 contain a fifth evidence of the changed life. It is WITNESSING FOR CHRIST. (5. WITNESSING FOR CHRIST) The text says, **"And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' And all who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?'"**

Being a proper Christian Paul went to school after his conversion--- or at least to some kind of training seminar--- so he could be qualified to be a witness, right? No. Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus. Sometimes those who are the most effective witnesses are those who are new Christians. Like Ali from Iran they may not know the Bible well, but they often have the most contacts with unbelievers and often the change in their lives is most obvious.

Paul came to Damascus with a commission from the high priest to arrest the followers of Jesus. But now he has received a commission from Jesus Himself to make more followers of Jesus. He doesn't wait around for things to happen. He goes immediately to the synagogues and starts serving as a witness for Christ.

The reaction of the Jews is astonishment. The literal meaning of the original Greek word is "to be beside themselves." These guys were the ones who had sent word to the

Sanhedrin in Jerusalem about the heresy that these Christ-followers were promoting, and probably they had asked for help to deal with them. But now this guy who had a reputation for roughing up Christians starts telling them to believe in Jesus.

Paul didn't have his whole theology worked out yet, but he told what he knew. He told about the change that had happened in his life. That is the basic job of a witness. We can do that whether we are new Christians or old Christians. Some of us may have what the New Testament describes as the gift of evangelism. We may have a special ability or knack for doing that. But all of us have a responsibility for being a witness to the unbelievers in our sphere of influence. One of the marks of the changed life is being a witness for Jesus.

6.

Evidence #6 comes in v. 22. It is BIBLE STUDY. (6. BIBLE STUDY) **“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.”** The text does not specifically say that Paul was studying the Bible. This is an inference. But it is a reasonable inference given the fact that he was proving that Jesus was the Christ. “Christ” means “messiah.” How would he be proving that Jesus was the Messiah? Given that he was dealing with a Jewish audience, this meant that he was arguing with them from the Hebrew Bible. So he had to be studying the Bible, and probably he was getting some help from other Christians in the process. Paul as a student of the famous rabbi Gamaliel had studied the Hebrew Bible thoroughly. But as a result of his conversion, he had to do some reinterpretation of it.

You will notice that v. 23 makes reference to the passage of many days. In Galatians #1 Paul later refers to this period of his life, and he speaks of an event that probably happened between vv. 22 & 23. (GALATIANS 1:17) He says in v. 17 of Galatians that after his conversion **“I [did not] go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”**

Damascus is to the north in Syria (NABATEA MAP), and Jerusalem is about 150 miles to the south in Judea. Nabatea to the east occupies parts of what are today Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Paul doesn't say why he went to Nabatea. This was an unpopulated area. There weren't any major Jewish centers there. There is no reference anywhere to Christian communities in Nabatea. So many experts in the study of Paul suggest that he probably went there for some quiet study. Paul was a studious type. The Scriptures were the basis for his life. Now that he was a follower of Jesus he probably took some time to look at them through Christian lenses and to develop his theology.

In Galatians 1:18 Paul says that it was three years between the time that he was converted and when he visited Jerusalem. So probably he spent a couple of years studying here in Nabatea. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Bible study is an evidence of the changed life. When we become part of the family of God, the natural thing to do is to get to know our Heavenly Father. Studying the Bible is

the way that we can do that. A disciplined, regular intake of God's Word is evidence of the changed life.

7.

The seventh and last evidence of the changed life that I notice in this passage is PERSEVERANCE IN SUFFERING. (PROJECTOR ON--- PERSEVERANCE IN SUFFERING) That comes out of vv. 23-31. Assuming that our chronology is basically right, Paul returned to Damascus after a couple of years of studying in Nabatea. He did some fellowshiping with the Christians there. No doubt he did some preaching, too. The Jews weren't happy about that, and they planned to do him in.

We get some additional information about this return to Damascus from Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians #11 vv. 32 & 33. (2 CORINTHIANS 11:32) The apostle says, **"At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, (2 CORINTHIANS 11:33) but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands."** Aretas IV was king of Nabatea between 9 BC and 40 AD. Some scholars think that Aretas was controlling Damascus at this time. Others suggest that there was a Nabatean colony in Damascus and the official of Aretas, called an ethnarch, had some authority over it. Because he didn't have authority over the city as a whole, he couldn't go in and arrest Paul, but he could nab him when he tried to leave the city gates.

Whatever the exact story was, it seems that Aretas's men were in league with the Jews to nab Paul. Why would Aretas have an interest in Paul? I suspect that Paul was doing more than studying in Nabatea. He was also doing some preaching. Preaching Christ did not go over with the pagan ruler of the country.

This one who had originally come to Damascus to persecute Christians is now himself the object of persecution. Already we see signs of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Ananias that Paul must suffer for the name of Christ.

Verses 23-25 are consistent with Paul's own statement from 2 Corinthians. In v. 25 reference is made to "his disciples." Paul already has disciples who have been won to Christ through him and/or are being nurtured in the Christian faith by him.

The next stop for Paul is Jerusalem. We find out later that Paul's sister has a nephew in Jerusalem. Perhaps Paul stayed with him and/or his mother. But Paul had a hard time being received by the other Christians. Minority movements faced with persecution are understandably defensive and suspicious of outsiders, especially of those they have known as persecutors.

Bob Marquis was involved with Don Moberger in his prison ministry. He was an ex-convict. Several years ago he was manning a booth at the annual Christian conference in Boston when he noticed an elderly lady staring intently at him. Finally she came up to him and looked at his badge. Then she said to Bob, **"I have a bone to pick with you."**

“Do I know you?” he asked. **“We’ve met once before, back in 1967,”** she said. **“But at that time you were holding a gun to my head, and you were so intent on getting out of my establishment that we were never properly introduced.”** Bob then recognized her as the Jewish woman who owned the liquor store in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, that he had robbed.

Bob didn’t know quite what to expect, but she smiled, gave him a big hug and said, **“Isn’t it great how the Lord has changed both of our occupations?”** He asked how she recognized him after 29 years. She explained that she had kept the picture of him from the newspaper that showed him under arrest for the crime. She kept the picture on a wall of her house. She cursed him and threw darts at the picture frequently. But then she became a Christian and began to pray for him each day. The Lord heard her prayer, and now they had been brought together.

Paul also needed to be brought together with the Christians in Jerusalem. Barnabas, whom we met back in #5, became the instrument of that reconciliation. Verse 27 says specifically that Barnabas brought him to the apostles, who did receive him. In Galatians #1 v. 18 Paul says that he spent 15 days with Peter.

Verses 28 & 29 add that he started witnessing to the Jews. In particular he was arguing with the Hellenistic Jews. Remember, that is what Stephen had been doing that resulted in him being executed by the Sanhedrin. Paul had been present and had approved of that action. Now he has taken on Stephen’s former role in preaching to the Greek-speaking Jews in the synagogues of Jerusalem. They also get very upset with Paul. This guy is not just a powerful witness for Christ, he is also a turncoat. That must have been especially upsetting to these Jews.

Fortunately the Christians found out about the plot against Paul. They didn’t want to see another martyrdom happen, especially one involving such an effective spokesman for their cause. (PROJECTOR ON--- DAMASCUS CAESAREA MAP) So, according to v. 30, the Jerusalem Christians sent him from Damascus to Caesarea and then to Tarsus, which was his hometown.

Verse 31 tells us that there was then a time of peace for the church in Judea and Samaria and Galilee. Perhaps that was partly due to the fact that their most avid persecutor was now one of them. Perhaps it was also partly due to the fact that this bold rabble-rouser for the Christians had also left the area.

Thus Paul began to experience suffering for his faith. But he persevered in the face of it. There are some Christians who have mistakenly taught that when people come to Christ, they can expect to enjoy good health and great wealth. They can expect to experience the good life. Paul certainly claimed to experience the abundant life, but he wasn’t able to enjoy great health and great wealth. He was to endure a lot of suffering. (2 TIMOTHY 3:12) Later he wrote, **“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”**

Apart from faith in a sovereign God who rules the universe there is really little point in enduring suffering. The more rational course of action would be to use all reasonable means to avoid suffering. But an evidence of the changed life is that Christians will persevere in the face of suffering. When we know that we are doing God's will, we will persevere in the face of suffering that comes our way (PROJECTOR OFF)

All of these seven elements are evidence of the changed life. They are the results of lives that have been transformed by Christ. Do you see these things in your life? If you don't, perhaps the problem is that you have not truly become a Christian. Perhaps you need to change that. The Bible says that your responsibility is simply to trust in Jesus, to believe in your heart of hearts that he was God who became man, that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, and that He rose from the dead. If you will put your trust in Him and His death for you, you will become a part of God's family, and you will receive the gift of eternal life.

Most of us have made that important decision. But perhaps as we look at this list of results of the changed life, we see some areas where we have really fallen down. While these elements are things that the Lord brings to pass in our lives, we have a role to play in seeing that they are developed fully. God gives us the power through the Holy Spirit to produce these fruit. But we have to obey Him and trust Him to bring them to pass in our lives.

So as we close today, I would challenge you to pick one of these seven areas and decide to do what you can to remove the barriers that might be keeping the Lord from producing this evidence of the changed life in you. Look down the list for the one area where you most fall short. We are going to close with a moment of silent prayer. I would encourage you to talk to the Lord about this one area. Let's pray.