

*“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. <sup>4</sup> I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, <sup>5</sup> as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.*

*<sup>6</sup> “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. <sup>7</sup> And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ <sup>8</sup> And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ <sup>9</sup> Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’ <sup>11</sup> And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.*

*<sup>12</sup> “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, <sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. <sup>14</sup> And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; <sup>15</sup> for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’*

*(Pastor prays)*

In the story before us a bomb has been dropped on the foundations as the ascended Jesus appears to Paul while he was on a business trip. We find him in this passage telling his story for the first time. Luke described it to us in Chapter 9 and Paul will tell it again to Agrippa in Chapter 26.

In the context, Paul has just been rescued by the police from a riot in the temple, a riot that started because of his Christianity. Here, v. 1 tells us he has stood to make his defense – *apologia*. And his defense is his testimony. His story (which will make a sub-picture) is the story of God, and how He sovereignly, powerfully and overwhelmingly broke into Paul's life to save him.

Alexander McClaren said a flood swept away the ground he stood on. What used to be solid, was vaporized. Paul was not just made better or healthier or nice. He was radically, fundamentally, and completely transformed. And although you might say that your conversion was not a Damascus Road experience, it must not be seen as any less dramatic.

I am afraid in our rush not to be offensive and to reach more people, we have reduced Christianity to nothing more than the "Jesus option" that you can sort of opt in and opt out of as the stages of needs in your life change. I am afraid we cheapen conversion and in so doing we've cheapened Christianity; and today, I want to walk you through Paul's story and then make a few points of application at the end having to do with your testimony. So as you listen, think in terms of your story and as you do, let's take a good look at his. I will read the scripture with some commentary.

So what does it take for a person to be saved? What kind of understanding do you have to have?

### **You Need an Awareness of Self**

I would normally start with God when witnessing, but this is Paul's testimony and he starts with his own self-awareness. It's right there in v. 3-4. Everything was right ethically, religiously, educationally. He was even sincere. In v. 4, he was a sinner but he wasn't looking for God.

The song, "All I Have Is Christ" Sums it up so well. One line – "As I ran my hell-bound race, indifferent to the cost, You looked upon my helpless state and led me to the cross." Paul is painfully aware, there is nothing in him to get God's attention, to make God love him: not his ambition, not his religion, not his sincerity, nothing. This drives us to see, it's God's grace alone that we receive through faith in Christ. When you see who you

were, or for some of you, who you *are* (Paul called himself the chief of sinners), you might see your need, that in spite of your religion, comfortable life, good education or even your sincere attempt at being a good guy, you are without Christ and separated from God; and part of your testimony is your awakening to the perils of being without hope and an actual enemy of God if you are not in Christ.

That's where he found himself. That's more than just wanting to change or looking for fulfillment or purpose. That's coming to grips with the fact that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. But it can't stop there because self-awareness alone is defeating and Christianity is built on hope. Your testimony has another part – and it must.

### **You Need Awareness of God**

I don't mean a vague understanding of a God you can't really know. I mean a real awareness of the triune, holy, just, loving, merciful God who reveals himself in Christ.

Look again at the story as I point out some things about God:

1. He initiates the conversation in v. 6. Notice Paul wasn't looking to change – God intervened.
2. He confronts our sin. In v. 7, Paul didn't realize he was fighting against God.
3. He awakens our minds and hearts to believe. V. 8-9, *And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'* <sup>9</sup> *Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.* Notice that the people with Paul heard the sound but didn't comprehend what was being said. They saw a light but didn't see Jesus. They saw a light but didn't see Christ. They heard a noise but didn't sense a call. This is a picture of why, sitting in this sanctuary, there are two people hearing the same sermon, reading the same Bible and yet one person's heart is being awakened and stirred while another person just doesn't get it.
4. Conversion really is grace. God saves us by grace. Let's drop down to when awakening came to Paul. It's in v. 12-15, and let's draw truth from v. 14-15, *And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, <sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.'*

*And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. <sup>14</sup> And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; <sup>15</sup> for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.*

Look what God does. I'll sum it up in 4 words.

1. Adoption – v. 14, *And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you... Chosen. We love him because he first loved us.*

2. Direction – v. 14, *And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, To know your life is worth something. To live for His honor. To give yourself to glorify God.*

3. Discipleship – v. 14, *And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; From this point forward it would mean growing as a Christian knowing Christ more and more and knowing His word more and more.*

4. Service – v. 15, *for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. His new purpose in life, in all of life, would be to give testimony of Christ in every situation and circumstance.*

But I would be mistaken if I didn't point out two questions Paul asked. The same two questions that everyone here must ask are one in v. 8, the other in v. 10: *And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' <sup>8</sup> And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' <sup>9</sup> Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'*

Isn't that what you have to ask about Christ? Who are you? Jesus of Nazareth. What must I do? The Bible says to believe in Jesus, His life, death and resurrection, and you will be saved.

Today is a day of testimony...About yourself, a sinner...About God, Christ as Savior...  
About your response, believing.

*(Pastor prays)*