



Opening the Eyes of the Blind: Seeing the Just One

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Saul of Tarsus, Pharisee of the Pharisees, was zealous to remove Christians and Christianity. He is identified with this city on the southeastern tip of Asia Minor, close to Antioch and North of Jerusalem. His father was a Roman citizen and merchant, so Saul was born free and a Roman citizen. Tarsus was on trade routes, a wealthy cosmopolitan city, with the largest university in the world, bigger than Athens and Alexandria. Saul of Tarsus followed the tradition of learning a trade, tent making, but at age 13 he was sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel [Gamma-lay'-el], the leading Jewish theologian. By c. age 21, Saul had the reputation of being the most educated Jew in the region, was well known around Jerusalem, and present at the stoning of Stephen.

Saul's profound hostility would make him a terrorist, as we would say today, infamous, and full of hatred against believers in Christ. He consented to the death of Stephen, and people laid Stephen's clothes at his feet. In God's eyes, evil was being done, and Saul did nothing to stop it. That's cowardice. Aiding and abetting is a capital crime. But Saul was blind to it and considered himself justified in his stance.

Then, after seeking and receiving papers authorizing him to go and rout out Christians in Damascus, he encountered the radiance of Christ's glory, a radiance that blinded him on the road to Damascus. He gives his testimony of this event three times in the Book of Acts, but let's listen to it from Acts 9:1-9.

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. ^[a]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. (Acts 9:1-9 NKJV)

So Saul of Tarsus went to the high priest for letters of authorization to have followers of Jesus Christ bound and brought to Jerusalem for interrogation and trial. He was breathing out threatenings and slaughter. The Greek refers to breathing in threats of murder with passionate determination. The picture is one of a wild beast who snorts before he attacks, who breathes in to make that sound.

Saul loved the Law with a passion against any who disagreed with Jewish tradition. To him, Christians were heretical; and Saul wanted to go to Damascus.

Damascus in Syria was an old city even back 2,000 years ago. Saul wants to go after those who may have seduced Jews into believing in Jesus. See Deuteronomy 13. He wanted this authority from the high priest to bind, arrest, and bring such Jews to Jerusalem for punishment.

It was around noon when this radiant and blazing light comes and obscures the light of the sun. This light shone! It would be like the light of a lightning strike enduring for several seconds. R. C. Sproul describes it as a blinding, effulgent light of the glory of God, supernatural. Saul is thrown to the ground.

Saul fell to the ground and heard a Voice. **Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?** Someone being addressed by the repetition of their name occurs only about 15 times in the Bible. For example, we have Abram on Mt. Moriah, Moses at the burning bush, Samuel being called as a young child, Elisha saying, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." 2 Kings 2:12. We have David crying out, Absalom, Absalom, my son. And we have Jesus saying, Martha, Martha; and then again, Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! Matthew 23:37 NKJV

On the Cross, Jesus cried out, **Eloi, Eloi, [a' low ay], why have you forsaken Me?** Mark 15:34.

With Jesus and Saul, this is intensely personal and speaks of the special grace of election. Jesus uses Saul's Hebrew name. He has chosen Saul. Jesus had ascended into heaven. Jesus identifies with His people being persecuted for His sake. To persecute His own is to persecute Him.

Saul immediately responds, Who are You, Lord? Saul knows this Voice is that of the Supreme Sovereign, the Most High God. But then, it turns out to be the Voice of Jesus, the name Saul hated with a passion. Jesus tells him it is hard for him to kick against the goads/pricks.

Now produce was carried in ox carts, but when an ox got stubborn, sometimes that ox kicked. Goads or spikes were used to stop the kicking, but sometimes the ox just kicked even more. So this is basically like some ox who kicks against the ox goads and then keeps on resisting, a resistance which is foolish.

Saul trembles in astonishment, but still immediately asks Jesus what He will have him to do. This is repentance. The whole agenda changes. He must humble himself in obedience to the Christ. Jesus tells him to **Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do.**

"Arise and go." This is a common phrase and I have written on it. MCM Message of the Month **ARISE, GO** March, 2001 There is a rest in God that only comes as we ... He chooses, He redeems, He calls, He entreats, He commands His people to "**Arise, go.**" ...

<http://www.marycraig.org/NewsViews/AriseGo.htm>

The men with Saul heard the voice but saw no one. When Saul got up from off the ground, he opened his eyes but he was blind. He had to be led by the hand and brought into Damascus. For three days, blind, he neither ate nor drank. So for three days, Saul was blinded, hungry, and thirsty. He was in the dark, humbled. Blindness would disqualify him from the synagogue.

Indeed, any person who has a defect is not to approach the Tent of Meeting— the blind, the lame, one who is mutilated in the face or who has a very long limb, ISV. Leviticus 21:18, e.g.

Likewise, Saul had been a blind guide, the blind leading the blind, one to which could be applied: John 9:41 Jesus said to them, **“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.** Saul thought he “saw,” but he was blind. Now he has been blinded by Jesus and sees his true condition. He will continue to call himself “the chief of sinners” for persecuting believers. **1 Timothy 1:15. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”**

During this time, Ananias receives his own “Arise and go.” Read Acts 9:10-18.

Ananias was sent to Saul of Tarsus there in Damascus. He was to go into the street called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas. Saul was praying and the Lord told Ananias that Saul had seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Ananias responded with what he knew about Saul and the evil he had done to the saints at Jerusalem. But he was told to go.

Here we get insight. Saul is a chosen vessel unto the Lord, to bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. Jesus will show him how great things he must suffer for the Lord’s name’s sake. Likewise, we learn that Ananias was sent not only for Saul to receive his sight, but also to be filled with the Holy Ghost. With this healing, there fell from Saul’s eyes as it had been, scales. Saul received his sight and got up and was baptized.

Ananias may have put up some resistance, reminding us of Moses, Jonah, and Jeremiah, but he obeyed. As an aside, Acts 9:13 is the first usage of the word “saints” in the NT and it means, your holy ones, those set apart and being made holy, those given the Holy Spirit.

Saul will become known as Paul and be the Lord’s vessel, His tool, His instrument, His implement. He has been chosen for this purpose. He will bear Jesus’ Name. He will carry a heavy burden. He will do this for Jesus’ mission. He, Paul, will pay the price.

In Acts 22:10-16 we get more information. Here we are told that Paul could not see for the glory of that light. It had blinded him. Ananias calls Paul “brother.” Paul was healed within the hour. We learn more about Paul’s commission.

The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know His will, and see that Just One, and should hear the Voice of His mouth. Paul will be Jesus’ witness unto all people of what he has seen and heard. And he is not to wait, but to arise and be baptized, and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Again we have in Acts 26:16-19 Paul before King Agrippa.

¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ ¹⁹ “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ESV

Paul was transformed by the electing grace of God, called to be an apostle; called, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and sent on a mission and with a message.

The Just One would speak to him. Jesus Christ is the Just One, the promised Messiah, the Holy One of Israel. Jesus is that Holy One and Just. Habakkuk 2:4. Paul will BE a witness of all he

has seen and heard. Acts 1:8. He is considered by theologians as the greatest theologian, missionary, evangelist, pastor, and man transformed by grace. He will speak of the Just One, setting forth “The Just shall live by faith.” He will know nothing but Christ crucified, preaching and teaching and exhorting the atoning work of Christ who lived a perfect life of obedience to God His Father, who died and took the penalty of the law for sin, who bore the wrath of God, who Himself was the sacrifice for sin, who redeemed the elect by the Blood of the Lamb, who defeated Satan, destroying his works of darkness. He will call people out of darkness, as he had been. He will open the eyes of the blind that they might be transformed by the radiant glory of the light of Jesus Christ. He will fight the good fight of faith to the end. No longer seeking to be justified BY the Law and law-keeping, he knows Jesus died, the Just for the unjust. He knows Christ. He is justified IN Christ. Galatians 2:17-21:

¹⁷But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. ¹⁸For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. ²⁰**I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.** ²¹I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

May we bring every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ, being encouraged by the hope of the Scriptures which tell us the truth of Jesus through testimonies of people like the Apostle Paul. Amen.

Praising the Glory of His Grace,

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The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know His will, and see that Just One, and should hear the Voice of His mouth. Acts 22:14

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