

What Paul Saw When He Was Blind

A Topical Sermon

SERMONS WORTH REPEATING

by David Roper

I heard a preacher preach on this topic while I was a student at Abilene Christian. It might have been Gordon Clements (now deceased) at the Northside congregation in Abilene. I have since learned that many preachers preach on "What the Blind Man Saw"; I do not know where the idea originated. What caught my attention in this particular presentation was the opening scenes that introduced the topic. I retained this idea and the main points. Through the years the lesson has continued to develop and has become a favorite of mine. Here is its present form.

Let your minds go back almost two thousand years. It is a dark night. On the top of the wall surrounding a city, men are hastily tying a rope to a large basket. Inside the city emotions are running high and people are searching in the dark—searching for a man they want to kill. Meanwhile, on the top of the wall, the man they are seeking steps in the basket that has been prepared. As the basket is slowly lowered over the wall, we call out this question to the man: "Why? Why do you teach the things they don't want to hear, these things that make you so unpopular?" As the basket reaches the ground, the man steps out and pauses before he moves into the darkness. The answer floats back to us: "It's all because of what I saw when I was blind."

A few years go by. We are walking along a dusty road. Off in the distance we see an angry mob as they drag a man out of the city and begin to stone him. Again and again their arms are raised to hurl stones of all sizes upon the unprotesting form. As we draw near the spot, apparently their hatred is satisfied and the people return to the city, leaving a battered body in the dust. We walk up to the still form, assuming the man to be dead, but even as we watch breath returns to the body. We stoop and lift up the bruised and bloodied head in our arms. We wipe away some of the dirt and grime and discover, to our amazement, that it is the same man who escaped over the wall. "Why?" We ask, "Why do you persist in this way that makes you so unpopular?" And back comes the answer from his cracked lips: "It's all because of what I saw when I was blind."

The years go by. The scene is now a dark damp prison cell. An old man is writing to a friend. Slowly he forms the words:

For I am now already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only; but also to all them that have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

He writes a bit more and finally lays down his pen for eternity. Some time goes by and then his prison door opens as they come to take him to his execution. As the small group passes us in the dark corridor, we peer carefully at the bent form and wrinkled face and are surprised once more to see that it is the same man. We shout, "Why? Why did you continue throughout your life in this way—a decision that finally has brought you to your death?" The man's head comes up, his stride becomes firmer, and there is a smile on his face as he answers: "It is all because of what I saw when I was blind!"

What *did* Paul see when he was blinded on the road to Damascus that so completely changed his life? Before Paul started on that road, he was called Saul. He despised Christianity and everything it stood for. After he had been blinded on that road, he was a zealous worker for Jesus, even willing to die for the Lord. What did he see when he was blind that made such a change?

You understand that I am using the word *see* in the sense of "to understand, perceive, or comprehend." I once spoke on this topic and one lady had a hard time understanding how one could "see" in any sense while physically blind. I explained as best I could and then asked, "Now do you see?" Her face lit up as she said, "Oh! Yes, *now I see.*"

The story of Paul's conversion is found in three chapters in the book of Acts: chapter 9 when it happened and chapters 22 and 26 as Paul

tells about it. You may want to refer to these chapters as our lesson progresses.

Let me suggest that Paul saw at least five things that completely changed him—three things that he came to see in their true light for the first time and two inescapable conclusions reached as a result of the new truths. These things changed Paul and they will change any man who can *see* them.

I. HE SAW THAT JESUS WAS THE SON OF GOD.

First of all Paul saw Jesus clearly for the first time. Imagine Saul, as he was then called, as he traveled on the road to Damascus. One can imagine his thoughts going back to the day that Stephen was stoned while he took care of the cloaks of those who did the stoning or to the times of his persecuting and scattering of Christians from Jerusalem or imagine his thoughts about his present task—that of finding Christians in Damascus and bringing them bound back to Jerusalem. Then one can imagine him lifting up his face to God and *thanking* Him for the privilege of serving Him in this way!

But, you ask, how would that be possible? Because to Saul, Jesus was a fraud, a deceiver. Maybe, just maybe, he had some good qualities, but he had claimed to be the Son of God, the promised Messiah, and he had announced that his way was to replace the time-honored way of Moses. To Saul this was nothing short of blasphemy and anyone who followed this blasphemer deserved only one thing—death!

But then, whatever Saul's thoughts were on the road, they were interrupted as a bright light shone all around him, a light brighter than the noonday sun. As he fell to the ground, he heard a Voice asking, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4). He looked up at the One who spoke (1 Corinthians 15:8) and asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" The answer came, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5; KJV).

The visual image of the resurrected Lord faded from Saul's eyes as physical darkness closed in, but the mental image was forever branded upon his mind and soul.

Can you imagine the initial shock to Saul as the full impact of this appearance hit home? His whole life, his purpose in being, his every action

had been centered around the conviction that Jesus was *not* the Messiah, was not the Son of God. But now the truth is brought home to him in a way that he could not deny that Jesus was all He claimed to be, that he (Saul) had been dead wrong! Little wonder that seeing this truth completely changed his life!

Today there is no greater need than for the world, for the U.S., for (*state*), for (*town*), to see Jesus for what He really is.

Oh, most of those about us do not call Him an impostor and a blasphemer as did Saul. But they still sell Him far short. They give Him lip-service as a good man, a great man, an outstanding teacher, one who preached love and kindness, and will even acknowledge Him to be the One who died on the cross as long as that makes no demands on their lives. But this is far short of acknowledging Him as the Lord of their lives, the One who made heaven and earth, the One who gave His life for them, the One who deserves their unconditional obedience in all things!

The one today who has never seen Jesus for what He is cannot expect the shaft of light that surrounded Saul, but the evidence that He is all I have said and more comes "brighter than the noonday sun" from God's own word.

For instance one can compare the prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament with their fulfillment in the New Testament. Jesus fulfilled each and everyone—even those over which He had no personal control. To discredit Jesus, His enemies had simply to paint out one prophecy left unfulfilled; this they could not do. Further, the record of these things was written while many who had seen them still lived. Again, if the record had been faulty, how simple to discredit the entire movement.

Then, there is the character and life of Jesus. Those with whom He came in contact knew that this was no ordinary man. John the Baptizer said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Even a hardened soldier said, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39).¹

Then, there are the miracles of Jesus—climaxed by the greatest of all, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Skeptics have wrestled for years with the problem of what happened

to the body of Jesus, but no explanation fits the facts like the one given in the Bible: On the third day Jesus arose from the dead and came forth from the grave! The very change that took place in the apostles is testimony to the resurrection—yes, and the change took place in Paul!

How would *you* explain the complete turn-about in Paul if he did *not* see the resurrected Lord? One liberal commentary² has suggested that Saul had an epileptic seizure in the middle of an electrical storm! If such an experience could make us all men like Paul, we should all pray for epileptic seizures in the midst of electrical storms! But can one seriously suggest that Saul was so far removed from reality that he did not know the difference between a physical malady and a visitation from God? Read Paul's letters. This is a great man with a great mind—strong in faith, but completely in touch with reality! No, there is no other adequate explanation. Paul *did* see the resurrected Christ; Jesus *is* all that Paul said He was.

This being the case, each one of us needs to give ourselves without reservation, heart and soul, to this Jesus! To see Jesus for what He really is will motivate every alien sinner to obedience and will cure the indifference that is spreading like a cancer through the churches!

II. HE SAW THAT HE WAS A SINNER DESPERATELY IN NEED OF SALVATION.

But as Saul was on the road, he not only saw Jesus clearly for the first time, but he also saw *himself* clearly for the first time.

Up to that point Saul was very satisfied with Saul and his spiritual condition. He later said to the Jewish council. "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day" (Acts 23:1). His conscience was commending him all the time he was persecuting Christians. He later said to Agrippa, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9).

But when he saw Jesus on the road, he suddenly realized that he was *wrong* in what he had been doing. He had been honest and sincere, but honestly wrong and sincerely mistaken. His conscience had been at ease, but that conscience had been mistaught and misguided. He saw himself

now as he really was—a sinner desperately in need of salvation! He later wrote to Timothy: "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am *chief*" (1 Timothy 1:15; italics mine).

Until Saul understood that he had a *spiritual need*, there was no hope for any real change to take place in his life. But once he understood that need, he was *open* to change.

I suggested earlier that there is no greater need than for the world to see Jesus for what He really is. The second greatest need that exists is for those in the world to see *themselves* as they really are. Do you know why every pew is not packed today, why there are not seats in the aisles and people sitting along the edges of the platform? Because most folks think they are in fine shape spiritually. They may lie and cheat, be unfaithful to their wives, tell dirty stories, use God's name in vain, never darken the church house door, cheat on their income tax, but they will say, "God and I are just like that."³ Jesus said the *majority* will be lost and only a *few* saved (Matthew 7:13, 14), but the majority are self-deceived into thinking they have no significant spiritual needs.

The same Paul who came to see his own spiritual need would make us aware of our own. He said, "For *all* have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Again he said, "For the wages of sin is *death*" (Romans 6:23). (Italics mine.)

Be honest with yourself for a moment. Have you ever "come short" of what you should have been in your words, in your actions, in your thoughts? Can any of us say, "*Every* word I ever spoke, *every* thing I ever did, *every* thought I ever thought has been as clear as the fresh driven snow"? If we are *ever* to be what we should be, we must admit that we are *sinners*, sinners in need of salvation.

Before I leave this point, let me stress this: Instead of denying their sinfulness, some have gone to the opposite extreme and are overwhelmed by their feeling of sinfulness. "I have gone so far into sin," they say, "that there is no hope for me!" Look again at Paul. He was "the *chief* of sinners." If God could save the *chief* of sinners, He can save you. There is hope in Jesus Christ!

III. HE SAW THAT YOU CANNOT SEPARATE CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.

Paul not only came to see Christ and himself clearly for the first time, he also came to see *the church* clearly for the first time.

We are living in one of those periods of time when the church is being depreciated from all quarters. To those in society the church is an outmoded institution that has lost its purpose for existence. Some young people are saying, "Christ, yes; the church, no." A thought often heard is, "I don't need the church. I'm as good as those church members." Many think they are turned off by the church, when really they are turned off by denominationalism. Some, who are supposed to be members of the church, apparently no longer see any need to support and promote that institution. All these need to see something that Paul saw, something that completely changed his attitude toward that body of people called "the church."

Follow me closely if you will. In Acts 8:3, we read, "But Saul *laid waste the church.*" In Galatians 1:13 he wrote, "For ye have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jew's religion, how that beyond measure *I persecuted the church of God*, and made havoc of it." Again he wrote to the Philippians: "As touching zeal, persecuting *the church*" (Philippians 3:6). Notice it: Saul "laid waste the church"; he "persecuted the church of God"; he was "persecuting the church." If anything is fairly established, it is this: Saul was persecuting *the church*.

But now let us return to the road. The light shines around Saul. He falls to the ground and the voice says, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?" (Acts 9:4). Wait a minute. Jesus had died, been raised, and had ascended back to heaven before Saul began his persecution. Saul never personally laid a hand on Jesus: He had simply persecuted the church of Jesus. But notice it: When Jesus appeared to Saul, He said, "You have been persecuting *Me*."

What conclusion should we reach? There was only one conclusion that Saul could reach, only one conclusion we can reach. And what conclusion is that? *That you cannot separate Christ and His church.*

I know Saul reached this conclusion because of his later actions. He spent the rest of his life teaching on, promoting, and encourag-

ing all men to become a part of that church that he once tried to eradicate. And I know Saul reached this conclusion because of his later teaching on the relationship between Christ and His church. Paul noted that Christ is the *foundation* of the church (1 Corinthians 3:11), that the church is the *fulness* of Christ (Ephesians 1:23), that Christ *loved* the church, that Christ *gave Himself* for the church (Ephesians 5:25), that Christ *purchased* the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), that the church is *subject* unto Christ (Ephesians 5:24), that Christ is the *savior* of the church (Ephesians 5:23; 1:22, 23).

One illustration used by Paul to emphasize the closeness of the relationship between Christ and His church is that of "head" and "body": "And he [God] put all things in subjection under his [Jesus'] feet, and gave him to be *the head* over all things to the *church*, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Ephesians 1:22, 23; italics mine). (See also Colossians 1:18.)

My head and body are one, a unity. There is an interrelationship here, a mutual dependence. To attempt to separate one from the other (please don't!) would be to destroy the effectiveness of both. Any injury to the head affects my body *and any injury to the body affects the head.*

This is what Christ was saying to Saul. "What you do to my body, the church, affects *me*. You are literally doing it to *me*." He made the same point in Matthew 25 when He pointed out that whatever was done (or not done) to the least of His disciples was also done (or not done) to Him (vv. 40, 45).

So then: If anyone depreciates the church, he is depreciating Jesus. If anyone makes fun of the church, he is making fun of Jesus. If any say, "I do not need the church," they are saying, "I do not need Jesus." If any are indifferent to the church, they are indifferent to Jesus. If any fail to love the church and to show that love, they are failing to love Jesus!

Yes, I know there are individual members of the church who are not what they should be, but never let these keep you from loving and appreciating and spreading the church itself! Come to see the church for what it really is. You can't separate Christ and His church!

IV. HE SAW THAT HE HAD TO MAKE A CHANGE RELIGIOUSLY.

Saul saw some powerful things when he was blind—truths he had never seen before concerning Christ and the church. And these truths forced him to certain inevitable conclusions. The first was this: He saw that he had to make a change religiously.

This naturally followed from what he had learned. He now had to obey the Jesus he had once rejected. His former religion had left him “the chief of sinners.” He needed to be a part of the church of Jesus.

But even though a change was obviously called for, this did not mean that a change would be easy. He was well established in his religion. He later wrote of his religious background:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless (Philippians 3:5, 6).

His family had been Israelites for many generations—his parents, his grandparents, his great-grandparents—all the way back to Benjamin, son of Jacob. No doubt it was his parents who had made it possible for him to be educated at the feet of the noted Jewish teacher, Gamaliel. But something was more important to Saul than his religious background, the traditions of his family, or even his love for his parents—he loved *God* more than all these and he had dedicated his life to pleasing God.

Saul was not only deeply religious; he also loved truth and was honest in his search for it. Only the truth can make one free (John 8:32). If one does not have a love of truth, he will believe a lie—and be lost (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11). Saul was a big enough man to see the truth, to admit he had been wrong, and to make a change religiously.

He later said, “I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Galatians 1:16) and “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). I am sure he loved his parents and respected his teachers, but he did not check with them or with any man. He knew that he was responsible personally to God—that when he stood before God he would not give an account of his parents or

teachers, or they him. He would only give an account of himself (Romans 14:12). So he obeyed the Lord—even though it meant that he had to completely change the direction of his spiritual life!

This is hard, isn’t it? Perhaps we have known only one way all our lives; how hard it is to see another way. Perhaps those in our family for generations have all believed a certain way; how hard it is to admit they may have been wrong all those years! It is hard, but Jesus said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).

I love and respect my mother and father, but I realize that ultimately they cannot be the authority in my life. My father was born in a log cabin. (He has never understood why, with that qualification, he was not president of the United States!) But even though my father was born in a log cabin, I don’t plan to move out of my modest brick home in Fort Worth into a log cabin. When my mother was a girl living on a farm in Oklahoma, she and her family rode to town in a wagon. But I don’t plan to sell my Impala, road-weary as it is, and get a horse-drawn wagon just because my mother used to ride in one. My parents also have strong convictions about religious matters. But *they* are not my religious authority; the *Bible* is—the words of Jesus and the inspired writers (John 12:48).

I would like to stress, however, that if one makes a change religiously to bring his life in conformity with *truth*, this is *not* a reflection on parents or other beloved teachers, but a compliment. The story is told of a man who for many years had a country store. He was loved by all in the community and known as an honest and fair man. He had reared his children to be honest and fair. At last he died and the oldest son inherited the store. Before the son reopened the store, he had it remodeled and all the equipment checked. When he did so, he learned a startling truth. The scales his father had used all the years weighed heavy. Year after year his father had been giving people short measure. When the son discovered this, he had at least two options: He could reason, “If I admit that the scales are wrong I am saying that my father was dishonest, a cheat. So, rather than reflect on my father, I will pretend that the scales are all right and will continue to use them as my father did.” Or he could reason,

“My father taught me to be honest with others and with myself. My father did the best he could with what he knew. He did not know the scales were faulty. I do. *To fail to readjust the scales would be the greatest reflection on my father of all!*”

Paul did *not* reflect upon his parents. When he saw that he was wrong, he was ready to make a change.

V. HE SAW THAT HE NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING IN ORDER TO BE SAVED.

But there was still one more thing that he saw, one more inescapable conclusion: He saw that he needed to do something in order to appropriate the salvation in Christ—a doctrine that goes against both Scripture and logic. When Paul saw that he was a sinner who needed Christ, who needed to be in the church, who had to make a change, he instinctively knew that there was something for him to *do*.

When Christ appeared to him, he said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to *do*?” (Acts 9:6). The Lord replied, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou *must do*” (Acts 9:6). He arose and was led into the city and spent three days in agonizing prayer, unable to eat. Then God sent a preacher named Ananias to him. Ananias restored his sight, told him of God’s great plan for his life, and then said, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16). Acts 9:18 says simply, “He . . . arose, and was baptized.”

Occasionally revivalists tell their audience, “You need to be saved as Saul was saved on the road to Damascus—see a bright light; see a vision; have Christ speak to your soul; have an experience.” But if Saul was saved on that road, he didn’t know it, for he asked what to do (Acts 9:6) and then spent three days in misery, praying and fasting. If he was saved, the Lord didn’t know it, for He told him to go into the city to find out what to do (Acts 9:6). If he was saved, the inspired preacher did not know it, for he told Saul to arise and be baptized *to wash away his sins* (Acts 22:16). He had seen the Lord, he had prayed earnestly, but he still had his sins! Let us note in passing that the Lord appeared to Paul to qualify him to be an apostle, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 1:22; 26:16-18; 1 Corinthians 15:8) The appearance alone did not save Paul. No, Paul was

not saved by “having an experience”; there was something for him to *do*.

That “something” was not prayer. If some modern day religionists had come upon Saul praying, they would have encouraged him to continue. They might say, “Repeat this prayer: ‘Lord, I accept You as my personal savior.’” But the preacher sent from God looked at the praying man and asked, “Why *tarriest* thou?” For the alien sinner, prayer is tarrying. One does not have to beg, beseech, and ask God to love and save Him. God has shown His love in the giving of Jesus (John 3:16); God is ready and anxious to save all sinners (2 Peter 3:9); all that remains is for a man to come to God in the way God has prescribed. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Saul already believed. So Ananias said to him, “Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

This Saul did (Acts 9:18). When he did so, he was baptized into union with the Christ who was the Son of God (Galatians 3:27), his sins were forgiven (Acts 2:38), he was added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 1 Corinthians 12:13), and he moved from error to truth—being translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s Son (Colossians 1:13; John 3:5). He was then ready for the magnificent adventure of living his life for Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Yes, Paul saw five things when he was blind that completely changed his life. These five things we also need desperately to see:

We need to see that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of mankind, the One worthy of our total allegiance.

We need to see that we are sinners, sinners who cannot save ourselves, sinners totally dependent upon the mercy and grace of God.

We need to see that Christ and His church are inseparable and that we need to be *in* the Lord’s church to be saved.

We need to see that truth is more important than tradition, that we must be willing to make whatever changes are necessary to put our lives in accordance with the will of God.

We need to see that God asks for *obedience* to His will—to *do* what He has asked us to do to become Christians and to live the Christian life.

Let each of us look at our own lives at this time. *Have* we seen these truths? And, more importantly, is our comprehension evident in our lives and actions? Or is it possible that we have not yet totally surrendered our lives to the risen Christ? Are any present who have not been scripturally baptized? Are any present who were once baptized but have not remained faithful? Is it not wonderful to realize that each of us can have our sins *washed away* in the blood of Christ, even before we leave this building today (Acts 22:16; 1 John 1:7)?

If you *need* to come, “Why tarriest thou? Arise, . . .”—and come as we stand and sing.

FOOTNOTES

¹Or this could be “a” son of God; see various translations.

²This is *Abington Bible Commentary* from several years ago. I have not checked later editions.

³Put fingers close together indicating closeness.

MISCELLANEOUS OUTLINES

Why Did Jesus Come?

I. HE CAME TO FULFILL THE LAW.

“Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

II. HE CAME TO SAVE.

“For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

III. HE CAME TO GIVE LIFE.

“ . . . I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly” (John 10:10b).

IV. HE CAME TO BEAR WITNESS.

“To this end have I been born, and to this

end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” (John 18:37b).

The Tears of Jesus

I. HE WEPT OUT OF SYMPATHY (FOR HIS FRIENDS).

“Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

II. HE WEPT FROM SORROW (FOR HIS ENEMIES).

“And when he drew nigh, he saw the city and wept over it, . . .” (Luke 19:41).

III. HE WEPT DURING HIS SUFFERINGS (FOR HIMSELF).

“Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, . . .” (Hebrews 5:7).

Working in the Master’s Vineyard

“But what think ye? A man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard’” (Matthew 21:28).

I. “GO . . .”

Initiative is needed.

II. “GO WORK . . .”

Productive activity must be chosen.

III. “GO WORK TODAY...”

The need is urgent.

IV. “GO WORK TODAY IN THE VINEYARD.”

The work must be done in the Master’s vineyard.

by Neale Pryor

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