

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-17 Saul Meets Jesus

When I met Christ, my life was changed. I was a wild and willful young man who cared little about anything but himself. Then I met Christ, and he turned my life around. However, my story is not that unusual. Millions throughout the world can testify of how Christ transformed their lives too. Today's story from the book of Acts tells the dramatic story of how Saul of Tarsus encountered Jesus of Nazareth, and how his life was forever changed.

While Philip was ministering in Samaria and western Judea, Saul was back in Jerusalem lashing out against the Christians there. Day after day he was "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples." He went from house to house, arresting believers and putting them into prison. He tried to get them to renounce their faith in Christ. That's when he received word that the church had spread into Damascus, the capital city of Syria.

Damascus was about 250 kilometers (150 miles) to the north of Jerusalem—four to six days' travel. Saul thought to himself, "*This plague must be stopped!*" So he went to the high priest and got permission to arrest any Christian he found in Damascus, man or woman, and bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners. Soon Saul and his gang were on their way to Damascus. After several days' travel, the city was finally in sight. That's when it happened!

Suddenly Jesus appeared to them in a blinding flash of light. Dazed, Saul fell to the ground. Then the Lord Jesus spoke to him out of the light. "Saul, Saul," he pleaded, "Why are you persecuting me?"

Saul replied, "Who are you, Lord?"

Jesus answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city. There, you will be told what to do." The men who were with Saul heard a loud sound; however, they did not understand the words that Jesus spoke to him. Because Saul had been blinded by the intense light, his men had to lead him by the hand into the city. For the next three days he had nothing to eat or drink (Acts 9:1-9).

This is the third time we have met Saul in the book of Acts. We first met him in Acts chapter 7. There we saw him giving encouragement to the men who murdered Stephen. Then in chapter 8, we watched as he began to violently persecute the church in Jerusalem, scattering the believers throughout Judea and Samaria.

In today's story, Saul's rampage against the church continues. He heads off to Damascus to terrorize the Christians there, just as he had done in Jerusalem. Little did he know that an encounter with the living Christ would dramatically change the direction of his life.

The bright light that Saul saw came from the resurrected Jesus. This is the same Jesus whom Stephen saw standing at the right hand of God. It was from this exalted position that Jesus

had poured out the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Now, in his glorified body, Jesus appears to Saul—and his glory shines through like a blazing light.

At this moment, Saul was saved. We know this because he called Jesus ‘Lord’ and submitted himself completely to Christ’s will. Later, when he meets Ananias, this disciple from Damascus calls him ‘Brother Saul.’ In our next lesson we will learn how Saul is later filled with the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we know that salvation and the baptism in the Holy Spirit are two separate experiences. When one is saved, his or her sins are forgiven and they are made a part of God’s family. When one is baptized in the Holy Spirit, they are empowered to take the message of salvation to others.

We learn three important lessons from the story of Saul’s encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

First, we learn how very much Jesus loves his church. On the Damascus Road, Jesus asked Saul, “Why are you persecuting me?” By persecuting the church, Saul was persecuting Christ. This shows how closely Jesus identifies with his church. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote that Jesus loved the church so much that he died for it (Eph 5:25). Paul often referred to the church as the “body of Christ.”

If Jesus loves the church, then so should we. The church is Christ’s means of taking the message of salvation to a lost world. We should do everything we can to support and promote the church.

The second lesson we learn from this story is that God’s grace can redeem anyone. When Saul met Christ, Satan was using him to oppose the work of God and destroy the church. In the minds of many Christians, he was the least likely person in all Israel to turn to Christ. Nevertheless, God had a plan for his life. He was able to see into Saul’s heart and know how much he really wanted to serve God. So, Jesus appeared to Saul and revealed himself to him. When Saul saw and heard the resurrected Christ, he gave himself completely to the Savior.

We should never lose hope, saying that a person is too far from God to be saved. We must rather pray for them and share Christ’s love with them. By God’s grace they too can become faithful followers of Jesus Christ. In our eyes it may seem impossible, but with God, all things are possible.

A third lesson we learn from the story of Saul’s conversion is how a person’s life can be changed by an encounter with Christ. When Saul met Jesus on the Damascus road, an inner change took place. In a moment, the church’s great persecutor became its ardent promoter. Jesus called this experience being ‘born again.’ When a person is born again, he or she becomes a ‘new creation’ in Christ. Truly, “the old has gone [and] the new is here” (2Cor 5:17). To be born again one must repent of their sins and put his or her faith in Christ alone for salvation. They must then take up their cross daily and follow Christ.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches us how God can change any person’s heart and turn them from a persecutor of Christians into a lover of Christ.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we should never write a person off, even if they are a great sinner. We should love them and pray for them, knowing that Christ can change them into the person he wants them to be.

Let's **review** some of the significant things we have learned from studying the story of Saul's encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road.

1. When was Saul truly saved?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you said that Saul was truly saved the moment he committed his life to Christ on the Damascus Road, you answered correctly.
2. When Jesus asked Saul, "Why are you persecuting me?" what does this tell us about Christ's relationship to the church?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you said that it shows how much Jesus loves the church and identifies with it as his body, you are right.
3. Who is so far from God that Christ cannot save them?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "No one is so far from God that Christ cannot save them," you answered correctly.
4. What happens in someone's heart when they commit their life to Christ?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you responded, "They are born again and become a new creation in Christ," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it several times until you can tell the story and its lessons to others. Then, identify someone who you think is a great sinner and begin to pray for that person and show him or her the love of Christ. Every time God brings that person to your mind, breathe a prayer for God to save them.