

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-10 Salvation: Encounter

Most people resist being asked by another person to change. Children feel it. Spouses feel it. Employees feel it too. We all like to be independent, to do things our way. We may even say, “If any change is going to take place, I want it to be my idea!” Therefore the idea that God wants us to change is seldom a welcome thought. But in fact, those that oppose him the most can become some of the best converts. Those who have been forgiven much, love much, the Bible says.

The Book of Acts tells the story of a man named Saul. He was a good Jew, who hated and persecuted Christians. He even asked the high priest to send him to other cities to find them. He wanted to arrest them and take them as prisoners back to Jerusalem for trial. It seems he wanted to treat Christians the same way others had treated Christ – to crucify them! But God changed all that.

Saul set out, about four to six days of travel, toward a city with a large Jewish population. Just when he was about to arrive at his destination, Damascus, a light from heaven flashed around him. He bowed to the ground, startled and frightened. God had gotten his attention! A loud voice shouted out “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Trembling, Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?”

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” The men who were traveling with Saul stood there speechless. They had heard the sound, but did not understand it or see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Later the Lord called one of his disciples to go and pray for Saul. The disciple, Ananias, was afraid. He had heard about Saul’s threats of arrest and murder. God said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

So, Ananias was obedient and went to the house where Saul was. God had shown Saul in a vision that a man would come. He would place his hands on Saul to restore his sight. Ananias said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength (Acts 9: 1-18).

Later, this man’s name would be changed to Paul. He would become one of the greatest apostles of all time, planting churches all around the Mediterranean Sea. His letters to these churches make up about one-third of the New Testament. He eventually gave his life for a gospel he once violently opposed.

What makes such a man change so abruptly and completely? The answer is in the story. When he encountered the Lord in such a powerful way on the road to Damascus, it forever changed his life.

In the previous lesson you learned that God has placed a yearning in every human heart. We want to know the reason for our existence and to learn more about him. But people should not remain in a place of permanent seeking. Rather, like Saul, they need a profound encounter with who Jesus is and what he has done for them.

This encounter is the second phase of the salvation process. It involves an encounter with the person of Jesus in a powerful and life-changing way. In Saul's case it came through a personal encounter that evoked his worshipful question – “Who are you, Lord?”

The risen Jesus states, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!” Saul got the message. His encounter with Jesus was the result of divine revelation by Jesus Christ himself to the persecutor. For many Christians this encounter with the Lord will likely come through other means. Salvation encounters with Jesus are as varied as the lives and backgrounds of each person who confesses him as Lord.

According to Jesus in John 16, encounter is the result of an awareness of righteousness. The Spirit helps us understand that Jesus has gone to the Father—an expression concerning his death, resurrection, and ascension. Bible scholars speak of these events as one world-changing event called, ‘The Cross.’ The story of the Cross becomes a catalyst for change in the lives of its hearers. The awareness of Jesus as the Son of God sacrificed for our sins, resurrected from the dead, and sitting at the right hand of God. This becomes the means of our salvation. By coming to accept Christ's righteousness as the Son of God, we encounter the risen Lord and are born again. We are touched from above, made new in him, just like Saul.

This story is **important** as it shows us that humans must move beyond perpetual seeking, to encountering the risen Lord and his righteousness. Each person needs to be born again, or touched from above.

The **central truth** is that a dynamic encounter with the risen Lord—the realization of righteousness—will dramatically change a person and start them on a journey with God.

Review Questions

1. Why was Saul going to Damascus? [Pause 5 seconds.]
 - A. If you said, “He was going there to imprison Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial,” you would be correct.
2. What does the expression “because I go to the Father,” that Jesus used in John 16 mean? [Pause]
 - A. If you said that it means he was predicting his death, you are correct.
3. How are people born again, made new, and touched from above? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “By accepting Christ's righteousness as the Son of God, we encounter the risen Lord and are born again just like Saul,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it several times until you can tell Saul's encounter story in your own words. Think about your own encounter with the Lord. In what ways was it like Saul's? In what ways did it differ? How can your understanding of the encounter phase of the salvation process assist you as a Christian to help others on their spiritual journey? Tell Saul's story to an unbeliever and ask God to help that person have an encounter with Christ as you witness to them.