

## 2010 ACTS #10 CHAPTER 9 FROM HATRED TO HOLINESS - SAUL

Acts 9:1-19

Today were looking at a man of hatred.  
 A man whose rejection of the truth  
 Led him into a fanatical lifestyle that  
 lost all sense of reason and compassion for humanity.  
 It led to the arrest and killing of other human beings.  
 Just because they believed differently.

I never cease to be amazed  
 At the level of hate attacks made on Christians.  
 And the attempt to discredit and destroy the Bible,  
 Or the level of dishonesty used to deny the existence of the living God.

**Take the teenage boy in an art class who drew**  
 a line drawing piece of art for a school project.  
 The boy's teacher found the work so objectionable  
 that she refused to give the boy a grade,  
 and the Wisconsin school stood by this teacher.  
 They gave the boy two detentions for the objectionable artwork.  
 The drawing was handed in alongside other students artistic creations  
 One, a red-skinned demon mask complete with horns and bared fangs;  
 Another a Buddha fountain;  
 Another a sorcerer;  
 There was a drawing of the Greek goddess Medusa.  
 An eight-armed Hindu goddess riding a giant swan.  
 But the art the teenage boy submitted that went over the limit  
 in the eyes of the school.  
 And what was so offensive, so vulgar to the boy's teacher?  
 Was a white chalk drawing on a black background of a cross,  
 with the caption, "John 3:16, a sign of love."

Why is it that the teacher's grading policy,  
 upheld by the school district's policy against "religious expression,"  
 apparently did not apply to Buddhism, Hinduism, paganism, or Satanism,  
 but only Christianity.

**The Lord our God, the Creator of all things says,**  
**"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and**  
**light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" Isaiah 5:20**

The reason the world wants to discredit and destroy  
 Any attempt to of Christian belief  
 Is because we don't want any limits on our self centered lives,  
 We don't want anything interfering with  
 Our insatiable desire for pleasures  
 We want to live in the now,  
 And so scoff at any accountability with an Almighty God.

All the while we stuff the emptiness inside  
 back into the corners of our minds,

Until we have an arterial rupture of the soul and psyche  
 That leaves us broken and bleeding in the dust.  
 And buried in the ashes and dust of the ground  
 With the mournful plea on our lips,  
 "If there is a God, then how come..."

### **I. SAUL WAS A HATE-FILLED MAN.**

He was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a free city of the Romans,  
 and saw himself a freeman of that city.  
 But Saul was anything but free.  
 He was a violent man filled with fire.  
 Maybe some of it came from his having to fight his way all his life  
 Because of his stature.

Ironically although he was named after King Saul  
 Who stood head and shoulders over others,  
 Saul of Tarsus was short and called by the ancients.  
*Homo tricubitalis--but four feet and a half in height;*  
 And in his home town of Rome he was known by the citizen  
**As Paul--little.**  
 He was small in stature,  
 But huge in his hate,

**<sup>1</sup>Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. Acts 9:1**

The word *breathing out* is expressive of violent anger in the original text.

**Epic Homer** loved to say they breathed out

"Spears, and pikes, and helmets, and crests, and greaves, and the fury of redoubted heroes."

**Euripides** said it this way

"They came into the assembly, breathing mutual slaughter. "

The Greek text points out how determined Saul was  
 to totally destroy the infant Church of Christ and the new believers..

He was a mad man.

All Jerusalem and Galilee were terrified.

He writes of himself in 1 Timothy 1:13,

**I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I Timothy 1:13**

To do this violence Saul had to get permission.

And he went to the

**He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. Acts 9:2**

We might ask, "What is the church doing in the business of killing and crucifying?"

We can see how far the church had gotten away from God's goodness

And the sanctity of human life."

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The high priest was chief in all matters of an ecclesiastical nature

He was the bishop,  
 He power covered all the countries around Jerusalem  
 Including Damascus.  
 He had to consented to the killing of innocent women and children  
 to enhance his power  
 And the people choice.

Just like the church today too often is ready  
 To kill the unborn innocent child  
 All on the altar of political correctness  
 And a woman's sinful choice.

**Saul got the letters of death from the high priest,  
 He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus,  
 so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he  
 might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. Acts 9:2**

Damascus was one of the most ancient cities in the world,  
 Existing long before the time of Abraham.  
 It was a rendezvous city of trade for  
 Pilgrim from north Asia to and from Mecca  
 It contained about 100,000 inhabitants,  
 Most of whom were *Arabs* and *Turks*, but  
 15,000 Christian refugees lived there,  
 in a state of considerable degradation  
 Damascus was surrounded with strong walls  
 With nine gates  
 But even this was not a sanctuary for Christians.  
 No safe haven.

Saul was thinking that no wall could hide the christen believers.  
 Then he ran into one himself.  
 This very Jesus whom he said did not rise from the grave  
 Did not bring eternal life, confronted him.

**<sup>3</sup>As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed  
 around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why  
 do you persecute me?"**

## **II. THE HATE-FILLED MAN BECOMES A HOLY MAN**

The pride of the Pharisee is now brought down to the dust;  
 and the fury of the persecutor is not only restrained,  
 but his teeth have been pulled  
 and the lion becomes a lamb.

**Saul asked:**

**"Who are you, Lord?" Acts 9:5**

**Jesus said:**

**"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." Acts 9:6**

**But something changed for Saul.**

**When he got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. Acts 9:8**

Sometimes in a conversion of one life  
A turn around by the spirit of the living God.  
Will mean blindness to the old way of life.

Because, many times the old life is all we can see.  
The old lifestyle is all we know.  
The old attitudes.  
The old habits and friends.  
But suddenly all things are changed.  
Our sights must be different.  
Our tastes and preferences must be changed.  
That is called conversion.

Sometimes God has to blind us to that old life.  
That's why in conversion sometimes there is confusion as to what happens next  
We know we can't go back to the old lifestyle  
So we must be resighted for what is to come.

There was no way Saul could go back they would kill him.  
He came toward Damascus riding at the head of the pack, leading an army of haters  
But he went back into Damascus at the back of the pack, blinded and  
Led by a humble servant.

**So they led him by the hand into Damascus. <sup>2</sup>For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. Acts. 9:8-9**

Friends, God does not leave us directionless.

**<sup>10</sup>In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. Acts 9:10**

**He tells him**

**Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." Acts 9:11-12**

Now would you have gone if you were Ananias.

This man was a known killer.

A violent man.

Unreasonable,

Compassionless.

And Ananias a Christian believer, was on his hit list.

And knew Saul would just as soon behead him as address him.

**I mean he had already killed Stephen.**

**<sup>13</sup>"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."**

Isn't God full of surprises.

The Christian believers in Damascus had been

Praying for a miracle of protection against Saul.

But this request is so preposterous its unbelievable even for Ananias

**<sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup>I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."**

Here we see the humor of God

Choosing the very disciples Ananias

Who was going to be arrested, persecuted and tortured.

To be the one God uses to show Saul salvation.

Friends, I want to say to you that God will help any person.

There is no one outside of his love

No one incapable of conversion.

There is no one outside of the grace of God

That can't be changed.

Whose habits can't be broken,

Whose ungodly will can't be redirected.

And violent spirit can't be harnessed.

Christianity is the only hope for a sick heart

Because only in Christianity is there complete forgiveness.

I don't know how many of you have seen news broadcaster Bret Humes

Television interview where he said:

The only hope for Tiger Woods to experience the healing of forgiveness

For his many affairs, and the terrible betrayal toward his wife is

Is to turn to Jesus to make a full recovery.

It is only in Christianity that Jesus offers Tiger Woods what he so badly needs.

Saul was in Great need.

**<sup>17</sup>Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he 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." Acts 9:17**

Once Jesus touches your life.

Once we have a changed heart in Christ.

The scales will fall off.

**<sup>18</sup>Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup>and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Acts 9:18-19**

When Saul believed and received Christ,

Not only was his sight restored.

His soul was resighted

His distress healed.

His appetite returned.

And he gained his strength.

He became the greatest apostle to ever live,

In bringing the Good news to the Gentile world.

He died for his savior in a Roman Jail, by Emperor Nero in ad67

When they beheaded him.

Friends God is in the business of new life.  
 He specializes in new beginnings.  
 It doesn't matter how violent you may have been,  
 How misdirected your life  
 Or deceitful your heart  
 God wants to claim what is falling apart all about you  
 and bring you to a cohesiveness that will never fall apart again.

Do you have it all together?  
 Do you sense a cohesiveness in your spirit?  
 In your family?  
 In your body?

Or do you need that divine help today?  
 If you do then open your heart and let Jesus be involved  
 in your life in a far greater way  
 Because he is already there acting in your behalf.

It is called Laminin  
 Molecular biologists tell us is a unique cell adhesion molecule.  
 In the body called Laminin.  
 It is a protein molecule whose adhesive qualities  
 Which self-organizes the body into its molecular structure.  
 and there are between 10- 60,000 proteins in the human body.

This adhesive protein called Laminin  
 And tells the cells what their job is in the body.  
 And holds it together.  
 It is the rebar of the human body.  
 Rebar, you know, is what they put in cement to hold it together.  
 In the driveway and buildings.  
 That is what Laminin is and does for the human body.  
 The very stuff that holds us together,  
 That holds the skin on,  
 And the organ of our body together,  
 Holds blood vessels and nerves in line.

But you have to see it to believe it.  
 Have you seen what it look like?  
 What is the scientific diagram of this protein Laminin  
 that holds everything together in the body?  
 It is in the perfect shape of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You say well that just a scientific rendition.  
 Well look at the electron microscopic image of the real protein of laminin  
 Can you believe it.  
 The perfect shape of the cross.  
 Just as Laminin holds your body together  
 The cross of Jesus Christ holds your life together.

Paul writes to the Colossians:

Speaking of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

**Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For by him all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, all things were created by him and for him, He is before all things and in him all things hold together.  
Colossians 1:15**

Friends don't go on living one minute more with a disjointed life

Don't let another hour go by of being torn up by the world.

Ripped apart by carnal relationships.

Split in two by indecision and confusion.

Living in a hopeless world.

**For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. Colossians 1:15-20**

But bow your knee before the cross of Christ.

And know that he is the supreme molecule of spiritual wonder

That brings us all together

And holds us all together

in the hands of a living God.

#### PRAYER

Marvelous God of wonder,

If there is anyone here today that is falling apart,

Whose life seems to be quickly unraveling,

Oh God, let them reach out in faith to the Cross of Christ,

And to Jesus whose cohesiveness of spirit

Can bring together that which is broken,

And fill that which is empty,

And heal that which has offended.

And bring that lost soul home to a living God.

Let it be done, Lord,

Let it be done.

I pray in Jesus name.