

The Conversion of Paul

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Okay, Acts 9. I want us to consider this morning the conversion of Paul. In fact, in my Bible, that's how this section is titled: "The Conversion of Saul." Let's read in v. 1.

"But Saul, still..." Still. It's not new right here. He applauded and approved the death of Stephen. And still he's breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest. He hates Christ. He hates the followers of Christ. He goes to the high priest. He has access to the high priest personally. He asks the high priests for letters "to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way..." - any Christians - he's going to go to the synagogues in Damascus and see if among the Jews in the synagogues if any have been persuaded that Jesus is the Christ. That's what he's looking for. And if he finds any within the synagogues, he's got letters of approval from the high priest himself. Men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. He's going to arrest them. He's got authority to do it.

"Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus." He's on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus. Damascus is the capital of Syria. It's to the north. He's traveling the highway between those two great cities. And suddenly, somewhere along the way, "suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' He said, 'Who are You, Lord?' He said, 'I am Jesus Whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do.'" Jesus tells him to go to Damascus. "The men who were traveling with him stood speechless hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days, he was without sight and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias. He said, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Rise, and go to the street called Straight.'" Straight Street. "'And at the house of Judas, look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. For behold, he is praying. And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to Your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' The Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name.' So Ananias departed and entered the house, and laying his hands on him, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus Who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized. And taking food, he was strengthened. For some days, he was with the disciples at Damascus, and immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'"

Folks, I want us to consider the conversion of Paul. Consider Paul. You know how he says there in Romans 7 that he was once alive without the law? He was once alive. I want you

to consider the conversion of Paul. You know why? It was real. We know that Paul actually got converted. And you know what the thing about him is? He thought at one time everything was okay. And that's like a lot of us. That's like most of us. We thought things were okay at one time. But they weren't okay. Paul thought they were okay. He thought he was alive. He thought he was doing good. But he wasn't well. He was hellbound. He was full of sin. There was animosity against God. There was rebellion. He was not well. It was not well with his soul.

And here's the thing, Paul got converted. And I know that on the authority of Scripture. He truly got saved. He's in heaven right now. We know it for a fact. How do we know this? We know this because Scripture declares, Jesus Christ says right here in what we just read that Paul was a chosen instrument of Mine.

Now here's the thing that I want you to see. You know what? You don't really know if my conversion is the real thing. I may not be able to be certain about you. In fact, Scripture seems to indicate I can't. Our Lord tells us don't try to pull up all the tares. Why? Because in pulling up the tares, what do we end up doing? We end up pulling up the real.

And you know what? Matthew 7 says you've got a bunch of people very much thinking that whatever conversion experience they had, it's all going well with them. And yet, they get there to judgment day and the Lord says, "Depart." I'll tell you this, when Jesus said somebody is going to betray Me, they didn't all look and say, "It's Judas." They didn't know. I mean, in their estimation, they suspected themselves more than they suspected him. We're not always clear on all this.

But I'll tell you this, we know about Paul. Because Scripture tells us his conversion was the real deal. He really did get converted. That's what makes his conversion valuable. If we examine it, we can see what true conversion looks like. Paul himself says, listen to this, Paul said in 1 Timothy - don't turn there, but "I received mercy for this reason, that in me as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life."

Paul says, I'm an example. What's happened to me is an example. Okay, let's take him as an example. Let's look at his conversion. Let's look at his conversion as an example of the real deal. Let's look at that. This is what I want to do. Paul's conversion is unique in some ways. There's dramatic elements about this that are not going to be typical to all of us. But here's the thing, as much as it might be true that he got converted and he became an apostle, we don't get converted and become an apostle. It may be true that a light shined from Heaven. I'm not saying a light needs to shine from Heaven. What I want to do is I want to boil this down. I want to boil Paul's conversion down to the bare essentials of what conversion is. We're going to bypass the dramatic.

You know what? Because this has to do with us. What is it about conversion that needs to be true of you and me? What is it about conversion that we can look at in Paul and say yes, that. When you boil it all down, that is essential to conversion. Lloyd-Jones would speak about this as like the irreducible minimum. When you boil it all down, what is that basic essential quality of conversion? That's what I want to do. I want to look at Paul. I want to boil it down. (incomplete thought) Anything that's sensational here, anything that's dramatic, anything that's unique, I want to brush out of the way. Down to the basic essentials of conversion. Because I want to look at what is the nature of this thing. Because you and I have to have it for it to be well

with our soul. What is Paul's conversion at the bare minimum? The absolute essentials? We need to forget that he knew the high priest personally. Get past those things. What do we find?

The question that I'm asking everybody right now, the question of the hour: What happens to a man or to a woman or to a child when they become a Christian? That is the question. What happens? What happens? And so, let's look at what happens.

First thing that I would have you to notice is this: Look at v. 3. "Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from Heaven shone around him." Now what I want you to see is this. Think about this. Paul is walking along and what happens? God breaks into his little orb of life. Right? Don't we walk through life that way? Our minds - we're thinking about what we're going to do. We think about where we're going. We think about the stuff that pertains to us. But we're going through life and we're thinking about our thing. You want to know something about true conversion? God breaks into your bubble. And that's what happened here. There's no conversion unless God comes. He breaks into Paul's bubble.

In conversion, let me tell you this, something happens. There is a change that takes place from outside ourselves. Now it affects us. It affects us inside. But it comes from outside. God comes to us. What happens is light breaks in upon Paul from the outside.

You know what? Again, let's just sweep away the sensational and the dramatic. I'm not saying you're going to see light from Heaven. But I can remember that night on that floor in that apartment in Oshtemo, Michigan. And I don't know whether I saw physical light or spiritual light. I don't know if it was inside or outside, but it broke in.

And I'm not saying you even have to have a sense of light. What I'm saying is when conversion happens God breaks into your bubble. He comes to you. Something happens. Something happens. This is key. And it happens from outside of one's self. There's a consciousness that God is dealing with me. You think Paul suddenly recognized he was being dealt with? You better believe he did. He suddenly recognized that life as he knew it was suddenly being interrupted. That's what happens in conversion. That path you are walking is suddenly interrupted. Something happens. You know that God is dealing with you. You know that He has come from outside. There is a recognition that suddenly, you are being changed. You are being influenced. There is something happening.

Now, you may not be able to describe what it is. And it may not be as sudden as it was with Paul. But you know something is happening. Sometimes you may look up and look back and say, wow, this was happening to me. Sometimes it's like these lights: just boom! They're on. Other people it's like the sun rises, but one day they look, or somewhere along the line they look and suddenly they recognize the sun is there where it wasn't before. Something is happening. That's conversion. We realize we are not so in charge as we thought we were. Suddenly, something is happening to me and I didn't plan it. I didn't predict it. I didn't make it happen. It's happening to me. This is essential. Why? Because in conversion, God is dealing with the sinner. God deals with the sinner. That's true conversion. This is a divine encounter. God intervenes.

Notice v. 4. "And falling to the ground..." I'll tell you this, Paul had not been one to humble himself. Look, when it came to religion, he looked real good. Paul was a man who was confident. He was self-confident. He was a Pharisee. Isn't this what we find in Philippians 3? He was a Pharisee. When it came to the law, he was blameless. He said, "I was a Hebrew of the Hebrews." You know what he's saying there in Philippians 3? He's saying if there is anybody

that can boast according to the flesh, it's me. And you can be sure that when he was lost and before he was converted, he did boast in all those things. That's what he put his trust in. And suddenly, where is he now? He is on the ground. Paul was not a man to be on the ground. Paul was a man who was confident. Paul was a man who was in charge. Paul was a man who was self-righteous. He was a Pharisee. He had zeal. He was the one that had the papers. I'm going to Damascus and I am in charge and I'm going to arrest who I want to arrest.

But God comes. And I'll tell you what, when God comes, He deals with that man. He took his proper posture. And I'm not saying that when we get converted, we necessarily physically drop on the ground, but I'm telling you this, Paul, before this, stood tall. He stood confident. And when God comes, your world gets turned upside down. You suddenly come to recognize who you are. Look at Paul. For the first time, he has taken the right position before God. For the first time. Man's self-confidence and self-image is destroyed when God comes. (incomplete thought). What do you think it means to convert? If we say we're going to convert it from AC to DC, we're changing. There's a change. You know what the change is here? It's Paul's estimation of himself.

Look at men. What do they trust in? The arm of the flesh. They trust in their charm. They trust in their appearance. They trust in lifting the weights and looking good. Arm of the flesh. They trust in their intellect. They trust in money. They trust in their own righteousness like it was with Paul. But it's dashed to pieces when God comes. That's what happens in conversion. These things are delivered a major blow. Suddenly, he's on the ground.

Here's what I want you to see next. Look at v. 4. "...And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul...'" I'll tell you something that happens in conversion: There's a personal element. He hears his name. You know what he recognizes? God is dealing with him personally. It's not just he hears this voice that is general. Do you know in conversion there is a specific call of God. It comes home to you. "Saul, Saul..." He is being dealt with personally. There's a personal element. Vividly aware he is being addressed. God is speaking to him. Brethren, he's no longer just another religious man out there in the throng. He's no longer an observer.

I remember this, I've told you this story before, I can remember driving my turbocharged Thunderbird down M43, headed to the beach, a trunk full of fun, and driving by a church and just looking. I saw these people going into this church building. I thought I can do that when I want to. And at some point in my life, you know, as you get closer to the end when you figure you better get things right because you haven't been living so well, I'm going to do that. I'll tell you what happens in conversion. You're no longer just an observer like that. I'm cruising by. I can do that when I want to. Brethren, when God came to me when I was reading "The Gospel According to Jesus," and I remember that specific night, and God came. And it came home. And it was personal. And I wasn't out there just watching from a distance anymore thinking I can do that. Suddenly, God came home to me. That's what happens in conversion. "Saul, Saul..." It's personal. It hits home.

Before this, Paul had ideas about God. He could think about what perhaps pleased God. He's walking through life. He had plans, right? He had the papers. He had plans. I'm going to Damascus. I'm going to do my thing. I think I know what pleases God and it's going to be to get these Christians. And you've got this idea about everything and you're in control and you're

doing this. He was the judge. He is going to go in and determine who should be dragged off to prison. He's in control here. He had the papers. He thought he was doing God's service. He was the one thinking his own thoughts, how he would serve God, but now his attention is grabbed. "Saul." Conversion is personal. And even if you don't hear your name specifically audibly like he did, it comes home to you. And you know God is dealing with you. With you. He grabs you. Your name is called whether it be in your soul, God is dealing directly and personally with you. That's how conversion is. It's personal.

Brethren, think with me. Who is speaking here? Jesus is speaking. You know what happens in conversion? Conversion is a time when God speaks to the soul of man. Saul had been doing all the talking up till now. He was breathing out threatenings and murder and slaughter. He was the one talking. I need papers to go to Damascus. You can imagine him on that road there to Damascus. He's heading in. We're going to go get them. If we find those followers... he's the one doing the talking. But now God speaks. I'll tell you what happens in time of conversion: Men listen. Suddenly, their mouths get shut. He's on his face. And you can be sure he's listening.

The problem with most non-Christians is they never stand still long enough to listen. That's why they don't hear. Because they always have an opinion. They always want to talk. You know how it is? We come to people. They don't want to listen. Why? Because they've got their own opinions. Everyone's ready to express their opinion. I know all about it. I know all about God. I know all about Christ. I know all about Heaven. I know all about sin. I know all about hell. It's not me you need to talk to. Give your tract to the guy next door. I'm good. They're ready to talk. They're ready to assure you about everything. Brethren, one of the most encouraging things that can happen, a great sign, is when God shuts your mouth.

Remember how it was with Job? Even though Job was saved, he came to the place that we all need to come to. I mean God began to speak to him and what does he do? He says [places hand over mouth]. You know how you know when God's speaking to somebody? If you were watching Job from afar, you know how you suddenly recognized he was no longer spitting out all of his own opinions? He says, "I put my hand to my mouth." I spoke and I'm done. You watch sinners when they come under the sound of the Gospel. Those whose mouths just keep going, they can tell you about their great, glorious experience that they've had, but God shuts the mouths. Before this, Saul's mouth, it breathed out death and threats, murder and slaughter. Now he listens. Do you notice in these words? Saul does not interrupt the Lord. That is key to conversion. If the mouth is not converted, be sure of it, neither is the life and soul of that man or woman.

Brethren, this is life and death. Let me ask you, have you gotten to the listening stage? God speaks from His Word. Every man who has become a Christian has passed through the stage of silence. Faith comes by hearing. Not by talking. Oh, the mouths of sinners! And if you see Paul there, the talk has gone out of him. He's listening. That's conversion.

Oh, how the world is full of religious people ready to tell you all that they think. They're ready to blurt it out at any time. This is exactly what it's like on the broad way that leads to destruction. Everybody has their opinions. Everybody thinks that they can just banter about. But I'll tell you what, when God starts speaking - Oh, He knows how to speak to get your attention. It breaks through all the noise. It sets the sinner right. You might notice that after this, I don't find

after this encounter that Paul speaks all the way to Damascus or for the next three days afterwards. Now, I'm not saying he didn't. I'm just saying Luke doesn't mention a thing that he says. Conversion tends to make one quiet.

Charles Spurgeon - it is anticipated that he saw one conversion for every day of his ministry. And you know what he said? The wounded stag - he says, when I preach the Gospel, (incomplete thought). If you know anything about hunting, when a deer gets shot but it's not lethal, when a deer takes an arrow but it's not a death wound, that deer will crawl away into the thicket and it will nurse its wounds until it is better and it will come out. Spurgeon said in all of his experience, show me the one who gets shot through by the Gospel and crawls in the thicket. They're quiet. They just lay there. They think. Their mouths have been stopped. Spurgeon said that great fireworks display that happens, he said more times than not it proves to be false. Because when God deals with somebody, He shuts their mouth. Oh, there's a place for praise undoubtedly.

Brethren, at conversion God's voice comes home personally. Christianity is first and foremost personal. It speaks to us one by one. We get converted one by one. We don't get converted as a church. We don't get converted as a family. We don't get converted as a nation. It happens one by one. Paul is suddenly at the very center of an encounter with God and he feels it with every fiber of his being. God is dealing with me. Me. Me. Something altogether different is happening to him. And it's not like the weather outside. It's cold. We all went outside when we just baptized Jerry and we all felt the cold. Conversion's not like that. Conversion deals with you specifically one at a time. I'm not saying there aren't times of revival. But even in those times of revival, you know God has come to you personally and He's dealing with you personally. "Saul, Saul..." That's what happens in conversion. Though He may be dealing with the person the next aisle over, it is personal. God is speaking to you. God is dealing with Paul personally here. (incomplete thought).

Let me ask you this question. Have you faced these things personally? You know what happened with David when Nathan came to him. He said, "Thou art the man." Have you ever had that? Where God looks at you and says, "David, you are the man." "Saul, it is you that I am dealing with." He deals with us personally. He deals with our sin personally. He deals with our guilt personally. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Have you ever heard your name like that? Have you heard that? Have you had an encounter with God that is so personal there is no mistaking it? Have you sensed God directly and personally?

And then notice this in v. 4, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" There's a realization in conversion of how God thinks about me. Do you recognize what v. 4 is? It's Jesus Christ summing up His personal opinion about Paul (Saul). "Why are you persecuting Me?" Can you imagine? He's sitting there. "Why are you persecuting Me?" Before, he was assessing Christ: Christ is a fake. Christ is an illegitimate savior. He's a deceiver. He's not valid. He's not true. Suddenly, there is a dawning realization in Paul's mind about how God thinks about him. The Lord calls Paul out as the persecutor that he is. You know what happens in conversion? We suddenly recognize, you know what matters is not so much about what I think about God, but what He thinks about me. And suddenly there is an eye-opening. God does think about me. And there is a way He views me. And Paul suddenly recognizes: God thinks of me as a persecutor.

No matter how I thought of Him, no matter how I thought of His law, no matter how I thought of His Son, he is suddenly face-to-face with how God thinks about him.

And I remember sitting there as God came to me for the first time in my life, and recognizing I am stained. I am wretched in His sight. I'm guilty. I recognize that. Suddenly, the moral judgment of God is against me. I used to be the one to size up what I thought about God: Well, I think He's this way. And I think He's happy with me. And I think all this. And suddenly, his mouth is shut and he's made aware about how God thinks about him and it is not how he thought about him.

A realization. In conversion, the truth comes home to us about how God deals with us and feels about us. And He's not pleased with us. This is the conviction of sin that's setting in. In conversion, there is a conviction of sin. "Why?" "Why are you persecuting Me?" There is a dread reality. Your eyes are suddenly opened to sin. You're convicted about sin. You're convicted about the fact that God really knows me and He knows my sin. There's something terrible about this. There's something frightening about this. Why? Because we're great sinners. And suddenly we're an open book before Him. And He says to us: You're a persecutor. He didn't see himself that way. Pharisee. Law? Blameless. Hebrew of the Hebrews. He saw the way he stacked up. Of the tribe of Benjamin. He, when it came to the flesh, he had all the credentials. And suddenly God breaks in and says your credentials are filth. You are a persecutor. And his mouth is shut. And it's personal. It's not just "you" generally.

You know, a great dead giveaway is when you go to somebody's door, and they say, "We're all sinners." Uh-huh. Paul wasn't saying, oh yeah, I know the high priest is a sinner. And I know these other guys that are traveling with me are sinners. [No.] In conversion, you don't look anywhere else. You know you are the man. You are the woman. That's what happens. Paul suddenly recognized: I'm not hidden.

Brethren, I'll tell you what happens in conversion. There is a foretaste, though it be small, there is a foretaste of judgment day. Because on judgment day, your name is going to be called and your sins - what you did in this body are going to be brought out on the table. That's what happens in conversion. To a slight degree. God says, you are the man. You are the woman. This is our sin.

We are so skilled at hiding. The Pharisees, they were full of dead men's bones, so says Christ. But on the outside, they looked good. And you know what? We're all used to that. I mean, when we grew up before our families, wherever we went to school, where we've worked, we love to posture ourselves. We even have a problem with that as Christians wanting to appear a certain way. We're adept at that. We are masters at that. And all of a sudden, what happens in conversion? I can't hide anymore. I thought I was hidden. You know what happens? We present ourselves to God the same way we present ourselves to one another thinking we can just hide. Thinking we can kind of create this mirage about who we are. And we actually get to deceiving ourselves that it's the same way with God. But it's not. And in conversion, what suddenly happens is the whole veil is peeled back and we're exposed. That's what happened to him. That's exactly what is happening to him. All is open. All is naked. You cannot get away. He knows all about me. It doesn't matter what He knows about you. He knows about me. And I'm a great sinner and this is not good. He'd never seen it before. Suddenly what happens is the enormity of our sin gets brought home.

Brethren, think about how we sin when we're lost. Things we just brushed aside. They're just trivial. Suddenly the enormity of it all, it just comes in upon us. We recognize we're not hid. He sees it. And it's enormous. Far more enormous than we ever imagined. That arrogance of how we lived. The pride of all of it. The blindness of all of it. Brethren, have you really faced yourself in the sight of God? That's what happens in conversion. The enormity of what you've done. Suddenly, Paul is faced by it all. The Lord has come. He's on his face. He recognizes who he really is. No man gets converted until he comes face-to-face with the fact that God knows.

And notice this, the thing that really lightens in our minds is that our sin - oh, how humanistic we are! Why in the world do you think that the world at large thinks that murder is the greatest crime? Because we are humanistic to the core naturally. We evaluate our sin so often by the consequences. Oh, our sin is bad! Why? Because we had to suffer such consequences when we got caught. We tend to measure our sin by how it impacts other people.

But do you hear what's being said? "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" I thought I was persecuting Christians. "Me." In conversion, our eyes are open that our sin is against God. It's against God. "Against You..." Is that not the cry of David? "Against You and You only..." I thought your sin was Bathsheba. I thought it was against Uriah. My sin is against You. Remember how it was with Joseph? To [Potiphar's wife]? Not: how can I sin against Potiphar, your husband? How can I do this sin, this evil, this wickedness against God? This is what happens in conversion. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" Suddenly, the humanism is just shattered. We recognize it's not just so much what we've done to other people. We begin to recognize in Scripture, the greatest commandment of all is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And so the greatest crime must be against Him. If the greatest commandment is, so is the greatest crime. We never thought that way before. That's what happens in conversion. Why have you sinned against Me? Suddenly, what we've done to men becomes comparatively insignificant. There's not even a mention of Bathsheba or Uriah. Against You and You only have I sinned. It just pales in comparison. We recognize that there is a holy God there. One who will judge us. One against Whom I have sinned greatly and He knows. He damns men for sin. He's the One that has showered me with all the good that I've ever had. He's the One that so loves that He would send His Son. This is the One that saves. And up till now, I've counted all my sin against Him to be just a trivial, insignificant thing. I denied it. I hid it. And suddenly, it's brought home. That's what happens in conversion.

You can't be a Christian until you've come to the place where you recognize you've sinned against God. You just come to recognize you haven't lived for God's glory. You haven't honored Him. You've counted His glory as we heard, brethren, that's one of the things that we come to recognize - however we recognize it - we may not know the terms. Well, I wasn't jealous for His glory. But we begin to recognize in conversion: I had really small thoughts about God. And I had really big thoughts about me. That happens. You realize you've denied God. You realize you've hated God. You realize your will kicked against His. It was against Him. You realize you redefined God. Brethren, does that not happen in our conversion? We recognize that the very image that we had in our minds of God wasn't the God of Scripture. We'd redefined Him as small. Oh, you can be sure right at this point, Saul is not thinking that Christ is small. A man under conviction is concerned about this. He's suddenly concerned about death, about eternity, about reality. God concerns him.

Notice this, Acts 9:4, "Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said..." Now notice when Paul does speak, "Who are You, Lord?" You know what? You know what happens in conversion? You may not know a lot about who Jesus is. You may not know about the hypostatic union. You may not have everything figured out. But I'll tell you what he had figured out, you know this - this happens in conversion. You know that Jesus Christ is Lord. And you know that you are not. Because we thought, the lost man thinks I am lord of my life. I'm in control. I'm the maker of my own destiny. But I'll tell you, when somebody gets converted, when they come face-to-face with Jesus Christ, everything changes. Everything. The whole thing gets turned upside down. Our perception of Jesus Christ suddenly becomes big. His perception of Christ before this was that He was an imposter. Now, he's calling Him Lord. Just ten minutes before, he wouldn't have called Him this. This is what happens in conversion. This silly idiotic non-Lordship type of Christianity just gets blown off by this whole thing. Paul would have said what? I guarantee you, the rest of the journey into Damascus, if somebody would have come along and said, let me tell you, Paul, real conversion - well, you can accept Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. He wouldn't even have given you a second look. He'd have just gone on his way to Damascus. Because when a man or a woman gets converted, they know better. They know that's not true. He would say: that may be the "Christ" that you believe in, but the One I just encountered back up the road here, He is Lord. And there is no arguing about that fact. No one - no one goes from being their own lord to coming face-to-face with the Lord of lords and not know it.

How about this? When the Apostle Paul recounts his testimony, to King Agrippa, he says this, he says, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." You know what has happened to him? He wasn't disobedient. He wasn't setting forth his own will. You know what happens to him? He's so lost at this point. He's so desperate. His only concern is to do what the Lord wants him to do. I was not disobedient. And in conversion that's what happens. We suddenly take a submissive posture. Lord, what do You want me to do? And what does He want us to do? Isn't it amazing? That voice comes to us and He could just knock us into oblivion because of our sins. And He says to us this is what I want you to do. I want you to trust Me. Paul, trust Me. That's what He says to us. He says, "I was not disobedient."

Suddenly, we come face-to-face with the enormity of our sin. We see the hopeless state, the helpless state. Lord, tell me what You want. Lord, Your will. What do You want me to do? You recognize: He spared me thus far. (incomplete thought) I remember. I remember, brethren, when it first hit home. I deserve hell. I was not thinking about the rest of my family or my co-workers. I deserved hell. And it wasn't until that point where God came and all the fight was gone. And I saw myself so lost. Just, help me, Lord. Help me. There's surrender. No more terms. No more bargaining with Him. Your negotiating days are over. You recognize you deserve to be blasted. You deserve the deepest, darkest, fiery parts of hell. You recognize that. You recognize your lostness, your hopelessness, your helplessness. Lord, whatever You want, just have mercy on me. And oh, there's hope, is there not? His name gets called and God just doesn't strike him down dead. There's that hope. He spared me. He spared me. No more bargaining. Unconditional surrender. He's not disobedient to this heavenly vision.

Brethren, Paul himself could say this: "Though formerly, I was a blasphemer, persecutor, insolent opponent, I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief." You who are

[not] Christians, you do the same. You who are not Christians, you do the same. You're ignorant. You get frustrated with God. You complain. But have you ever just stopped and listened? Ever come face-to-face with the enormity of your own sin? And what you deserve? That fight, that demand that you have that God should do this and God should do that, and you've been upset, you've been frustrated with God - suddenly, it's all ripped to shreds. Lord, do with me what You want. If You throw me into hell, I deserve it. I deserve it.

Do you hear God speaking your name? He says come to My Son. Come to Him. In the same way, He did not just blast Paul into hell, but rather, He made his life useful. He says so I will show mercy to you. Trust Him. He bids you come to Him. Go to Him at once. Because I'll tell you this, the day is coming when your name is going to be said. And it's going to be said and you're going to hear it. And you're going to be called to give an account. And in that day, there's going to be no hope except your one refuge is found in Christ. That's it. There is no other hope for mankind. There is no other help for mankind. He knows you individually. If you hear His voice now, if He is addressing you personally, Scripture says if you hear His voice, don't go on hardening your hearts. Surrender. Fall down before Him. Be obedient to the heavenly vision. What's that obedience? Repent. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He's calling you. He calls you to take Him at His word. Trust Him. Leave off your ways of death. Why will you die when a Savior has been provided? The day is coming when that offer is done. How you will curse yourself if you had a Savior offered to you and you refused! Come at once.