

Two Inseparable Questions¹

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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January 21, 2024

Text: Acts 9:1-19

Purpose: Just as the Apostle Paul was confronted by Jesus, we too are confronted by Jesus and need to ask, and search for the answer to those same two questions. Paul asked, "Who are you Lord?" and "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

Dewey goes to the local revival and listens to the preacher. After a while the preacher asks anyone with needs to be prayed over to come forward to the altar.



Dewey gets in line, and when it's his turn the preacher asks, "Dewey, what do you want me to pray about for you?"

Dewey replies: "Preacher, I need you to pray for my hearing."

The preacher puts one finger in Dewey's ear, and he places the other hand on top of Dewey's head and prays and prays.

After a few minutes, the preacher removes his hands, stands back and asks: "Dewey, how is your hearing now?"

Dewey says, "I don't know, Preacher, my hearing ain't until next Wednesday."²

The passage of scripture that I read this morning was one of the pivotal points in the life of Saul, who later was renamed Paul. Because of Paul's conversion, this really became one of the pivotal points in the New Testament. Approximately half of the Book of Acts involves the places Paul went to deliver the Gospel. His influence on the Christian faith is evidenced by the fact that he is the writer of 13 of the 27 books found in the New Testament. His conversion and missionary activity opened the Gospel message to the Gentile world.



Prior to his conversion, Saul was a devout Jewish Pharisee, who in sincere practice of religion and worship of God, secured papers from the Jewish high priest at Jerusalem, to journey to Damascus, Syria, to arrest any persons of “The Way” – followers of Jesus – found among the Jews there. Saul's purpose was to destroy the followers of Jesus, just like he had done to the brave deacon Stephen in Jerusalem, who was stoned to death. On the way to Damascus, Saul had a life altering experience, where he encountered the Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

Several times whenever and wherever we see Paul, we see him telling about that experience. Later in Paul's life, when he was in very difficult circumstances he would always go back to his conversion experience to remind himself and others of his calling.

On some occasions he would remind his challengers that he was a Jew and a Pharisee, a strict follower of the Law. Under certain circumstances he would remind his foes of his Jewish training and strict adherence to the Mosaic Law. On some pressure-packed occasions he would remind his hearers that he was a Roman citizen. But when Paul was really hard-pressed, when he needed to pull out every stop, he would relate the circumstances of his conversion experience. That conversion was not something which he had merely read about, or had been told about, but it was that life-changing event which he had experienced in a personal dramatic encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ.



Not one of us would have very much to say about our Christian life that is worthwhile or of interest to other people unless we have had a personal experience with Christ, an experience of conversion.

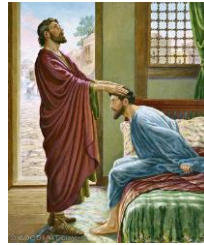
Saul's encounter with the Lord happened along the Damascus Road. As they were traveling, a bright light from heaven appeared and Saul fell to the ground. Then a voice from heaven spoke saying, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” Those traveling with Saul stood speechless hearing a voice but seeing no one. This encounter with the Risen Lord left Saul blinded and he had to be led by the hand to Damascus where he remained, not eating or drinking anything for three days. After being blinded, the Lord told Saul that he was to go and wait for further instructions. God was working in his life through the revelation to him of Jesus Christ, the Lord.





Saul's blindness caused him to ponder all that had just happened. During those three days I am sure he was praying and asking for an answer from God. While Saul was praying, another person by the name of Ananias received instructions from the Lord.

Ananias came to Saul and told him that Jesus had appeared to him, and that Saul would receive his sight and the Holy Spirit. When Ananias laid his hands on Saul, he was immediately able to see both physically and spiritually. The scripture says he got up and was baptized. He then ate and spent time with disciples in Damascus that he originally had come to arrest.



What a dramatic and strange turn of events, for the enemy was made an ally, the conqueror was made a co-laborer, and the foe was made a friend. Those who Saul came to seize and put in prison, he stayed to serve. Instead of preaching hate toward the Christians, he immediately began to preach about Christ and his love.



As you might expect from those who originally sent him to persecute the Christians, they turned on Saul and sought on many occasions to take his life. A few verses later in Acts 9, we read that it was those disciples of Christ had to help him escape by lowering him outside the city wall in a basket.

In the midst of this thrilling conversion experience are to be found two significant and inseparable questions which no one should risk missing, and which we should ask ourselves

today. Saul asked, ***“Who art thou, Lord?”*** and ***“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”*** Until both of these questions are answered by each one of us, we may actually be working against the things of Christ instead of the things for Christ. Until both of these questions are answered personally by us, we cannot know the meaning of life, or any adequate purpose in life.



Who art thou, Lord?
Lord, what wilt thou
have me to do?

I. WHO ART THOU, LORD?

A light more brilliant than the noon-day sun blinded Saul and he fell to the ground. Saul heard a voice speaking with solemn word, *“Saul, Saul.”* Who could appear in such brilliance, outshining the noon-day sun on the barren desert road towards Damascus? Who could speak in such a personal and searching way?

Who Art Thou, Lord?

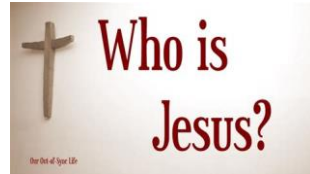
Saul asked the question of the identity of the voice, but he must have known who it was. In his question he said, *“Lord.”* Never before had Saul experienced such an appearance. Saul had been a zealously devoted Jew, even belonging to the group known as the Pharisees. Somehow, instantly, Saul knew this must be the Lord.

The voice answered, *“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”* Though Saul knew about Jesus and worked to persecute those following Jesus, he did not have personal faith in Jesus and did not know him as Lord. Saul had been bringing fear, dread, and suffering on the disciples of Jesus, on the

followers of “the Way.” Jesus sought out Saul and brought him to a place of surrender and obedience.

Prior to that encounter, Saul had some misunderstanding as to who Jesus was.

A. WHO IS JESUS? WHAT DID OTHERS THINK OF HIM?



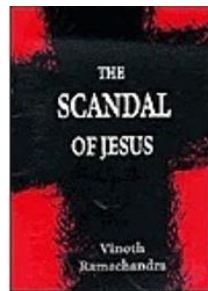
Who is Jesus to you? Do you believe in Jesus? Most people would answer "yes." Some would even say, “Why most everybody ‘believes in Jesus,’”! There is more than “lip service” to really believing in Jesus.

A person can believe, for example, that Lenin was a chief proponent of Marxism, but that doesn't mean that the person is a Communist. A person can believe Mao Tse-tung was once the head of the communist party in China but not be a communist. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ involves belief and commitment to Him.

During Saul’s day, many thought differently about Jesus.

1. *The scandal of the Jewish race.*

The Jews could not accept the parentage of Jesus. Let’s be honest, if a girl in the neighborhood had a baby, but insisted that there was no earthly father, we would not believe her. But the Jews had been told eight hundred years earlier by Isaiah that “*A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, called Immanuel.*” And there were other prophecies. They were expecting a Messiah. There were also heavenly messengers who spoke to Mary,



to Zechariah, to Joseph, and to others. Though a few believed, most of them did not.

Paul later referred to this idea of Jesus being a scandal in Romans and I Corinthians 1:23, “*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;...*”

The Talmud, a commentary on the Jewish oral Law (Mishnah) which was issued in Babylonia about A.D. 500, has no reference to Jesus. A Jewish scholar in New York University in 1960 found some early documents from the Talmud with the name of Jesus in them. These documents were found in Russia and they came from Egypt in the 1860's. Since destruction of the scriptures has been forbidden for Jews, these documents were buried and later found. This was likely an attempt to get rid of Jesus, the scandal of the Jewish race.

2. *One who came to heal bodies.*

Jesus did heal, but physical healing was not his primary mission. If healing was his primary purpose, then he neglected many people, because he did not heal all the people then nor does he heal all people now. Even Paul prayed three times to be delivered from some unknown “*thorn in the flesh,*” but his illness remained.



3. *An earthly ruler.*

Many of the Jews believed that the Messiah would be a political ruler, like David, the king of the Jews, whose role Jesus refused to fill. Even some of the



4. *A moral leader.*

5. *A religious leader and teacher.*

B. WHO DOES THE BIBLE SAY JESUS IS?


JESUS CHRIST
KING OF KINGS
—◆—
LORD OF LORDS

BREAD OF LIFE
 Lord of All
 HOLY ONE
 DELIVERER
 LAMB OF GOD
 OUR PEACE
 MIGHTY ONE
 JESUS
 WORD OF GOD
 CHRIST
 IMMANUEL
 GOD WITH US
 ALPHA
 OMEGA
 King of Kings
 BELOVED
 WONDERFUL COUNSELOR
 Lord of Lords
 SON
 EVERLASTING FATHER
 GOOD SHEPHERD
 THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIFE
 PRINCE OF PEACE
 LION OF JUDAH
 MESSIAH
 REDEEMER

8. The centurion said, *“Truly, this was the son of God.”*
9. Thomas said, *“My Lord and my God.”*
10. Paul said, *“I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord.”*

II. WHAT WILT THOU HAVE ME TO DO?

Saul asks a second question that day:
“Lord, what do You want me to do?”

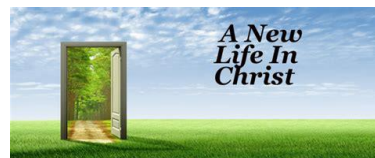


This is the same question others have asked. There was Samuel, who heard the voice of God calling him and arose to do service. There was the response of Isaiah, who in his temple worship experience saw God in His holiness, high and lifted up, and heard the question, *“Who will go for me?”* and Isaiah answered, *“Here am I Lord, send me.”*

Likewise, when Saul found out who spoke to him on the Damascus Road he immediately said, *“Lord, what do You want me to do?”* One cannot realize the true person of Christ without falling down in surrender to serve him.

J. J. Muir said, “The greatest thought that ever came to me was my personal responsibility to God.”

The question we should be asking of ourselves is, “Have we really seen Jesus?” and if we have, “What difference has it made in our lives?”



The personal commitment of many people was fulfilled the day they joined the church. This was all they ever did and all they ever expected to do. This is a shallow commitment, and one that means little or nothing in the kingdom of God if this is all. But the living Christ provides a living relationship, which gives every day the potential of service with Him and for Him.

I want to point out there were some things that Saul could not do that day on the Road to Damascus. They are also the things we cannot do.

A. SOME THINGS SAUL COULD NOT DO.

1. *Saul could not save himself.*

If ever a man tried to win salvation by works it was Saul, who tried zealously to save himself in the practice of his religion. He was able to say later (Ephesians 2:8), *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”*



2. *He could not silence his own conscience.*

All of the religious zeal and effort Paul exercised had not satisfied the inner hunger he had for knowing and serving God. Jesus said that Saul was finding it rough to ignore the spurs to his own inner conscience which he had received, in the words *“It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”* Are you finding it hard to resist the inner working of God’s conscience working on you?



That hunger is a universal one, felt by all rational persons. That inner hunger and longing can only find its fullest satisfaction when a person receives Jesus Christ into his life as Savior and Lord.

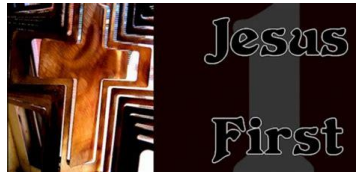
3. Saul could not rush the conversion experience or make it convenient for himself.

Time, praying, fasting, and obedience were involved. The Holy Spirit must do His work in each person's life through the process of conviction of personal sin, enlightenment about an adequate Savior, and regeneration or the new birth.



4. Saul could not serve God as he wanted to without first recognizing Jesus.

Saul tried hard to do this, but he found that to serve God he had to have to deal with Jesus. As the two on the road to Emmaus found out after the resurrection of Jesus, when they discovered who it was that walked with them on the road, it made a tremendous difference, causing them to return immediately to Jerusalem.



There are people today trying to serve the Lord without first acknowledging Jesus. They are trying to live righteously without the Lord's help. If they were honest with themselves, they would see that they are failing desperately.

**B. SOME THINGS SAUL DID . . . WE CAN TOO . . .
IF WE ARE WILLING**

1. Recognize Jesus as Lord.

Many people have accepted Jesus as Savior, but have never claimed him or yielded to him as Lord, and there is a tremendous difference. He must be accepted as the absolute sovereign of life if we are to serve him.

**Accept
JESUS CHRIST
As LORD
And Savior**

2. Surrender our lives to His will and stop resisting.

Saul may have felt the pull of Jesus before without surrendering, but God brought Him to a point of surrender.



3. Stand up and go seek the fellowship of others.

There was something left for Saul to do. Grace had been visited upon him. He needed to stand up and be obedient to what the Lord told him to do. After that, he met with the other believers in Damascus, followed his decision with baptism, entered into the fellowship, and worshipped with them.



We need to stand up and stand with other believers.

4. Prayerfully and sacrificially seek God's way.

Saul prayerfully sought the will of God. When he found it, he whole heartedly committed all he had to ministering in Christ's name.



5. *Work with others to spread the gospel.*

Saul worked with Ananias and the other believers at Damascus, and continued to proclaim Christ as long as he lived.



It is inconceivable that we could claim discipleship with Christ and be unwilling to work with other believers.

6. *Be prepared to accept the consequences of service for Christ.*

Then and now, it may lead one into persecution and even death. Saul found that out in verse 23 as he was persecuted by those he once ministered with. This was the experience of Paul and in some measure it will be the experience of anyone who is a disciple of Jesus.



Saul asked these two inseparable questions, ***“Who are You, Lord?”*** and ***“Lord, what do You want me to do?”***

Have you answered those questions for yourself? Jesus said in Luke 6:46, ***“But why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?”***



Who art thou, Lord?
Lord, what wilt thou
have me to do?

What are you doing for Christ?



There was a school headmaster that wanted the band to play before the school one day. The bandmaster did not feel they were ready but felt they had practiced enough that they would not do such a bad job.

When the day came for their performance, he told them, “If you don’t feel sure about your part, just pretend to play.” The bandmaster tapped his podium and brought down the baton to begin in a dramatic motion. At that very moment, the band stood at attention, but not one sound came out – they were silent.

It seems as if the church gathers each week to worship, pray, and learn more about the Christian faith and how to live it. But when it comes time for us to do something, the only thing we hear is the loud noise of silence.



Could it be we have professed Christ with our lips and not given ourselves first unto the Lord?

Once we have given ourselves first unto the Lord, grant us courage to ask God to give us a task to do – and then go do it!

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Outline from Sermon Preached by Ray K. Hodge

² Micky’s Funnies, A Hearing Funny, Nov. 17, 2023