

Easter 3
April 18, 2010

Acts 9:1-19
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Face to Face With the Risen Lord Jesus

- I. Confronted with our sin.
- II. Freely forgiven.
- III. Called to a new life.

Dear Christian friends,

Can you remember your conversion – **that time** when God changed you from an unbeliever into a Christian? MY GUESS is that most of us can't. It happened back when we were **baptized as babies**. Even if you can remember your conversion I doubt if it was as DRAMATIC or as MEMORABLE as Paul's here on the road to Damascus.

We may not remember our conversions but they do measure up to Paul's here. **So let's take a closer look** at Paul's conversion to better understand and **appreciate** our own conversions. **In his conversion** Paul was – simply put – FACE TO FACE WITH THE RISEN LORD JESUS. In conversion – in that FACE TO FACE meeting with the **risen** Lord Jesus – we are 1)confronted with our sin – we are 2)freely forgiven and we are 3)called to a **new life**.

I. Confronted with our sin.

There's something to note about Paul BEFORE he had his **face to face meeting** with the risen Lord Jesus. Paul was a VERY DEVOUT and sincere person. Paul took his faith seriously and he tried to live it daily. Paul was dead wrong in his faith but in HIS OWN MIND **Paul thought** he was right. Paul thought everything was ALL RIGHT between him and God. Paul thought God was "**well pleased**" with him!

What can we learn here from Paul? WHAT WE THINK is nowhere near as important as WHAT GOD SAYS. **What God says** overrides anything we may **think** or **feel**. I MAY THINK there are no real problems in **my relationship** with God but IF GOD SAYS there are –there are!

Paul saw his life's calling as **wiping out** Christians. Paul had been actively involved in the murder of Stephen – the **first martyr**. Paul "**was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples**" and they weren't EMPTY threats. Paul later admits, "***I was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus. And that is just what I did. I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished.***"

It was now time for Paul to meet the risen Lord Jesus FACE TO FACE. He was finishing the 130 mile – 5 or 6 day trip – to Damascus. He was approaching the city - it's "**about noon**" - when "**suddenly**" and TOTALLY UNEXPECTEDLY "**a light from heaven, brighter than the sun flashed around Paul.**" Paul's travelling companions also saw the bright light. **With Paul** they fall to the ground. They hear noise but they don't understand what's being said.

Paul was having a VERY PERSONAL – one on one – FACE to face meeting with the risen Lord Jesus. AT FIRST Paul didn't know who he was talking to. Whoever He was He was obviously more powerful and **more important** than Paul. He's also obviously not pleased with Paul. "**Who are You, Lord?**" Paul humbly and respectfully asks. Then came the answer Paul was probably NEVER EXPECTING to hear. "**I am Jesus.**"

Put yourself in Paul's shoes. Do you feel your heart sinking – your stomach knotting up? With that **“bright light from heaven flashing”** around you you are ON THE SPOT. There's no escaping – no hiding – no denying – no **excuses**. Jesus isn't there to talk to you ABOUT OTHER people and their lives. It's you and Jesus FACE to face talking JUST ABOUT YOU and your life.

Just trying to picture this is UNCOMFORTABLE – face to face with the risen Lord Jesus confronted with our sin. Jesus calling your name, “**David, David, why** are you... – here fill in whatever the sin. **“Why** are you talking like that to your parents? **Why** are you grumbling and complaining about how I'm taking care of you? **Why** are you such a busy body who has to know everything about everybody? **Why** are you carrying a grudge against...?” We have our excuses – excuses we expect God to accept. “NOBODY'S perfect. Nobody got hurt. Everybody else is doing it. I made a MISTAKE. God will understand.” NO, we need to understand. Paul was guilty of DEFYING God and **God's will** for his life. With whatever our sins may be we are doing the same thing – **defying** God. Paul had no excuses God would accept. Paul knew he was GUILTY - knew he deserved to be punished. **Paul knew** God had every right to **send him** RIGHT THEN and there to hell forever. That's JUST AS TRUE for you and me.

The first step in our **conversion** – the first part of our **face to face** meeting with Jesus – is being confronted with our sin and guilt. The question then becomes, “WHAT NEXT?” For Paul it was a simple, **“Get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.”** What's next is UTTERLY AMAZING. Like Paul we are...

II. Freely forgiven.

Paul obediently **“got up”** but when he **“opened his eyes he could see nothing.”** His companions had to lead Paul **“by the hand into Damascus.”** Paul is HUMBLED – crushed. **“For three days he didn't eat or drink anything.”** Paul's no longer **“breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.”** Now he's **“praying.”**

God called a Christian named Ananias to go see Paul. Ananias is NOT SURE about this. He's heard plenty about Paul. But God said, “Go” and Ananias **went**. Following God's instructions Ananias **“placed his hands on Saul and 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. Get up and be baptized and wash your sins away.’”**

Do you see WHAT this is? GRACE – pure grace – totally undeserved love – God giving Paul the EXACT OPPOSITE of what he had coming. It's NOT God giving Paul a second chance. This is forgiveness FULL and FREE. Ananias greets Saul as a **“brother”** – a member of God's family.

That grace and forgiveness is ALL BECAUSE of Jesus – the very Jesus Paul had **so hated** and **despised**. Years later Paul wrote to Timothy, **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief.”** With the eyes of a **God-given faith** Paul now saw Jesus for who He REALLY IS – the very Son of God – the world's only Savior. With the eyes of faith Paul now saw Jesus as his greatest – PRICELESS – treasure. **Here in Jesus** and His perfect life Paul had the righteousness to **stand acceptable** in God's sight. **Here in Jesus** and His innocent death on the cross was the full payment – the **“atoning sacrifice”** – for all his sins. **Here in Jesus** and His shed blood was God's forgiveness for EVERY SINGLE ONE of his sins. **Here in Jesus** risen so gloriously from the dead was peace with God – a whole new relationship with God – here was eternal life in heaven. HOW BLIND he had been – but now he SAW – Jesus is everything!

“He got up and was baptized.” For most of us that was **where** we first met our risen Lord Jesus FACE to face. Our simple baptism may seem SO BORING **compared** to what happened here to Paul. But don't be fooled! In this precious washing ***“of water and the Word”*** the risen Lord Jesus came into our hearts and lives – He washed away all our sins – clothed us with His perfect life – made us children of God – promised us eternal life in heaven. Here at the font the risen Lord Jesus said to you and me, ***“Fear not! I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are Mine!”*** WHAT GRACE! What a SAVIOR!

NOW that we are Christians – we are...

III. Called to a new life.

Paul was now a Christian. NOTICE the different ways we Christians are described here. We're ***“the Lord's disciples.”*** A ***“disciple”*** is a student. We don't know everything – we don't have all the answers. We need Jesus to TEACH and GUIDE us. There are no PART-TIME ***“disciples.”*** Every day for the rest of our lives we are to grow in our faith.

Christians are people ***“who belong to the Way.”*** Christianity is a whole new way – a totally different – WAY OF LIFE. **As Christians** our morals and values – our priorities in life – are **totally different** from the unbeliever. Our lives are no longer ALL ABOUT US but all about Jesus. Indeed, Jesus is ***“the Way”*** – the only way TO the Father and eternal life in heaven. **All other ways of living** ONLY LEAD us away from Jesus.

Christians are ***“God's saints.”*** The word saint means a holy person. Washed clean in Jesus' blood and clothed with Jesus own holy life God now sees us as SAINTS – holy people. **As saints** we are now called to GO OUT AND LIVE not like everybody else but as one of God's SAINTS.

Christians are those ***“who call on God's name.”*** We now find our comfort and **strength** – our help and hope in our God. We are COUNTING ON God to keep on forgiving us – to lead us through this life – to take care of us and work all things for our eternal good.

Christians are God's ***“chosen vessels.”*** Each one of us has a JOB in God's kingdom. We are not called to be SPECTATORS who watch others do all the work. **Each one** of us is called to be INVOLVED in servicing and sharing our risen Lord Jesus.

Paul was called to be God's apostle to the Gentiles. ***“This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name to the Gentiles.”*** The word carry literally means to **carry** a BURDEN – a **heavy load**. It wouldn't BE EASY for Paul to **bring Jesus** to others. God was upfront with Paul. ***“I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.”***

The **risen Lord Jesus** calls us to a NEW – but NOT EASY – life. That day after day battle with our sinful nature – that daily struggle to ***“deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus”*** instead of following the crowd – that's NOT EASY. Living in a world that can't stand our risen Savior – a world that ridicules our Christian morals and values – that's NOT EASY. Having the devil hounding us **every step** of the ways – that's NOT EASY. How we need to KEEP OUR EYES on our **risen Lord Jesus**. **Because of Jesus** we are forgiven – we have heaven as our home.

Paul never got over his FACE TO FACE meeting with our risen Lord Jesus. Later he wrote, ***“By the grace of God I am what I am.”*** God grant that we NEVER GET OVER our face to face meeting with Jesus. **God grant** that with Paul we joyfully say, ***“By the grace of God I am what I am.”*** Amen.