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**SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS****ACTS CHAPTER 9 – Part 3****HEAVENBOUND**  
**Acts 9:23-30**

***“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.”*** (Acts 9:3)

We have been examining the conversion experience of the man who called himself "The Chief of Sinners." There are three words that capture the story of Saul/Paul's conversion in Acts chapter nine: "Showdown", "Turnaround" and "Heavenbound."

We have all seen the "Before" and "After" pictures used in advertising, haven't we? The "Before" and "After" weight loss; the "Before" and "After" hair transplants; the "Before" and "After" facelifts, etc.

All of the "After" pictures have at least one thing in common: the persons in the pictures are changed -- they appear quite different from the photos taken before they use the service or the product advertised. Of course, that's the purpose of the advertisements.

In Acts chapter 9, we see the most obvious "Before" conversion and "After" conversion picture in the New Testament. Before Saul met Jesus Christ his conduct was murderous - he was Christianity's greatest human opponent. After he had come face to face with Jesus Christ, he became the greatest proponent Christianity had.

Before Saul's Damascus Road experience he hated Christians; after his Damascus Road experience he loved Christians; before his change he was known as Saul of Tarsus; after his change he was known as Paul a servant of Jesus Christ.

Certainly the "After" picture of this man is infinitely better than the "Before" picture. Those persons on TV who say they experience the slim figures, more hair, or a prettier face tell how it came about don't they? Well, Paul spent the remainder of his life demonstrating and declaring the change that took place in his life and the One Who changed him.

Right here in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts is where the transformation can be seen most clearly. There are three snapshots of Saul/Paul in this chapter. I have captioned them: "Showdown", "Turnaround" and "Heavenbound."

We have already considered his "Showdown" when he met Jesus Christ, his "Turnaround" and the drastic change that took place in his life, and now, let us look at the third snapshot: "Heavenbound." After his "Showdown" and "Turnaround" he was ever after "Heavenbound!"

It is interesting that during all of the transformation that is taking place in his life, recorded here in chapter 9, he asked only two questions: *"Who are you, Lord?"* And *"What do you want*

*me to do?"* And when Jesus answered him, he never looked back. He said, *"Forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* (Phil.3:13-14) And yet again he later wrote, *"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking onto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."* (Heb.12:2)

In this study let us look at some of the indicators that Saul was indeed "Heavenbound."

### **I. HE HAD A NEW ASSIGNMENT.**

*"Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."* (Acts 9:6)

*"He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."* (Acts 9:15)

"The risen Christ said to Paul, 'Go into the city, and you will be told what to do.' Up to this moment Paul had been doing what *he* liked, what *he* thought best, what *his* will dictated. From this time forward he would be told what to do. The Christian is a person who has ceased to do what he wants to do and who has begun to do what Christ wants him to do." (Wm. Barclay)

God told Ananias that Saul/Paul was going to be a special Envoy for the King of Kings. What a turn around! From leading a death squad to leading a life squad! He was going to have a ministry among Gentiles, Jews and even kings. His assignment was to bear the name of Jesus Christ.

***The peculiarity of the vessel.*** *"He is a chosen vessel..."*

He was a selected vessel and he was to carry in his vessel, that is his body, Jesus Christ, and pour out the sweet perfume of Christ wherever he went! Later, he wrote to Timothy about being *"A vessel unto honor, sanctified and fit for the Master's use."* (2 Timothy 2:21)

Spurgeon wrote, "Electing love chose a persecutor; almighty grace made him a penitent; the Holy Spirit made him a believer, and by divine authority he became a minister and an apostle. Grace works miracles." (Spurgeon's Devotional Bible, Oct.30)

***The proprietor of the vessel.*** *"He is a chosen vessel of Mine..."*

From day one of his conversion experience, Paul knew to Whom he belonged and he wrote to the Corinthian church, and to us, reminding us Whose we are: *"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."* (1 Cor. 6:19-20) Our "vessel" is also a "temple."

***The purpose of the vessel.*** *"to bear My name"*

Automobiles have the name of the manufacturer stamped on them: Chevrolet, Ford, Buick, etc. As they move along the highways they are advertisements of the company that made

them. We belong to God – He created us and then re-created us at the time of our new birth and as we move along the highways of life we are to be living advertisements for the Lord, bearing His name. His name is not emblazoned on our bodies but is to be evident in our lifestyles. We should be so Christlike that persons will say, “There is a Christian”; we should be so holy that persons will say, “He/she must be a Christian.” They will know that we bear the name of Christ.

There are those Christians who have His name on their lips - but their lives are a mess! They may be “blaring” His name verbally but they are not “bearing” His name visibly by the way they are living. May we live so that others will say of us what was said of Peter and John, *“They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”* (Acts 4:13)

Our bodies are the vessels of the Lord to be filled to overflowing by His fullness and spilling out the sweetness of Christ wherever we go! This was Paul's assignment and it is ours as well - to bear in this vessel, our bodies, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why we are left in this world after we are saved. Saul was not saved just to sit, soak and sour! Neither are we. When he was saved God had a new assignment for him.

## II. HE HAD NEW ASSAILANTS.

*“Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul.”* (Acts 9:23)

As a Heavenbound child of God, Saul/Paul had a new assignment and it wasn't long before he had an opportunity to practice his new assignment which resulted in hatred by those with whom he was formerly associated.

No doubt he was called a “turncoat”, “traitor”, etc. by those from whom he had disassociated himself. After his conversion to Christ, Saul was resented and rejected by his former Jewish compatriots. The antagonism of his former friends was real and severe. The hunter is now the hunted.

He wrote to the Corinthian church telling them that, *“Five times I received 39 stripes.”* (II Cor 11:24) That's 195 whip lashes! He goes on to tell us in the same chapter, that he was *“in perils of by my own countrymen”* -- that is, the Jews. (II Cor. 11:26)

The Jews viewed Saul as a major threat and they plotted to kill him. They blocked the city of Damascus trying to catch him but with the help of the believers there he was able to escape. *“And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.”* (Acts 9:24-25)

Here was one fellow who was really let down by his friends! Here was one preacher who was literally a basket case! This episode indicates the seriousness of the Jew's threats. Much of the time, wherever Paul went a harassment squad followed him. In town after town they hounded him. Read the accounts below:

### **Antioch**

*“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.” (Acts 13:45) “But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.” (Acts 13:50)*

### **Iconium**

*“And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe.” (Acts 14:5,6)*

### **Lystra**

*“Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” (Acts 14:19)*

### **Thessalonica**

*“This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” (Acts 17:3) “But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar...” (Acts 17:5) “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.” (Acts 17:10)*

### **Berea**

*“But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.” (Acts 17:13)*

### **Corinth**

*“When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” (Acts 18:12)*

Things were rough for Paul. Everywhere he went they fought him; everything he did they opposed. He may have become a little weary of it all and so one night the Lord paid him a visit. Listen to what Jesus said to him: *“Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” (Acts 18:9-11)*

You may have experienced some of what Paul experienced. You have experienced the pain of rejection from family, friends and foes, but remember that Jesus says to you and me also, *“I am with you.”* And in II Cor.12:9a the Lord said to him, *“My grace is sufficient for you.”* You will search in vain for one single word of complaint from the lips of Paul. On the contrary he said, *“Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (II Cor.12:9b)*

Paul did not have a defeated spirit. He said, *“None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24)*

Let us take courage from Paul's example of devotion and daring in an atmosphere, in our day, that is becoming ever more hostile to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### III. HE HAD NEW ASSISTANTS.

After Saul experienced his Showdown, Turnaround and began his Heavenbound journey, he immediately identified with the band of believers in Damascus. *"Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus."* (Acts 9:19) "Birds of a feather flock together."

That small band of believers in Damascus, led by Ananias, accepted Saul and encouraged him during his first days as a Christian. It was there that he first experienced brotherly love and a caring touch as Ananias placed his hands upon him and his sight was restored. It was there that he was baptized and began his Heavenbound journey and ministry. It was there that he preached his first sermon (v.20). The assistance that he received from the Christian community in Damascus was crucial to Saul. It is crucial to any new believer.

A church should be like a spiritual incubator where the newborn child of God feels accepted, loved, strengthened and protected. Every church should be a carrying place -- a place for the care and feeding of new babes in Christ! Saul found this among the Christians in Damascus.

How long Saul remained in Damascus after his conversion is not known. All we are told is that *"After many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket."* (Acts 9:23-25) He then traveled to Jerusalem.

Saul/Paul had been accepted and assisted by the Damascus disciples. I do not think that he ever forgot those first days as a Christian surrounded and assisted by the believers in Damascus. But when he arrived in Jerusalem, the disciples there were not as receptive of him, initially. *"And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple."* (Acts 9:26)

We should not be too hard on the Christians at Jerusalem because many of their friends and maybe even their families had been jailed or even killed under the leadership of Saul prior to his conversion. They had to have proof that this former murdering menace was now a genuine member of the family of God. And so we read that *"He was with them at Jerusalem coming in and going out."* (Acts 9:28) That is, he was going about his life, circulating among the church members and demonstrating that he was indeed a changed man. They probably held him at arms length, until – until good old Barnabas stepped up!

I love these following words: *"But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."* (Acts 9:27) The name "Barnabas" means, "Son of consolation." Barnabas was an encourager. Good old Barney!

Thank God for men and women who have the saintly characteristics that Ananias and Barnabas exhibited. I recently heard of a church in California that has what they call a

"Guardian Angel" program. Each new Christian is assigned a more mature member to see that he or she "makes it" through those early days in their Christian experience.

Guardian Angels were what Ananias and Barnabas were to Saul. Saul's new associations did not fail him or the Lord! Every new child of God needs to find companions, confirmation, and comfort in Christ's crowd.

**Illustration:** Years ago a lonely traveler stopped one Sunday morning for the worship service at the Andersonville Methodist church in Georgia. After the service he was warmly greeted by the people. He was never seen there again.

Years later, in Washington, New Jersey, Robert V. Brown, age 90, died. Someone commented, "He was a thrifty man who kept to himself." Mr. Brown bequeathed a part of his estate to the Andersonville Methodist Church. He left them 2,100 shares of American Telephone and Telegraph Company stock and 740 shares of Continental Can Company stock. At the time of his death, Mr. Brown's gift was worth approximately \$1 million.

Mr. Brown's attorney, informed the church of his client's bequest as follows: "My client told me that on a Sunday morning years ago, when he was traveling through Georgia, he felt very sad and lonely. He stopped at your church. A friendly welcome was accorded him. He never forgot the kindness you showed him. He did not have any church affiliation at the time and said, "I want to give a gift to that little church." How surprised the Pastor, Rev. W. J. Stanford, and the members of the Andersonville Methodist church were!

Every member of every church should consider themselves members of the Welcoming Committee for every visitor who comes. All who are Heavenbound should encourage their fellow travelers.

### SUMMATION

Most of chapter 9 is about Saul/Paul, but beginning with verse 32 and through the end of the chapter Peter reappears on the scene. In verses 32-43 he is featured as he:

- Travels to Lydda where he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. Peter was the human instrument God used to heal him resulting in many turning to Christ. (Acts 9:32-35)
- Peter then went to Joppa, where, by the power of God, he raised a lady named Dorcas from the dead, resulting in many of the townsfolk coming to the Lord. (Acts 9:36-42)
- The chapter closes with Peter taking a vacation down by the sea-side in the home of Simon, a tanner. (Acts 9:43)

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