



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 9:1-9

"The Conversion of Paul"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Tonight our subject in the continuation of our study in the life and ministry of Paul is the conversion of Paul, and so we are turning to one of the accounts in the Book of the Acts, Acts chapter 9, and reading verse 1 through 9. So turn with me to chapter 9, and will you listen as I read verses 1 through 9.

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were

opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

Outside of our Lord's ministry, the most important event in the history of Christianity is Paul's conversion, in the opinion of many. It is surprising really to realize that more space is devoted to it than any other event in the New Testament, except the passion of our Lord, and so one can see the importance of it. The cruciality of the event is seen also in the fact that humanly speaking, in the life of the apostle as he was persecuting the early church, something must be done about this man Saul, who was the chief of the Jewish Gestapo.

He is the individual of whom we read in chapter 8, verse 3, "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." In chapter 22, in verse 19, in one of his other accounts of his conversion, he makes this comment about his preceding ministry, 22:19, "And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee." And in chapter 26 and verse 10, in the third of the accounts of his conversion testimony he said, "Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them." So humanly speaking something must be done about the Apostle Paul.

And then also the cruciality of the apostle's conversion is seen in the fact that it is by means of this conversion that the apostle is prepared for the universal proclamation of the gospel. No one was prepared more significantly for the work that he was to do than the Apostle Paul. By heredity he was a man who was acquainted with Judaism, and a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and therefore had an acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures that no doubt was remarkable. He said he advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries, and so he had that going for him. And also

his environment made it very suitable for him in that while he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he lived in the Hellenistic world. He was from Tarsus and Cilicia, and so he had the advantage of heredity and environment and also language. Because he would be acquainted with Mishnaic Hebrew, the Hebrew of the land, Aramaic because of his acquaintance with Judaism, but living in Tarsus he was acquainted with Greek and possibly even knew Latin, because it would be not uncommon at all for a man like Paul to know all of these languages. And so we can understand then how beautifully and wonderfully he was prepared by the Lord for the work that he was to do.

Someone has said there are two ways to deal with an enemy, one is to eliminate them. That's what Stalin and others did with Trotsky, for he represented an enemy to the Communism that they wanted to survive in Russian. And the other is win over your enemy and God, in this case, chose the latter alternative, and determined that through the magnificent sovereign grace he would win over the Apostle Paul and make him a chosen vessel for the ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles. The biblical description of the conversion is given in verses 1 through 9, the verses that we have just read, and in these verses the question, "How did it happen?" is answered.

The news of the gospel had enraged the Apostle Paul. He was a man who took it upon himself to be the leader in the persecution of the Christians. He stood by, he said, when Stephen was stoned to death. Perhaps, as we mentioned in our last study, he was in the synagogues of the Hellenists and heard Stephen debate. He may have even debated with him, and no doubt was bested in the debate because as is stated in Acts chapter 8 they were unable to answer Stephen in the debates that he engaged in in the Hellenistic synagogue. And so, the apostle was still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Determining to do something about them he went to the high priest and desired of him, "Let us to Damascus and to the synagogue, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

It's very interesting that he describes the Christians as those who were of this way. Notice the second verse, "any of this way." That expression, "the way," was one of the characteristic terms that was used to describe Christianity. And it's a witness to two things. First of all, that Christianity is the only road to God, "of this way." We think immediately of the familiar verse in John 14 where the Lord Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Or we think perhaps of Proverbs chapter 14 in verse 12 where the writer gives us the Proverb that reads like this. It's a very familiar one, I'm sure you've heard it. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death." So Christians were "of this way."

I've more than once mentioned an experience I had many years ago with a business man in this city. He was a person who was converted really through an illustration that was given in a message about twenty-five years ago. And he had a lot of friends. He had just retired. He would go down still on the days of the week and have a cup of coffee with his friends that he had worked with for a long time. And the spiritual condition of his friends became quite a burden to him, and so finally he determined he was going to do something about it. And particularly one man was on his heart, he told me afterwards. And when the morning came for him to go down, he had made up his mind he was going to say something to this friend of his about Christianity and what had happened to him. He said, "I walked in the office and I was so burdened and so really nervous about what I was going to do that I walked right past the secretary." He said, "I usually stopped with the secretary and asked her if my friend was in, and this time I was just so concerned I walked right by the secretary. I burst into the office of the man, and I went over and I sat down by his desk." And he said, "Joe," whatever his name was, I've forgotten. He said, "Joe, I want you to know I'm going another way." And that was the way he expressed his conversion. And really, it's a beautiful way to express it, because that's what really happens to a person who becomes a Christian. He begins to go another way.

So the apostle took letters to Damascus so that if he found any of the way he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus." Damascus was one hundred and forty of one hundred and fifty miles from the city of Jerusalem. It was a journey that took in those days five or six days, and so the apostle was on the road for some time. The Damascus gate, he had gone out of the city of Jerusalem with the temple police and it's likely that he came right by Calvary, because it was there at the Damascus gate. It's even possible that as he went out he thought about the ministry of our Lord. In particular his crucifixion, because he had been told, no doubt often by some of those who were influence by the Christians, what they were making of the crucifixion of Christ. And as he went by, in his heart he probably thought, "You deceiver. We will see about those who are following you, and we will crush your movement." And with the letters to the synagogues in Damascus he fully intended to do that.

And then finally he came to the slopes of Hermon and looked down over where the city of Damascus was. It's a beautiful city in the midst of a valley with a lot of green around and called by someone, "A handful of pearls in a goblet of emerald." It was noon, he says later on, and the sun's rays were piercing like swords from heaven, when suddenly there shown round about him a light from heaven. One immediately, as you read this, puzzles over what exactly happened to the Apostle Paul. Was this lightning? Was this the light from heaven? Or was it simply light? Or was it perhaps the face of the glorified Savior? That is, the Lord himself came, and the brightness of his glory was so bright that it could only be described as the light, like the light of sun. There are some other things that are suggestive in the 26th chapter when the apostle again is describing this event. He says in verse 13, "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me." Notice he described it as above the brightness of the sun.

And then, of course, there is the incident of the transfiguration. In the earthly ministry of our Lord, when Peter, James, and John went up on Mount Hermon with him, and he was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as light. Well, it's possible that really what the apostle saw was simply the brightness that came from the face of our Lord Jesus Christ. We do read in passages like 2 Corinthians chapter 4, in verse 6 about the brightness of the face of the Son of God. In chapter 4, in verse 6 these words are found by Paul, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Well, whether this was lightening whether it was some bright light that shone from heaven, or whether it was simply the light from the face of the glorified Christ, we shall never know. But one thing we do know, it was a life transforming experience for the Apostle Paul.

Luther, in one of his table talks, describes something of a similar experience. He said that he was in the early days of his life he was on a road and in the midst of a tremendous storm, and there was a flash of lightening. And, as I remember, he fell over into a ditch by the side of the road and cried out, "Help, dear Ann, I will become a monk." And he traces part of his experience as an Augustinian monk to the fact that that particular experience came to him. Well, that's the light from heaven.

Now, we read in verse 4, "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul, you are not fighting a megalomaniac, but you are fighting the march of God through human history. "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" There was an old theologian who once said, "Saul was persecuting the body of Christ on earth, and the head complained from heaven." Notice that the Lord said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Now, actually the apostle was not persecuting our Lord, he might say. He could have said, "Lord, I'm not persecuting you. I'm persecuting them." Well, of course, so far as he was concerned that's what he was doing. He was persecuting them. But he

didn't realize that when he touched them, he was touching them. And of course, if you reflect about this for a moment, you can see that what our Lord is saying is that in persecuting them you are persecuting me. And the only way in which that can be true is by virtue of the union that exists between the Lord and his saints.

Now you know that one of the characteristic doctrines of the Apostle Paul is the union of the believer with saints. That is, when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we become united with him. We are filled with the Holy Spirit, indwelt permanently by him. And through this are united to the Lord himself. So to touch one of the saints is to touch that in which our Lord is most intimately interested. And it's been said that the Apostle's doctrine of union with Christ flows out of this word that the Lord spoke when he said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Yes, he was persecuting the body of Christ on earth, and the head of the body of Christ complained from heaven, "Why persecutest thou me?" The apostle replies, "Who art thou, Lord?" This is the question of an earnest inquirer after the knowledge of Christ. I think it expresses the fact that the apostle is willing to be taught, and so a tremendous transformation is already taking place within him.

Speaking philosophically, the apostle is at the point of regeneration. He's not yet come to a full understanding of his faith which will flow from it, but there is a transformation taking place within him. "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord answers and says, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." In chapter 28 he says, "I am Jesus the Nazarene." What an eruption in Paul's thinking. What a revolution. What an upheaval. The apostle could well have applied, "But Jesus, you died on the gallows months ago. You died in a poor and insignificant country, and world history strode over you." Well, Paul's going to learn, "No, it's not the world history strode over Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ is the one who strides over world history." "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

And then we read in verse 8, "And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus." Blind, defeated, as he says in other places captured or apprehended of Christ Jesus. You remember that expression in Philippians, "apprehended by the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, I think you can understand why the apostle believed in sovereign grace. Why he believed that a man goes contrary to the will of God until God, in sovereign grace, regenerates him so that he believes, transforming him from an enemy to a friend. The doctrine of reconciliation, the doctrine of justification, the doctrine of regeneration, all of those doctrines flow out naturally from this experience that the apostle had on the Damascus road, and the tremendous transformation that took place. A man so unwilling to listen to the things of the Lord has now become willing by virtue of the apprehension of the Lord God. I personally cannot doubt but that this is the source of the apostle's perceptive understanding of the sovereign grace of God. And then in a moment when he is told that he was a chosen vessel, and elect vessel, he will trace it all back to the love of God that issued in the first step toward the completion of the plan of God for him in divine election.

Now Luke says in this account of the conversion, "Saul arose from the earth," verse 8, "and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus." Blind, evidently he lost his sight for three days. I don't know if there was any connection with the three days in which our Lord was in the grave. Some have suggested there was, and that in a sense he enters into an experience that is similar to the death of our Lord, and in the apostle's theology, you know, he makes a great deal over the fact that in the union that we have with Christ, we are united with him in his death, in his burial, and in his resurrection. And it illustrates the fact the apostle did enter into an experience that was somewhat similar to it. Have you ever wondered what happened to the letters that he had to the high priests? One of the commentators, G. Campbell Morgan says that when he gets to heaven he's very interested to find out what

those letters did contain, but nothing further is said about them. He had letters to Damascus to the synagogue, but they are forgotten. So three days without sight. No doubt the apostle was trying to take stock, finding the balance of things, so to speak. And trying to organize this experience into the things that had dominated him previously, for this was a tremendous transformation in the life of this most unusual man.

Now, that's the general account, and later on we will in our studies deal with chapter 22 and chapter 26 a bit, and so we'll stop at this point. And what I'd like to do now is to answer the question, what was Paul's conversion, try to interpret it. Skeptics have had a field day in trying to explain away the conversion of the Apostle Paul. Some time ago I saw a cartoon in the *Wall Street Journal* in which a business man evidently, he looks very much like he's the boss, and one of his employees has come in with some paper in hand, and he's obviously trying to show him the meaning of something. And the boss is saying, "Don't try to explain it. I'm having enough trouble understanding it." Well, that's the way many have poured over these passages here. It's difficult to understand what happened, but when we listen to the explanation of the experts, we become even more confused often.

I think of the some of the theories that have been posited or posed about Paul's conversion. For example, it has been said it was all a fraud. That the apostle had no motive, he had everything, and therefore it was just a fraud. The rationalists have another theory. That is, it was a hallucination caused by a clap of thunder and a flash of lightening. The apostle, of course, is no weakling. He was not subject to nervous disorders, so far as we know. Philip Schaff once said, "If this was caused by flash of lightening and a clap of thunder, it's a strange thing that the clap of thunder speaks in Hebrew." [Laughter] Well, that's true of course, and that kind of theory only illustrates the fact that the theorists needs to study the account a little more subject to the divine will. It has been said that what we have here really is some kind of subjective vision theory. That is, the apostle had growing thoughts and doubts that led to the figure of

Christ rising before his mind. That's very much like a vision. He had been so concerned about these things, and deep down within he had been struggling, Jesus said to him, "It's hard for thee to kick against the pricks." And so evidently the apostle's been struggling a bit with the questions, but he's so one-sided in his attempt to persecute the Lord that he's overriding the doubts that have arisen in his mind, but suddenly there arises before the mind of the apostle this vision.

Now, of course, you'll notice as you read the accounts, the apostle stresses the suddenness of this that happened to him. So, so far as he was concerned he did not feel any long growing concern over the things that he was concerned with. The real reason, generally speaking, that men do not like to believe what Luke has written us about the conversion of Paul is they're anti-supernaturalism. They do not like to think that it is possible for God to intervene in our human history, as it's clear this account suggests that he did. In my opinion, it all goes back to objections like Matthew Arnold's who said, "Miracles just don't happen." And so, the anti-supernaturalism that is so characteristic of New Testament scholarship and biblical scholarship, of course, cannot deal with this experience that the apostle had. If we believe that it's impossible for something supernatural to happen, we cannot believe in the miracles. We cannot believe in the conversion of Paul. We cannot believe, really, in the resurrection of Christ. We just cannot believe in the Bible. In fact, we cannot even believe in the creation. So it's remarkable that people even bother to read the Bible, or even are concerned about the Bible if they cannot accept the supernatural.

Most of the orthodox have believed that what happened to the apostle was a supernatural objective and subjective vision. That is, it seems that the external appearance of the glory, the bright glory that the apostle saw is the vehicle of an inward revelation that came to him. Now, of course, they stress the fact that this was a genuine internal revelation that came to him. And he heard the words. We read here in verse 17, for example, "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his

hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." So the Lord Jesus truly appeared to him. In Acts chapter 22, in verse 14, the apostle writes these words, "And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth." So the apostle really heard the words of our Lord. In chapter 26, in verse 19, in the third account, he says, "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." So it was a vision, but at the same time he heard the words of our Lord, and the Lord Jesus truly appeared to him.

So I rather think that it was an external appearance. He heard words from the Lord Jesus, but at the same time this was a vehicle of God speaking to him in his inner man. It was a revolutionary experience for him, of course.

Now, let me in the remaining few moments, ask a further question. What are the theological implications of his conversion? What did it mean? Well, first of all, it meant that the apostle was an object of divine election. Look at the 15th verse of Acts chapter 9, "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." So, the first thing that apostle learns from this is that he's the object of the divine election. Is that fair? Why should the apostle be the object of divine election? Why should Paul be the one to have this magnificent experience? Why should not I? Why should I be born in the 20th century and live in the 20th century? Why shouldn't I be born in the 1st century and live in the century in which the Lord Jesus lived? Why shouldn't I have had that experience on the Damascus Road? Why shouldn't I be the minister of the gospel to the Gentiles, to bear the name of Christ before kings and before the children of Israel? That's discrimination. It's discrimination for God to select Paul when he had just as good an opportunity to select me. And mind you, he didn't select Paul, because of what was in Paul. Oh, I'm willing to grant that if this goes by merit, well then I don't deserve to have

any part in this at all. But the Scriptures say that he doesn't choose on the basis of merit, that he chooses on the basis of grace. So, why shouldn't he choose me?

The more I think about this, the more unfair it seems to me. The more unhappy I am with sovereign grace, that he should select him and not select me. Is that the way you feel? Well, probably you never thought of it before, or if you have thought of it before you dismissed it as foolish talk. You see, there are so many ways in which we might accuse God of being unfair. We like to pick on certain things like, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." Ah, there, there is unfairness for you. But actually, if you'll look at the experiences of life, almost all of the things that touch our lives might be called unfair. Why should he save me? Why should he not save someone else? Why should he not pass by my? There's nothing in me that would cause him to choose me. He says so. It's not by works of righteousness that I have done that I am saved. He called me not according to my works, but according to his own purpose and grace, given us in the Christ Jesus before eternal times. You see God deals in discriminating grace. Or put it another way, it's a little softer but it means the same thing, he deals in distinguishing grace. We cannot explain that.

I'm teaching right at the moment sin and salvation at Trinity Seminary. And you should have heard the discussions last week, because I'm on the subject of unconditional election. Amazing, some of the students even get a little angry. You can just see them. [Laughter] It's amazing. They calm down a little bit, not completely calmed down yet. Calm down a great deal when you start talking about the many ways in which there is discrimination and distinguishing grace in our experience. It's just a fact of life. And of course, the happiness of the Christian life comes when we realize the wonderful grace manifested toward us, and when we realize that there is not one thing in us that is the cause of that. It is traceable purely to the sovereign love of God. And as I've said so often, and as others have said here too, anyone who's ever been in love knows that love is sovereign. You don't say, "I think I will fall in her because, number one, she's pretty.

Number two, she can cook. Number three, she's got money. [Laughter] Oh wait, let's turn that around. Because number one, she's got money." [Laughter] No, we don't do that. We say, "Well she's met all of my requirements, and I think I'll fall in love with her and marry her." Well, there are people who do that.

Preachers, I used to watch them at theological seminary, and still do. They look at it a little differently. Number one, she can play the piano. [Laughter] Number two, her father is a minister, and therefore she will understand ministry. And number three, she knows a little bit about the Bible. And number four, being a preacher's daughter; she knows what it is to go without. And things like this, and of course, if they marry on those bases they think everything is going to be fine. But they will discover that that really won't do it.

The apostle learned right at the beginning, if he did not know it before, the doctrine of the sovereign election of God. And he never forgot it. It was, in his theology, the fundamental ground of all of his doctrine. Now, if you ask Paul why God chose he would say, "Because he loved." There is no other explanation. In the Old Testament that's what God said to Israel. He said, "I didn't choose you because you were more in number than others or for any other reason. But I chose you because I loved you." And if someone should say, "Why did you love them?" He would have to reply, "Because I love them." The Bible doesn't say anything beyond that. So Paul learned that.

He learned, of course, secondly, that Jesus was the conqueror of death, because when Jesus spoke to him and said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The apostle realized he had made a terrible mistake about Jesus Christ, for he had no idea that Jesus Christ had really come from the grave in glorified form. But this was the convincing experience that shattered all of his false ideas about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he passed the place, the Damascus gate, and left the city, and looked over at Calvary, as I said, he might have shaken his hands at the image of our Lord hanging there and thinking about the tomb in which he was supposed

to have been laying, he might have thought about him as only a dead person, but here he learns that the Lord Jesus is the conqueror of death.

He learns, of course, too that all of the claims that he had made are true claims, and he had claimed to be the Messiah. His followers called him Jesus the Messiah. And so he learns that Jesus is the Messiah. And he learns, too, that his followers are vindicated. And furthermore, in the fact that he was crucified by Israel the nation and by the Gentiles, he learns from this that God himself has condemned the nation for the crime of the Lord Jesus Christ's death. He learned, also, I think as he thought about it, but he must have thought about this a bit, that the Lord Jesus died vicariously, because you see, identified with his death is the text in the Old Testament that says that the person who hangs on a cross is cursed. "Cursed is every one who hangs upon the tree."

Well, Jesus of Nazareth then died under a curse, but yet he's the Messiah and the risen Lord. Well, he obviously didn't die for his own sin. He didn't die because he himself was cursed. The curse which was involved in his death must be the curse that is related to others. And since the apostle now has come to see how wrong he was. It was easy for him to understand that Jesus died as a substitute. It naturally flowed from the experience on the Damascus Road. He was a substitute, and of course, dying as a substitute, he came to understand all of the truth concerning the atonement that he so fully expresses in his epistles. And that substitutionary death is at the foundation of all of his doctrine of the atonement. No potential substitution, no conditional substitution, but a true bearing of the penalty of sin for those for whom he died completely.

And of course, he had a deep sense of the unspeakable grace of God. He learns something different about God. God is no angry God sitting upon a rainbow, as Luther spoke about the idea of God that he had before he was convicted and converted. But he learns that God is a lavish giver. And to put in Paul's own words in 1 Timothy chapter 1, and verse 16, this is what he said, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should

hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." And so the apostle came to a deep sense of the unspeakable grace of God, manifested in what had happened to him.

Helmut Thielicke, the great German theologian once said something that has impressed me greatly. I have said it many times through the years, but every time I look at it, I cannot help but say in my own spirit an amen to it. Telika says, "And I make bold to that even the most orthodox churchman will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless he's continually surprised by the mercy that has been shown to him." That's a good word for preachers, "continually surprised by the mercy that has been shown to him." I got a letter, which I read just a little bit before this, accusing me of sin and pride. This fellow has listened to a lot of my tapes and he says; I don't doubt he's probably right, but he said that "Your messages reveal an unveiled pride, self-approval, and self-authentication, uncomely for one knowingly the recipient of God's grace." Well of course, I'm sorry that I've given him that impression. And I can only say that so far as I'm concerned, I can only think of the unspeakable grace of God shown to me in my salvation.

I think also the apostle had a clear view of the inadequacy of religion from this experience. Enter Christ and exit religion. Many years ago when they used to put titles of sermons in the paper, I put a title in the paper "Enter Jesus, Exit Religion." It came out in the paper, "Enter Jesus, Exist Religion." I guess the fellow who looked at the title must have thought it was a misprint. "Enter Jesus, Exit Religion," that couldn't possibly be true, must be "Exist Religion." Typographical error, that's the way it appeared in the Dallas paper. Well, it's still just the other way around. When the Lord comes in view, religion goes out. That was the *Dallas Morning News* in case you want to know what lovely paper it was found in, [Laughter] but not the present religion editor.

And one final thing, the apostle had from this experience, a solemn sense of divine call to service. The Lord had said, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." He had

formally tried to win everything for Moses, but now it's everything for Christ. As Keble says, "As to Thy last apostle's heart, Thy lightening glance did then impart, zeal's never dying fire." So the apostle came to understand that Jesus Christ was not simply a dead fact of ancient history, but he was a risen living Messiah. And this same risen living Messiah is the one with whom we may have experience today. You know, I think we Christians are missing so much by not seeking, by the grace of God, to have this experience of a risen, living Messiah, with whom we may pass our hours of every day. If I had one thing that I would want for my life, it would be that I might know more deeply what it is to have that experience of personal communion with him, moment by moment.

The soldiers were there, too. They heard the noise, it said. They didn't hear the sounds, they heard the noise. All they received were some bruises when they fell on the ground. So in the midst of some of the great things that happened we sometimes are so blind, so deaf, so hard, so indifferent, so much like rocks that we are unresponsive to what is really happening. May the Lord give us tremendous desire to know personally the communion with Jesus Christ that the living Savior desires to give us. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for this experience of the Apostle Paul, and we know what a tremendous thing it meant to him and to his life and ministry, and what it has meant to us, because he has brought this testimony to us. And Oh God, we do pray for each one of us in this auditorium. Motivate us and empower us to have a deeper relationship with Thee. Lord, give us something of the experience of the communion that the apostle enjoyed. Work by means of the word of God and the Holy Spirit this desire. And may, Lord, Thy hand be upon us that we, too, may serve Thee as chosen vessels. For that is what we all are, chosen...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**