

Moments *for* You

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The Apostle Paul



WHO WAS SAUL (PAUL)?

Saul was born in Tarsus around AD 1-5 in the southeastern corner of modern day Tarsus, Turkey. He was of Benjamite lineage and Hebrew ancestry. His parents were Pharisees—fervent Jewish nationalists who adhered strictly to the Law of Moses—who sought to protect their children from “contamination” of the Gentiles. Anything Greek was despised in Saul’s household, yet he could speak Greek and passable Latin. His household spoke Aramaic, a derivative of Hebrew, which was the official language of Judea. Saul’s family were Roman citizens but viewed Jerusalem as a sacred and holy city.

At age thirteen Saul was sent to Israel to learn from a rabbi named Gamaliel, under whom Saul mastered Jewish history, the Psalms, and the works of the prophets. His education would continue for five or six years, and then Saul went on to become a lawyer. All signs point to his becoming a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court of 71 men who ruled over Jewish life and religion. Saul was zealous for his faith, and was not one to compromise. Saul was present for the death of Stephen, and he held the garments of those who did the stoning (Acts 7:58). Saul became ruthless in his pursuit of Christians as he believed he was doing it in the name of God.

The pivotal passage in Paul’s story is Acts 9:1-22, which recounts Paul’s meeting with Jesus Christ on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. On the road Saul was caught up in a bright light from heaven which caused him to fall face down on the ground. He

heard the words, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” He says, “Who art Thou, Lord?” Jesus answers directly and clearly, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (vv. 4-5).

From this moment on, Saul’s life was turned upside down. He became known as Paul (Acts 13:9), spent time in Arabia, Damascus, Jerusalem, Syria, and his native Cilicia. Barnabas enlisted his help to teach those in the church in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Paul took his first of three missionary journeys in the late 40’s AD. He also wrote many of the New Testament books, including Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

The Apostle Paul spent his life proclaiming the risen Christ Jesus throughout the Roman world, often at great personal peril (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). It is assumed that Paul died a martyr’s death in the mid-to-late 60’s AD in Rome.

What can we learn from the life of the Apostle Paul? First, we learn that God can save anyone. The remarkable story of Paul repeats itself every day as sinful, broken people all over the world are transformed by God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ. Every person matters to God, from the “good, decent” average person to the “wicked, evil” criminal. Only God can save a soul from hell.

We also learn what God can do when we surrender completely to Him. Paul was fully “sold-out” for God. “The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12). Paul was in prison when

he wrote these words, yet he was still praising God and sharing the good news. Through his hardships and suffering, Paul knew the outcome of a life well lived for Christ. He had surrendered his life fully, trusting God for everything. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Can we make the same claim?

—Adapted from GotQuestions.org

THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

What made Saul of Tarsus the chief of sinners? Was he immoral or lawless, a wicked man who was an outcast from society? On the contrary, he testifies that he was unequalled among men when it comes to morality. “If any other man ... might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:4-6). If you’re looking for a “good person,” Saul was your man; he was born to the “right people,” educated in the “right way,” and pursued religion with all his heart. If anyone could hope to find favor with God by following the rules, it was Saul.

But look at the dreadful will and malignant opposition with which he set himself against the purpose and mind of God. Hear his own account of it: “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth ... many of the saints did I shut up in prison ... and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:9-11) Who could imagine hatred of God and His Christ more desperate than this?

How do we suppose God must deal with a wretch like Saul, who is daily found breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of Jesus? We might assume that Almighty power would wield the sword of Divine vengeance and justice to remove such an one from the earth.

But how different from all our thoughts was His blessed way with poor Saul. God will stop him, not with the sword, but with glory! At mid-day, when the sun is brightest, Saul is arrested by that which is brighter still. What a sight! In that moment, Saul was awakened, arrested, and addressed by the Lord Jesus Himself.

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” That very One—who had been on the cross, under judgment because of man’s sin, now risen up from among the dead, and received up into glory—He it is who commands the rays of glory to fall upon the persecutor’s path. He it is who draws nigh to him, speaks to him, comes not to hurl him into the bottomless pit, but to take him up in the riches of grace and mercy, to give him forgiveness, righteousness, and glory.

Such is the way of His grace now, even to the vilest sinner. Christ has died for sin, and by His death righteousness has been established. Salvation is available for all who will receive Jesus Christ by faith. If the “chief of sinners” has been rescued and redeemed by God’s amazing grace, the way is open for all!

—W. T. T., adapted.

WHAT WILT THOU HAVE ME TO DO?

“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6).

Never was there a man who up to that moment felt less need of asking such a question. Never was there a man whose path was plainer before him. Never a man more sure of his purpose and his goal in life or more determined to reach it. And yet this man asked the question: *“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”*

From his youth up he had been devoted to the study and the maintenance of the religion of Israel. In the Christian Gospel he saw only a blasphemous assault on the faith of the fathers, and in Jesus a wicked impostor. But now came the great question and the great change. As he drew near to the city of Damascus, suddenly a bright light shone from heaven, a light so bright that it blinded him, and the fierce persecutor fell helpless to the ground.

As he lay there he heard a voice which said, *“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?”* (Acts 9:4). The astonished Saul replied, *“Who art Thou, Lord?”* (Acts 9:5). Then the voice said, *“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”* To this Saul answered, *“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”* Then he was told what he was to do.

He had been chosen to know the just One, to be a chosen vessel unto Christ and witness to His name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel, to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God that they might receive forgiveness of sins. He was also told that he was

to suffer great things for the sake of the name of Jesus.

All this was the direct opposite of what he had been doing. Never was a man turned more completely around. He was told to preach as the Son of God and Messiah the very Jesus whom he had reviled; to build up the church he had tried to destroy; to spread the Gospel that he detested; to plead with men to come to Christ, instead of imprisoning and slaying them for believing on Him. That was what Saul was now commanded to do. By the grace of God he did it.

WISDOM FOR LIFE'S PURPOSE

“What wilt Thou have me to do?”

This is an appropriate question for every Christian to ask. In our best moments all of us, I think, would like to do the will of God That is man's highest achievement. Even Jesus said that it was His *“meat ... to do the will of Him that sent Me”* (John 4:34).

Whatever work in life is chosen, and whatever calling someone follows, in that calling he or she can honor God and do good to his fellow man. For every one of us there is a particular work to do. On the front of the house on a hilltop in Pittsburgh, where astronomer John Brashear made his first telescopes, is this inscription: *“Somewhere beneath the stars is a work which you alone were meant to do. Never rest until you have found it.”*

DIRECTION IN LIFE'S CHOICES

“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” This is often asked by an earnest soul when facing some important choice or decision. No moral issue is involved, and yet it will have a profound influence upon the life. Take the question of marriage. With regard to this step in life the question is ever timely, and especially so today, when so many marriages falter and

fail. One of the reasons why they turn out that way is because the couples have not asked, “*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*”

STRENGTH IN LIFE’S TROUBLES

When confronted by some denial or frustration in life, the soul will sometimes say, “You have closed this door against me. Why is it so? *What is it that Thou wilt have me to do?*”

Paul must have asked this frequently. He had that thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7), perhaps a disease of the eyes, or some other painful and humiliating and hindering affliction. Three times he earnestly asked God to take this thorn from him. No doubt he wondered why God permitted such an affliction when he was so anxious to preach the Gospel. The prayer was not granted; the thorn was not plucked. But Paul learned that this thorn was God’s final will for him, and it became to him a source of strength. “When I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

The supreme illustration of doing God’s will is that of Jesus Himself. He not only taught us to pray, “Thy will be done,” but in the Garden of Gethsemane, in His sore agony when He knelt before His cup and prayed, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” He concluded His prayer by saying, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). So for you, too, it is possible to serve and glorify God by submitting to His will.

CORRECTION IN THE WRONG PATH

Before he was converted, Paul was on the wrong path and doing the wrong thing. The moment he knew he was wrong, Paul turned about, asked God which way to go, and when the way was made plain, took it immediately. When you find yourself on a wrong path and God

has made plain His way and His will to you, then there is only one thing to do, and that is to take that way and to take it at once.

Paul said that when he heard the voice of God, when he asked the question, “*What wilt Thou have me to do?*” and got the answer, he was “not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). But how many there are to whom God speaks His warning and shows His way, yet who are not obedient to that heaven-sent vision. Instead, they go on in the wrong path, a path which can only lead to sorrow and shame and misery.

There is one thing that stands out in all this record of Paul’s conversion, and that is how God earnestly wanted him to come to Christ. This was God’s will for Paul. It is God’s will for you and me, too. For God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). That is the will of God for you. Have you done that? Have you repented? Have you come to Christ?

Take this as your motto: “*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*” This will free you from the only thing in the future we have to fear—which is the fruit of not doing the will of God.

—Condensed from *The Greatest Questions of the Bible and of Life* by Clarence E. Macartney.

A NEW MAN

“*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What wonderful contrasts there are between the character of Saul of Tarsus and that of Paul the Apostle. He is the same man, and yet he is not the same.

FROM PERSECUTION TO PRAYER

First you will find that Saul, who went out to persecute, remained to

pray. The first verse reads, “Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). And in the eleventh verse occurs the remarkable expression, “Behold, he prayeth”! What has occurred? His face is turned upward to heaven, and the Spirit of God is at work in him.

Have any of us passed from fierceness to gentleness, from drunkenness to sobriety, from darkness to light, from blasphemy to worship? This is precisely the work that Christianity undertakes to do. The new life we receive by faith in Jesus Christ subdues our earthly nature and teaches us to clasp our hands in childlike plea and prayer at the Father’s feet.

FROM THREATENING TO PROVING

Take the second contrast, which is just as remarkable. When Saul was a Pharisee he threatened, but when he became a Christian we read that he proved. “Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ” (Acts 9:22).

As a Pharisee he said, “Destroy Christianity by destroying Christians. Bind them; open your prison doors, and I will fill your dungeons.” But having seen Jesus and felt His touch and entered into His Spirit, what does he say? Does he now say, “I have been persecuting the wrong people; now I find that it is you Jews, Pharisees, Saducees, that must be chained and put away”? Nothing of the kind.

What is his tone now? Standing with the scrolls open before him, he reasons and mightily contends; he becomes a powerful teacher of Christian truth, proving that Jesus is the Christ. Before he was converted, his method was rough and violent. But now he stands up with an argument as his only weapon.

How far is it from persecuting to praying? From threatening and slaughter to proving? That is the distance Christ took Saul, who only meant to go from Jerusalem to Damascus. In the same way, Jesus Christ meets us on the path of our own choice and graciously takes us on a way of His own. This Redeemer, who gave Himself, the Just for the unjust, who bought us with the blood of His own heart, does not seek to make a little difference in our attitudes and our purposes. His desire is for us to be born again, to be made new.

—Adapted from *The Ark of God* by Joseph Parker.

COME HELP US

“A vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia ... saying, Come ... help us” (Acts 16:9).

The events recorded in the sixteenth chapter of Acts have a particular interest for us, because this was the first time the Gospel got into Europe. The Apostle Paul had been going on with his work in Asia, but then he tries to go somewhere and is hindered (16:6). Then he tries to go in another direction but is hindered again (16:7). Then God sends Paul a vision of a man from Greece saying, “Come over, and help us.”

Well, the voyage is made, and the city of Philippi is reached. The next thing we read is: “A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple ... heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (16:14). I have no doubt that Lydia was an inquiring soul, one who knew herself a guilty sinner, but nothing she had ever heard up to that moment had met her soul’s need.

If you, beloved friend, have never met the Son of God the Savior—if

you do not personally know the Lord Jesus Christ—there is a want in your heart that nothing but God Himself can satisfy. Be sure of this: let people have anything they want in this life, but if they are without Christ, they are unsatisfied. The fact is that your heart is too big for the world to fill. Money will not fill it, and pleasure will not fill it. There is a need, a want, a void in the soul which is never met until Christ is known.

Such a void was in Lydia's heart, and with what gladness did she hear the glad tidings of the blessed Savior—His coming into the world, His life, His death, His resurrection, the joyful news of forgiveness, and pardon, and peace through His name! Her heart was opened, and she drank in the good news. She received the Gospel of Christ into her heart, and she received the servants of Christ into her home (16:15). She was not ashamed to take a stand for the Lord.

Why did God send Paul to Europe? To show the way of salvation, and Lydia was the first to find it. I think the heart of the Apostle Paul was exceedingly happy when he found himself under Lydia's roof. "Thank God," he could say, "for the first convert in Europe, and the work will now spread." And truly it did.

—Adapted from *Night Scenes of Scripture* by W. T. P. Wolston.

I AM READY

I think Paul might have used these words as his motto. All through his life, whatever happened to him, he was always ready. If he had to speak to crowds in the street, he had the fitting word; if to the elite upon Mars' hill, he was ready for the philosophers. If he talked to the Pharisees, he knew how to address them; when he was brought before the Sanhedrin

and perceived the Pharisaic and Sadducean elements in it, he knew how to avail himself of their mutual jealousies to help his own escape.

See him before Felix, before Festus, before Agrippa—he is always ready. When he came to stand before Nero, God was with him and delivered him out of the mouth of the lion. If you find him on board a ship, he is ready to comfort men in the storm. When he gets on shore as a shipwrecked prisoner, he is ready to gather sticks to help to make the fires. At all points he is always ready to go wherever his Master sends him and to do whatever his Lord appoints him.

READY TO WORK

"I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also" (Romans 1:15). He had preached the Gospel throughout a great part of Asia, he had crossed over into Europe, he had proclaimed the Word through Greece. But if ever an opportunity should occur for him to get to the capital of the world, whatever might be the danger to which he would be exposed, he was prepared to go.

He was ready to go anywhere for Jesus, anywhere to preach the Gospel, anywhere to win a soul, and anywhere to comfort the people of God. "I am ready." There was no place to which Paul was not ready to go. Are we as ready as Paul was to go anywhere for Jesus, or do we feel that we could only work for Christ where we are today? Oh, may God keep us always on tiptoe ready to move, and equally ready to stay where we are.

READY TO SUFFER

"I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). To some of us it has become a habit to be ready to preach the Gospel. But here was a man who was ready to suffer for the

name of the Lord Jesus—so ready that he could not be dissuaded from it.

Beloved friends, are we ready to be scoffed at, to be thought idiots, to be put down? Perhaps so. Are we ready, if we should be required to do so, to lose friends for Christ's sake? We have not come to the height of readiness until we are ready for whatever the will of God may appoint for us. Unreadiness is a relic of rebellion, for when we are fully sanctified, when every thought is brought into subjection to the mind of God, then the cry is not, "As I will," but "As Thou wilt."

READY TO DIE

"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Timothy 4:6). Paul was ready to die. Well might he be, for he could add, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

We who are active and have talents to use and health and strength with

which to use those talents must go on with "the greatest fight in the world" until we can say, "I have fought a good fight." We must go on running the Christian race until we can say, "I have finished my course." We must go on guarding the Word of God and holding fast the truth of God until we can say, "I have kept the faith."

To be ready, especially to be ready to die, removes all fear of death. If we are as ready as Paul was, all fear of death will be gone from us. And I think it takes away a thousand other problems if we are ready for service, ready for suffering, ready to die. Dear brother or sister, you would not be so ready to give up if you were ready for the Lord's work and the Lord's will.

And you who are ready to perish would get out of that sad kind of readiness if you came and trusted Christ and became ready to suffer or to do the Master's will. The Lord is ready to pardon; may we be ready to believe! Come at once to Him, accept salvation through Jesus Christ, and then through the rest of your life be ready to follow Him.

—C. H. Spurgeon, condensed.

PAUL'S "FAITHFUL SAYINGS"

THE SAVIOR OF SINNERS

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

—1 Timothy 1:15

THE BLESSING OF FAITHFULNESS

"It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us: If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself."

—2 Timothy 2:11-13

THE ETERNAL BENEFIT OF GODLINESS

"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation."

—1 Timothy 4:8,9

THE PROFIT OF A GOOD TESTIMONY

"This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men."

—Titus 3:8