

# The Conversion of Saint Paul

Hymns: 44, 498, 485, 421, 47

## The INTROIT

*P: They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament:*

**C: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.**

*P: Jesus said, Ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration:*

**C: when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones.**

*P: I will bless the Lord at all times:*

**C: His praise shall continually be in my mouth.**

## The COLLECT

O God, who through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul hast caused the light of Thy Gospel to shine to the Gentile world, give us grace ever to joy in the saving light of Thy Gospel and to spread it to the uttermost parts of the earth; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

## The EPISTLE

**Acts 9:1-22 (KJV)**

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.

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision,

**Ananias.**

And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him,

**Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.**

Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. 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: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.**

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. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.

Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

The GRADUAL

*P: He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:*

**C: and they glorified God in me.**

*P: By the grace of God I am what I am:*

**C: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain. Hallelujah!  
Hallelujah!**

*P: The Lord said unto Paul, thou art a chosen vessel unto Me:*

**C: to bear My name before the Gentiles. Hallelujah!**

The HOLY GOSPEL

**St. Matthew 19:27-30 (KJV)**

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

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Acts 9:1-22 — “For He Is a Chosen Vessel unto Me”

INTRODUCTION

I. FOR HE IS A CHOSEN VESSEL UNTO ME

II. I WILL SHEW HIM HOW GREAT THINGS HE MUST SUFFER FOR MY NAME'S SAKE

III. BUT SAUL INCREASED THE MORE IN STRENGTH

CONCLUSION

## The Conversion of Saint Paul

Hymns: 44, 498, 485, 421, 47

Acts 9:1-22 — “For He Is a Chosen Vessel unto Me”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Today is the Third Sunday after the Epiphany and the Festival of the Conversion of Saint Paul. The text is from Acts 9:1-22, the account of the miracle of the Conversion of Saint Paul.

**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.**

**And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision,**

**Ananias.**

**And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him,**

**Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.**

**Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. 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: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.**

**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. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.

Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## INTRODUCTION

This is truly exciting. This is truly amazing. This accounting of the conversion of Saint Paul gives witness to the miracle of faith by which the LORD makes disciples of His enemies. Truly, in the conversion of St. Paul we behold the glory of the power of God, the Gospel.

### I. FOR HE IS A CHOSEN VESSEL UNTO ME

Who would expect that such a miracle could happen? Who would even begin to imagine that a heart that was so violently set against the Lord Jesus and His Church would be converted to be a powerful vessel for God's use in carrying the Gospel to the world? Yet this is what the Lord Jesus declares to Ananias.

**And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision,**

**Ananias.**

**And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him,**

**Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.**

**Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. 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:**

No one in the world saw this coming. No one in the Church expected this. No one even imagined such a thing. Yet this is the way of the Lord our God. And this is not only the way with Saul, the devoted Pharisee, but also with you and me. For by nature, we are all enemies of God. By nature we are all born into this world as those who hate God and reject His goodness and mercy. By nature we all resist God's gracious call of the Gospel. By nature we all seek to be our own gods and hate the one true God on account of our hatred of being ruled over by Him and

especially on account of hating the judgment that we encounter as we behold the glory of His holiness.

What is more is that like Saul, we all imagine ourselves to be good by our own choices and thoughts and words and deeds. Saul stands as a strong warning to all of us who count ourselves as good Christians and good disciples of the Lord. Saul most assuredly thought that he was a true servant of God as he carried his papers by which he would arrest the followers of the Way. He carried letters from the high priest, letters that he eagerly besought to take to Damascus, counting himself a faithful servant of the true Church and a true servant of God to carry out the will of God.

How could Ananias have known that this man was indeed a chosen vessel unto the LORD? Imagine the shock to hear of this from the Lord Jesus!

Imagine the shock to Saul and the men who were with him when the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul and pierced him to his soul and drove him to his knees.

**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.**

The very One against whom Saul was working with all of his strength was the One that he had falsely imagined himself as serving. Yet the word from this One was not one of condemnation. Saul stood condemned and the LORD made this clear to Saul. But condemnation was not the message. Rather, repentance unto the new life of faith was the message. **“Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”**

Saul was a chosen vessel unto the Lord Jesus. Notice that the Lord Jesus did not say that Saul would be a chosen vessel or that Saul would become a chosen vessel. The Lord Jesus said, **“for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:”** This is the predestination of which the Scriptures speak. The Lord knows those who are His own, even when they do not. The Lord knows those whose names are written in the Book of Life. The Lord knows all that is, even before it comes to be in time. For the Lord is more than everlasting, He is eternal. He Himself IS eternity. All things exist in connection with Him. Time is His creation. He knows what will be because time exists within Him. For God, what will be Is. And so, Saul is the apostle of the Lord and the chosen vessel of the Lord even as he kicks against the pricks.

## II. I WILL SHEW HIM HOW GREAT THINGS HE MUST SUFFER FOR MY NAME'S SAKE

This part is not hard for us to accept. Or so we think. We don't realize the fullness of our own conversion and so we minimize what it really is. We talk about the miracle of conversion as the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, but do we really believe that it is God's work alone by which we are converted and by which we live? The fact that we tend only to hear the first part of what the Lord says to Ananias and that we tend to read quickly past the second part, not really counting it as applicable to ourselves, shows that we still cling to the notion that we somehow are responsible for the faith that we receive.

**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: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.**

The life of a Christian is a life of being a vessel of the Lord. Every Christian is one whom the LORD has set apart unto Himself to be a holy vessel of the LORD God. Through this person, this converted sinner and enemy of God, the LORD makes Himself known to the world. Through each Christian God goes forth and does His work of the Gospel in the world. Therefore, the life of each Christian is a life of carrying the suffering of Christ and the suffering that accompanies the name of Jesus.

This part we don't want to hear. Being a vessel of the Lord is to be one who displays the suffering of Christ to the world. In our bodies, Christ shows the world what He sacrificed for the world. As the world persecutes us, so they persecute Christ. In the name of Jesus, we bear in our own bodies the hatred that the world holds against Jesus. In the name of Jesus, we suffer for the sake of the name by which we have our life.

Unlike the Lord Jesus Himself, we do not choose this for ourselves. He chose to be the one who would bear the world's hatred and scorn. He chose to be the one who would take the sin of the world. We, on the other hand, must be regenerated and converted to this way. We must be crucified and buried with Christ through Baptism, marked and sealed as bearing His name. Then we, too, suffer with Jesus and rejoice in what God is working both for us and through us.

When God works the miracle of conversion in us, this is how it is. Once God converts us we no longer see ourselves as part of the world and the world no longer counts us as part of it. We have been converted to be observed as vessels unto the Lord. This is a very real change. Our spirits and hearts and minds are no longer akin to the ways of the world. We no longer desire to walk in that way. We cry out against the things of that way. We congregate no longer in the dark paths of sin but congregate to kneel in the light and confess our sinfulness so that we might hear the light of the Gospel pronounced over us. And we genuinely experience the separation that God works in our conversion. We feel the pangs of separation from our family and friends. Moreover, we genuinely experience the passion of our Lord Jesus, who looked upon His enemies and cried out for their forgiveness and salvation.

## III. BUT SAUL INCREASED THE MORE IN STRENGTH

Yet this suffering to which we are called is not the same as the suffering that the children of the world experience. It is very different.

**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. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.**

When the Lord Jesus appeared to Ananias, Ananias suffered at the words that were spoken. This message from the Lord Jesus put Ananias in danger. This message put the household of Ananias in danger. Yet the Lord strengthened Ananias with the Gospel and Ananias arose and did as the Lord Jesus commanded him.

The beginning of Saul's suffering had begun, too. In fact, the worst of his suffering had already been suffered and was about to end. The worst part of his suffering was the conversion that the Lord worked in him. The Lord's called servant came to Saul and put forth his hand upon him and spoke to Saul the words that the Lord had given him to say. Saul's blindness was peeled away like scales that fell from his eyes and he arose with the new sight that had been given to him by the light of the Gospel and he was baptized. Then he ate and he was strengthened.

**Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.**

Is this not amazing? Those whom Saul had come to destroy he now counted as brethren. The Lord Jesus, against whom Saul openly fought, he now preached with all of his strength. To the synagogues that he previously came bearing letters by which he intended to put the disciples of Jesus in chains, to these same synagogues Saul now went, being increased in strength by the Gospel so that he confounded the Jews that dwelt in Damascus, proving that Jesus in the very Christ.

Truly Saul suffered as the Lord Jesus stripped him of his pride as a Pharisee. Truly Saul suffered as the Lord Jesus showed him his blindness as a persecutor of the Lord that he claimed to trust and to serve. Truly Saul suffered as he realized that all that he had worked to produce and all that he had done in the past was mere sewage to be flushed away by the waters of Baptism. Truly Saul suffered as he realized that his trusted teachers were actually false prophets and liars. Truly Saul suffered as he realized that all whom he counted as dear were no longer his friends and allies. Yet all of this was as if it were nothing when he rose up in the strength of the Gospel of which he had been made a vessel unto the Lord.

Saul was made to see that the Word of God is more than words. Saul met the Word of God, Jesus, and was converted by this encounter. Saul was made to know the Gospel as more than a tool or a proclamation, but as the very One who is proclaimed. For the Gospel is not merely a message. The Gospel is the very power of God unto salvation. The Gospel is God Himself, the Lord Jesus, who was made flesh and tabernacled in the flesh so as to live as one of us to suffer our sufferings and to die our death. The Gospel is Jesus the Christ come to save us. When the Gospel is rightly preached, it is not merely talk about what Jesus has done and will do. When the Gospel is rightly preached, this is Jesus at work among us to convert us and to save us

and to strengthen us. This is Jesus coming to us and speaking to us through His chosen vessel.

Those who truly know this increase the more in strength as they preach the Gospel, just as Saul did as he preached and proved that Jesus is the Christ. This is true for all who truly preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, whether it be the little baby who is carried by his father to the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit and then to the Table of the Lord's Holy Communion, or whether it be the pastor who preaches from the pulpit and administers the Sacraments, each one is a vessel unto the Lord and each one proclaims the Lord's death till He comes. For each one has been converted to be a chosen vessel of the Lord, and each one suffers the name of Jesus before the world and especially as the called out unto the Lord. Together we are strengthened in the preaching of Christ.

#### CONCLUSION

Each of us are chosen vessels, yet we do not stand alone and we do not stand by our own strength. We each suffer in accordance with being made vessels of the Lord, each according to what is appointed by the Lord. Also, we each are strengthened as we congregate in the name of the Lord apart from the world. It is important on this day of the Conversion of St. Paul that we do not forget that he was not converted apart from the gathering of the saints. His conversion was initiated by the encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, but it was through the preaching of Ananias and through Baptism that Saul was converted. It was through the Lord's Holy Communion that Saul was strengthened so as to rise up in joy and to go forth and excitedly to proclaim the Gospel with power.

It is the same for us today. We are not to seek to be strong by our own strength. The Lord provides us His strength as we draw near unto Him in His body. Here He shelters us from the struggles that we encounter in our lives. Here He sets us apart from all of the things of the world so that we hear only His grace, mercy, and peace. Here He absolves us and pronounces us to be holy and pure and clean by the power of His name. Here He feeds us His body and unites us in the unity of the true faith and refreshes us with His blood of the remission of sins and life through the faith given in Baptism which carries us to His Table. And so while apart from the strengthening of the Lord in His body our suffering as Christians seems to be great, the Lord takes our suffering even as He converts our blindness by the light of His Gospel so that our suffering is received with joy and with the festivity of Eucharisting in His name. When this is how we receive the suffering appointed to us by the Lord for His name's sake, truly we perceive the honor and glory appointed to us in Jesus' name and our very lives are filled with joy and peace and thanksgiving. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.