**What Do Good Guys Wear?**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A man was walking down a busy city street one day when a homeless man asked him for a handout. He checked his wallet for some singles, but all he had was a twenty. So he thought to himself, “Do I really want this $20 used for drugs and alcohol?” After a few seconds, he thought, “Nah!”—so he gave the man the twenty!

Well in that story, it’s kind of hard to tell who’s the good guy and who’s the bad guy—who would use the money for drugs and alcohol and who wouldn’t. In the old Westerns, the good guys always wore white hats. But recently I was watching an action movie on television and the good guy *and* the bad guy were *both* wearing black! And as they were wrestling and rolling around on the ground, it was kind of hard to tell them apart and to know who to root for!

And as we resume our study in Acts 9, we see something similar. When Saul of Tarsus got saved and started preaching Christ, it was kind of hard to tell him apart from the bad guys, since he used to *be* one of the bad guys! After he got saved (Acts 9:1-19), we read:

**“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?” (Acts 19:20,21).**

As you can see, the Jews in the synagogue in Damascus couldn’t believe that the guy who came to their city to *kill* the followers of Christ was now *preaching* Christ!

But when it says he preached “that He is the Son of God,” I’m often asked why Saul preached Christ like that. It’s not that Christians doubt that it is true. They know that Christ is the Son of God. It’s just that *grace believers* know that preaching Christ that way is how He was preached under what we call “God’s kingdom program” for the people of Israel. The message that “Jesus is the Son of God” is the gospel that the Jews had to believe to be saved back when the Lord was here telling the Jews that He’d come to give them their kingdom, as we see in John 20:31:

**“…believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God…*that…ye might have life through His name.”***

That’s all you had to believe to be saved back then!

So when it says that that’s what *Saul* preached right after he got saved, grace believers ask me why he preached *that* gospel instead of the one he preached *later—*the one he reminded the Corinthians that he preached in I Corinthians 15:1-4:

**“…I declare unto you *the gospel which I preached unto you,* which also ye have received…by which also ye were saved…*how that Christ died for our sins…was buried, and…rose again…”***

As you can see, that’s the gospel that Paul preached *later* in his ministry. But when Luke says he preached “Jesus is the Son of God” in the *beginning* of his ministry, this has led some Bible teachers to conclude that he preached the kingdom gospel early in his ministry. And you can certainly see why they might think this.

Now maybe you’re thinking, “Why should I care if Paul preached the kingdom gospel early in his ministry?” The answer is: people who say he preached the kingdom gospel in the beginning of his ministry say that the *epistles* that he wrote in the beginning of his ministry are all about the old kingdom program and *not* about the new program of grace that he preached in his later epistles.

And that would mean that those early epistles aren’t written to you as a member of the Body of Christ living in the dispensation of grace, they are written to the Jews under the kingdom program. And I’m talking about the book of Romans*,* the book that tells us we are saved by faith without works. And the Corinthian epistles that tell us about the rewards we’ll receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And Galatians, the book that warns us about legalism. And the Thessalonian epistles, that tell us we’ll be raptured before the Tribulation!

*That’s* why it is important for you to know that Paul didn’t preach the kingdom gospel early in his ministry. But that begs the question of why Acts 9:20 says he preached “Jesus is the Son of God.” Well, put yourself in Saul’s shoes for a moment. You just walked into a synagogue in Damascus, and you’re looking at a bunch of unsaved Jews who don’t *know* that Jesus was the Son of God!

And if they don’t know that, how can they believe He died for their sins? If Jesus Christ wasn’t the sinless, spotless Son of God, then He had sins of His own to die for, and couldn’t die for yours. So of course that’s what Saul preached to those unsaved Jews! If that’s not the first thing you talk about when witnessing to your unsaved Jewish friends, I’d encourage you to be Pauline and follow the apostle’s example here.

But I personally believe that that’s not *all* that Saul preached, that’s just all that Luke (the author of the book of Acts) tells us about here. What makes me think that? Well, look at what Luke says Saul preached *nineteen years later* in Thessalonica:

**“…they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul… reasoned with them…*that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ”* (Acts 17:1-3).**

Here Luke says that Saul was *still* preaching “Jesus is the Christ” *nineteen years later!* But we know he preached much *more* than that, because later he wrote an *epistle* to the Thessalonians, in which he said,

**“…our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost…” (I Thessalonians 1:5).**

Speaking of himself and Silvanus and Timotheus (IThes.1:1), Paul talked to the Thessalonians about “our gospel,” the gospel that they preached when they arrived in Thessalonica. But when Paul used the term “my gospel” in writing to the Romans, he identified his gospel as “the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery” (Rom. 16:25). And that gospel included much more than just the simple message that Jesus was the Christ.

Paul went on to remind the Thessalonians of the conversion experience, saying:

**“…ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; *And to wait for His Son from heaven...*even Jesus*…which delivered us from the wrath to come”* (I Thessalonians 1:9,10).**

Here we see that when the Thessalonians got saved they turned to God to serve Him *and to wait for His Son from heaven.* That means when they got saved Paul *also* taught them the doctrine of the pre-trib rapture, how the Lord will come for us before the “wrath” of the Tribulation.

And do you remember what you have to believe in order to *qualify* for the rapture? If you forgot, Paul explained it to the Thessalonians when he wrote,

**“…if we believe *that Jesus died and rose again,* even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him*…*For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven…Then we…shall be caught up…to meet the Lord in the air” (I Thessalonians 4:14-17).**

To be eligible for the rapture, you have to believe that Jesus died and rose again. So we know Paul preached that to the Thessalonians *in addition* to “Jesus is the Son of God.”

And we know that he didn’t just preach the *fact* of Christ’s death and resurrection, for he also talked to them about

**“…our Lord Jesus Christ…died *for us…*that we should live together with Him” (I Thessalonians 5:9,10).**

Here we see that Paul had taught them that Christ died *for us.* So when Luke says Paul preached “Jesus is the Christ” to the Thessalonians, we know he preached more than that. So it is safe to assume that when Luke says that that’s what Saul preached right after he got saved in the synagogues of Damascus, that that’s not all he preached there either.

You may be thinking, “How much more could he have known, he just got saved?” Well, how long did it take you to understand that Christ died for your sins? I know you probably had the advantage of having heard that all your life, whereas it would have been news to Paul on Damascus Road. But Saul had the advantage of knowing that the sacrifice of Christ replaced the many thousands of animal sacrifices he had offered throughout his life. How long do you think it would have taken the Lord to tell Saul, “Those sacrifices were types of *My* sacrifice.”

Now I know that in our past couple of studies, we didn’t see Luke mention anything about that when he recorded what the Lord said to Saul that day on Damascus Road (Acts 19:1-9). But he *also* didn’t say anything about what Paul later records the Lord as having said to him that day:

**“…as I went to Damascus…I heard a voice…saying…Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?...But rise…for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, *to make thee a minister*…unto …the Gentiles…To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, *that they may receive forgiveness of sins…”* (Acts 26:12-18).**

Luke didn’t record any of these things in Acts 9 either. That means the Lord told Saul a lot more than what Luke documents in his initial description of Saul’s conversion. Now do I know for sure that the Lord also told Saul that He died for his sins? No, but I think he did, based on all that we’ve seen. I think he believed—and taught *others* to believe—more than just the kingdom gospel of “Jesus is the Son of God” *right from the beginning of his ministry.*

So now the question is: How come that’s all Luke *says* he preached when he recorded what Paul preached in Damascus and in Thessalonica? Well, the thing to remember about Luke is that he wrote the book of Acts as a *historian,* and *not* as a theologian. That is, it wasn’t his purpose to get into the details of what Paul was preaching. It wasn’t his purpose to get into theology.

You see, the theology of the new program of grace wasn’t given to Luke, *it was given to Paul* (Eph.3:1-9). So Luke didn’t go into detail about Paul’s preaching. If you want to read about Paul’s theology, you have to read his epistles, not the book of Acts.

Now as we saw in Acts 9:21, the Jews in Damascus couldn’t believe what they were hearing from Saul. If you want to try to get a sense of what their disbelief was like, imagine Adolph Hitler doing an about face in the middle of World War II and start *praising* the Jews that he started out *slaughtering.* That’s how amazed the Jews in Damascus were over Saul.

But as we read on we see that those unsaved Jews didn’t *like* what Saul was preaching:

**“But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ” (Acts 9:22).**

Now if you forgot why Saul *needed* to increase in strength, glance back at what Luke says of him right after he got saved:

**“And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink” (Acts 9:9).**

After Saul got saved, he was so traumatized to think he had actually been *killing* the people who followed the one who turned out to be his Christ that he didn’t eat or drink for three days! Now you can go *weeks* without food, but you can’t go more than *four* days without water—and Saul hadn’t had any in three days. That means that ol’ boy nearly died!

But he began to be strengthened in Acts 9:19, and he “increased *the more* in strength” here in Verse 22. As you can see, he regained enough strength to *confound* those unsaved Jews by *proving* that Jesus was their Christ.

“How did he do that?” The same way he proved it in Thessalonica!

**“…Paul…*reasoned with them out of the scriptures*…that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; *and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ”* (Acts 17:2,3).**

Paul proved that Jesus was their Christ by showing the Jews *out of their own Scriptures* that their Christ would die and rise again—and oh, by the way, *that’s what Jesus did!*

“How’d they *not* know that their Christ had to die and rise again?” Well, when they thought of their Christ, they thought of a conquering hero who would come and conquer His enemies—*not* allow His enemies to conquer Him! And someday the Lord *will* return and conquer His enemies. There are prophecies that say just that. Those were the prophecies that those unsaved Jews preferred to think about when they thought about their Christ. But Paul proved to them out of the Scriptures that *first* He had to come and die.

Well, let’s read on to see how they reacted to Saul’s proof that Jesus was their Christ:

**“And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him” (Acts 9:23).**

As you can see here, they didn’t like his message, so they decided to kill the messenger!

And this wasn’t just a matter of them picking up where Saul left off killing people who said that Jesus was their Christ. Saul had become a *huge* embarrassment to them! I mean, imagine if the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan started to campaign for civil rights for blacks, and started preaching all the things he used to oppose! Do you think maybe the Klan would be embarrassed by that?

Well that’s how those unsaved Jews felt after Saul got saved and started preaching all the things that *he* used to oppose!

This happens a lot in the political world. Did you know that Hillary Clinton was originally a Republican who campaigned for Barry Goldwater, the archbishop of conservatism? Did you know Ronald Reagan was a well known Democrat before he switched parties? Or that Elizabeth Warren started out as a Republican? Or that Frank Sinatra was a well known Democrat who later supported Nixon and Reagan?

Do you think their parties were *embarrassed* when those people began preaching the things they used to *attack?* Of course they were! It makes people think that there must be something to what the other party is saying. And that’s how unsaved Jews felt when Saul switched parties!

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is one of the biggest proofs we have that Christianity is real. *Berean Bible Society* founder Pastor C. R. Stam once told me about two atheists who lived about a century ago who set out to prove that Christianity is false. One said, “I’ll prove that the resurrection of Christ is false,” and the other said, “I’ll prove that the conversion of Saul is false.” They knew that those two things are the biggest proofs that Christianity is true.

They went their separate ways so as to work independently one of another, and eventually the first man got saved after he was unable to prove Christ’s resurrection false. And the other man *also* got saved when he failed in his attempt to prove Saul’s conversion false.

And the unsaved Jews in Damascus were also smart enough to know that Saul’s conversion proved that Christianity was real. So they knew that his voice had to be silenced, and they “took counsel to kill him” (Acts 9:23). So how did Saul escape their murderous plot? Luke says,

**“But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him” (Acts 9:24).**

Now that phrase “laying await” is the Bible way of describing an *ambush,* as we see when Solomon wrote,

**“If they say, Come with us, *let us lay wait for blood,* let us lurk *privily* for the innocent without cause” (Proverbs 1:11).**

Do you see how “laying await” was something that was done *privately?* That means these Jews were fixing to *ambush* Saul by privately setting a trap for him.

So when Luke says “their laying await *was known of Saul,”* we have to ask how he knew about it. I mean, the whole idea of an ambush is to keep it a private secret—*especially* from the one you’re fixin’ to ambush! So how did Paul (the “ambushee”) know about the *ambushers?*

Well, while we can’t be sure, look what Paul said in I Corinthians 13:2:

**“…I have *the gift of prophecy…”***

Paul was an apostle, but he was also a *prophet—*and prophets just knew stuff like that! Do you remember what happened after the the ambushes laid for the king of Israel by the king of Syria kept failing?

**“Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel*, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber”* (II Kings 6:11,12).**

As a prophet, Elisha knew about every plan the Assyrian king concocted in secret! And I think that this is how Saul escaped the secret ambush that those unsaved Jews laid for him. Remember, Saul was filled with the Spirit soon after he got saved (Acts 9:17-19), and I believe the Spirit gave him the gift of prophecy, enabling him to escape the clutches of those murderous unsaved men.

Now it is true that the Bible doesn’t say that, so it’s possible that someone just told him about the ambush. But the Bible doesn’t say that either, and when it says “their laying await was known of Saul,” that makes me believe he knew of it by means of his gift of prophecy.

So what did Saul do about this threat to his life? Luke went on to say,

**“Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket” (Acts 9:25).**

Now you know what that means, don’t you? It means that the next time you feel like a basket case, don’t feel bad. Paul was a basket case too!

If you’re wondering if they make baskets big enough to hold a man, I’m reminded of something that happened back when I was a painting contractor many years ago. I was painting a man’s house when I noticed an extremely large basket in his garage. When I asked him about it, he explained that he was a hot air balloonist. Now can you picture a basket that big?

We learn more about this daring escape when Paul talked about it later in II Corinthians 11:32,33:

**“In Damascus *the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison*, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped *his* hands”**

Here we see that those unsaved Jews got the governor of the city to do their dirty work—just like they got Pilate to do it instead of killing the Lord themselves. So now Saul is not just on the run from the Jews, he’s also on the lam from the law.

But as we read on, we see that after leaving Damascus, Saul eventually found his way to Jerusalem:

**“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.**

**“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:26,27).**

Now that word *assay* means to *try,* as we see when Hebrews 11:29 says of the Jews in ancient Israel,

**“By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians *assaying* to do were drowned.”**

The Egyptians were unsuccessful when they tried to cross the Red Sea, and Saul was just as unsuccessful when he assayed to join up with the disciples he was famous for slaughtering.

But now this begs another question: How come the 12 apostles didn’t know that good guys wear baskets? You’d think they’d know that anyone who had to escape those unsaved Jews in a basket was probably one of them. The indication is that they figured it was a hoax, an elaborate trap staged by Saul to gain their confidence. They smelled a rat and were having none of it.

But before we move on, we have to fill in a few blanks here. It’s important that you know that when verse 26 says that Saul came to Jerusalem that *three years* had passed since he got saved on the road to Damascus. How do I know? Because of what Paul later said when he filled in these blanks in his epistle to the Galatians:

**“I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it…But… God…called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me…immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: *neither went I up to Jerusalem* to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. *Then* *after three years* I went up to Jerusalem…” (Galatians 1:13-18).**

Now here you might be thinking, “That’s interesting, but Pastor Kurth, you’re killing me! You said it was *important* that I know this, not just interesting.” If so, let me ask you a question. If you were Saul and you just got saved, who’s the first 12 guys you’d go see? I kind of gave it away when I said “12 guys,” didn’t I? So how come Saul *didn’t* want to talk to the apostles?

I believe it was because the Lord told him that if he went to see the 12 apostles that people would think that he *got his message* from them, and that he preached the *same* message they preached—and he didn’t! The Lord gave him a *new* message, the message of grace, so he steered clear of the 12 apostles so no one would think otherwise.

When Paul finally *did* meet up with the 12, they didn’t tell him what *they* had been preaching, he told them what *he’d* been preaching, as we see when Paul recalled that meeting to the Galatians:

**“I went up to Jerusalem…But…they…in conference added nothing to me: *But contrariwise*…they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter” (Galatians 2:1-7).**

Saul knew all about what they’d been preaching. He didn’t go around killing people like them without first doing his homework. If he had, he wouldn’t have been able to say,

**“…I have lived *in all good conscience before God* until this day” (Acts 23:1).**

Saul was such a conscientious man he wouldn’t have gone about slaying the followers of Christ without thoroughly investigating what they believed and taught. When he did, he deemed them to be heretics deserving of the death penalty under the law of Moses. That means he *knew* what the 12 preached, he just didn’t *believe* what they preached.

But the 12 didn’t know what *he* had been preaching, because what he’d been preaching was a *mystery.* That’s the Bible word for a *secret—*a secret that the Lord probably *taught* Saul during those three years in Arabia. At least it seems safe to assume that to be so. I mean, if it took three years to train the 12 apostles, and then you read of Saul disappearing for three years right after he got saved, I think it is actually more than an assumption to say that he spent those three years learning the mystery from the Lord himself.

And now that Saul has come to know the Lord, the focus in the book of Acts will begin to shift away from the 12 apostles and settle on the apostle Paul. We actually have proof of that right here in this passage.

Did you ever wonder why the 12 didn’t know that Saul was telling the truth when he said he’d gotten saved? Think back to what happened in Acts 5:1-9:

**“…a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price…But Peter said, Ananias…thou hast…lied…unto God….three hours after…his wife…came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:1-9).**

How did Peter know they were lying? He had the gift of prophecy that Elisha had! So how come he *didn’t* know that Saul *wasn’t* lying when he claimed he’d trusted Christ as his Savior? Well, the answer had to be that the 12 were starting to lose their miraculous spiritual gifts.

Now we know they didn’t lose them all right away, for in our very next lesson we’re going to see Peter raise a woman from the dead. But when Saul used the gift of prophecy to tell him about the ambush, and Peter *couldn’t* use it to tell him Saul wasn’t lying, that shows that God was taking the apostles’ gifts and giving them to the Apostle Paul.

And the reason it is important for you to know that too is that you’ll never understand the Bible unless you know that God’s focus today, in the dispensation of grace, is on what Paul tells you in *his* epistles, and *not* what the 12 tell you in *their* epistles.

Now the question is: how did Barnabas know that Saul wasn’t lying when he said he was a believer? Well, we can’t be sure, but I wonder if perhaps Barnabas saw Saul escape that ambush by using his gift of prophecy. He may have even seen Saul preaching Christ in Damascus.

All we know for sure is that Barnabas convinced the 12 that Saul was the real deal, and they hung out for a few days:

**“And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:28).**

Now it doesn’t say how long Saul was with the apostles, but he tells us later in Galatians 1:18:

**“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, *and abode with him fifteen days.”***

Fifteen days isn’t a lont time, but it was long enough for Saul to get a whole new group of people murderously angry with him, as we see as we close out our text:

**“And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.**

**“Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.**

**“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied” (Acts 9:29-31).**

If you ever had any doubt that Saul of Tarsus was the main guy when it came to persecuting the church, that last verse should settle it in your mind beyond dispute. Once Saul stopped slaughtering the disciples, all the wind got sucked out of the sails of Satan’s opposition, and the disciples were able to take a long, huge sigh of relief, and they were finally able to get some rest.

If you’re reading these words and *you’re* not getting any rest because you think you haven’t a friend in the world, consider where Saul of Tarsus was in this passage. Unsaved Jews hated him, the government was trying to kill him, and the disciples of the Lord didn’t trust him! Talk about a man without a country!

If that’s how you feel, I would recommend that you move to Steger, Illinois, so you can attend *Faith Bible Church,* the church that I’ve pastored for the past 41 years now. If you will, you’ll find the warmest, most loving group of saints this side of anywhere.