

A Genuine Salvation II

By Greg Rangel

In the book of Acts there are many examples of people who had a true encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the many was Saul, the great persecutor of the faith.

No doubt when his name was heard among the Christian church they trembled for fear of Saul. Even after his conversion, the Christians had a difficult time in believing that he was now a Christian. For that very reason Dr. Luke, the author of the book of Acts wrote about it in Acts 9:26. But why would it seem so difficult to the Christians that God was able to transform a life like Saul's? Oh of course he was guilty of murdering many of them, and caused many more to blaspheme the name of Jesus (Acts 26:11), but nothing and nobody was too difficult for God's reach, nor for His grace to save, not even you, the reader.

Since hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ Saul no doubt began to resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit. For that reason Jesus told him during his conversion that, "*...Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me? And he said, who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutes: it is hard for thee to kick against the goads*" (Acts 9:4b-5).

The goads are the long pointy sticks that people use to poke the animal to get them going. But when the animal refuses to go, it kicks back because he is trying to fight it. This is still in use in third world countries. And so that is what Saul was doing after he had heard the gospel through the preaching of Stephen, the first martyr of the church.

Stephen was just preaching away and declaring the history of the Jewish people, perhaps not knowing that his words were piercing the heart of one of his hearers, which was a young Pharisee named Saul who took care of the coats of those that hurled rocks at him. But God was faithful to his Word. His Word was not going to come back void, as He said in Isaiah 55:11 "*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*" And so each word that Stephen was proclaiming was coming down like a ton of bricks into the heart of Saul, the great persecutor of the church. And he began to fight it.

Saul was in the same position that many find themselves in today. Saul thought that because he was a religious man that he was o.k. with the Lord. But that was so far from the truth. What drove Saul to kill the Christians was the religion of his fathers, no doubt thinking such things as, 'I am in the true religion! I received this as a tradition from my fathers! How could they dare speak against what I believe?' But Saul was blind because all he had was a dead religious system of works.

How often do we hear that today? How often people think that it is their religion that will save them? Quite too often, unfortunately. Saul came to find out once he truly believed in the Lord Jesus that everything that he believed kept him from the truth, so therefore he had to consider it as trash and lost, never to find it ever again (Phil. 3:8).

Perhaps you find yourself in that same position that Saul was in, fighting against the conviction of the Holy Spirit. You know with out a shadow of a doubt that your vain religious traditions have failed you. And you know that you are not living in right standing with God because of what you do. But you also know that God has been tugging in your heart to get right with Him. Receive the Lord Jesus today as your Lord and Savior. He will forgive you and drastically transform you. He will give you a purpose and a hope. He loves you. Jesus says, *“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matt. 11:28-30).