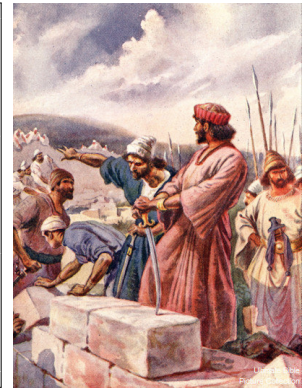


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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Evidence for the Deity of Christ from the Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

There are several conversion accounts in the book of Acts. None of them is more dramatic than the conversion account of Paul the apostle (nee Saul of Tarsus). The events leading up to and following this amazing occurrence are filled with many points for our benefit. In order to fully understand our subject, let us examine some of these events.

Saul of Tarsus was not an insignificant character in the Jewish culture when we first learn of him. He was a highly educated Jew and a Pharisee (Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:5). He was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58) and was filled with much zeal to continue persecuting the church (Acts 22:4). Saul of Tarsus had the confidence and backing of the high priest and the chief priests to hunt down the disciples (Acts 9:1-2; 26:9-12). By his own admission he was "...a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man..." (1 Tim. 1:13).

When Saul of Tarsus left Jerusalem bound for Damascus, he most certainly did not believe in Jesus. Saul was a man on a mission, totally absorbed in stamping out any followers of Jesus that could be found. However, something happened to this man before he got to Damascus. What happened was so dramatic that it turned his life completely around from Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle. Based on this dramatic change, what happened can only be described as momentous.

I encourage the reader to read each account of the conversion of Saul at this time (Acts 9:3-18; 22:6-16; 26:12-19).

As Saul and his company neared the city of Damascus at midday, a light shone from heaven. This light was seen by all. All the others heard a voice, but did not understand the voice. Saul understood every word. It was Jesus, the very one he sought to persecute, who spoke to him. Saul asked what the bidding of Jesus was for him. Jesus told him to continue to Damascus and one would tell him what was required of him. Saul was the only one of the party that was blinded by the light since the others lead him by the hand into the city. Saul waited three days until a disciple by name of Ananias was sent by Jesus to tell him what to do. Saul immediately complied with the commands of Jesus through Ananias and was now converted to the cause he once sought to destroy. (**Note:** Many will say that Saul was converted on the road to Damascus. **That is not so!** His conversion was not complete until he was baptized in Damascus three days later. Also, if Saul was converted on the road to Damascus, he was converted yet still in his sins since Ananias told him to be baptized in order to wash away his sins). It is ironic that the once zealous persecutor would later be zealously persecuted himself (Acts 23:12, 21).

Jesus said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mk. 16:16). The needed question to ask is what did Paul believe? I believe that we can find the answer in one of the passages that comes right after his conversion. Acts 9:20 says, "*Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.*" There is little doubt that this is tied to Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. Notice that it says that Christ (meaning the anointed one or Messiah) was Son of God. This statement in and of itself would be acceptable to the Jews in the synagogue. The question for the Jews was always,

"Who is the Christ?" His identity was clear in Paul's mind, "*But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ*" (Acts 9:22). He later wrote to the church at Rome and stated that one of the undeniable proofs that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is His resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4). Paul was in a position, prior to his conversion, to know the public facts that Jesus had been crucified and buried. He also knew those claims concerning certain events that followed His interment in the tomb. Like a good number of the other Jewish leaders of the day, Paul likely doubted and denied the claims. However, his doubts and denials vanished when he heard the voice say, "*I am Jesus*" (Acts 9:6; 22:8; 26:15). The inescapable conclusion for Paul was that Jesus was the Son of God. This is what Paul believed and never ceased to believe. Then when Paul had an opportunity to teach what he now believed, he taught "that He is the Son of God."

One continues to find this great fact as central to Paul's writings. It is especially noticeable in 1 Cor. 15 where Paul makes a bold assertion in linking the resurrection of Jesus to all matters of faith. Some at Corinth were saying that there was no resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12). Paul had listed the post-burial appearances of Jesus to numerous witnesses, including himself (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Such a large number of witnesses over a period of time dismisses the notion of deception or delusion. Many of the witnesses were well known and this establishes their credibility. Paul proceeds to point out to them that if there is no resurrection, there is no faith (I Corinthians 15:15-17). There is an unstated admonition here in that if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then He is not the Son of God

and, therefore, there is nothing to believe in at all!

Another item which should be considered at this time is Paul himself and what his conversion to Christianity meant to the Jewish community. His initial preaching in Damascus was in the synagogues (Acts 9:20). Those Jews that heard him knew of him and were amazed at his change in life (Acts 9:21). These Jews conspired to kill him (Acts 9:23). In other words, they were convinced of his change and realized what a danger he presented due to the potential he possessed now in preaching the gospel. Paul could not be dismissed with a “wave of the hand” as an ignorant fisherman. He had one of the best educations available and had been a very prominent individual among the influential Jewish leaders and discrediting him would not be an easy task. This allowed him opportunities for an audience among the Jews. Later, his Roman citizenship allowed him even more opportunities. In all of these his message remained rooted in the faith that began with the appearance of Jesus, raised from the dead as the Son of God. There is one instance of Paul’s preaching that illustrates this. Please notice Acts 13:30-37: *“But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings; that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’ And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.”* Paul quotes from Psalms 2:10; 16:10. Paul knew of these passages before his conversion. Like other Jews, he anticipated the one of whom this speaks to come as the Messiah. Though some might apply these verses to David, the only possible application is to Jesus Christ. He, not

David, did not suffer corruption in death. He alone was raised from the dead. It was He who appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus and it was He who informed Saul, through Ananias, that *“you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard”* (Acts 22:15).

Paul’s message never changed. In Thessalonica we find that Paul *“as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach unto you is the Christ’*” (Acts 17:2-3). Paul steadfastly knew this to be true for he had witnessed it with his own eyes. His life was forever changed and he always looked in anticipation to the day when he would once again see Jesus, the Son of God, and stand in His presence to receive a crown of victory (2 Tim. 4:8).

The events that surround the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Paul) are significant in that they offer proof for the Deity of Christ. What happened did not happen to someone who was already a disciple. Paul had been a hard-bitten opponent of Christianity. He had every intention of eradicating this sect. His turnaround proves that something happened. How could it be Jesus who appeared to Him? The Jews had maneuvered the Romans into crucifying Him. Saul would not have believed the claims of Jesus’ His resurrection because he knew men do not rise from the dead. However, one who was truly the Son of God (or Deity) could rise from the grave. Now Jesus had appeared to Him. Saul now knew that all that had been said about Jesus was true. His mission was an exercise that he could not pursue. All of this amounted to an inescapable conclusion and Saul made it. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. His life was now forever changed. His bold message that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is testimony enough to what had happened. Toward the end of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy. He still believed in the Deity of Jesus when he wrote in 1 Timothy 3:16, *“God was manifest in the flesh.”* That has application to no one save Jesus of Nazareth. It is still true today.

Thirty Pieces of Silver

“What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you? And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver” (Matt. 26:15).

Here is, without a doubt, the low point in one man’s life. That he would betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Did you know that this price was established back in the Old Testament? It was the common value determined for the loss of a slave (Ex. 21:12). How deplorable it is that this was so officiously determined. However, it was not just Judas alone, was it? The chief priests were party to this agreement. It was a low point for them as well. Though they would later try to dismiss their own culpability, they had paid the price of blood money (Matt. 27:3-6). The piece of silver mentioned here is the common coin of the day that would represent one day’s wages. Thirty pieces were the equivalent for one month. It seems hard to this writer to determine the worth of a person, let alone the Son of God. Nevertheless, the pitiable amount agreed upon is a testimony to the avarice of Judas and the contempt of the chief priests.

Now let us examine ourselves for a moment. We see how Judas betrayed and sold out his Master. We must remember to ask ourselves, “Is it possible for me to do something similar?” Unfortunately, it may happen more often than we care to think about. It may not be for thirty pieces of silver. It may be for a lot less and, perhaps, even something insignificant. I have known of some who have sold out their Master for a moment’s pleasure. There are those who have sold out their Master for some peace and security in a secular setting. Ah, but that is those other people. It would not happen to me. Do you remember how Peter said almost the same thing? (re. Matt. 26:33). What did Peter do soon after making such a bold declaration? Let us be careful, and loyal.

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