

The Last Appearance of the Risen Savior Acts 9:1-19

In the second sentence of Acts, Luke tells us “He (Jesus) presented himself alive to them (his apostles) after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” In the book of Luke, his first book, he had recorded Jesus appearing to his disciples after his death and saying, “Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bone as you see I have.” These references demonstrate three kinds of proofs by which Jesus presented himself alive after his death: proof for the eyes-he appeared to them; proof for the ears- he spoke to them; proof for the hands- he had them touch him. The appearances of Jesus were proofs and evidence that Jesus had physically risen from the dead.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-9, at the end of defining the gospel he preached, Paul lists several resurrection appearances Jesus made during the forty days between his resurrection from death and ascension into heaven. Then he lists one more and one last appearance of the risen Lord, an appearance to him, though he persecuted the church.

This is what we read about in Acts 9:1-19. Because of this appearance of Jesus, Saul is converted. Saul’s transformation is one of the strongest proofs for the truthfulness of Christianity and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this passage we get a picture of Saul before and after he encounters the glorified and resurrected Jesus on his way to Damascus. Before, Saul was against the disciples of Jesus. He was breathing out threats and violence against them. The word translated “breathing” was normally used of a wild animal, like a raging bull, “snorting” in anger. With this term, as well as others, Saul is described as being like an angry, violent animal in his opposition to the church. (Acts 9:1-2)

In Acts 9:3-9, we are told about his physically real encounter with the glorified Jesus. Is his conversion “example” or “exceptional”? In many ways it is exceptional. There is a blinding, flash of light as Jesus appears to Saul. There is an audible voice that speaks to him calling him by name and telling Saul who he is. These are not normative of Christian conversion. But, beneath these things we have the fundamental elements of true conversion: A realization that Jesus is the risen Lord; A faith that the gospel is true; A repentance bringing a changed life. Saul sees Christ, and asks “Who are you Lord?” He knew immediately this one he was seeing was Lord and God. Then Christ says, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” At this moment Saul knew that Jesus is Lord and he has been persecuting him by persecuting followers of the Way. Saul would have quickly realized that the gospel message of these people, with whom Jesus so closely identified himself, was true. This would have caused him to repent.

In Acts 9:10-19, we see God directing Ananias, a disciple in Damascus to go to Saul in order that he might lay his hands on Saul in order for him to see again. After regaining his sight, being baptized, and regaining his strength by eating, Saul is among the disciples in Damascus. Before he was against the disciples of Jesus, but after this encounter, he was among the disciples of Jesus. He has been completely changed.

What was the gospel that Saul began to believe and preach because of this encounter with Christ? We are told in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. There are two essential elements: Christ died for our sins and he was raised on the third day. Jesus’ death was for us and our sins. His death was him paying the penalty of our sins instead of us. Then, he was raised from the dead. Both of these gospel essentials were “according to the Scriptures”. They were foretold and foreshadowed in the Jewish Scriptures. There are also two evidential elements: He was buried, and he appeared. This appearance to Saul, as well as the other previous appearances, was evidence of his resurrection, like burial was evidence of his death. Saul, like anyone else, was saved by God’s love, from God’s wrath, for God’s glory, through repentance and faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus.