

What Motivated This Man?

People normally have zeal. They have a zeal for something. Their zeal may not be for the Lord. It may be zeal for the immediate future of their life. It may be zeal on how to get a good job, how to find a spouse, how to be important in their community. People generally have a zeal for something.

These days, I think one of the greatest desires that people have is to have fun. Fun is defined differently for different people, so for some it is soccer, for others it is Facebook. For some, fun is a picnic in the park, for others it is tea and a cigarette in a nice café. Some people find the most fun in music and dancing. For some, fun is a video game, for others it is “okay” in a coffee house. For some it is a sitcom or a movie. Most people I know are very busy having fun as they know it.

But let’s look at the life of a man whose focus was not fun as most people understand it. Let’s look at a man whose purpose in life is something outside of the normal way of serving himself. Let’s look at the life of one named Saul who became Paul.

And that is a good start because the life of Paul and the life of Saul are two different things; they are motivated by two different sources. The first time we read about this man is in the book of Acts. But Paul’s story is intertwined with Stephen’s life. Stephen had been chosen as one of the deacons and the Bible says that he preached and did wonders and signs among the people. There were a group of Jews who were disputing with Stephen but could not resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he was speaking.

So they found people to bear false testimony against Stephen and accused him of blasphemy against Moses and God. And the people and the elders and scribes grabbed Stephen and took him to the high court, the Sanhedrin.

Then Stephen preached to the Sanhedrin. Here is how the sermon ended:

Acts 7:51- 8:3 " *You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. ⁵² "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, ⁵³ "who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*." ⁵⁴When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had

said this, he fell asleep. Acts 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. ³ As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

What was the attitude of this man who was called Saul? What motivated him?

Philippians 3:4-6 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of the tribe of Benjamin*, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Saul was trusting in his own way. He was in control of his life; he knew what he wanted and he knew how to get it and he was zealous for it. Sounds like people today.

The martyrdom of Stephen made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it. The memory of the signet of God upon his face; his words, which touched the very souls of those who heard them, remained in the minds of the beholders, and testified to the truth of that which he had proclaimed. His death was a sore trial to the church, but it resulted in the conviction of Saul, who could not efface from his memory the faith and constancy of the martyr, and the glory that had rested on his countenance. {AA 101.3}

At the scene of Stephen's trial and death, Saul had seemed to be imbued with a frenzied zeal. Afterward he was angered by his own secret conviction that Stephen had been honored by God at the very time when he was dishonored by men. Saul continued to persecute the church of God, hunting them down, seizing them in their houses, and delivering them up to the priests and rulers for imprisonment and death. His zeal in carrying forward this persecution brought terror to the Christians at Jerusalem. The Roman authorities made no special effort to stay the cruel work and secretly aided the Jews in order to conciliate them and to secure their favor. {AA 101.4}

After the death of Stephen, Saul was elected a member of the Sanhedrin council in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion. For a time he was a mighty instrument in the hands of Satan to carry out his rebellion against the Son of God. But soon this relentless persecutor was to be employed in building up the church that he was now tearing down. A Mightier than Satan had chosen Saul to take the place of the martyred Stephen, to preach and suffer for His name, and to spread far and wide the tidings of salvation through His blood. {AA 102.1}

Saul was spending his time building himself up. He was simply going about his own interests with a disregard for what that may cost someone else.

But he was turned into someone with different attitudes.

Philippians 3:7-14 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² ¶ Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

What caused the turn-around?

Acts 9:1-11 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads." ⁶ So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." ⁷ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰ Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.

Saul met Christ. But lots of people met Christ. Not all were changed. Not all received Him as Lord and Savior. Not all gave their life to Christ. Most went about pursuing their own interests. But not this man.

Philippians 3:7-10 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Saul looked at the life he had before and counted it complete loss. Not some. All. Now he wants to know Christ, the power of the resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made like His death. Saul's eyes were turned away from the things of this world. He had new motivations and new ambitions and new desires. No longer serving Himself, He found joy in uplifting Christ. This is true conversion. He allowed Christ to transform Him. He surrendered to the way.

What does it mean to count all things loss for Christ? You have to earn a living. That is what you are doing here, but that is not what you are here for. Paul earned a living at times making tents. That was what he did, but that was not what he was there for. He was totally given to Christ and His cause in the world.

This is where true satisfaction is found. This is where the purpose of your existence finds meaning and fulfillment, and yes, excitement.

Paul did not focus his life on a home or a spouse or a job or any of those things that is good in and of itself. Rather he set his mind on serving God and the other things that he needed fell into place. God carried him all over the world and gave him adventure, and friends and thrills beyond his dreams. And God gave him a job, and a place to stay.

There was no word of complaint from this man.

2 Corinthians 11:24-28 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; ²⁷ *in* weariness and toil, *in* sleeplessness often, *in* hunger and thirst, *in* fastings often, *in* cold and nakedness -- ²⁸ besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Now let us look back on the life of one who surrendered himself to God. Let us suppose that Saul had gone on his way. Let us suppose that he continued to persecute the Christians and continued as a member of the Sanhedrin. Would you know his name? Who would he be? Nobody. Can you tell me the name of any of the Sanhedrin except Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? What is their place in eternity?

Whatever plan you have laid for your life, the one God has for you is more glorious and exciting and happy than the one you can dream for yourself. What is done for God will last eternity. But what is of this world will pass away. At Christ's second coming all our life's work will be history except that which is done for God. No one will remember anything about this place and what was

here except that which is done for saving lost man.

Paul decided to have Jesus more than anything. Is there something in this world you want very badly? I urge you to give your life to Jesus completely instead. When I say that, I don't mean once a week on Sabbath morning. When I say that I don't mean that God is very important in your life. I mean that God is your life. It is more exciting, fulfilling and challenging than anything you can do. Anything. Is it the song of your heart this morning to have Jesus more than anything? More than silver or gold? More than the praise of men? More than houses or lands? I urge you to surrender your life to God completely today. God has a work for you to do. God has a plan for your life that exceeds your own plans. Won't you give your life to Him right now? Totally and completely. Be willing to go anywhere and do anything for Him. Are you willing to be completely His?