

## Installment 3

### Follow Me!

I hoped to wait for a little while before dealing with the subject of Jesus' divinity but contemporary events demand that we treat it now. In a recent talk, Presidential candidate Barack Obama used the Bible in a way that raised some furor among certain powerful evangelicals, one critic even calling his views an "Obamanation." Obama said he was misunderstood; being a Christian himself. Reading all this back and forth conversation with the faith in the middle reminds me of the time John F. Kennedy ran for President and all the nonsense over his Catholic roots. In the human arena for the highest office in our country hot topics never cease, and religion is always a hot topic.

But my concern here is not Obama, or John McCain, or the Clintons, but Saul the new Christian. Do you remember the passage for this installment? For years Saul had an anti-Christian reputation among the fledgling Christian churches. It was well deserved. Yet on the weary road to Damascus he was suddenly and radically converted. Our text says after Saul regained his sight,

*"**At once** he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ."<sup>1</sup> (Note my emphases, either bold or underlined.)*

Talk about flip-flop! Saul, named for the first king of Israel, did not put up any argument or ask any question but "at once" proclaimed that "Jesus is the Son of God," that "Jesus is the Christ" (the Messiah, the anointed One). Not only did Saul accept Jesus as fulfillment of his Judaic faith, "at once he began to preach in the synagogues" that Jesus is the one Savior for all people. He did not say, "My brothers, I have come to see that Jesus is one way among many in fulfilling the highest aspirations of humankind. I think you should consider Jesus as well as Zeus, or Hermes, or Artemis, or "the unknown god." Not at all! Unlike many of our "Christian" politicians, Saul spoke boldly that in Jesus, and in Jesus alone, can we find the salvation that eludes us if we seek it elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 9:20-22, NIV.

The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has forced the church to put up or shut up. That is, we must speak boldly of Jesus as Son of God and Messiah or turn ourselves into a social agency, good yes, but redemptive no. I am sure there is no career as public as those in political life. Some politicians say religion has no place in politics. Perhaps that is true of religion but what about Jesus? He is no religion; rather He is the “Son of God” and “the Messiah.” Jesus did not construct another religion. There are enough of those. Rather, the Lord called men and women to follow Him and live out His teachings in their lives, *regardless of their chosen career*. He knocks on the door of the Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist, even the atheist, and every other person in the world. He does not say “Join my religion” but “Follow Me.”

The call of Matthew to be a disciple of Jesus is a good example of what I mean.

When Jesus was leaving that place, he saw a man sitting in a tax office. The man's name was Matthew. Jesus said to him, “*Follow me!*” So Matthew got up and followed him.<sup>2</sup>

### **Which Jesus Approaches Us?**

It is eternally important to know which Jesus is saying “Follow me.” This is the function of the New Testament, to be perfectly clear who Jesus is. We do not have space here to deal with the whole New Testament view of Jesus of Nazareth, but we can look at one of the great passages telling us about Jesus’ identity.<sup>3</sup> It comes from Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The Apostle writes,

<sup>5</sup>Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup>but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant (lit. slave),  
being made in human likeness. (lit. looking like other men)

<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man,

he **humbled** himself  
and became **obedient** to death—  
even death on a cross!

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 9:9; God’s Word Translation.

<sup>3</sup> Paul’s letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 5-11.

<sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

This passage is pregnant with meaning. Reading it carefully one can see why scholars spend so much time with it. Note: Verses 5-8 speak of Jesus coming from heaven to earth. Verses 9-11 speak of Him going back to heaven for the reward God will give Him. Now reread the verses again, noting this movement.

In verse 5, Paul tells the Philippians that they need a new mind. Although Philippians is a wonderful letter, almost poetic in its language, the Philippian church was on the brink of serious trouble. The main theme of the letter is unity in Christ.<sup>4</sup> But exactly what the problem was between the two female leaders of the congregation is difficult to tell. Nonetheless, they—and we—need the mind of Christ if we are to be authentic Christians.

But what is this mind of Christ Paul wants us to have? Let's see if we can find out by taking a closer look at the Philippians passage.

<sup>6</sup>Who, being *in very nature God*,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup>but *made himself nothing*,  
taking *the very nature of a servant*,  
being made *in human likeness*.  
<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance *as a man*,  
he **humbled** himself  
and became **obedient** to death—  
even death on a cross!

The mind of Christ: what the Lord thinks, perceives, dwells on, values, comes from his original nature, the nature of God Himself (vs. 6). We must set the Lord apart from the rest of us if we are to understand why it is so important to seek His mind instead of the mind of someone else. But can we talk about having Christ's mind if He is so high and lifted up, divine by nature, glorious and beautiful in His character? Yes, because He gives Himself to those who seek Him, who love Him and want to be with Him.

The Lord Jesus came to earth as a servant, as low as the lowest servant, a human being that is limited in all ways as a human being. This is incredible to think about. The majesty of God came to us through the lowly character of a human being who is from the

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<sup>4</sup> Read chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians and see what problem(s) Paul highlights there.

lowest class. For example, the President of the corporation sets aside his or her authority and mixes with the workers as one who sweeps up after business hours, who cleans toilets, and takes advice from the person below him. As such, as the lowest man on the totem pole, Jesus **humbled** Himself and became **obedient** all the way to a death reserved for traitors and the worst of criminals.

Jesus never stopped being obedient; He never said, “Enough is enough,” and took back His heavenly authority. He never said, “Look! I’m not a poor man! I’m really the King of the universe, its designer, creator, and manager.” No, death on the cross was His chosen destiny...and something like that is for all of us! Can you believe it? I can’t, and yet I do believe it because that is how our Lord is consistently portrayed during His earthly journey. No other major religion, when compared with the Jesus of the gospels, understands its divinity this way.

The question now is: Do you and I have the mind of Christ? Are we *humble* in relation to others...humble all the time? Are we *obedient* to God in everything, without grumbling about Jesus or wanting something else for our life? [Along this line, read Matthew 16:24 and see how Jesus’ teaching relates to humility and obedience.] Verses 5-8 speak of the downward movement of the God of heaven to the human condition. Now we take a look at the upward movement of this unique Man.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God **exalted** him to the highest place  
and gave him ***the name that is above every name,***  
<sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup>and every tongue *confess* that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
***to the glory of God the Father.***

The humble and obedient man has been killed...crucified. What now? The divine One has come from heaven to His own, the Gospel writer John says, and instead of a welcoming kiss He received a spike and a cross. All that is left is mourning and thinking of what might have been. But not so fast! Verse nine is based on a strange event that we humans simply cannot conceive. The crucified One has been raised to life again by His heavenly Father. “God **exalted** him.” “Exalted” comes from a Greek word that is used only here in all the New Testament. It actually means something like “super-exalted,”

“amazingly exalted,” or “incredibly exalted!” I cannot describe it here - it is so wonderful.

Then the Father gave Jesus “the name that is above every name.” From what follows we can see that this “name” means bowing and confessing that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” The word “Lord” means Him who is over everything, the name above every name. And everyone who has ever been born, whether living on the earth, or in the heavens, or in hell will “confess.”<sup>5</sup> . The whole human community, past and present, will acknowledge Christ’s authority, divinity, and majesty. In this, Paul writes, God is glorified! Now, does your faith in Jesus glorify God? Well, what do you believe about Him?

### **Possibilities of Goodness**

When you think of Jesus, what do you think? Is He your Savior, Lord, and Guide? Who do you think about in the morning and throughout the day? Is it the Lord of all? Do you know the Jesus who met Saul on the road? It would be impossible to meet this One face to face and not be changed! Saul was! And I suspect that there were some who thought he was past saving. “Saul, forget about him! He is too far gone to ever know the Lord.” No, in fact the text says that the Lord would use Saul mightily...and God will use you too. The Lord will take your pride and anger and put humility in their place. God will take resistance and suspicion and put obedience in their place. It all begins with “Who are you, Lord?”

By now it seems as though you have read the passage of Saul’s conversion many times. It is a basic passage and the better we know what is happening in it the better we will understand the installments to come. Oh yes, there is one more thing. Saul was converted and \_\_\_\_\_ in this passage. And what? Check it out. It is the subject of our next installment (#4).

Peace to you!      *Yep! Read the same text! Acts 9:1-31.*

--Jerry Mercer

--July 11, 2008

### **Do you Remember?**

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<sup>5</sup> To “confess” is “to say the same thing.” Thus, The Father says the Son is Lord of all and therefore everyone living on earth, or in heaven, or in hell.

In Installment 2, I asked the question: What parallels do you see between Saul and Moses? What did you find? What can you add to the following list?

1. Both were suddenly apprehended by a strange event involving light and a voice.
2. Both heard instructions on what to do.
3. Both men's experiences were unique, one to the OT and the other to the NT.
4. Both were instrumental in the overthrow of oppressors.
5. Both will become steadfast followers of the Lord God.

--JLM