

**Introduction: Last week I watched the testimony of Lee Strobe**

**Lee decided at a young age that God does not and cannot exist.**

He grew up, went to college and eventually landed the **job as the Legal Editor of the Chicago Tribune**. He was so skeptical of people's claims that they had a sign in their newsroom that read "If you're mom says she loves you—check your sources."

**In a hard, fact based and evidence-based career—his skepticism hardened into cynicism.** He reasoned that the most logical way for him to live his life was to become a hedonist—who just pursued his own pleasure. He became narcissistic, self-absorbed, profane—a lost soul by every possible measurement. **As he collected award after award for excellence in journalism**—his personal life was spiraling out of control. A weekend drunk; full of rage, anger. And he hated the very idea of belief in God.

**His wife Leslie made a friend—who happened to be a Christian.** She shared the good news of Jesus's salvation. Took Leslie to church. And over time—Leslie's heart warmed to the truth about Jesus and his forgiveness of sins. She came home after church one Sunday and told Lee Strobel "I've decided to become a follower of Jesus Christ. I am a Christian."

**He thought, "Oh no." For an atheist, this was terrible news. First word that went through his mind was "divorce."**

But he noticed immediate changes in Leslie—her outlook on life; the way she treated Lee and the kids; her hopefulness. It began to pull Lee whose life was so empty, so full of himself—to the Christian faith.

But he wanted his old life back—and he wanted Leslie the way she used to be. So he thought, "I'll use my training as a skeptical legal journalist to disprove the Christian faith. Then she'll see what a sham Christianity is and she'll leave it."

**He thought, "I think I can disprove this—shouldn't take me more than a weekend." So he decided to expose this notion of a Resurrected Jesus. He knew that the entire Christian Faith would rise or fall on whether the Resurrection of Jesus was true or not.**

**Transition: After a two-year investigation of the historical claims and evidence for the resurrection the facts, he says, were undeniable:** (1) fatal torment of Jesus on a cross, (2) the empty tomb which not even Jesus's critics could deny, (3) his appearances to his followers, (4) early traditions of the resurrection dating at or near the crucifixion—(5) and the meteoric rise of the Christian faith—after two years he concluded this must be true. And he believed it in his heart—and received it. He knelt in his living room and prayed committing his life to Jesus. He experienced the power of the risen Jesus in his life?

**Transition:** One of the keys to Lee Strobel's conversion was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

## 1. Paul's Experience of the Resurrected Jesus

Luke takes pains to describe what kind of person Saul of Tarsus was. The conversion of a man like this cries out for an explanation.

### Saul's Character Before Jesus

8:1-3 "Saul agreed with putting him to death. On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. <sup>2</sup> Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. <sup>3</sup> Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison."

9:1-2 "Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem."

- Saul was **devout**. "A Hebrew of Hebrews." He had the finest religious pedigree one could ever ask for—Son of Abraham, tribe of Benjamin, circumcised, Kosher, Sabbath and festival compliant.
- Saul was **calloused**. 8:1 "Saul was there giving approval to his death."
- Saul **violently persecuted** the church. 8:3 "Saul however, was ravaging the church."
- Saul threatened and **terrorized** the church. 9:1 "Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord."
- Saul was **zealous** for his cause. Thinking that what he's doing is a service to God.
- Saul was **successful**. He had become infamous among Christians and celebrated among the Sanhedrin. This was Saul of Tarsus' ticket to fame and notoriety.

Gal 1:13-14 "For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup> I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors." Paul's ticket to prominence among his peers was his zeal in persecuting the Christian faith.

**Summary:** He was angry, deceived—a blaspheming, religious zealot who was absolutely convinced of the rightness of his cause. A man who thought he was doing God's will—and was actually opposing God's plan. Who thought he was close to God and the truth is he could not have been further from God.

**Lost in religion—without Christ and without hope in the world.**

## Saul's Conversion on the Road to Damascus

9:3-6 “As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” <sup>5</sup>“Who are you, Lord?” Saul said. “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting,” he replied. <sup>6</sup>“But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

- Jesus **elected** Saul from birth. **Gal 1:15** “But when God, who from my mother’s womb set me apart and called me by his grace,”
- Jesus **revealed himself** to Saul. **Gal 1:16** “[God] was pleased <sup>16</sup>to reveal his Son in me”
- Jesus **confronted Saul** with his sin. 1 Timothy 1:13 “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man.” He goes on to say that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners “of whom I am the worst.”
- Jesus instructed Saul to **repent**. “But get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.” Every time the question is asked, “what must we do?” the answer is “repent and believe.”

**Paul describes this event later in Acts 26 at his trial before King Agrippa** “And the Lord replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. <sup>16</sup>But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. <sup>17</sup>I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them <sup>18</sup>to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ <sup>19</sup>“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” This is both a call to mission but a call to repentance—he goes from being a chief persecutor of the church to its chief advocate.

- Jesus **confirmed Saul’s calling** through Ananias. There was a man named Ananias—we wasn’t an apostle; as far as we know not even a deacon—just a guy in the church. Following Jesus. About to be arrested by Paul—and Jesus appeared to him and said, “There is a man I want you to go to him—he’s been praying and fasting for three days; lay hands on him and he will receive his sight and receive the Holy Spirit.” Great! What’s his name, “Saul of Tarsus!” But Jesus told him, “Go. This man is my chosen instrument to bring the Gospel to the Gentile world. I will show him how much he must suffer for me.”
- **Jesus baptizes Saul** in the Holy Spirit “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup>At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. <sup>19</sup>And after taking some food, he regained his strength.”

**Summary: All this to say—Paul had absolutely no incentive to join the very faith he was persecuting.** And he had every reason to continue his quest to rid the world of this new Jewish cult. Paul’s conversion cries out for an explanation! **Saul’s experience of the resurrected Jesus on the Road to Damascus is the best explanation for how such a man could have changed his mind!**

## 2. Paul's Gospel of the Resurrected Jesus

1 Cor 15:3-5 "For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ **died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that **he was buried**, that **he was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that **he appeared** to Cephas, then to the Twelve...Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me."

- **Christ was Crucified "died for our sins according to the Scriptures"**
  - As a perfect man—the spotless lamb who takes away the sins of the world
  - As a sacrifice for sins—punished in our place
  - **Isaiah 53:5-6 He was wounded for our transgressions, pierced for our iniquities; the punishment that brings us peace was upon him—and by his wounds we are healed/restored/reconciled to a loving God.**
- **Christ was buried "that he was buried"**
  - In a borrowed Tomb—Joseph of Arimathea.
  - Sealed for the better part of three days. Jesus was dead—good and dead.
  - **Isaiah 53:8-9 For he was cut off from the land of the living...<sup>9</sup> He was assigned a grave with the wicked,**
- **Christ was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures**
  - Raised bodily
  - Raised immortal, never to die again
  - Raised as the firstborn from among the dead—the firstfruits and the first of many brothers to raise and never die again.
  - **Isaiah 53:11 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied**

And there is salvation in nothing else, no one else. Christ and Christ alone.

### **Conclusion: My Story**

After my dad's death when I was 14—my life spiraled downward. I quit high school, got into lots of trouble—turned my back on the faith of my youth

But God, who is rich in mercy called me though I was not seeking him. He sought me.

He revealed the truth of the Gospel to me—I could not deny the power of his forgiveness and salvation.

He confronted my sins and I confessed all my hatred, my pain, my lusts and my fears.

He filled me with the Holy Spirit and called me to a life of service.

When I hear stories like Lee's—you see I know that story is true because I have met the same Jesus.

When I read stories like Saul of Tarsus' conversion—I resonate with it because I have come to believe in the same resurrected Lord—having received new life in him.

And you can join us today.

How do we experience the hope of Christ's resurrection and salvation today?

Romans 10:9-10 "This is the message of faith that we proclaim: <sup>9</sup>If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation."

**Unbelievers: What's stopping you today from believing with your heart and confessing the truth?** Believe it from the heart and receive it. To all those who believed on his name—to those who received him he gave the right to become children of God.

**Believers: You know there's no one who is beyond the reach of salvation.** If God could reach Saul—a hater and blasphemer; If he could reach any of us—he can reach your spouse, your child, or grandchild, or parent.