

EPWORTH LEAGUE TOPICS

Great Stories of the Bible

X. The Conversion of Saul Acts 9.

TOPIC FOR THE THIRD WEEK OF FEBRUARY.

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No topic studied thus far in connection with this series has brought more opportunities for a fine rousing meeting to our Leagues than this one. Let the leader plan prayerfully for the meeting to be held during the week of February 16th, and it will be a memorable one in the life of the local League.

Do not make the mistake of treating the topic in the usual scrappy fashion, and do not attempt to bring interest into the meeting by fixing attention upon the familiar details of the story. Most of our members have heard and have read this chapter so often that they could almost repeat it, and their very familiarity with it has robbed it of much of its effect. It would be a mistake in the writer's judgment to give the evening of this meeting up to a mere exposition of the story.

It will be more profitable far to begin with a consciousness of the fact that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus is only one of those great and gracious events in the history of the Christian Church which declare that its Lord is not a dead Christ, but a living Christ enthroned in the skies.

The book of Acts was not written by a man with the spirit of a mere historian—man who writes to simply chronicle events—but to prove a thesis, and the thesis is that the crucified Nazarene is still doing His mighty works. (See Chap. I, 1 to 9.) The descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple "called Beautiful," the painful story of Ananias and Sapphira, the vision and testimony of the martyr Stephen, the signs and wonders wrought by the hand of the apostles, this story of the arch-persecutor's conversion and every incident narrated in the book all bear the same message, namely, "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts ii. 36).

It would be well, then, to make this a *conversion meeting*, and, beginning with the story of how Saul of Tarsus discovered his Lord, to link together the centuries of Christian history by a chain of such narratives as this that prove Jesus still to be "both Lord and Christ."

Here is a suggested list from which a selection of great conversion experiences may be made: The Ethiopian Eunuch; Lydia; the Philippian jailer; St. Augustine ("Confessions," Book VIII., 28, in Everyman's Library); Luther (see June, 1912, EPWORTH ERA, page 126, or any life of Luther); John Bunyan ("Grace Abounding," etc., paragraphs 229 and 230); Charles Wesley (see "The History of Methodism," Vol. I., page 72); John Wesley (the same, page 73); George Whitefield (Stevens, page 59 of Vol. I.); almost any one of the early Methodist worthies whose biographies are accessible.

A variety of striking conversion stories is also given in the first lecture of Rev. George Jackson's "The Fact of Conversion," where other very helpful material will also be found for this meeting. Your pastor probably has the book. The late Prof. James' volume on "The Varieties of

Religious Experience" will prove a treasure house of such authentic stories, if you can secure it from your pastor's library or elsewhere. Harold Begbie's "Twice Born Men" gives some interesting Salvation Army conversions, and S. H. Hadley's "Down in Water Street," which is probably in your Sunday School library, will furnish you with some from the famous "Water Street Mission."

With a wealth of material like this it ought to be easy to make this meeting a heart-stirring one. But do not miss your chance to carry your chain of conversion records right into your own community. At all costs make the members feel that they are not studying about something remote from their own day or town. Turn your meeting into an old-time testimony meeting, but narrow the testimonies down to the theme of conversion. Get any persons in the community who can justly boast of "a great salvation" to tell the story of how the light broke on them.

It will add to the interest of the meeting if you have each conversion story read or told by a different person, and intersperse the testimonies with hymns of conversion, pointing out in this connection that the hymnody of Methodism is replete with such hymns—a natural outcome of the multitude of joyous conversions with which the labors of the early Methodist preachers were honored. Hymns like Nos. 897, 347, 348, 351, 252, from our Methodist hymn-book, or Nos. 30, 211, 215, 219 from the old Wesleyan hymn-book, which was in use before our present hymn-book was published, will add to the forcefulness of the conversion stories, for they are themselves testimonies in song.

If you are the right person to do it, or if the moment seems a timely one, make the testimonies pass into an appeal to those who may be longing for an experience such as they have been hearing about. In all likelihood some of the associate members and others who will be present will be just awaking painfully to the consciousness that all their good new year resolutions have been broken, and that if life is to get a real and permanent uplift it must be through a "Saviour who is a Saviour indeed." The time will be opportune to invite them to come to Paul's Christ and yours.

Let the meeting close with the evangelistic note sounding strongly. Some such hymn in closing as number 73 or number 87, or number 88 in our Canadian hymnal would send some away thinking deeply, if not with "the great decision" happily made. The conversion of our associate members and of other young people in the community is one of the objects of our League. Can we not realize that and to some degree through this story of how Saul of Tarsus found his Lord? The literary side of the meeting will be well enough emphasized in the great conversion narratives referred to above.

ADDED SUGGESTIONS.

The following questions might be handled if opportunity offers: How often is this story told in the Acts of the Apostles? What does this tell us of its significance as an event in the early history of the church from Luke's viewpoint? Does any Christian conversion exhaust its significance in the individual's

own life? Who is the hero of the Acts of the Apostles from this on? How often does Paul refer to his conversion either in Acts or in his letters? (See Acts 22: 6 to 16; Acts 26: 9 to 19; Phil. 3: 12, R.V.; Gal. 1: 15 and 16; 1 Tim. 1: 13. What were the elements of the "vision" that came to Saul on this occasion? The writer would answer that they were three: (a) The Vision of Jesus as Lord and Christ; (b) The Vision of Self; (c) The Vision of Service. Can you find the passages in the story in which each element mentioned is touched upon? The element of the vision of service is better seen in one of the duplicate narratives. Did Paul ever forget the vision of self that came to him that day? (See Acts 22: 4-6 and 19-20; Acts 26: 9-11; Ephes. 3: 8; 1 Cor. 15: 8; 1 Tim. 1: 15.) Did he ever forget either of the other two elements of his vision? (See in answer 2 Tim. 4: 6-8. See also poetic extract from Rosetti appended to this article.) Does the story anywhere hint to us what the mental condition of Saul was immediately before his conversion? Are all conversions as sudden and as startling as this? Compare the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch or contrast it with each of the two conversions in Philippi, i.e., of Lydia and of the jailer.

Observe when Saul's conversion occurred. (When he was "breathing out slaughter" and was drawing "near Damascus.") Would it have made much difference to the Church if his conversion had come *after* instead of before he had completed his mission to Damascus? Would it have made much difference to him? Would it have made much difference in our lives if we had been converted a day, a week, a year later? Would our Christian peace and joy be as large as they are?

O blessed Paul, elect to grace,

Arise, and wash away thy sin,

Anoint thy head and wash thy face,

Thy gracious course begin,

To start thee on thy out-running race.

Christ shows the splendor of His face;

What wilt thou face of splendor be

When at the goal He welcomes thee.

C. G. Rossetti.

Safeguarding Children and Youth

Reference—I. Cor. 6: 9-20.

TOPIC FOR FEBRUARY CITIZENSHIP MEETING
—LAST WEEK IN MONTH.

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TENDENCIES.

To properly safeguard the boys and girls we should know the prevailing tendencies among our young people. Let us consider some of them.

1. The boys and girls do not *obey* as implicitly as those in former generations. Authority and seniority are not respected as highly. This is seen in the home, school and church.

2. Superstitions and mythological stories and fables are not *believed* by the children of to-day. They demand explanations. Fear is not a predominant factor in their life.

3. The boys and girls are given more *social freedom*, and participate in the social life outside of the house at an earlier age.

4. The *separation of the sexes* is not as rigidly maintained. Will this lead to the breaking down of the safeguards of modesty and virtue?

5. The home has *lost much* of its former influence and authority. The