

BIG AUDIENCE
Big Church – Part 4
October 22, 2017

Why does a third of the current world's population identify with being Christian? Some Contributing Factors:

1. A widespread persecution of the Church began.

Acts 7:58b&8:1a (NLT) *“His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. ^{8:1}Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.”*

Acts 8:1b (NIV) *“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”*

Acts 8:2-3 (NIV) *“Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.”*

Acts 9:1-2 (NIV) *“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”*

Acts 9:3-4 (NIV) *“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?’”*

Acts 9:5 (NIV) *“‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ He replied.”*

We are the representatives of Jesus on earth.

Acts 9:6 (NIV) *“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”*

Acts 9:10-11 (NIV) *“In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered. ¹¹The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.’”*

Acts 9:13-14 (NIV) *“‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to Your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.’”*

Acts 9:15-16 (NIV) *“But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is My chosen instrument to proclaim My name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.’”*

This was not just a Jewish message.
This was for the entire Gentile world... a Big Audience.

Acts 9:19b (NIV) *“Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.”*

2. Saul transformed from persecutor to preacher.

Acts 9:20-22 (NIV) *“At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.²¹ 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?’ ²²Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.”*

1 Corinthians 15:1 (NIV) *“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.”*

1 Corinthians 15:3a (NIV) *“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance:”*

1 Corinthians 15:3b-6 (NIV) *“That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.”*

This is what Paul preached...

Christ died for our sins.

He was buried.

He was raised.

He appeared.

1 Corinthians 15:7-9 (NIV) *“Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”*

1 Corinthians 15:10a (NIV) *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect.”*