

Acts 9:1-23

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- [0 : 0 0] We have come as far as Saul. We've come through Stephen and Philip, our two deacons. They're different paths, very different paths. One, both of them to glory. One to martyrdom, to the presence of the Lord, to glory. And then Philip, the glory of being used by the Lord to start a revival in Samaria. And potentially a revival in Ethiopia when the eunuch went back. And then also on up into Caesarea where he'll come into play 20 years later with Paul. So we will start in chapter 9. Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priests and desired him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. So Saul is hot on the heels of the persecution of the church, the subsequent persecution after the martyrdom of Stephen. And we know that Paul stood there consenting to Stephen's death.
- [1 : 1 9] He was watching the close. Multiple places. We looked at it before later on in the New Testament. He'll bring that back, that I was there. I consented to the death of Stephen. I consented to his death. And so it would seem like Paul is as far from the Lord as he could possibly be. And yet he's like just about to fall over the threshold. He's like at the doorstep. This is eating at him. The witness that Stephen gave. The fact that Stephen being stoned after giving the proof of the resurrection through the Scriptures, the witness of the Holy Spirit, then he gets to see Stephen, see his face shining when he looks up and sees the Lord. And so he is reacting strongly to that. Where we might look at it and go, oh, well, this guy hates Christians. This guy's rejecting the Lord. Well, this is the witness of the Holy Spirit convicting Saul. And he's reacting to that very strongly. But it's still the Holy Spirit convicting him. And I was thinking about where it says here, and Saul yet breathing out threatenings.
- [2 : 2 1] You know, on Sunday we're going through Genesis, right? And we're going to get to the part where it says, and God created man. He formed him out of the dust of the ground and he breathed life into him. God's going to breathe that life into him. The breath of life. And each of us have the breath of life in us because the Lord has breathed it there. Life beyond just existence like an animal, but a life that is a soul that's eternal. And here's Saul. What's he breathing out? He's breathing out threatenings. Threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Man, this is the ultimate end of religious zeal. It always ends in persecution. There is no other alternative, right? We see today the faith-based movements, the faith-based whatever. But if they're not Christ-based, then this is where they're going to end.

Because anything that is not Christ-based, anything that is not recognized Jesus as the Son of God, ultimately, according to 1 John, is of the spirit of the Antichrist. And so Saul thinks, you know, here's this religion that he's grown up in.

[3 : 21] Here's this man who has such knowledge and such a place of position within Judaism. This is the only system given to man by God through all of history that God gave it to man and says, this is a system by which you can approach me.

And it was good, and it was wonderful, and it was meant to be a blessing. And I know we kind of look down on the law a little bit on this side of the cross and this side of resurrection. We're like, well, that was a law.

But it was meant to be a blessing. It was a way in which sinful man could approach God and have their sins covered. No, not ultimately taken away. But if God all through the Old Testament says, you know, I want your heart.

Is your heart right towards me? If your heart's right towards me, then it gives meaning to that sacrifice. And it allows it to do what it's supposed to do. So this is a good system, and it was meant to be a blessing.

And look what it had become. That it was opposed now to the very person who implemented this. The very person who said, you know, this lamb you're going to sacrifice, the lamb at Passover, the Day of Atonement, hey, guess what?

[4 : 30] That points to me. And now the system has rejected that. And we know, Jesus tells us, right? He says to the Pharisees, you full well reject the commands of God that you may keep traditions of men.

And that's what this had become. And so Paul, he had reached the upper echelon in this system. And he thinks he's doing God's work. And so breathing out threatenings and slaughter, I don't think that word slaughter is used in the Bible any other time except towards animals.

And here Saul, again, that system where they would sacrifice. He's going, and he's doing to people worse than he would have done to the animals. At least there's a humane way that they dispatch them.

And Paul desired, he desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

And so Paul's going to set off on a journey to Damascus. He's had his fill of persecuting Christians in Jerusalem. We know a big part of his persecution is what pushed out, pushed out Philip to go out and preach and all the other, these other Christians.

[5 : 34] We're going to see that all throughout Acts that they've just been dispersed abroad. But as we go through this chapter, we're just going to get, you know, about 19, 20 verses, hopefully, through Saul's conversion.

Nothing's as it seems. There's a quote from the silver chair in Narnia. Narnia, if y'all are going to be coming here to church or Bible study, you better get up to speed on your Narnia.

That's like, I just love the allegories in Narnia. When I think of heaven, I think of going to Aslan's country. It's like, I just can't wait. But in the silver chair, they're in Narnia, and they're in the castle, and Eustace and Jill have just come from England, and they're there to find Prince Rilian.

But anyway, she's all excited to be there, and she says, when dragging herself upstairs to bed, yawning their heads off, Jill said, I bet we sleep well tonight. And then that night, they set off on their adventure.

They get interrupted in the middle of the night. And C.S. Lewis says this, That's what I was thinking of as I was reading this.

[6 : 41] Saul thinks he knows. The guys traveling with him think they know. They're going to go to this guy's house, Judas. Poor Judas, whoever he is in here. He must see he's probably somehow involved in the Damascus synagogue.

He thinks he knows what's coming next. Ananias thinks he's got it all down. The only one in this whole section we're going to look at who knows what's coming is Jesus, who's going to try and tell him, hey, this is what's coming, and everybody thinks something else.

So, it's not what it seems. Man makes his plans. Proverbs 16.9, but the Lord directs his steps. That's a good thing. I always thought of it as kind of like a fallback.

Well, man makes his plans, but the Lord directs his steps. You know, if it doesn't work out. But it's a good thing. Man makes his plans, but, oh, man, the Lord directs his steps. Thank you, Lord.

You know, we made our plans. They weren't really plans. It was just kind of like, I guess it wasn't even our plans. It was kind of like the Lord was like, hey, start a church. Like, all right. Well, the Lord directed our steps, and like, here we are.

[7 : 41] You never know what's going to happen next. So, here he sets out to Damascus that he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. Terrible. Bringing them back to the place that God said, this was supposed to be this city on the hill.

This was supposed to be a light to the Gentiles. This was supposed to be for the whole world. My house shall be called the house of prayer. And Paul says, oh, I'm going to bring you back to Jerusalem, and I'm going to slaughter you.

I'm going to throw you in prison, and I'm going to kill you. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. Very specific from heaven.

Not just a light. A light from heaven. And I can't help but notice, having just gone through, you know, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was out form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water. And God said, let there be light. And there was light. And God divided the light from the darkness. And the light he called day, and the darkness he called night.

[8 : 39] And the morning and the evening were the first day. The first thing he did, right? Let there be light. And so here's this bright light shining from heaven. Specific, very specifically, where it's from.

And he fell to the earth. You'll notice there's no horse in here. There's no donkey. There's no mule. He said he fell to the earth. You know, it was in Sunday school, a little flannel graph. Saul was always on like the mule.

And then Saul was on the ground. And he was knocked off his horse. He's like, oh, he's knocked off his horse. Kind of like when you look at the section in Mark where the paralytic's carried by the four men. You think, oh, four friends. Well, it doesn't say that.

It just says four people. So is it super paramount whether he was on a horse or not? No, but I think it's good to know what the word says and be good interpreters and good observers of the word.

So he fell to the earth. Interesting. A light from heaven knocks him to the earth. He has no response to this except to gravitate towards the natural state that his soul is currently in. He falls to the earth.

[9 : 38] And he heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? You know, I don't think he said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? What's up, bro? I said, Saul, Saul.

Twice. Saul's name means desired. Desired. I think Jesus is like desired one. I desire you. Desired, desired. Saul, why are you persecuting me?

What have I done to you, Saul? Saul, that you would persecute me. And he said, who art thou, Lord? We're going to look at, you can put your fingers if you want, Acts 22 and Acts 26.

There's a whole lot of information about Saul's conversion that we do not get in Acts chapter 9. Ananias has a whole speech that he gives when he goes to Saul. We don't get that here. Jesus has a whole section that he'll speak to Saul about his future that we don't get that here.

We're going to go through a few more verses of this, and then we're going to jump over and kind of piece in some of this. But Jesus' desire for Saul is so much more than what Saul's was right now.

[10 : 48] Saul didn't have any idea of that. He's going to tell Saul eventually, in verse 16, he says, For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

And Paul will eventually say in Colossians 1:24 that he is to fill up the sufferings of Christ. And it's like, what does that mean to fill up? Like Christ didn't suffer enough? No, not at all. It's just like Paul recognized that he was to partake in and to fulfill part of the same call that was on Christ that was now upon Paul.

Anyway. And so he said unto him, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutes. It's hard for you to kick against the pricks. And so here's my point there, where right away Paul says, Lord, who art thou, Lord?

Like he is so ripe for salvation. Jesus is like, I'm going to intervene in this guy's life. What didn't he do? Saul didn't react with like, what is this? Be gone.

What is going on? Oh my word. I have no idea who this is. I don't know what's going on. Right away he recognizes, this is the Lord. This is the person who's been calling to me.

[11 : 56] I don't think verse 4 is the first time Jesus had called to Saul. That the Holy Spirit had, Saul, Saul, Saul, Saul. When he's standing there during Stephen's trial, and Stephen is going through his whole defense, Saul would have been there.

And the Holy Spirit's going, Saul, Saul, desired one. I desire you. When he watched Stephen die, he would have heard, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And now, I don't think the Lord gets impatient, but it's almost like, all right, buddy, boom. What's going on here? Why are you persecuting me? He said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute.

It is hard for you to kick against the pricks. So Paul recognized authority, but he had no familiarity with it. Right? He recognized there was an authority, but there's nothing that he was familiar with, that resonated within him.

Galatians 2:20, Paul will eventually write and say, that Christ lives in me. The hope of glory is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. In the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[13 : 01] So right now, though, there's nothing in Paul that resonates back to this, but he recognizes an authority. Obviously, we know pricks means ox goad. Paul will eventually say in Galatians 2:21, he says, I do not frustrate the grace of God.

Right now, he's frustrating the grace of God. He's fighting hard against it. And he's kicking against those pricks. And we all know what that is, right? A little ox are going along, and the one doesn't want to move, and he pokes at it.

The plowman pokes at it with his stick. Or they would have on the back of the, maybe the plow, where if his feet came back, it would kind of goad him forward, keep him moving.

And Paul's fighting. So the Lord is witnessing to Paul right here that you know because you're kicking against this. I'm constantly prodding at you. I'm constantly calling you, Paul, and you're pulling against this.

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. Surrender.

[14 : 01] Right? Surrender has no will of its own. Surrender is completely taken up with another's will. If I'm surrendered to your will, then it is no longer my will, it's yours.

I'm completely taken up with someone else's will. And here Paul, he does the first thing that we all must do, right? Take the first step. Take the next step. Paul does that really well. Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

We want to know what's next. Paul, Saul wants to know what's next. What's coming next, Lord? Right? Jill wanted to know what was next in the, in the last battle. Do we ever get to know what's next?

Well, yeah, if we take the next step. If we don't, and we wait, we'll probably never find out what's next, because we'll be constantly in a point where there's no motion forward, right?

When the Lord told Joshua to go forward through Jordan, he said, put your feet in. So when the priest put their feet in, it'll part. When Moses cried out to the Lord, and he said, why are you crying out to me? Lift up your staff and go forward.

[15 : 02] Moses is like, because there's water. But it must've been wild though, when the Lord told that, said that to Moses, lift up your staff and go forward. And he was like, lift up his staff.

Nothing like happens. Takes a step forward. And the wind blows, and he's starting to part and all that. Crazy. Absolutely crazy. Turns around, looks at the rest of the people and goes, of course, come on.

This is, we knew this was going to happen. Let's go. It's funny, isn't it? A people that was led out of Egypt, with all those plagues, had a fire and a cloud to lead them.

And then at this time, when the Egyptians were about to wipe them out, they had the pillar of fire between them and the Egyptians, looked at that body of water and thought, it's all up. It's over. Sue and I were kind of talking about this a little bit today.

It's how like the Lord, it was so good, the Lord just came through in something. It was like, wow. And instantly my mind went to the next thing. Yeah, but what about the next? Like, no, no, no, no. So, it's so my natural state to see God do something amazing, to see him come through.

[16 : 09] And then I think, yeah, but it's just crazy. And so here's Saul doing the next thing. Arise, go into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do. Paul, you're not calling the shots no more, buddy.

You got your letters of authority to go to Damascus and go whoop on some Christians. You think that you're Mr. Man in Charge? And now he's like, well, what shall I do? I'll tell you what to do.

You just go on into the city. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless. They heard a voice, but they saw no man. The Holy Spirit moves powerfully, but he also moves personally.

It's not just like some general, you know, we see the Holy Spirit in Acts moving on groups many times, but it's personally, each individual, as they're moved by the Spirit, it's their own personal relationship with the Lord.

I can't rely on how the Holy Spirit's moving in your life super powerfully, and we're in a room, and the Holy Spirit moves in everybody's life really powerfully but mine. It's not going to do anything for me. I might be able to go away from there and be like, well, that was kind of cool, you know, tell the story, write a book, whatever.

[17:16] I'd rather be in a room with the Holy Spirit, no offense, only moved in my life, and I had a personal experience with the Lord because then it's like something fruitful has happened. Better that than you're the only one that the Lord hasn't moved on your heart.

And so the Holy Spirit moves very powerfully, but it's also personal. So these men were witnesses to the move of the Spirit. They were witnesses of what was happening in Saul's life, but they had no part in it because they had no part in the Lord at this time either.

And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man, but they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. What was he going to do at Damascus? Remember what it said? He was going to bind them and bring them back.

Saul, who was Mr. Mighty Man, who was going to go and lead other people around, he's being led by the hand. He's blind. This is humiliating. And I was thinking about these poor dudes who were traveling with him.

You know, Saul, I'm sure he was arrogant. He's going to end up at this guy Judas' house because when Ananias, the Lord says to Ananias, in verse 11, he says, go into the street called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas.

[18:24] We don't know who this guy is, but the people traveling with Saul, his companions, these men he brought with him to enforce his will. They did the next natural thing, which was, well, we'll just take this guy to the place we were going to go anyway.

So I picture Judas, because, you know, Saul's not going to go to some nobody's house. This is Saul. This is probably the leader of the synagogue at Damascus. He's going to go to his house. And think if you're Judas, right?

Saul's coming to your house. Great. Saul is so stinking dangerous. You know, you don't want to, you don't want to upset Saul. Oh, he's going to go back. He's a taddler. Oh my word. He's a, he's a brown noser.

Oh, Saul. And you can picture this guy, maybe Judas being like, you know, we're happy here in Damascus. Who cares about these Christians? Let them do their thing. No, Saul's coming.

And then all of a sudden, this happens to Saul. This moment changed Saul's life, the course of Saul's life, but it also changed the course of history. If it wasn't for Saul, we wouldn't have the hospitals we have.

[19:27] We wouldn't have the sanitation we have. We wouldn't have the civilization we have. Now you could go back and say, if it wasn't for Jesus, we wouldn't have that, which is true. But Saul's conversion, and then his subsequent opening up the world to the gospel, and then the work that the gospel did, you see today, unfortunately, it's bad mouthed all the time.

Colonialism. Well, we used to call that civilization. You know, now they call it colonialism. But what it was, it was the gospel. It was, it was a nation, it was nations that recognized that there was people who needed Jesus, and they would go in, and the gospel would transform lives, and they would give up their pagan ways, and their idolatry, and their immorality, and they would live moral lives, and it would be called civilization.

Now, it's being called colonialism, and we should all go back to, somehow, it'd be better if we all went back to, like, living in the jungles, and worshiping animals, and all that junk. But because of Saul's conversion, because of Paul, this moment, we're sitting here, in the surroundings we're in, because of Christianity.

No other religion does, look, pick any religion in the world, and it's goofy. It is goofy. Go to India, you know, and the cow walks across your path, and you got, oh, don't touch the cow.

But they're all goofy. But anyway, so here's Saul, this mighty man, and I picture him now, like, just totally wrecked, and after this light, you know, he's blind. I bet he's crying his eyes out, like, ugh, and here these guys are like, Saul, you all right?

[20 : 56] Saul, and he's just like, I can't see, and oh, Jesus appeared to me, and they're like, oh my word, he cracked. He cracked. The pressure, it was too much. I knew it. The guy was going at some crazy pace, killing people.

He cracked. And so they're like, oh, take my hand. They're leading him into Damascus. They get to this dude's Judas house. Who's Judas think is coming? Judas is like, prepared, you know, Judas's poor wife, you know, I took all this time to prepare, and he's blind?

Come on. He's not even going to see the work. They show up at his door, and he's like, what happened? I don't know. Some, it was a bright light. I mean, Joe here thought he heard a voice.

I don't know. It just sounded like thunder, and this guy's just cracked, and here he is. He's yours. You know, imagine them going back to Jerusalem. Where's Saul? You wouldn't believe it.

The guy went nuts, and now he's like saying, this dead guy's alive, and he's preaching, and it's crazy. And so here's Judas, who gets Saul showing up on his doorstep.

[21 : 56] And that's the scene where Saul then arises, and in verse 9, it says, and he was three days without sight, and neither did he eat nor drink. What's he doing during that time? He's praying. Jesus is going to tell Ananias that in verse 11, saying, behold, he prays.

And we're going to find out, we flip over to Acts 22 and 26. Some more about what was happening with Saul at this time. So right now he's praying. For three days and three nights, I think he just sat there, rocked to the core.

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias. And to him said the Lord in a vision. So he's just a certain disciple, nothing particular about him.

You know, we have Saul, our big man, and then we just have this certain disciple. Just someone who loved the Lord, was following Jesus, reading his Bible, going to Bible studies, going to work, living life.

Did he have a family? I don't know. And to him said the Lord in a vision. So he didn't see him, but he heard his voice in a vision. I've never had that. And I can imagine Ananias is like, yes, yes.

[23 : 03] What do you want me to do, Lord? Yes. I heard about Philip in that revival. That was cool. And then the Ethiopian, and you sucked him away, like just, and then dropped him somewhere else. What do you want to do with me, Lord? A martyr like Stephen?

I don't know, Lord, about that, but oh, let's do it, Lord. Maybe like Peter, thousands of people saved. And Ananias answered and said, behold, I'm here.

Good answer. Very good answer. He was singled out for a specific purpose. God had called him for a purpose, but not as he expected. And the Lord said unto him, arise and go.

We saw that with Philip, right? Back in verse 27 of chapter 8, when he's there at the revival in Samaria. And then an angel of the Lord appears to him, says, arise and go.

And it says, and he rose and went. And we said that there's always this two-step process, process of responding to God's call. First, you respond by arising out of where you are.

[24 : 02] Then you respond by going to where you're called. You can never do it the other way around. He said, arise and go into the street, which is called straight, and inquire of the house of Judas.

You know, maybe he knew who he was. Like, okay, Judas. Interesting. Right? Am I going to go? Oh, okay. He's, he's connected with the synagogue. Maybe I'm going to go and witness to him. Maybe there's going to be, you know, a revival here in Damascus, like there was in Samaria.

For one called Saul. Ooh, Saul. Boy, I hope it's not Saul of Tarsus. Oh, no. For behold, he prays. Sure he does, Lord.

He's praying he can kill us all. He's praying upon us. And I've seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive him. Ananias's name, we see that two other places.

Where is the first place we saw that? Right? He had a wife, the guy who's named Ananias, they got killed off. Ananias and Sapphira. We're going to see it again later on when Paul is kind of going through that whole process where he's in Jerusalem, says, I appeal to Caesar.

[25 : 09] He ends up before Agrippa, and the high priest at that time is Ananias. The name Ananias means whom Jehovah has graciously given. And here Ananias is a gift, a gift of the Lord to Saul.

God has graciously given this man for this task and this moment. And yet Ananias is having a hard time accepting this. And he says that he's seen in a vision a man named Ananias, putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

We, you know, in the church, we understand, we do a lot of putting hands on. I take it for granted, you know, I've grown up in a bunch of different churches, Assembly of God, Baptist churches, community churches, and then about 14, Calvary Chapel, and then Calvary Chapel from then on.

So I've seen lots of different stuff, and some of it I just kind of take for granted, but I don't remember if it was Natalie or someone asked me afterwards, like, why do we put oil on people? You know, you pray and you anoint him with oil. I'm like, because you do.

But you do. Well, because it says in James, you know, let him who is sick go to the elders, and they will anoint him with oil and pray, and God will hear their prayer and heal the sick.

[26 : 21] It represents the Holy Spirit, right? This is the Holy Spirit, the oil that ran down upon Aaron. It represents being anointed by the Holy Spirit. And so, same with like putting on hands, you know, it doesn't mean as much in our culture anymore.

Unfortunately, even shaking hands has just disappeared. Like, I go to shake men's hands that like, men of stature and business, and they go, or they go, that's my favorite.

It's like the elbow. Like, what am I supposed to do with that? I mean, scratch it? It's like, I'll shake your hand. Or you go to shake their hand, and it's like, you know, and it's like, ah, shake my hand.

It doesn't mean anything anymore. Well, in this culture, laying on of hands meant something. It meant a transfer of authority. It was very important in their culture. And so, Saul understood, and Ananias understands, when he's putting his hands on him, Ananias is recognizing, whoa, we're transferring something.

This is a sign of acceptance. A transfer of authority. Lord, I don't know. Not what this guy saw. And Ananias answered the Lord, and said, I've heard by many of this man, how much evil he's done to thy saints at Jerusalem.

[27 : 34] And here he has authority from the chief priest, to bind all that call on his name. Well, Ananias, you need to listen to Jesus over the many. Right? Jesus just said to him, the only one in this whole story, who actually knows what's going to happen next, Ananias is like, no, Lord, I know what's going to happen.

This guy, mm-mm, this guy's going to kill me. He's come here, he has authority. Well, it's a higher authority. Romans 13 tells us that all authority, all authorities are given by God.

And no authority exists that's not given by him. And so he's been given authority, but Jesus is trumping that authority. And the Lord said unto him, go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, the kings, and the children of Israel.

We can only go our way. We can never go anyone else's way. Saul can only go his own way. Ananias can only go his own way. And here the Lord is saying, go your way.

You know, Ananias, you are a chosen vessel unto me. You are whom Jehovah has graciously given, and I've graciously given you much. Salvation and a call. You got to arise and go.

[28 : 42] And you have a way for you to go. We're going to eventually get to Saul, after he's converted and he's Paul, has a desperate desire to witness to the Jews. He wants to see his brethren saved.

But it's a mess every time he tries. He's like, I got this. I understand them. I'm totally schooled in all of their religion. They will listen to me. We're going to find out, if you briefly look over here further on in chapter 9, in verse 22, it says, But Saul increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that he is very Christ.

And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him. Peter does the same thing. He says, he proves, he witnesses to the resurrection that Jesus is the very Christ, and thousands get saved.

Well, what's the difference? I think of the scripture that says that the gospel is, when Paul will eventually write this and say, the gospel is the power of God and salvation. To the Jews, a stumbling block.

To the Greeks, foolishness. Paul is sent to the Gentiles, to the Greeks. The gospel's foolishness. You say, there's this man who's super smart will debate with them.

[29 : 57] Mm-mm. He goes, he says, I've determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. I did not come to you with wisdom of words, but in demonstration of the power and of spirit. The spirit. Your faith will not stand in the wisdom of men, but the power of God.

So here he stands in front of these Greeks who they want knowledge, and they look at this man and go, this is like one of the smartest men we've ever known. He was at the pinnacle of his career.

And now he's preaching foolishness. And it blew their minds. And yet, when they would debate with him, they were cut to the heart. He destroyed every argument they had. Paul thought he was ready for the Jews.

He thought, I need to go to the Jews. Yes. No, the Jews needed a stumbling block. That stumbling block was the little rock Peter. Petros. Right? What a stumbling block. They look at him and go, he's just some backwater hick Republican.

I mean, Galilean. You know, where did this guy come from? He doesn't know anything. But we can't, we can't speak against him. We can't put down his arguments.

[30 : 59] This guy's just, we're just stumbling over this. And so, the Lord knew, no, Paul, you're going to go to the Gentiles. But man, he wanted to, he wanted to get the Jews.

And we're going to, until he gets to the Gentiles, it's a mess. He just makes a mess where he goes. There's fruit. And it made me realize that we each have a sphere that God will make us successful in.

Not success like the world thinks so. But we have a sphere of influence or a sphere of work that God's called us to. Just like with Ananias. Go your way. A chosen vessel.

And we each have a specific sphere. And we try, and sometimes, before we're put in that, we're placed in that by the Lord, it's like, Lord, I feel like I'm just beating my head against the wall. I feel like no matter what I do, it's just, I mean, my heart's right.

I'm genuine. But there's no fruit. There's no success, shall we say. You know? I mean, sure, Lord, there's some fruit. You're doing a work.

[31 : 58] Well, that's because God has a specific sphere for each of us. We don't know, like Paul here, when we're going to be placed in that. And sometimes it comes and we're like, that's not what I thought it was going to look like.

I expected something different. Much different. The Lord says, no, go your way. I have chosen for you. And he said, go your way, for he's a chosen vessel, in verse 15.

He's chosen a vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, and the kings, and the children of Israel. Paul will get to bear his name before Israel many times. But it's not the same result as when he does it before the Gentiles.

So in verse 5, we find that Paul wasn't just chosen, but he chose. It seems like the Lord just kind of stepped in and chose for him and forced him. Paul, you're going to be converted.

But we're told here that Jesus says, Saul, you are my chosen vessel. And in verse 5, Saul said, Lord. It was a surrender. Like, yes, Lord. I don't understand this, but I recognize who you are now.

[33 : 02] And he said, for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. 1 Peter 4, verse 13 says, but rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's suffering.

This is Peter writing this, not Paul. Peter suffered plenty too. Rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's suffering. It's not your suffering. Saul, it's not going to be your suffering. When they beat you and leave you for dead and you crawl back into the city, it's not your suffering.

It's not our suffering when the enemy attacks, when he's pressuring our hearts and minds, when people are rejecting us, when people think we're goofy and foolish because we don't follow their stupid religions.

We actually follow something that gets real results. You are partakers of Christ's suffering, that when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.

How do those two things go together? I'm to rejoice that I'm a partaker of Christ's sufferings. Why? So that when his glory shall be revealed, when he comes in all of his fullness and glory, we're no longer looking through a glass darkly, but then face to face, at that time, I may be glad also with exceeding joy.

[34 : 18] How does suffering for Christ now relate to exceeding joy at that time? Well, because when we suffer for Christ, it indicates the direction our life is going. It indicates who we're surrendered to because the world hates Jesus and the enemy hates Jesus.

And so, just by the very nature of who we're identified with, we're going to suffer. And so, when Jesus comes in all his glory, we can stand there and go, Lord, you know I'm with you. You know I'm one of yours.

Remember that time? They hated me. And you said that take heart because know this, if the world hates you, they hated me first. And the servant is no greater than his master.

So, Lord, you know I'm with you. You know I'm one of yours. And Saul is being told, or Ananias is being told that this is Saul's lot in life, that he must suffer many things for my name's sake.

And Ananias went his way and entered into the house and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, brother, brother, we're brothers now, okay? Said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, he's laying a lot of groundwork here.

[35 : 27] Brother Saul, the Lord, remember? The Lord Jesus, the one who came to you, Jesus, same Lord, you're surrendered to him now, right? Good. Even Jesus that appeared unto you in the way as you came has sent me.

Jesus always appears in the way, always appears in the way, thankfully, right? Whatever way we're in, that's where he'll appear. We never have to worry that we're out of a way that Jesus can't meet us or reach us.

He always appears in the way. He sent me that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. You look, as we're going through Acts, they were saved, they believed, they were baptized, and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes in a little different order. Saved, baptized in the Holy Spirit. It was the natural thing. It was like, are you a believer? Have you received the Spirit? It was like you couldn't exist without it.

It's like a cell phone without a battery, right? Looks nice, great, completely non-functional. And that's what we are without the Holy Spirit. And unfortunately, I think because of what's been done in the name of the Spirit so often in today's world, nobody really wants to talk about that.

[36 : 38] And it's kind of like, have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit? You have. Oh, okay, I can talk to you about it. You know, you talk to someone else. Hey, the Holy Spirit. Well, I don't really believe any of the gifts are for today, and I think that cessationism happened, and I, oh, okay.

Well, cool. Must be a boring life. But he said that you might be filled with the Holy Spirit. I want to jump over, let's go over to Acts 22 because we need to see a little bit more from Ananias.

Actually, you know what? I think we're going to go to, let's go to 26 first. Paul is before Agrippa at this point, and he's giving an account of what happened in verse 13.

Well, verse 12, he says, Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

And when we were all fallen to the earth, boom, they all were knocked out. The guy's with him too. I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, desired one, desired one, why persecutest thou me?

[37 : 51] It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Well, that we already knew. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. And here now, something we didn't get from Acts 9. But rise, stand upon your feet, for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make thee a minister and to witness both of these things which you have seen and of those things in which I will appear unto you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send you.

to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

That's a lot that we didn't get from Acts chapter 9, that Jesus shows up to Paul, to Saul, and gives him this. So Saul is sitting there for three days. This is resonating in his mind.

He's appeared unto me for a purpose. I was persecuting him. He told me that. Why do you persecute me? I was killing his people. Well, that means what you do to the church you do to Jesus, doesn't it?

Saul never actually did anything specifically to Jesus, but he did to his people. He says, why are you persecuting me? Because it's his body. I've appeared unto you for a purpose. I'm going to make you a minister and a witness of these things which you've seen and of those which I'll appear unto you.

[39 : 11] Saul's going to go to Arabia for three years. From Damascus, he's going to go to Arabia and stay there for three years. He's eventually going to come back to Jerusalem and then he's going to go to Syria and Cilicia for over a decade before Barnabas comes and gets him and brings him to Antioch.

There's a lot that happens back as we go through Acts in a very short couple verses. He doesn't give all this. And during that time, Paul does receive a vision. If you turn to Galatians chapter 1, Paul tells us, kind of giving his background to the Galatians here.

In verse 17, he says, Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me. This is after his conversion. Right on the heels of what's happening now with Ananias.

Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and abode with him fifteen days.

But other apostles, saw I none, save James, the Lord's brother. And so Paul tells us that there's three years. What was he? Three years with Jesus and then fifteen days with Peter?

[40 : 18] That's a good ratio. That's a very good ratio of, you know, I know my ratio is not very good with that. I end up spending more time with the people of God than the God of the people.

But that's a good ratio there. So Paul goes into Arabia. Galatians in chapter one, still, you look at verse 21. He continues to tell them, Afterwards, I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia and was known by face under the churches of Judea which were in Christ.

But they had heard only that he which persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me. So that's going to be over a decade that he's going to be in that location before Barnabas comes and gets him.

So that was what Jesus had told him. He had given him this message. Encouraging, scary, but to have that handed to you, you know, had Paul had, how many years was he a Christian at this point?

He'd just been converted. And the Lord says, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to send you to be a minister, a witness. You're going to turn many from the power of darkness to light. The power of Satan to God to receive forgiveness of sins.

[41 : 33] Turn over to verse chapter 22. Now we'll see more of Ananias' story here. This is when he's standing, he's in the temple. They think he's just brought a Gentile into the temple.

The Jews do. They're rioting. The soldiers come down from the Antonio fortress. It kind of was up above. It could look down into the temple courts. The Romans could keep an eye on them. And they come down the stairs.

There's a riot. They grab Paul. They're taking him back up the stairs. He says, hey, hey, hey, hey, let me talk to them. Let me settle them down. So he's like, okay, go ahead. And in verse 5, no, sorry, we'll just back up to verse 1.

Men, brethren, and fathers, hear you my defense, which I make now to you. And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue, they kept them more silent. Oh, okay. The leader of the band of soldiers at the Antonio fortress, he thought, he's like, hey, aren't you that Egyptian that made an uproar and let out thousands into the wilderness and that was a murderer?

Like, no, I'm not. I'm a man of Tarsus, of no mean city. Tarsus was a hoppin' city. They were free from Roman, they're kind of free to rule themselves, but they're given status in the Roman system, Roman citizenship, but they're very well thought of in a very educational location.

[42 : 52] So anybody from Tarsus would have been considered as somebody. And so he says, I'm verily a man, in verse 3, which I'm a Jew born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of our fathers and was zealous toward God as you are this day.

And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women. Paul was never he was never he never hid his past. I think he was ashamed of it in the sense that like it hurt him that he did that.

He never hid it. He said, this is who I was. But I also think he never forgot it. The rest of his life, I think it was always, this is who I was and what I did. It's pretty bad. I think it ate at him some that he had done this to people now that he loved and shepherded.

And also, the high priest does bear me witness in all the estate of the elders from whom I also received letters unto the brethren who went to Damascus to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished.

And it came to pass that as I made my journey and was come nigh into Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. I fell into the ground and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

[44 : 04] And I answered, who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I'm Jesus in Ezareth. And they there with me saw indeed the light and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. So they knew it was a voice, but they couldn't make out who specifically.

And I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, arise and go into Damascus and there shall be told the all things which are appointed for thee to do. When I could not see for the glory of that light being led, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

And here we have Ananias now. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me and stood and said unto me, brother Saul, receive thy sight.

And the same hour I looked upon him. Well, we already knew all that. And he said, and Ananias now has more to say, the God of our fathers has chosen you that thou shouldest know his will and see the just one and should hear the voice of his mouth.

So think of what we just read from Acts 26 where Jesus comes and says, Saul, this is my calling for you. And he's sitting there for three days thinking this through. Wrecked.

[45 : 11] Totally wrecked. But probably with the most peace he's ever had in his entire life. His sins have been forgiven. He's met Jesus. And then have Ananias come and almost say the same thing Jesus said, that confirmation.

Wow. This is exactly what I heard in that vision. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15.8 that he is an apostle born out of due season. What was the qualifications of being an apostle?

You had to be with Jesus during his earthly ministry. You had to be there for the death, the burial, and the resurrection. You had to have been part of his ministry. Paul wasn't there.

Well, he was because Ananias says here, you are chosen that you should know his will and see the just one and that you should hear the voice of his mouth. Three years in Arabia with Jesus.

For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and what thou hast heard. And now, why tarryest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on the name of the Lord.

[46 : 12] What good news that must have been for Saul. All he had was this vision in this moment. It was pretty cool. But then to have someone come kind of like Philip did with the eunuch and to give him more understanding and say, hey, there's nothing that prevents you from being baptized.

Let your sins be washed away. Baptism didn't wash away his sins, right? Baptism was just his active participation in saying, yes, I recognize that Jesus has washed away my sins.

If you look at verse 17, and it came to pass that when I was come again to Jerusalem, even when I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance and saw him, saw Jesus, saying unto me, make haste, get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

But Paul will have opportunities where the Lord will appear to him. So this is the moment that Saul's just had. The conversion that's happening from Saul to Paul. This process is happening in three days.

A couple of very pointed moments. Jesus appears and speaks to him. Ananias is going to come and speak to him. Saul had a journey that he was on that he thought he knew the end. He didn't know what was coming.

[47 : 17] Ananias thought he knew how his day was going to go. He was a Christian. He had opportunities to walk with the Lord. He'd never had a day like this. He didn't know what was coming. Verse 18, And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received sight forthwith and rose and was baptized.

And when he had received meat he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus and preached straightway and straightway preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the son of God.

But all that heard him were amazed and said is not this he that destroyed them which called on his name in Jerusalem and came hither for that intent that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests.

But Saul increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus proving that this is the very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled the Jews took counsel to kill him.

And we'll stop there and pick up the rest of that narrative another time. Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the son of God. I think sometimes we do ourself a disservice in not recognizing the God we serve who he really is.

[48 : 31] We think ah I've only been a Christian for 30 years you know. Look at these guys. Look at Stephen. Look at Philip. Look at Saul.

Now Paul. Look at Ananias. Ananias couldn't have been even if he got converted on day one at Pentecost he's only a few years into this whole movement. And what do they have in common?

They're hearing the voice of the Spirit. They're hearing that. They're recognizing Jesus in his authority. They're acting upon it. Each one of these guys acting upon it. I hear the Lord's voice.

I don't always act upon it. I think sometimes I get used to just the routine of expecting the Lord to to speak to me. But I wonder how often the Lord's expecting me to act on that and I don't.

So the overall thing as we look at this each one of these people thought they knew what was coming next and they didn't. And each one of them had a sphere God was going to place them in like with Saul and Peter where they were going to be most productive for him.

[49 : 32] That they had a place God had a place for them. And we can set out like Paul no we're not going to go out or Saul to to wreak havoc to the church but when we go our own way instead of the Lord's way and we're not surrendered we end up wreaking havoc.

We end up messing up either our lives or messing something up because we're on the same path that eventually led Saul to breathe out threatenings and slaughtering. We're no longer walking in the spirit we're walking after our own counsel.

The counsel that Jesus brought to those who weren't saved and to those who were rocked their world. Saul did not expect this but he responded to it with surrender. Ananias did not expect this and he was a believer but he responded to it with surrender.

So it's okay when the Lord comes to us and rocks our world with something we're not expecting and says go here do this sit here say this whatever it is it's okay to have that moment Ananias and saying Lord let me explain this better to you this is who I am this is what that is there is nothing between me and here that can get me there and in each of these instances what did they need to do?

Saul arise go into the city Ananias go your way get up and go Philip what did he have to do? Go speak to him go and open your mouth the entrance fee isn't very high it doesn't cost a lot to do that it's what we anticipate coming next and every one of these people in this narrative tonight anticipated what was coming next and they were dead wrong so that's encouraging for me because I anticipate the worst most of the time I anticipate that which causes me apprehension you know we think that the Lord probably has the most difficult thing for us to do next where the thing he probably has for us to do next is like just go lie down in that green pasture over there get refreshed Saul's converted he's on fire he goes and spends three years alone with Jesus I don't think he would trade that for anything right so we each have a sphere God will show us that sphere when he tells us to step into it let's trust him and do that right so Father we thank you for an opportunity to just be immersed in you

[51 : 56] Lord thank you Jesus for appearing to Saul changing him to Paul Lord thank you Lord you looked at this man that none of us would look at and say yeah he's desirable for the church oh he's going to be a great guy you looked at him and you said oh I desire him desired one desired one and how you pushed into his life and you orchestrated Lord all of the plans Lord he made his plans and you directed his steps into grace Lord so you're going to do the same for us you've already gone ahead of us you've already made the way Lord you already planned it all out you have a specific sphere and a calling for each one of us just like you said to Ananias I have chosen him that he would go and be a minister and a witness unto me Lord we can say the same thing you have called each one of us Lord to be a light to this world and Lord I pray that we would be doers and not just hearers Lord of the word Lord I pray that like Paul Lord we've each had our conversion but Lord maybe we need to be knocked to the earth by heaven

Lord maybe we need to realize that there's a further surrender that needs to happen Lord I know I need to realize that Lord and I thank you Jesus I thank you so much that you're the only one who knows what's coming Lord just as we looked at Sunday Lord you are in the beginning at the beginning and like you tell us in I believe it's Isaiah you say I am the Lord I call the end from the beginning Lord you look at things backwards you look at them from the end to the beginning you know the end you know our ends Lord we don't have to fear we can walk forward in faith and assurance and Lord I just pray for a new filling and a new anointing a fresh baptism of your spirit Lord recognizing that apart from you we can do nothing and Lord also recognizing that that is what energizes us that is enabling Lord without that what are we doing and Lord I pray that you would fill your house Lord bring in a harvest in these last days and may we have the courage Lord to take that ginormous step of faith which is just go arise speak and love you Jesus in your name we pray

Amen