

**9** Then <sup>a</sup>Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked <sup>b</sup>letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> <sup>c</sup>As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. <sup>4</sup> Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, <sup>d</sup>why are you persecuting Me?"

<sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>1</sup>It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

<sup>6</sup> So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup> And <sup>e</sup>the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

### ***Ananias Baptizes Saul***

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus <sup>f</sup>named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias."

And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

<sup>11</sup> So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul <sup>g</sup>of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. <sup>12</sup> And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

<sup>13</sup> Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, <sup>h</sup>how much <sup>2</sup>harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all <sup>i</sup>who call on Your name."

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for <sup>j</sup>he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before <sup>k</sup>Gentiles, <sup>l</sup>kings, and the <sup>m</sup>children <sup>3</sup>of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For <sup>n</sup>I will show him how many things he must suffer for My <sup>o</sup>name's sake."

<sup>17</sup> <sup>p</sup>And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and <sup>q</sup>laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord <sup>4</sup>Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and <sup>r</sup>be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

<sup>19</sup> So when he had received food, he was strengthened. <sup>5</sup>Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

## Saving Saul (Acts 9:1-22)

### Introduction

Saul has been relentless in trying to stop the spread of the Way (Acts 8:2-3; 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). He has hauled away men and women to trials, beatings, and death in a ruthless effort to put an end to the Jesus movement (Acts 26:9-11). Now, having obtained permission from the high priest, he is traveling with an entourage to Damascus to arrest any Jews that he finds claiming to following Jesus; it is a no-holds-barred effort to destroy the church (Galatians 1:13).

His concern about the strength of the movement in Damascus is not unwarranted. Indeed, Saul was on point in thinking that the Jesus movement in that city was not to be ignored; the Lord's followers will keep spreading His message (Acts 8:4-5). Luke introduces us to one of those followers in the account of Saul's conversion: Ananias (*Yahweh is gracious*, Acts 22:12). This man is a disciple (μαθητής) or a learner of Jesus' (Acts 9:10). As we consider the conversion of Saul and the role of Ananias we are given indispensable insights for missional living in our own day.

### Confronting the Persecutor (Acts 9:1-9; 26:11)

**<sup>1</sup> Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. <sup>4</sup> Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." <sup>6</sup> So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." <sup>7</sup> And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.**

**9:1** The **still** (ἔτι) of Acts 9:1 indicates that Luke is picking up again his story about Saul. Who is Saul? He is the young man introduced during the execution of the first martyr of the church (Acts 7:58). Saul, beyond lending his support for the murder of Stephen, was leading the vicious attack on the Jesus-Follower community.

<sup>1</sup> Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> As for Saul, he made havoc of the

church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison. (Acts 8:1-3)

While the Lord was using Philip to reach the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-8) and an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), Saul was spearheading efforts to destroy the church (Galatians 1:13). But, again, who is he? By birth he is a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5). By conviction he is a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; Philippians 3:5). By citizenship he is a Roman (Acts 22:25-29) born in Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39) and educated by one of the greatest rabbis of the ancient world - Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). By education he is a Greek. By grace, though, he will become a Jesus follower himself.

Concerning our Bible here are some interesting statistics about Saul's work after his encounter with Jesus:

- Paul wrote 50190 of 179011 words of the NT (28%)
- He wrote 13 of the 66 books in the Bible (19.7%).
- He wrote 13 of the 27 books in the NT (48.1%).

We are sometimes ready to write a person off based on their faults and failures. However, while we may not be able to see how they could amount to much, which God all things are possible.

**9:2** But prior to the days when he would be inspired the great chapter on love (1 Corinthians 13) he would be a young man with a bitter hatred for Jesus followers. He is now on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus with extradition authority; he has permission from the high priest to (1) arrest anyone he finds calling on the name of Jesus and (2) to bring them bound back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2).

**9:3-4** Saul and his cohort are **near Damascus** when they are interrupted. They were accosted by a light from the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). The brightness of the light that **shone around him** exceeded the light of the midday sun itself (Acts 26:12-13) and rendered the church persecutor unable to see (Acts 22:11). Saul **fell to the ground**. It was then that he heard a voice in his native tongue of Hebrew posing a question: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

There is significance in the twofold mention of Saul's name in the address. This is called the

double vocative and it communicates emotion. Consider (1) the following cases where it is used by Jesus and then (2) verses that explain how Jesus feels about those being address.

- Addressing Martha (Luke 10:41) - And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things." And then what is recorded about his disposition toward Martha? The answer comes from the gospel of John: Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (John 11:5)
- Addressing Jerusalem (Luke 13:34) - "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!" Later Luke will share this insight into how Jesus feels concerning Jerusalem and her fate: Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, (Luke 19:41).

What are we to say, then, about the question of Jesus to Saul (Acts 9:4)? In the light of these other passages where the double vocative is used and where Jesus' feelings toward the person or group are disclosed, Jesus loves Saul. Let that sink in. The Lord loves the one that has been persecuting Him.

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Matthew 5:44)

**9:5** In the next verse we have the first calling out and confronting of Saul's crime of unbelief. Where, you ask, is the mention of unbelief? Let us note that we are reading Luke's account. In the words of Saul (later Paul) himself through Luke this is what was said:

<sup>6</sup> "Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. <sup>7</sup> And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' <sup>8</sup> So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' (Acts 22:6-8)

They are nearly identical. Luke, however, does not mention the **of Nazareth** that Jesus gives as an answer to Saul's question. (It is not a contradiction because Luke does not deny that it was said.) Is it significant? Consider the following:

- The Testimony of Peter (Acts 2:22) - When speaking to a crowd of people that are questioning the miraculous events of Pentecost Peter says Jesus of Nazareth. In the light of most recent events (John 19:19) there is no doubt who Peter is referring to.
- The Testimony of the Stephen's Accusers (Acts 6:34) - The name Jesus is mentioned with the region (Nazareth) that the rabble rousing rabbi was from. In this way the crowd knows which Jesus was being referenced by Stephen and his accusers.

Through this mention of Nazareth the Lord disambiguates the name Jesus. Saul was persecuting people that call on this name in reference to the person that hailed from the town of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth was associated with claims of blood relations to David, miracles, signs, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the power to heal the lame. Jesus of Nazareth is the figure at the center of the cult that Saul is trying to stop. And why is Saul trying to stop the Jesus movement? Because he does not believe it.

Despite all of the signs, wonders, and witnesses, **goads** against which it is hard to kick, Saul rails against the church. Each of these things is being used by the Holy Spirit to convict Saul of the sin of unbelief. Each is a sharp object pricking his conscience and causing him discomfort. And yet he has been determined to be unbelieving. Although unobligated, Jesus stages an intervention to throw light on the real issue.

**9:6** The light, the voice, and the revelation overwhelm Saul. He is **trembling and astonished**. This means he has been raising his hand against Messiah and His people (Psalm 2:1-3). Indeed, he has helped to put to death people who have been right all along about Jesus of Nazareth. He was so blind. But now, although blind (Acts 9:8), Saul sees the Truth.

#### **Ananias' Assignment (Acts 9:10-12)**

**<sup>10</sup> Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." <sup>11</sup> So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. <sup>12</sup> And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."**

The work of God in the life of Saul has been humbling. Three days ago he was on his way to Damascus with extradition papers to arrest the Lord's disciples. But things have changed and God has brought the Pharisee to the point where he desperately wants the help of one of the Lord's disciples - **Ananias**. Three days ago Saul would have seized this man and taken him to Jerusalem for trial. But now, blinded by glory, he can only hope for the helping hand of the Lord's disciple on himself.

When Ananias sees the Lord in a vision he is given an assignment that involves Saul. Notice that when Ananias is called there is no confusion about who is speaking. He says, "**Here I am, Lord.**" This stands in stark contrast with Saul who was completely ignorant regarding the view and voice of Jesus.

What follows is a dialogue between two people. From one perspective it is the sending of a subject by his Sovereign Lord. Looked at from another angle it is a request upon the redeemed by his Redeemer. Either of these views is valid and certainly offers something to the reader as he attempts to make sense of the text. But it is perhaps most helpful, when considering the repeated use of the word disciple (μαθητής) and trying to understand the meaning of the passage for its original readers, to see it as an assignment and lesson for a student from his Teacher-Lord. In the talking of the text, when looked at this way, the Pedagogue is seen patiently imparting truths that will serve Ananias as he carries out the instructions.

**9:10-11** In a vision Ananias is called by name and quickly responds, "**Here I am, Lord.**" (Ananias' response is a reminder of Isaiah's response to the Lord's question about who will be a witness for Him; See Isaiah 6:8.) As with Joseph (Matthew 2:13; 2:20), a paralyzed man (Matthew 9:5), Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:26), and recently with Saul (Acts 9:6) the command to **Arise and go** is given with the expectation of *immediate obedience*. The instructions are clear - put a healing hand on a man that has sought to destroy the church (Acts 9:12). And in the instructions to Ananias the Lord has given two indications that Saul will not be problem. First, Jesus tells Ananias that Saul having already been given a vision. Remember that before the Lord called Philip he had gone before preparing the Ethiopian Eunuch. And in this instance, before calling Ananias, the Lord has gone before preparing Saul.

**The Spirit of the Lord goes before those sent making hearts ready for what will be said. He goes before the preaching preparing people for the truth that will be declared.**

Second, there is what Saul saw and heard on the road to Damascus. He saw the Lord and was confronted personally by Christ Himself in Aramaic about his sin. Notice, that Jesus does not tell Ananias at the time about Saul's experience on the road. (He will tell him more later; See Acts 22:12-16.) And neither will He tell us everything that He is doing to prepare people to hear the gospel from us. At some point we have to be willing to trust and obey go (Matthew 28:18).

Questions for Community Discussion

- What indicator is there that Ananias knows Jesus? (John 10:27)
- Why does Jesus tell Ananias that Saul of Tarsus is praying? (Acts 9:11)

- Are you responding in immediate obedience to the Lord's command to go? (Matthew 28:18-20)
- In what ways did God prepare you for the gospel before you heard it?

#### Ananias' Answer (Acts 9:13-14)

**<sup>13</sup> Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."**

Based on the absence of **Arise** in Acts 9:15 we may gather that the concerns of Ananias were given *while getting up*. What remained after the concerns expressed in these two verses was the going; I imagine that he was now standing when the command to **Go** was given. Seen this way his concerns are not two reasons for refusing to go but the real concerns of a man in relationship with Jesus. He was not afraid to share what bothered him about the assignment with his Teacher and Lord. And the Teacher is not seen getting angry over the questions. It is a teaching moment.

Saul's reputation precedes him. Ananias had **heard from many about this man**. With each concern that is shared we have Ananias' implied concern for himself.

*1<sup>st</sup> Concern - Expressed:* Saul has a history of hurting Jesus followers. *Implied:* Since I am a Jesus follower I might get hurt.

The damage done by Saul is well known. On account of his persecution in Jerusalem people had already come from Jerusalem to Damascus seeking refuge.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Concern - Expressed:* Saul has arrived with the authority to arrest Jesus followers in Damascus. *Implied:* Since I am a Jesus follower in Damascus he has authority to arrest me... and you are sending me to the man.

Ananias uses the phrase **who call on Your name** to refer to Jesus followers. Peter had used this wording, originally used in Joel 2:32, earlier in Luke's history of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:21).

#### Ananias' Assurance (Acts 9:15-16)

**<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how many things he must**

**suffer for My name's sake."**

Jesus takes time to answer the concerns of Ananias. In each answer He gives assurance. The command to **Go** is followed by the first assurance: Saul has been selected to bring the name of Jesus to Gentiles, rulers, and Jews. In the language of reason there is an already-not-yet explanation of why there is nothing to fear.

## **The Lord changes whom He chooses.**

To bear the name is to be a willing witness for Jesus. Without expanding further He has told Ananias that the grace of God is greater than Saul's sin or sin nature. Jesus says, in effect, "Yes, Ananias, he has a history of hurting My people. But, because of My own immutable decision to show kindness to my enemy, he has a future of faithfulness to Me and My people." I found the second reason curious. It did not immediately makes sense to me that this would have been assurance to Ananias or even a reason for going. But then I saw that the sufferings mentioned were heard as the common experience of the family of faith. Ananias is being told that Saul will suffer the pain that he caused not as retribution but as a consequence of belonging to Christ.

## **The promised suffering for the Lord's sake is a word sign of Saul's eminent salvation.**

**Ananias' Action (Acts 9:17-18)**

**<sup>17</sup> And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.**

Ananias accepts the assurances and takes the assignment. After locating the house he goes in and meets the man who has been breathing murder and threats against the disciples. But by the grace of God faith has overcome fear; He puts his hands on the blind and broken man and calls him **Brother Saul**. This is significant because Saul has not yet received the Holy Spirit. This is noteworthy in light of the fact that the blind man has not yet said anything to indicate that the hate is gone. Ananias believes what the Lord has said and sees by faith the new man even before the changes are complete.

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.  
(Hebrews 11:1)



Ananias is sent with the mission of helping Saul to see and be filled with the Holy Spirit. If Spirit filling is not forced but is the outworking of unconditional yieldedness we see the positive side of pain that the Lord causes. It was the confrontation, the blindness, and the waiting that worked in the man to produce both godly sorrow and surrender.

**Sometimes we do our best work with God when we allow Him to humble the rebel. And we do our worst when we attempt to deliver the criminal from a crises that will be used to bring about his conversion. Discernment is needed by those who would cooperate with the Lord in His working to save our fellow man.**

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. In what ways does God use discomfort to bring about a good change in Saul? (Acts 9:8-12)
2. What is the reason for using Ananias to help bring about instructions, healing, baptizing, and filling? (Acts 9:17-18) Hint: Paul is being helped by someone that he was there to hurt.

#### The Apologetic of a Changed Life (Acts 9:19-22)

**<sup>19</sup> So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus is the Christ.***

Years ago a mentor shared with me that the greatest modern miracle is the miracle of a changed life. Over the years I have seen the truth of this. When a person known for acts of excessive evil becomes synonymous with deeds of definite good a miracle has taken place. The gospel of Jesus Christ is made more credible through the stark contrast between what the person was and what they become. When the change is not forced and the person has no material or social gain from the change their conversion becomes an apologetic. Such is the case with Saul.

**9:19** After receiving his sight and the filling of the Holy Spirit brother Saul spends time in

fellowship with the disciples at Damascus. He had been there to arrest them. Now he is with them for another reason - mutual encouragement in their common faith.

**9:20-22** When given an opportunity he does what Christ asks of us all; he witnesses. More than just telling the truth, **he preached the Christ in the synagogues**. As he called other Jews to faith in Jesus of Nazareth people were amazed and confused. Formerly this same man had been trying to destroy people who call on the name Jesus. Now he is calling his brethren to call on the name Jesus. In other words he says, "Brethren, I was wrong. Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Messiah. He is the Son of God promised in the Scriptures. I know that I tried to get people to change their minds but... I have changed my mind. I was blind but now I see. Join me in receiving forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus." Of course it was hard to receive and some tried to say that he was wrong. But, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he was **proving that Jesus is the Christ**. Saul himself is now one of the many reasons why people have to consider the claim that Jesus is the Christ. After all, the leading prosecuting attorney against Jesus has dropped his case and become a proponent for the Lord.

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