

From Murderer to Missionary - Acts 9:1-31
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

The conversion in Acts 9 is a monumental moment in the story and in Christian history. In a moment the most ardent persecutor of Christians became a follower of Jesus himself, a murderer became the most significant missionary and theologian the church has ever seen. We first met Saul (A.K.A. Paul) in Jerusalem at the murder of Stephen after he proclaimed Jesus to the Sanhedrin. Saul stood over the body as it received blows from the rocks being thrown approving of his death. This led to a persecution with Saul at the forefront arresting believers and having them harassed, thrown in prison, and even martyred. The outcome was the scattering of the church from Jerusalem to regions throughout Samaria and Judea, and all over the Middle East and Europe. The greatest evil quickly became the greatest good as the Gospel left a city and started spreading to the world. But Saul did not see this as a good thing, so he kept pursuing Christ-followers, members of “the Way” who fled to other areas. He gained warrants to arrest Jesus’ people in the city of Damascus up on the coast at the border of Israel and Syria. This story is called “the Road to Damascus” because it was on this very journey that Jesus met Saul face to face and changed his life.

Think of the arrogance and evil that must reside in a person’s heart to pursue people in other towns to arrest and have them executed because their belief system is different. By the way, this sort of thing goes on all over the world, as followers of Jesus in many other cultures and contexts meet this morning knowing their safety and lives could be in danger. Yet, while Saul is on this journey he experiences a bright light, so bright that it blinds him, and hears a voice speaking. “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” What a statement. Do you see it? Jesus is identifying the persecution of His followers as persecution to Himself. The God of the universe who sacrificed His own life for our redemption is telling Saul that he is in an awful and dangerous place, because he is not just harassing some wayward individuals, he has chosen to pick a fight with Jesus, the Son of God. In a moment, the blink of an eye, this evil and arrogant man had everything he believed to be true deconstructed. And he quickly realized that he deserved from Jesus everything he had been trying to do to His followers. Yet, Saul was met with life-changing grace and mercy on the Road to Damascus. But part of that mercy was the undoing of Saul, being left helpless and blind, unable to defend or care for himself.

Saul meets a man named Ananias in Damascus, a faithful follower of Jesus whose name was probably on Saul’s list. He too saw a vision of Jesus, but this one was a call to go meet Saul, lay hands on him, and see him saved by the grace of Jesus. So Ananias calls Saul, the murdered and persecutor of believers “brother” as he lays hands on him. Scales fall from Saul’s physical eyes, but this is also a metaphor of what his happening to the eyes of his Spirit as blinded eyes to the truth of the Gospel now see, and see unbelievably clearly. Saul will immediately go about preaching Jesus as the Son of God, the Christ, and in the name of Jesus our Lord. This is just the beginning in Acts, eventually the story will show us that this man will take the Gospel all the way to Rome, and pretty much to every major city in the Greek and Roman world.

For us, the story is about the hilarious, glorious grace of Jesus who saves sinners. Saul, later known as Paul would declare that he was the worst of sinners, yet it was grace that reached down and rescued him (see I Corinthians 15:1-7). There are a couple clear applications for us. First, you are never beyond the reach of Jesus. The Gospel made available through the death and resurrection of Jesus is sufficient to cover all sin, even the sin of a terrorist like Saul. If God can rescue this man, you too are within the scope of His redemption. This is why we so clearly believe in salvation by grace alone. On one hand, nothing you do can earn this. Saul tried that, he was about as religiously dedicated as a person could be, zealous for what he believed was true. In terms of Jewish Law keeping,

nobody could outdo this man. Yet, it was that very prideful dedication to keeping the Law that built up his hatred to those who disagreed. We cannot earn God's favor, and our attempts to do just that actually leave us further from God than we know. Yet, we are saved solely by trusting in Jesus because of the free gift of redemption made available by Jesus' sacrifice. And this gift is available to all, no matter how far you might have strayed or how bad you have failed. If Saul can be saved so can you. Second, this text is a reminder that nobody we know is outside of the scope of redemption. We should never write someone off because of their hardness of heart, their sinfulness, or even hate of Jesus and His followers. Sometimes, just to prove how amazing He is, Jesus chooses to save those people. And what joy will He give us when we are faithful to proclaim Jesus and love those who hate us. So our call is to love, pray for, and even share the Gospel with our enemies and the people we think are the furthest from God in our culture. May we be like Ananias hearing the voice of God to rise and go to Straight Street to meet the former murderer and terrorist with the hope that God can save him.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Jeremiah 44	Jeremiah 45	Jeremiah 46	Jeremiah 47	Jeremiah 48	Jeremiah 49	Jeremiah 50

Reading from this past week: Acts 9:1-31

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 9:31-43

Family Worship

Song - *His Mercy is More*

<https://youtu.be/l1GiZL60c80>

Gospel Project

Unit: King Saul

Story: God is good to judge sin

Big Picture Question: Why does sin separate us from God?

Answer: Because God is holy, sin has broken our relationship with God

Scripture: Genesis 18

New City Catechism

Question #26: What else does Christ's death redeem?

Answer: Every part of fallen creation.

Verse: Colossians 1:19-20

Scripture

Acts 9:1-31

- Maybe you are familiar with this story, or maybe not. But if we really think about this story it is shocking. What is so incredible about this story?
- If someone who persecuted Christians and who had killed people you knew because of their faith showed up at church, could you call him a brother? How does the response of Ananias in this story challenge you?
- Why is it important for us to remember that no person is outside of Jesus' redemption in the Gospel, and that no sin is beyond God's forgiveness?

Prayer

*Pray for the end of abortion and that God would give grace to mothers considering it.

*Pray for the Hunters Green neighborhood

*Pray that you would find great joy in the Gospel in which God saves His enemies.