

## Acts 9 “A Chosen Instrument”

Acts 9:1-22

August 17, 2025

### Acts 9:1-22

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. <sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” <sup>5</sup> And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. <sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” <sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” <sup>17</sup> So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; <sup>19</sup> and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

What Acts 9 records is likely the **most significant conversion** story we know. Saul writes about his conversion experience in different places in the New Testament and one of those important for us today is 1 Timothy 1:15-16.

1 Timothy 1:15-16

15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

**Saul sees himself as an example for others.** *In what way?* Aspects of Saul conversion experience are not easily relatable. Bright lights. Jesus speaks audibly. From the experience Saul is blind. Another man has a vision directly him to go to Saul who heals his blindness. This has been something that **I have struggled with** over the years. Thinking, if I had been converted like this, knocked down, confronted with a risen and living Jesus, blind to later see - I imagine my life being more bold and worrying less. How is Saul's conversion helpful? It feels more unfair.

**Illus. Maybe you know people with big and dramatic conversion stories.** I have a friend that had involved in drug use and it turned into a prolonged issue in which he was visually impaired, it scared him and he tells the story of going to the Christian he knew and asking him for help. Their conversation became a salvation conversation and when Jesus saved my friend he healed him the drug affects instantly.

Then there are others not as dramatic. We read about the Ethiopian eunuch last week, just reading the Bible and from a conversation with Philip about the Scripture - stops and gives his life to Jesus through baptism. So conversion seems different for each person but there are some common elements that **I want to show you this morning - How Saul's conversion an example of our own conversion and that aspects of Saul's conversion are important of any true conversion?**

***V. 3 Now as Saul approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice.*** We don't know exactly whether it was the light or the voice but something knocked Saul to the ground. And this is the first sign of true conversion - that when we saved, **whatever direction we were headed in before changes.** Whatever we thought was important is confronted with a bigger and heavier reality. **Saul fell to the ground.**

Christianity is not a set of religious ideas or a way of being good and moral that we add to our lives. **Christianity is confrontation** that whatever we've acquired or accomplished, that all of it been a self serving effort to control and determine our lives, as if we could be our own saviors. Saul later writes in ***Romans 3 - everyone is under sin. "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.***

**We need a God that different** than what we might make him out to be, because a god you want to believe in will never actually change you. We need a god that doesn't respond to us based on our good works or bound to religious devotion.

***When Saul is knocked down,*** he says, "*Who are you, Lord?*" Which is a fascinating question because for Saul his devotion, education and passion would have signaled that he was someone in the know. That he did know God. Saul is a picture of human work and effort and sincerity and if those things are enough, (Our culture wants to believe that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe it with all your heart), but this moment is striking because when the Lord shows up, Saul has no idea who He is. Saul reveals to us that there is a

human concept of who God is, and then there is a greater and more true reality.

**Being knocked down sets a new direction** for our lives. The word “*repentance*” describes this and I like the word for repentance in Hebrew, “T-shuva”. It means to come to the end and turn, but has the context of someone returning home. It is to stop and head in the direction that you were meant to go. Christianity was never meant to be a set of ideals and principles that you picked up or added to your life. It was a new way of living in which your old life ended and a new one started **with Jesus**.

**Saul asks, Who are you, Lord?” And he hears, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”**

Another aspect of Saul’s conversion is an example of any true example, conversion occurs **with** a risen Jesus.

**Saul’s conversion** has actually become evidence for a risen Jesus. You may have heard some of those proofs before, such as why would the disciples die for a lie, or why would the gospel account include so many elements of surprise and the disciples appearing ignorant and caught off guard, why would it be that honest unless that is really what happened? And it is this conversion of Saul that has been hard to example a part from a true encounter with a risen Jesus. What did Saul have to gain socially or religiously from his conversion? There only good explanation is that **Saul encountered a risen Jesus** and his life was changed.

**Our conversion becomes a moment in which we are now with Jesus**. Christianity is more than going to church and trying to do unto others what you would have them do unto you. Trying to be less self centered and more charitable. **Christianity is an encounter with a risen Jesus**. Jesus said, “Saul why do you persecute me.” Saul is throwing Christians into prison and Jesus says what you are doing you do to me. **When we suffer. He suffers.** No other faith says this. An alive Jesus means that everything is headed in a certain direction. And our union with an alive and risen Jesus is our ongoing **salvation**, a **righteousness** that is alive and bestowed by risen Jesus with a **future**

secure because Jesus is making all things new and will see it accomplished.

### **Saul's conversion is an example of our submission and service**

Luke writes that there was man named Ananias in Damascus, a Christian. And the Lord tells him to go to Saul, who praying, and who has seen a vision of you laying his hands on him. Ananias says that he has heard about Saul and all the evil he has done in Jerusalem. And if you are telling me to go to Saul, you are asking me to go to someone who has a warrant for my arrest. The Lord said, "Go, for his a chosen instrument."

**Acts 9:16**

**16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."**

### **Saul is an example of true conversion as our lives are redirected from self towards service.**

**2 Corinthians 4:7-12**

**7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.**

If you life isn't moving towards service and a way of expressing the glory of God through sacrifice and the willing and joyful meeting of needs in those around him, then re-examine your conversion.

**Karl Barth** - Swiss Theologian from the early 1900s, says that service "In general terms, service is a willing, working, and doing in which a person acts not according to his own purpose or plans but with a view to the purpose of another person and according to the need, disposition, and direction of others. It is an act whose freedom is limited and determined by the others' freedom, an act whose glory

becomes increasingly greater to the extent that the person is not concerned about his own glory but about the glory of the others.”

**A Christians willingness to limit** our on freedoms, narrow down our choices, and do what is best for someone else is distinctly Christian. When Jesus says about Saul that “I will show him how much he must suffer for my sake”, Jesus says that to all of us, [John 13:16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.](#) As Jesus came to serve and not be served, so we are also growing and moving to acts of service, other centeredness, and willing to be uncomfortable.

- *How easily and spontaneously do the small, messy, and annoying things get done around you?*

- *How are limiting and directing your own freedoms to help someone else?*

**Saul’s conversion is an example of a life in community.**

***V.17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul”***

**Illus.** Did anyone else have a church experience in which everyone called each other brother or sister? My first few church experiences, all the pastors were called “Brother”. “Brother John”. “Brother Jimmy”. “Brother Chet”

**Being in Christ means being in Christ with others who are in**

**Christ.** I don’t belong to God first and then decide whether or not to join a local church community but to be Christian is to be committed to a local community. There is a deeper knowing of Jesus through the face and friendship of other brothers and sisters. You were *not just saved from yourself* and the penalty of *sin but saved into a family.*

***Romans 12:5 - so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.***

**Illus.** **Refrigerator Privileges-** (who doesn’t have to ask permission to open your refrigerator?) **or a 2 a.m friend** - if you needed to call someone at 2 a.m. and knew they would answer, who is it?

**Last point, Saul's conversion is an example of God's pursuing grace in every conversion.**

“So long as we imagine it is we who have to look for God, we must often lose heart. But it is the other way about - He is looking for us. And so we can afford to recognize that very often we are not looking for God; far from it, we are in full flight from him, in high rebellion against him. And He knows that and has taken it into account. He has followed us into our own darkness; there where we thought finally to escape him, we run straight into his arms. So we do not have to erect a false piety for ourselves, to give us the hope of salvation. Our hope is in his determination to save us, and he will not give in.” - Simon Tugwell

**False piety** - We don't have to project something from ourselves that we think God would like and so be interested in us. Our hope is in God's tenacity and desires to save us. He has chosen to come after us and to save us and we rest in his determination not in ours or who we hope to be.

It may feel sometimes as if it is all up to us to find God. For every passage that encourages us to seek Him, there are passages that affirms that God is looking for us.

**Illus. Playing hide and seek** with your Dad. If your Dad is hiding - his real goal is not to stay hidden - his real goal is to be found. What is more special to him than a good hiding place is the moment of discovery and the reunion that takes places upon being found. (How I make noises under the bed, or leave my feet revealed at the bottom of the curtains)

**Saul is an example of God's perfect patience and his desire to create an encounter.**

Acts 26:14

**14** And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

**'to kick against the goads'** was an expression from the practice of farmers goading their oxen in the fields. Goads were slender pieces of timber and pointed on one end. Farmers used the pointed end to direct a stubborn ox. Occasionally, the beast would kick at the goad, causing greater pain." So when Saul tells that Jesus says, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" Jesus is pointing out how Saul is resisting God's work, not working for God as he thinks. And even though Saul's conversion seems like a sudden encounter, God has been working on him for awhile, prodding, and guiding.

It's the example of God's pursuing grace in our lives and how He has often been working in numerous ways. It is never just one event.

"Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone." Eugene Peterson

***Saul writes "I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life"***

I received mercy so that you would know God is merciful. **If God would save me - there is enough grace and love for you.** It was for your sake that God saved Saul the way he did, so that you would understand something more about the love, mercy, goodness, and patience of God.

God's mercy and power are not limited to people from Christian homes and have grown up in church. The chief of sinners was converted. And that means hope for you. **What have you done?** Been divorced. Bankrupt. Addicted. Humiliated. Abused. Confused. Cursed God. That is the stuff God works with. That is the only stuff God works with for we have all been a part of that. Jesus said it is not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick.

Whether you are on your way - to the grocery store or to your next sin. when something or someone intervenes.... and your world falls a part

and is in pieces all around. Most often our undoing is God's gesture of mercy. When God steps in no matter how abrupt and painful - it is an act of His grace. And God is good so we don't have to worry **about the "why" things happen-** and through Saul we know isn't without purpose. God keeps bringing us to new places. To new points. Where He can take our lives and turn them around towards home.

### **Prayer -**

When Saul also know as Paul says he is an example for us - he means that God had you in mind when Saul was saved.

Are you open to God knocking you off your chariot so that you can see by faith and not by sight? Are you open to a new way of seeing things. For Saul it was now going to be seeing life through the fact that Jesus is Lord and that God had a purpose for his life. And this is the same perspective God wants for you today too.

Psalm 118:1. Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever!