

9/18/22 - Acts 9:1-19 - "Once Lost, Now Found"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Our scripture reading for today is Acts 9, starting from verse 1, reading to verse 19.

So if you have your Bibles, feel free to open up there to Acts chapter 9, starting at the beginning of the chapter. But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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.

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him, and falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And he said, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus. Whom are you persecuting? Whom you are persecuting?

But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do. The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one.

[1 : 24] 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. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

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.

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, 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.

But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.

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

[2 : 42] 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.

And immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, and taking food, he was strengthened.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen.

Amen. It's great to be gathered here today and to be opening up God's word together.

This is the best day of the week. And we're going to be continuing in the series today. Let me make sure we got all the slides up that we need.

- [3 : 45] And I'm really excited to dive into this passage today. What a powerful passage that we just read through. Thank you, Daniel, for reading that. Boy, it's been a crazy week in the life of leadership at Steel Valley Church.
- And so we are excited to dive into something that has authority over all things, gives everything in life perspective.
- And regardless of how you came, we know that when we leave the word of God, we leave changed. And so we are going to be changed today by the word. Amen. Amen.
- And so we reach a two-episode account, and we meet this man. He's a devout. He's a trilingual.
- He's an intelligent Jewish man. So devout, his family actually stems back to the tribe of the Benjamin Knights. This family was devout Jewish people.
- [4 : 51] And so we know one thing about this name, though. We've heard this name before, haven't we? We've heard this name Saul.
- This isn't the first time we've met this man named Saul. And his authority was made known to us in our series in the book of Acts, all the way back to Stephen's death, where the garments of Stephen were laid at the feet of this young man named Saul.
- We saw that Saul actually approved of Stephen's execution. And we see towards the beginning of Acts chapter 8 that Saul was ravaging the church.
- He was going in homes and taking people out and charging them. This man was a Pharisee. He was a student of Gamaliel. And he never heeded the advice of this Gamaliel of the Sanhedrin back when they were questioning Peter and John of what do we do with these disciples?
- Should we just arrest them and kick them out? But Gamaliel, remember Gamaliel? He stood up among the Sanhedrin. And he said, if this is of God, then it's going to continue.
- [6 : 06] If it's not, it's going to stop. We don't have to do anything. And Gamaliel being the teacher of young man Saul. It was like a Timothy and Paul relationship.
- Saul and Paul relationship. And we see that he did not heed those directions from Gamaliel. But unbeknownst to Saul, God would summon this man for a task.
- This task would be to reveal through his proclamation and penmanship the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because this Saul, as we see today, he is the author of 14 of 27 books, manuscripts that we have bound within our Bibles today.
- This man was called, he was summoned by God. And so through the account of Saul that we just read through today, we meet the amazing transformative power of God.
- The power, the grace of God. We see the radical activity of God revealing himself to man. But we also see something is the mission that the entire church is brought into.
- [7 : 28] This passage today is about God's miraculous intervention in our lives. As he pulls us off the road of darkness and sets us on the road to life.
- This is what the passage is about today. And so I have a sermon title for us. Once lost, now found. Stolen from the wonderful hymn, amazing grace.
- Right? And so if you're not a believer, if you've kind of just found yourself, you heard that this is the best place to be on Sunday morning.
- The best day of the week. Best place to be. So you came in and you tried it out. Well, welcome. So if you're not a believer today, stepping into this building, I trust that you could very well be stepping out of this building a believer of Jesus Christ.
- A follower of Jesus Christ. And we're going to talk about just how that comes to be. And we see a gospel-packed account that left Saul speechless on the road of darkness.

[8 : 35] He said the question, who are you, Lord? And might God expose the answer to that question in full today in our midst?

In a generation, a century so far removed from this occurrence, might we be exposed to the answer to that question? So let's see two roads colliding today, that of darkness and of light.

And before we get into the thick of it, I want us to pray. So please join me in a word of prayer. Father, we are grateful to be here, to be gathered at this place in this time.

And this is by no coincidence that any ear is in this building right now as we open up the word of life. Jesus, to you we lift our eyes, our glory, and our prize.

Let us see you today, God. We praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So we got two sections today.

[9 : 48] The failed Baptist preacher I am today with only two. And so the first section is the rejecter meets the rejected.

And so verse 1 of chapter 9 begins, But Saul, sort of hanging like, but Saul.

Here he goes. Still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, that was a term for Christians back in that day, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

So we kind of got this narrative that's setting up for us, church. And that narrative begins with, But Saul.

And this plugs into sort of how Luke has structured the book of Acts in such a way that has been bringing good news and bad news. You kind of sense that tension in the entire book of Acts in this series so far.

[11 : 00] We see that there were good things that happened, there were bad things that happened. And we saw the good news of Jesus commissioning to the disciples. Praise the Lord. But guess what? Jesus leaves. Okay, what do we do now?

Well, good news. The Holy Spirit comes. Oh, but the bad news, they get arrested for it. And then there's charity among the church. But then there's Ananias and Sapphira, who are lying to the Holy Spirit.

And then we see that there's a neglect of the basic needs of this church body. But then they appoint six in Acts chapter six, or the seven, sorry, in Acts chapter six.

And then the good news, they start witnessing the gospel spreading and everything like that. And then they're arrest and Stephen dies because of it. But then the good news, the gospel leaves.

So it's like tension of good things. And then there's a reprieve. It's sort of like a dance of a melody. You sort of feel that through the book of Acts.

[12 : 02] And we should sense that, especially when we hear something like this, but Saul. And there's a word here that's important for us to take attention to, is the word still.

The last two weeks specifically, we've been talking about Philip. Philip is the main attraction in the book of Acts so far right now. We see that he was in Samaria evangelizing.

Great things were happening. Simon tried to stood up, but he took out the local celebrity and took him off of his throne of fame and put God where he belongs. And we see that led to a road with the Ethiopian eunuch last week.

All these good things, but Saul still breathing threats. Saul continues in his wicked way.

Right? Even gathering search warrants for those who are in Damascus from the high priest. He is out for blood.

[13 : 06] Saul. Saul was a devout warrior to preserve Jewish worship, an instrument of Satan to silence the church from spreading.

But God had different plans for this man. It reminds me of the book of Judges with Gideon being called from a wine press. And it's almost as if, just as Gideon had this way, this fervency about him, and this temper about him, it's like God calls Saul to go in that might and serve me, not the religious temple worship anymore.

And so, we see in verse 3 that an extraordinary event takes place. Now, as he went on his way, he approached Damascus.

And suddenly, get a picture of this. Suddenly, without any warning or indication, suddenly, there was a light from heaven shone around this wicked man.

falling to the ground, surrounded by this immediate light. He heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

[14 : 43] Imagine this. On his way to surround himself in the terror, the screams.

Can you hear the screams of terror from the Christians as Saul enters those homes? Ripping families apart, men and women. He's got search warrants. He has been surrounding himself in the terror and screams of Christians.

And now, he is surrounded in the terror of the presence of a holy God. What a breathtaking event. And Saul is left with very few words.

Three in the Greek in verse 5. And he said, Who are you, Lord? And in such a long dialogue, with Saul only saying these few words, makes it a point that this was a speechless event that took place.

And the voice came through, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

[15 : 52] But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do. And the men, we can imagine him being with soldiers from the temple, temple officers to arrest people.

The men who were with him, traveling, stood speechless as well. hearing the voice but seeing no one. I am. Ego, I mean, Jesus.

The risen Messiah you devoted your life to. The God of your worship is truly found in the person of Jesus Christ.

this is your God standing before you. Here we receive significant insight into the depths of persecution, don't we? You've probably heard it once or twice going through this passage.

He says, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. That the very families that he's tearing apart are truly threats and attacks against Jesus Christ himself. You cannot separate the attack upon the people of the church and remove it from an attack upon the God of the church.

[17 : 10] They are united two in one. And for us today, we might be swiftly reminded about our own failure of assaulting our brothers and sisters in the faith.

Right? And contribute to various acts of persecution even within the church. We are all guilty of this from one severity to another.

But what an event to take place, right? Saul, the man who brought death, meets the God who conquered death. This is a spectacular event.

And only a voice resounded by the traveling temple guards. And so in verse 8, we see Saul rose from the ground and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing.

Saul was blinded. Here. Verse 8 continues, So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

[18 : 11] And for three days, he was without sight and neither ate nor drank. We see in verse 9 the devoutness of his Jewish roots really come out.

He spent this time in prayer, in fasting, in seeking the Lord. And we see and in the darkness within his own heart against the church, he rose from his speechlessness experiencing for the first time ever in his life the very darkness that consumed his life.

He could not see anything. And I would imagine for this prideful man, if you know anything about Saul or Paul, this would probably be a thorn in his flesh that would humble this man to seek God.

He entered Damascus not by his own way with his own plans, he entered Damascus God's way. And we see, church, God captured Saul.

He captured him. The man who's out capturing Christians, God captured him. Giving him instant retinal degeneration, whatever you want to call it, he just couldn't see.

[19 : 29] Alright? And where Saul would only be capable of inventorying his own life. Imagine being surrounded in darkness with the only thing that you have are the thoughts in your head or the heart inventorying itself.

You see, this was a very solemn time for Saul that God got a hold of him and said, you need to check a couple things over. This is a time this devout Jewish man would question everything.

And church, while this occurrence is far from normative, I don't know if anybody in here has a conversion or transformation experience similar to this. I'd like to hear about it. That would be cool. But this is far from normative.

It's similar to the delayed reception of the Holy Spirit to Samaria. It's not normative. But it's quite descriptive that God is sovereign over even the enemies in this life.

So, sovereign over the enemies of the church. And this is good news. The most vilest opponents to God on earth doesn't simply reside in geographical borders like the enemies within the state or political parties that are found in Washington, D.C.

[20 : 51] No, that's not where the enemies ever resided. The enemies that reside in this life are the hearts of man that are living in rebellion to God.

Rejecting, suppressing the truth. And apart from faith in Jesus Christ, we are either actively or passively rejecting who God is and the purpose that we are created for in this life.

Those two theological realities we cannot escape from, who God is and our purpose. And here, Saul gets a rude awakening. And as we continue to see the two narratives colliding, we meet a man named Ananias.

God's word shows us that the church cannot separate the mercy of Christ from the mission of Christ. That the church that has received abundant mercy, abundant grace, abundant power by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are equally called into the mission of Christ.

It doesn't matter what Myers-Briggs says about your personality, it doesn't matter what you think or what people say about introvert, extrovert. When God calls you to grace, you are to die to your flesh and live in mission for Him.

[22 : 09] That's the mission of mercy. And so we see a devoted instrument here in the second section of the passage. Devoted instruments of God's purposes.

And so verse 10 brings this other narrative into play. And now, there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias.

And he said, Here I am, Lord. And the Lord said to him, Rise and go to the street called Straits. And at the house of Judas, look for a man of Tarsus named Saul.

For behold, he is praying and he has seen a vision, a man named Ananias. Come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.

Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man. How much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here, he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name.

[23 : 29] It's a wonder why God didn't leave out Saul's name out of that. Maybe he would have got the church kicked into gear without perceiving any threat to their lives.

Have you ever sensed, church, God doing something or calling you to do something that's so radical, that is so radical, that it's like you try to convince God that it's a bad idea.

I mean, that's the life of any preacher. This text, Lord, you want me to teach on this? I mean, you want me to draw people to your word and to adore you?

I'm sorry, I'm going to retract people from the faith. If you're going to use anybody, you don't use me. Right? Especially preaching for the first time. I'll turn people away. I'm not the guy.

Do you know about this? You ever sense God doing something in your life that seems so radical that it's like you try to convince him that it's not a good idea?

[24 : 35] I think whether it's blatant or maybe subtle in our lives, we can all imagine that story applying into our own lives in different shapes and sizes. But this is precisely the encounter that Ananias has when God comes to him.

And it's such an honest reality, such an honest image of how so many of us would probably respond to the same news. But we see a call from God similar to Philip.

Rise and go. But we see a little hesitation here. And he says, here I am, Lord. These are words of all those that God calls. Abraham, Jacob.

We see that in Moses. We see Samuel. We see Isaiah. This is the words of a servant, a man in the military standing at attention, waiting to receive orders.

But there's a little hesitation here. He says, the Lord says, go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

[25 : 40] For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. Hmm. Hmm. What a forbearing God.

He takes the time to reassure Ananias that Saul, who by his hands did everything to thwart the spread of the gospel, killing for nearly fun, probably, would carry the gospel with the same hands that were used to kill to the ends of the earth.

I imagine that the reality of this would be striking. But doesn't this provide such an important reminder that God does not allow the sinful past within our lives to impede the future?

That if God calls this man Saul, who has afflicted the church in every possible way, that he is calling this man to be an instrument?

If he's an instrument, he's a flute, right? A lowly flute. That's not saying anything about flute players in here. I'm not being discriminatory. So, it's just saying that it would not seem likely.

[27 : 05] You'd be wanting to take someone else, maybe like Ananias. Maybe there would be a moment of pride where Ananias would say, but what about me? I'm devoted to you. I'm standing at attention.

But we see that God does not let our sinful paths impede a forgiven future. There is not one sin that God cannot forgive. Only the sin of unbelief is unforgivable.

And there is not one sin that God cannot forgive except unbelief. So, if you're not a Christian in here, boy, this is good news. This is very good news.

The best news of your life happening today. God forgives sins. He forgives.

If you still have breath in your lungs, just as Saul had breath in his lungs, you can be forgiven. This is good news.

[28 : 15] Could you imagine Saul coming out of a life that's ravaging the church? I would imagine, just like any war hero in the military, may have those images that they would rather not carry with them in life.

of how they have inflicted other people, killed other people, and the pain that they caused.

I would imagine this probably keeping Saul up late at night, once in a while. Nightmares of hearing the cries of the church, the bloodstains on the grounds, imagining Stephen's last breath as he sees the heavens parted.

And breezes last. But God, God does not keep a scoreboard of sin. The record has been wiped clean.

Wiped clean. And in Saul's own words, as people refer to him in the Greek, Paul, he would someday write in Colossians 2, verse 13, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

[29 : 46] This, he set aside, nailing it to the cross. God forgives sins. God forgives sins.

However, this does not alleviate the rippling effect that sin causes in life, does it? It doesn't mean that all of a sudden you're baptized and you come up clean and all of a sudden those charges, those criminal charges that you've been brought wonderfully served by law enforcement, those fines will still be paid due.

We see that if you had a sexual slip-up, that baby is still going to be yours. Maybe you've gone to the extreme of trying to figure out who you are and your purpose in this life, that you've changed even your sexual identity in this life.

You're still going to live with that choice and the impact of those choices, the rippling effect. But better for us to float on choppy waters forgiven than to drown in still waters guilty.

Better for us to float on choppy waters forgiven. Still, a promise remains. God will carry you. He will always be with you. He will never forsake you even through it all.

[31 : 05] And yes, sin is messy and God doesn't promise to provide us a spotless home here on earth, but He does promise to provide you a spotless home in eternity with Him.

This is the promise of God in Jesus Christ. Maybe then we might understand what God meant when He said to Ananias, for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

Saul made it really difficult of his tenacity towards the church and he would suffer greatly for his name. And so Ananias in verse 17, the narrative kind of comes to a pause.

He departed, entered the house, laying his hands on Saul. He said in verse 17, Brother Saul, a familial reference, 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.

And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized and taking food he was strengthened.

[32 : 36] Fasting was over, seeking God was over. I would imagine that he's probably thinking, boy, am I nuts? Was I just dehydrated out there?

Not according to the men who were with him and surely not according to Ananias. There is so much unconnected confirmation to this event.

Saul could do everything but not believe in God. To not believe in Jesus Christ. He received the Holy Spirit, was baptized and fasting and questioning was over and added to the kingdom that day was a radically transformed man by the hands of who?

The church. The mercy of God calls us to the mission of God. A future Saul will realize very soon and the same is even true today.

So the implication that we can often have of our sin is a haunting reality that kind of stretches in our lives.

[33 : 55] Being that this is a two-episode sort of narrative we're going to continue next week in Saul, we see something important that we can pause and we can reflect specifically on.

is the haunting reality of sin in our lives. A passage like this can make us and cause us, force us literally kicking and screaming to inventory our entire lives.

I almost dropped my coffee. And this is not only just for non-Christians. This is for Christians as well who are here.

take Saul for example. This is a huge, pivotal moment in his life. This would be a time that he would recount multiple times.

He is the author of 14 of the 27 manuscripts that we have bound here today. And within those manuscripts, he would recount this miraculous event again and again and again.

[35 : 10] In Romans 1, in 1 Corinthians 15, Galatians 1, Philippians 3, 1 Timothy 1. When God intervened in this wicked man's life, he sure was true to tell the story.

Amen? He told the story. Church, don't neglect your testimony as well when you're witnessing to it.

These testimonies are a living truth of God's grace working even today. And it's the story of God's grace finding us, isn't it? All of our stories connecting to the grace finding us when we least expect it.

Saul being a patron saint of evil. It's a story of a man just like us. who were blind but now we see once lost now found.

In Paul's case he had a non-normative encounter with God to bring a metaphor to life. Isn't it beautiful how he brings that amazing grace to life because it is amazing grace.

[36 : 26] Why? Because God's grace is undeserved to any of us to receive. the fact that he even bothers with us forbears with Ananias in his hesitancy of going to fulfill the commands of God.

Our hesitation all these things God does not have to do it that way but he does. That's what makes God so amazing in his grace.

As we close I just wanted us to think about what John Stott has to say about this as well. If you don't believe me believe him.

He says we too can and must experience a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Surrender to him in penitence and faith and receive his summons to service provided that we distinguish between the historically particular and the universal between the dramatic outward accomplishments and the essential inward experience what happened to Saul remains an instructive case study in Christian conversion and moreover Christ's display of unlimited patience towards him was meant to be an encouraging example to others.

So may we in our day to day inventory our lives and may we all believe Christian non Christian whether you've believed your entire life or whether you've come in just wondering what this gospel is all about may we all believe today it's that simple believe brought from the road of darkness to the path of life this is the way for us church may we point the way to those around and not neglect to share our testimony what's our testimony once we were lost now we are found let's pray but we