

# What Happens When The King Steps In

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     the king and the kingdom. And this morning we're in Acts chapter 9. So if you have a Bible, please turn to Acts chapter 9. If not, don't worry. We will have it up on the screen.
- Just to set the context of where we've been, there was a young man named Stephen, one of the chosen seven Hellenists in the church.
- This man Stephen was full of grace, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. And he spoke out the truth of Jesus with much power and grace.
- And those who would come to argue with him couldn't withstand his wisdom in the spirit with which he spoke. And they began to bring false charges against him. And they brought him up before the council. And they set up a sham court.
- A sham trial to put him to silence. Stephen gave this big defense and exposed what these people were actually about.
- [ 1 : 13 ]     And at the end of that, he said, full of the Holy Spirit, gazing into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
- And Stephen said, behold, I see the heavens opened. The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. And his situation, this is the kind of thing you say if you want to get killed.
- But Stephen's not lying. He saw this. He told the truth. Testified to what was in front of him. And at this, at this testimony of seeing the glory of God and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, they stopped their ears.
- They cried out with a loud voice. They rushed together at him. They cast him out of the city. They stoned him. And it says that the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.
- If you've been around church for any length of time, you know that this is Paul. Just a young man, full of passion and zeal, thinks he's doing the will of God. And he approves of this execution of Stephen, who saw the glory of God and who saw Jesus at his right hand.
- [ 2 : 28 ]     He approved this execution and he began to ravage the church, going from house to house, dragging off men and women and committing them to prison.
- And this scattered the believers out from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. And so the gospel went out. And as the gospel went out, so did Saul.
- He went out after them. And that's where we're at in Acts chapter 9. So let me read Acts chapter 9, verses 1 to 31. 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. 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 you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do.

[ 3 : 48 ] The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 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.

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 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 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 in 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.

[ 5 : 01 ] For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. So Ananias departed and entered the house. 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. He regained his sight. Then he arose and was baptized and taking food he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues saying, He is the Son of God. And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of all those who call upon this name?

And has he not come here for this purpose to bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

When many days had passed the Jews plotted to kill him but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him but his disciples took him by night and led him down through an opening in the wall lowering him in a basket.

[ 6 : 32 ] When he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples. They were all afraid of him. They did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who spoke to him and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists but they were seeking to kill him.

And when the brothers learned this they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

And walking in the fear of the Lord in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it multiplied. Amen. We pray that God would bless the reading of his word.

Well folks this is this is quite a moment in the story. For a moment I would like you to think that if you're a Christian if you know anything about God if you know anything about the word of God I would like you to actually think for a moment try and think back either in the Bible or throughout history or even in your own life think back and think has God ever failed?

[ 8 : 10 ] Just have a wee think is there a moment where God has ever failed? Now I don't mean the things that folks might think God will do or they might think that he promises but the things that we know he has promised from his word and I know I'm a Christian I know if you're a Christian your answer will be automatic but actually think for a moment search your mind has he ever failed to keep a promise?

Has God ever failed you? Even just one time even in a small thing has God ever failed you? are we ever tempted to think that he has?

Perhaps not explicitly perhaps we wouldn't ever come out and say that but what about implicitly? Are we ever tempted to think that he has failed on something?

You see Jesus said that he would be with us always Jesus said that he was coming soon Jesus said that he would build his church and nothing would stop it and you know that he is currently in heaven at the right hand of God and he gives his spirit to those who believe but do you know what he is doing?

Is he even doing anything or is he mostly sitting about resting? See a question to have in your mind is how does the risen Jesus reigning in heaven interface with your life here on earth right now?

[ 9 : 53 ] It's a question worth asking every day how does the risen Jesus reigning in heaven interface with your life right now on earth? See it's easy to gloss over these accounts and acts either because they're from such a long time ago or perhaps because we're really familiar with them but this is real life this is real life a man going about with murderous threats against the church the believers having to run and hide scattered this was not a fun time to be in church it was now practically illegal to be a Christian there were no exceptions there were likely parents being separated from children and put in prison for believing in Jesus you couldn't even go to the synagogue anymore without threat of being arrested if you were a Christian you were now receiving death threats at this point the Christians have now seen one of their own people being murdered being executed without any pushback a government approved execution of a believer in Jesus who did no harm to anybody this is your church experience in Acts one of your brothers has been executed and it's been approved and now you're on the run if you're a believer you're on the run and the man is going door to door hunting for you is it maybe time to think about going back to

Judaism is this maybe a time when you think maybe we should just give this up maybe this guy Jesus is not worth following maybe we should forget about this Jesus character maybe he wasn't the Christ maybe he's really still dead is it time to give up on religion is Jesus really Lord if all this is happening is he really risen is he actually in control it doesn't look like it on the ground does Jesus actually have all authority in heaven and on earth when we see the kind of things that are happening is Jesus actually above all things or does he just not care why isn't he doing something this is real life this was not a fun time this account is the conversion story of one of the most feared enemies of Christianity who becomes one of Christ's most effective instruments for the gospel even the famed atheist scholar

Bart Ehrman writes Paul was undoubtedly the most important convert in the history of the Christian religion but the reason that Luke writes about this in Acts is not to say something about Paul but to say something about Jesus so I just want to look at three things that we can learn from this today and by looking at three things that people might be tempted to think number one we can be tempted to think that Jesus doesn't care that Jesus isn't bothered number two we can be tempted to think that Jesus isn't really reigning that he isn't powerful he isn't in control and number three we can be tempted to think that Jesus isn't really working he's not active he's not at work so when we're tempted to think that Jesus isn't really bothered what do we do have you ever experienced any of you have you ever experienced hostility for being a

Christian on any scale most of you likely have in some some sense perhaps there are times when it's relatively mild and you genuinely count it an honour to experience some hostility for his namesake maybe a bit of slander here and you think wow what an honour what an honour to be mistreated in some way for his namesake but what about when the heat turns up perhaps you've experienced some of that but most of us probably haven't experienced a lot of that in this country how many of you have went to prison for your faith how many of you lost a job for your faith or how many of you have received death threats this doesn't just exist in acts this is happening in places across the world today but what about even our suffering what about our own struggles and suffering most of you will know what it's like to suffer in one way or another most of you will know what it's like to struggle and you know that

Jesus loves you that he gave his life for you but do you think that just because he suffered that it doesn't matter to him much if you do too a little bit or that just because you will eventually be raised like him that he somehow doesn't care that you're going through this 1 Peter 5 7 says cast your anxieties on God and the next line says because he cares for you even your anxieties matter to God why because he cares for you Hebrews 4 15 says we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin well let us therefore then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need see even our weaknesses even our temptations matter to him he understands he sympathizes it's for that very reason that we can have confidence to draw near and ask him for help

[ 16 : 09 ] Jesus is not unaware of your struggles Jesus is not unaware of your suffering he's not unaware of how much this dark world hates the light and he's not unaware of those who face hostility for his namesake he is really not unaware he cares about these things more than you can imagine and he takes them very seriously so when you are persecuted whenever you are persecuted he is persecuted the hatred that you receive if you ever receive hatred for his namesake the hatred that you receive is hatred against him he doesn't say to Saul look Saul it's me Jesus I'm really alive and these people that you're persecuting they're my people so now that you know that I'm really the Lord stop persecuting him that's not what Jesus said instead this is what he says why are you persecuting me and you can understand

Saul's confusion he knows that this person before him is a heavenly being he's therefore more powerful and important than Saul and his response is as if to say I do not know who you are but it's not you that I'm persecuting I don't know who you are I wouldn't dare persecute you but it's a group of defectors that I'm trying to stop not you Jesus says no no it's me that you're persecuting these are my people and it's me that you're persecuting this heavenly being says that he is the one that Saul is persecuting look at verse 1 the disciples of the Lord verse 2 those belonging to the way there's no mistake in which group of people it is that are being persecuted but yet Jesus said that it's him Christians are the ones that are being targeted and they are the only ones that Jesus identifies with if no one else if no one else does

Jesus Jesus says that by persecuting them you're persecuting him now if you're a Christian this morning you know this Christianity is not a religion for the weak or the insecure it might look weak it's certainly not for the faint hearted the truth is we're often more despised than others we're often more marginalised than others and we're certainly more persecuted than any other group on earth it's happening a bit more in this country but it's happening much more in other countries even today believers are being scattered they're being hunted down like criminals they're being put in prison and they're being killed for their faith Christianity is not a religion for the faint hearted we might not understand why he allows such things to this extent but Jesus is in control and he cares he cares whatever happens to you is against him

Jesus states plainly the hostility is really aimed at him not his people the servants are mistreated because the master is hated that's what's really going on what you do to the least of these you do to me and that's true even today is it not see it's a lot easier to talk to people about God because that's a general other people have other gods it's a lot easier to talk to people about God but to mention Jesus name the hostility of darkness is against the light of Christ there's a bad taste in the world's mouth with the very name and person of Jesus see some will accept him as a moral example some will accept him as a wise teacher but most cannot stand the idea that he really is the son of God and that he's the only way to be forgiven and saved the idea that what he said about sin and judgment being true is distasteful to the world why because the kingdom of darkness wants to downplay the necessity of the cross that's why the ruler of darkness wants to downplay what Jesus did on the cross because that is the thing that redeems people see John wrote that the light

Jesus came into the world but people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil that everyone who does wicked things hates the light hates Jesus and doesn't come to the light because their deeds would be exposed see at the heart of hostility is a blindness to who Jesus really is Jesus takes your suffering very seriously any hostility against you is against him and he cares about you way more than you could ever imagine lilies of the field birds of the air are you not of more value to God than these things are you who Jesus gave his life for not more valuable he cares about you he knows what you're going through and he cares a whole lot what you're going through and that is why we can indeed draw near with confidence draw near to the throne of grace in the time of need see Jesus has allowed the hostility of Saul to send

[ 22 : 00 ] Christians out into the world with the gospel but he will not allow Saul to chase them down and do more damage see Saul on earth Saul on earth had every authority to stop the Christian sect but Jesus has all authority in heaven on earth and it seems from this account that Jesus was really the only one who could have stopped Saul and that is exactly what he did see this same Jesus is your king this same Jesus is your Lord does he not care for you is he not with you he knows you he died for you he is interceding before the father for you every day he intercedes for your protection he intercedes for your perseverance he's your king and he cares for you a whole lot we must trust in the care of our loving king what do we do when we're tempted to think that that perhaps

Jesus isn't reigning that he isn't in control that he isn't powerful well folks we must never interpret Jesus patience as though he is passive he is not he's not passive we must never also interpret his patience and wisdom as though he is powerless he's not Jesus doesn't take opposition against his own people lightly you might look at different times when people face hostility or even in your own life or the lives of others and be tempted to think that Jesus is passive is Jesus passive no he's not is Jesus powerless no he's not he must be powerless otherwise he would do something he's not powerless this is when it helps to think of who Luke is writing acts to remember Luke is writing acts to Theophilus so that he would be certain about the things that he's already been taught imagine that you're a Gentile convert in this world many many many years after

Paul's conversion you know a bit about Paul you know that he's this famous Christian missionary many churches have been started by Paul indeed he has fought particularly for the Gentile churches to be free from unnecessary burdens of the Jews you know about this guy Paul he's the Gentile missionary you knew that but perhaps you didn't know what he was like before so looking right in this is letting you know it's like the Christian caricature from the TV show The Simpsons I don't know if you've seen that there's a guy called Ned Flanders he's a well-to-do Christian neighbor dressed quite plainly acts very politely and he feels obliged to do anything for his neighbors how did he do he it's like a Christian isn't it but imagine you found out that Ned Flanders once used to hunt down Christians and throw them in jail imagine you found out that Ned Flanders before he was a

Christian was a murderer that he approved the execution of Christians imagine you found out that Ned Flanders used to send death threats to Christians that he wanted to destroy the religion that he is now the champion of see I think we need to be reminded at times of who each one of us would really be if we had never encountered Jesus we need to be reminded Paul does that in his letters you once walked in this way this is who you were before Jesus why are you different something happened in between and it was him we need to be reminded of who we would really be if we hadn't encountered Jesus and if he hadn't changed us Paul does this in his letters he reminds believers of who they are who they were without Christ and who they would be without Christ see maybe we could explain the persecution and suffering of Christians by saying that Jesus is passive but he's definitely not maybe we could explain it by saying that

Jesus is powerless otherwise he would crush the opposition would he not Jesus is not powerless again we ought to remember that like Paul we ourselves were the opposition Jesus could have crushed us but he didn't perhaps not to the extent of Paul but Romans 5 8 says God showed his love for us and that while we were still sinners Christ died for us see when it comes to someone like Paul who was relentless in his hostility and mission to destroy the church of Jesus why on earth would Jesus demonstrate such great power against him in such a merciful way shouldn't he have just crushed Saul I mean Saul approved of the execution of Stephen he put people in prison men and women he hunted them down shouldn't Jesus have crushed him shouldn't he have avenged the death of

[ 27 : 11 ] Stephen and the mistreatment of many more you see this is the thing this is the thing that Jesus said when he was standing before Pilate my kingdom is not of this world I'm not like the kings of this world God see see Jesus demonstrated here he in far more superior way far more superior way instead of crushing this man of great darkness he turns him into his greatest instrument of light to the world see Saul wanted to stop the message of Jesus going to more Jews but Jesus got a hold of him and Saul then took the message of Jesus to the whole world Jesus demonstrates his power in a far superior way than we could ever imagine Acts 26 Paul recounts when Jesus said that Paul would open the eyes of the blind so that they may turn from darkness to light from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus and Jesus did that to Saul before Saul would do that for anyone else

Jesus opened Paul's eyes and turned him from darkness to light turned him from the power of Satan to God forgave his sin even his sin he forgave and gave him even him a place among those sanctified even him Ananias says surely not not this man the disciples didn't believe he was a real disciple Jesus gave even him a place forgave even him Jesus is not passive nor is he powerless he's far more active and more powerful than you or me can ever imagine and Paul is an example to show us that there is no one no one that Jesus cannot turn from darkness to light there is no one under any power that Jesus cannot conquer and there is no one there is absolutely no one that Jesus cannot forgive look at us what would we be without Jesus sometimes we need to be reminded of who we once were so that we can see that Jesus really is powerful that he really is active we must learn to trust in the power and sovereignty of our patient and merciful king and finally what are we to do when we're tempted to think that he isn't perhaps working that he isn't active see as much as act is about the activity of the spirit there is no doubt that Jesus is front and centre in handling this particular conversion this one man was a great threat to the disciples and Jesus then graciously chose him to be a great instrument of the gospel to multiply and strengthen the disciples rather than divide and destroy them

Jesus chose this man graciously as an instrument to plant and build up Jesus' church rather than to uproot it and tear it down isn't Jesus powerful isn't he active he turns up to stop this man as well as Jesus being the only one who could have stopped Paul Jesus was perhaps the only one who could have convinced any of the disciples that Paul really was one of them now you see that don't you in the reluctance of Ananias he's reluctant this is quite telling see when you have an experience where you actually get a vision of the Lord when the Lord is before you talking to you are you going to refuse anything that he says but look at Ananias he's reluctant isn't he surely not I know you're Jesus I know you're my Lord I know you're in control but surely not you must be mistaken do you not remember what this man does surely not it just shows how bad Paul really was but Jesus the Lord and the head of the church is the only one who could have convinced and commanded his disciple to accept Paul as a brother do you notice that like two words that must have been the hardest thing to say when Ananias says brother Saul he calls him a brother how hard it must have been yet who are we to refuse as family when Jesus has brought them into the same family that he graciously brought us into who are we to refuse

Paul says the same of Cornelius as well who was that to stop the Holy Spirit I remember being in a wee a wee brethren church that I visited see the power of Jesus turned me from darkness to light I used to walk by you've probably heard this story to no end a little brethren church in East Coebridge and outside it had these big words on the wall Jesus said I am the way John 14 6 I used to go by that every time I went by it I mocked it and I mocked Jesus the way to what you're not a way you're dead Jesus turned me from darkness to light and so I wanted to visit that wee church and I went in and I felt totally out of place because I'd never had any church background wee brethren they all had suits on and I had jeans and I said to one of them afterwards I says my you're all dressed up you know and I feel like I'm in rags here and this lovely woman said to me well

Jesus accepted you so we have to brother Carl who are we to refuse anyone Jesus can forgive anyone there's not anyone outwith the power of Jesus no one see here's the thing the truth is that Jesus was at work in Paul long before he went to the Damascus road because when Jesus said why are you persecuting me later on in Acts 26 we find out that he also said it's hard for you to kick against the goads this implies that Paul has been resisting for a while he's been resisting previous convictions perhaps it was Stephen perhaps it was the preaching of Stephen perhaps it was the trial of Stephen perhaps it was the death of Stephen no doubt they had an effect on him but he was resisting whatever the case he was resisting this conviction for a while before he was ever on the Damascus road but it just made it harder for him and so when it comes to us when it comes to us we must never think that Jesus is not at work he's at work long before we're on the scene we think we're the first person to speak to someone about Jesus we think we're the only chance

[ 34 : 29 ] Jesus is at work always my father is working always and so am I Jesus is on the scene long before us Jesus is on the scene before we even open our mouths we are more like Ananias actually we're like Ananias quite often reluctant and not the first on the scene and when we do go it's more just to confirm something that's already a reality to bring to light something that Jesus is doing inside of someone's heart just a confirmation of what Jesus has already been working inside he's on the scene long before we are consider as well the New Testament the New Testament the largest contributor to the New Testament is Luke the author of Acts and his two books Luke and Acts they're big books he's the friend of Paul they make up the most words of any other but second to that is Paul this man he wrote more books in the New Testament than anyone else this man who persecuted the church he wrote 13 letters that we know about some were lost more than 30,000 words to strengthen churches and glorify Jesus this man who was persecuting

Jesus wrote over 30,000 words that glorify Jesus proving that he's the Christ Jesus is at work he alone contributed a quarter of the entire New Testament and his friend Luke contributed another quarter he alone took the gospel into Europe he was the first to bring the gospel into Europe he spread the gospel around the known world proclaimed Christ to kings and took the gospel into Rome but yet when he went to these places he found that Jesus was at work already didn't he in Philippi and other places Jesus is there before us Jesus is working and fulfilling his promise that he will build his church another evidence of that is me and you look at us look at our changed lives is Jesus not working every single day to build his church friends we might have strategies we might pray here and there we might have services and meetings we have a business meeting on Wednesday night we might give our time to trying to see the church grow but Jesus doesn't need a rest like we do

Jesus doesn't need sleep like we do every night and every day Jesus is working to build his church all over the earth who is the one who is sustaining Christians in the Middle East who is the one who is protecting Christians in China who is the one interceding for all of us all of the time who is the one who is working against darkness more than anyone else who is providing for us sufficient grace to keep us going every moment of every day Jesus is at work in me and you to build his church and he's not limited in the ways that we are limited not only because he's risen but because he's reigning he has the power and the authority to build his church when Paul first began persecuting Jesus allowed that to push the gospel out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria Luke said that would happen

Luke said that would happen when he recorded Jesus in Acts 1 from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria Jesus allowed that to happen through Saul but when Saul started to go on the hunt Jesus said no no in fact you're not going to hunt down Christians you're going to take it to the next level gospel to the ends of the earth through one of his greatest enemies look at the summary statement in verse 31 of Acts 9 see Jesus allowed Paul's persecution to push the gospel into Judea and Samaria and then he went on the hunt in Judea and Samaria to hunt down Christians but look at verse 31 after Jesus has been at work this is the report the result of Jesus converting Paul was now that the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up walking in the fear of the

Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it multiplied no longer were they on the run no longer were they under threat of prison or death no longer did they fear persecution no longer was there someone so active in trying to stop the gospel and destroy the church no longer because Jesus is at work so we must never think that Jesus doesn't care we must never think that Jesus isn't powerfully in control and that he isn't actively working let us learn to trust in the care of our loving king he knows what you face and he cares for you more than you could ever know he knows the situation of this very church and he cares for it he gave his life for it and he is working for it every day let us trust in the power and sovereignty of our patient and merciful king he's the head of the church he's sovereign he's not powerless he's not powerless against the things that come against me and you and he's not powerless against the things that come against this church we are not in control but he is and his wisdom and power is far greater more superior than anything that we could ever make happen and let us always trust in the presence and in the promise of our faithful king he is faithful he has not left us to do this any of this alone he has given us his spirit and he is with us always he doesn't leave it up to us to build the church he doesn't leave it up to us to persevere in the faith ourselves he doesn't leave it up to us to keep ourselves faithful till the end he is working always always working he is our king he is always caring always ruling and always working for me and you let me pray

[ 41 : 13 ]    God our heavenly father we are so thankful that any of us are here this morning we are thankful that you have revealed yourself to us through Jesus Christ and that you would have every right to crush us we are thankful for your mercy and grace in Jesus that not only did you not crush us you crushed him for our sake that through him we would have forgiveness of sins and eternal life that we would be reconciled to you and that you would rescue us from the power of Satan and that you would transfer us into the kingdom of your beloved son we are thankful help us always Lord to trust in you help us always to know that you care for us that you are reigning and ruling powerfully and that you are always working help us always trust that whenever and before we ever do a thing and help us confidently then call out to you and draw near to the throne of grace we pray in Jesus name

Amen Amen Well we're going to have one final song and then I'm going to see us out  
Thank you