

# PM Acts 9 A Saving encounter with the Living God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Robert has already alluded to, we're going to be looking this evening at the conversion of the Apostle Paul, formerly known, as we will see in a moment, as Saul.

Just to let you know, when I come to preach, we're going to be focusing on chapter 9 of the Acts of the Apostles that we will read, but also referencing chapter 26 of the Acts of the Apostles, where from verse 12 onwards in 26, Paul, once again, as he does on a number of occasions through the New Testament, gives us information about what was for him a transforming event in his life, in his encounter with the living God on the road to Damascus.

So if I'm saying something and it's not in chapter 9, then look in chapter 26. If it's not there either, we might have a problem, but at least give me some leeway, so that you know that we're expounding God's Word, and as you should, you're checking that everything that I'm saying is in Scripture and consistent with it.

So turn with me then to chapter 9 of the Acts of the Apostles, and let's read together from God's Word.

1.

[ 2 : 09 ] 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 you are persecuting.

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

Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were open, 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.

[ 3 : 35 ] 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.

For I will show him how much he must suffer, for the sake of my name. So Ananias departed, and entered the house.

[ 4 : 50 ] 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, sorry, 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. And he regained his sight. Then he rose, and was baptized.

And taking food, he was strengthened. Amen. And may God bless to us, this reading of his holy word, and to his name be praise, and glory given.

Amen. Let's just pray together. I want to, first of all, focus, and this will be, the predominant focus, this evening, on the perspective of God.

Then very briefly, I want to look at, the perspective of Ananias. And then thirdly, I want to finish, by looking, at the perspective, of Saul, or Paul.

[ 6 : 15 ] At the very heart, of what we are looking at, this evening, from these three angles, is what we call, conversion. Indeed, what we are looking at, is the most unlikely, of conversions.

As a young Christian, I used to, pray for the conversion, of certain people. Even as a young minister, I did that.

Perhaps you do the same. You look at people, you see the influence, that they have, or the impact, that they are having, on society. And you say, if only so and so, would get converted.

What an impact, that would have. When I was in the Church of Scotland, I prayed for many, of the people, who were in, positions of responsibility, who were, pursuing a liberal, unbiblical agenda, on the church.

If only they, would get converted. Perhaps today, you pray, in those kind of terms. if only our prime minister, would get converted.

[ 7 : 35 ] If only, Nicholas Sturgeon, would get converted. Friends, this event, in Acts 9, and, as I said, repeated, in Acts 26, is as unlikely, a conversion, as any of the conversions, of these people, would ever be.

Pharisee. This man, Saul, as we know, was a strict Pharisee, probably belonging, to a subset, of very zealous, law-loving, law-insisting, Pharisees.

In chapter 26, and verse 5, Paul describes himself, at that time, as being, of the strictest party, of the Pharisees. A man, who was vehemently, set, in his whole life, and work, against, the Christian church.

Described here, in chapter 9, as, belonging, to the way. The way people, or the people, of the way. Here was a man, who was giving, his absolute all, to opposing, the name of Jesus.

To stopping, the progression, of the church, and the gospel. To hinder, and halt, anything, that was being done, in the name, of this Jesus, of Nazareth.

[ 9 : 08 ] How does, such a transformation, happen? What is the basis, of that transformation? Which seems, to me, an obvious question, and a necessary question, for us to ask.

And so, as I said, I want to look at this, from three perspectives. First of all, the perspective, of God, or Jesus.

Jesus. It is very obvious, from any, simple reading, of the text, that Jesus, makes it clear, to Paul, that the persecutions, that Saul, has been pursuing, and engaged with, Jesus, takes personally.

Saul, Saul, Saul, Saul, he says in, 9, 3, and 4, why do you, persecute me?

Who are you? I am Jesus, whom you are, persecuting. And we might, reasonably ask, how is it possible, that the Jesus, who is no longer, walking this earth, who is gloriously, ascended on high, who is seated, at the Father's right hand, is personally, persecuted, and impacted, by the actions, of a mere man, here on earth.

[ 10 : 54 ] Is this just, Dr. Luke, who wrote, who wrote this, using hyperbole? I don't think so. And in realising that, we learn something here, about the nature of God.

What we learn, is that the suffering, and persecution, of God's children, impacts, personally, on God.

He has a tangible, and intimate, sympathy, with the persecuted church.

The prophet Zechariah, testifies to this, in Zechariah 2.8, speaking this time, of Jerusalem. He who touches you, Zechariah says, touches the apple, of God's eye.

Friends, this is our God. God, the living God, feels the agony, and pain, of his people.

[ 12 : 16 ] Saul. And when Saul, is about, his detestable, pursuit, persecuting, God's children, almighty God, and his three persons, is no distant, absent, monarch, king, getting out of date, reports, about how the battle, is going.

How his nights, are doing. He is a God, who is in, the battle. The persecution, is to Jesus.

Why, do you persecute me? And that perspective, then, tells us something, about the nature of God.

But it also, tells us something, important, about the nature, of the church. It tells us, that what happens, when you are converted, when you become, a Christian, that you are, nothing less, than joined, to Jesus.

When you become, a Christian, you become, part, of his body. every single person, this night, who is, a Christian, you are, the body of Christ.

[ 13 : 53 ] And Christ, is your head. You have been, miraculously, engrafted, into him. when we hurt, he hurts.

He hurts. This is no, empathetic pain, feeling, or sympathy. This is not, God saying, I understand, how you feel.

what is conveyed, to us here, is a reality, that it hurts, God, when we hurt.

that is the most, extraordinary thing. That is one of the, many things, but one of the, most significant things, that sets the true, and living God, apart from all other, gods of every, other religion.

We are in him, and he is in us. He experiences, the aggression, and the affliction, and the abuse, and the blows, of the persecutor, and enemies, that land on him.

[ 15 : 17 ] Jesus makes it, very, very clear, to Saul, that he is hurt, by Saul's efforts, and persecutions.

That perspective, tells us about, the nature of God, and the nature of the church. It tells us too, of the nature of grace.

It tells us that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus did not, only feel, the persecutions, personally, he planned, Saul's conversion, purposefully.

Chapter 9, verse 15, Jesus, now commands, Ananias, to go to Saul, Saul. And you will have noticed, the astonishing way, that the Lord talks, about Saul.

The reality of this, is sobering. Saul was what, he was about, to become, because of the way, God had made, and formed, and destined him, in the womb.

[ 16 : 41 ] But what he was, before his conversion, was equally, part of God's, plan and purpose. He placed him, in a Jewish home, by his sovereign purpose.

He gave him his intellect, by a sovereign purpose. He gave him the passion, and zeal, and energy, in his sovereign purpose.

He gave him the energy, and zeal, to engage in the persecutions, that he did, with the consequences, of them, as part of his purpose. God weaved this man, and his character, and his ability, knowing full well, that these things, would be, at one point, set against Christ.

Set against the gospel, and set against the church. God's ways, are not our ways.

God's ways, but also, by grace, and in his, sovereign purpose. It has been, ordained, that all these, characteristics, his drive, his energy, his zeal, his leadership, would become, the very instruments, of the advancement, of his church.

[ 18 : 03 ] You see, when Paul, in Romans, writes, about all things, working for good, just think, what Paul, must have, personally, reflected upon, and consider, does the Holy Spirit, led him, to write that?

all things, all things, work, for good. And Paul, is sitting there, the stoning, of Stephen, works for good.

The imprisonment, torture, death, execution, of the followers, of Jesus, Saul's hatred, of Christians, all things, all things, work for good.

Our God, works out, his purposes, for good, in the human good, in the human bad.

and in the human ugly. For his, purposes, alone. And so often, there are no explanations, given to us, this side of eternity.

[ 19 : 48 ] Jesus, Jesus looks, on Saul, in all his, acidic bitterness, and fervent, hatred. And even, in those circumstances, he said, this man is mine.

What is it, the town's end says, loved, before the dawn, of time. This is our story, in Christ.

This is our story, this is my story, in Christ. That God chose us, before the beginning, of the world.

In the good, in the bad, and in the ugly.

Friends, in your hearts, you may be religious, or you may be, at enmity, with God. Working against, his commandments, and rule.

Your life, is far from, anything remotely, Christian. You don't like, Christians. You don't even know, why you might be here, or, why you're watching. Why you're looking, at Christians, in your work.

[ 21 : 04 ] each one of us here, is no more, unlikely, a convert, this night, than Saul was.

You cannot, have rebelled, against God, any more, than he did. But God, at some point, said, that woman, that man, he's mine.

And every conversion, here tonight, is the divine selection, of a chosen one.

When God, calls sinners, to come to him, they will come. No man, or woman, becomes a Christian, simply by, making a decision.

Those of us, who are here, this evening, who are converted, have been made, Christians, by a God, who marked us out, before the beginning, of the world, as his.

[ 22 : 24 ] Paul comes, to realize, that himself, in Galatians 1, 15. He who set me, apart, before I was born, who called me, by his grace, was pleased, to reveal his son, to me, in order, that I may preach him, among the Gentiles.

You see, the central character, in chapter 8, of Acts, is not Saul. It's Jesus. The perspective, of Jesus, on the events, of Acts 9.

Secondly, and briefly, the perspective, of Ananias. I suppose, in modern terms, we would use the phrase, he didn't get it.

He couldn't see it. Two lessons, we need to learn. Whoever, God lays, his saving grace, upon, can often, be a great mystery, to us.

And often, it's because, we fail to understand, the grace, that was necessary, to save us. us. We forget, that we once, stood lost, and sinful, and as apart, from God, as Saul was.

[ 24 : 03 ] We may not, be guilty, in the same way. The list of charges, we would face, are probably, not the same. But underneath, you are just, as opposed, to the gospel, and a great, an enemy, of a holy God, if you are out, with his kingdom, this night.

You are opposed, to the gospel, and an enemy, of the holy God. And the second, realization, is this. For those of us, who are converted, men and women, it took as much, of Christ's blood, to save you, and me, as it took, to save Saul.

Every, converted, man or woman, here this evening, is nothing less, than a miracle, of grace, in equal proportion.

An unlikely, convert, friends, no one, not one, can ever, be labeled, a likely, convert.

[ 25 : 23 ] For every, saving work, of God, is a miracle, beyond, imagining. And, Ananias, initially, could not, grasp, that truth.

The third, perspective, is of course, the perspective, of Saul, himself.

On this day, Saul, encountered, the living, and ascended, Lord. He was faced, with the reality, of Jesus, and the realization, that what he, up to that point, has given his life, to seek, to wipe off, the planet, what he had tried, to silence, in the death, of Stephen, in the gospel, preaching, and testimony, of Christians, what he had, considered, as false, was actually, true.

Absolutely, and gloriously, true. You notice, Saul responds, by addressing, Jesus as Lord. This is an address, of submission.

He's been brought, to a sobering, realization, that what Saul, had been working, to silence, and now speaking, to him. The one that Saul, had tried to rid of, was now talking, to him.

[ 26 : 59 ] And with that, came the realization, that the gospel, is true. And Saul, tells us, that he falls, on his face, in submission, to the transparent, authority, of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Saul, didn't expect, this meeting. Saul, didn't arrange, this meeting. he was hunting, Christians. And in that moment, it became clear, that the hunter, was the hunted. He was felled, and transformed, by the relentless, pursuit of God.

God. In chapter 6, verse 14, Paul, elaborates, with a slightly, fuller account, of this moment.

And Luke, tells us there, that, Jesus said to him, it is hard, for you to kick, against the God. 26, 14.

[ 28 : 13 ] Paul, as he writes, to the Ephesians, articulates this, so clearly. He says to us, God the Father, chose us in Christ, before the foundation, of the world, that we should be, blameless before him, in love he predestined us, for adoption, to himself, as sons.

That's the relentless, pursuit of God. There is a sobering, couple of verses, in John 2, 23 and 24. Jesus tells us, people were surrounding Jesus, crowds were building, and John says, many were believing, in Jesus. That sounds good, but it's not.

For the next verse, comes, Jesus, did not believe, in them. The word used there, is translated, entrust himself, to them.

But that word, entrust in the Greek, is exactly the same word, that is translated, in the previous verses, believe. In other words, Jesus didn't believe, in them.

[ 29 : 33 ] Why? Because he knew, what was in their hearts. Jesus knew, that these palipos, believed things, about Jesus. They were putting, their faith, in something, they liked, about Jesus.

But what they were not doing, was believing, in the way, Jesus demands, that truly converted, people believe in him. You see friends, to truly meet Jesus, in conversion, is to meet Jesus, on his terms.

You meet, with the second person, of the Trinity. You meet, with the Jesus, who died, a saving, substitutionary, death, on the cross.

You meet, with Jesus, who physically rose, on the third day. You meet, with the Lord, who comes, in the person, of the Holy Spirit, to rule, and reign, over your life.

You meet, with the Holy Spirit, who will so, miraculously, transform your mind, that you will know, that the Bible, is true. And if you believe, in a different version, of all these things, or a new idea, of who he is, don't delude, yourself, to think, that your version, is of saving value.

[ 30 : 54 ] Now, so many Christians, today, are full of people, who, sorry, so many churches, today, are full of people, who deal with Jesus, on their terms.

He demands, that he deals, with us, on his terms. Paul was not, just struck, to the ground, physically.

He was brought, to a place, where he submitted, his life, and his will, to Jesus, as Savior, and Lord. What do you, want me to do?

And that, friends, is the basis, of true conversion, and the evidence, of the transforming, power of the indwelling, Holy Spirit. He is no longer, Saul, the legalistic, Pharisee.

He is now, Paul, and he sees, the world, through the prism, of grace. And he sees, people, in the perspective, of eternity. He lives, and works, and serves.

[ 32 : 11 ] In submission, and independence. The persecutor, is now persecuted.

To that day, he says, in 2622, I have the help, that comes from God. Instead of exhaling, threats, and murder, he helped men, and women, find life, in Jesus Christ, through the gospel.

Friends, all around us, these miracles, are happening. And they are waiting, to happen.

Like Ananias, we need to, have our eyes, open, to see what God, has done, and is doing, as he gathers, in his harvest.

Christ. And like Paul, we must submit, to the lordship, of Christ. And do all, we can, to pursue, the world, for the Lord, Jesus Christ.

[ 33 : 23 ] What is it, that great hymn says, Jesus shall reign, where he are the sun. Why has the church, lost that vision, to see a world, won for Christ?

And like Saul, of Tarsus, we must not, go against the God. if we feel, the hand of God, on us, this evening.

If you hear, his voice, fall on your knees, and submit your life, to the relentless, pursuit, of God almighty.

Let's pray. Gracious God, and loving heavenly father, we thank you, for grace.

Grace is everything. Grace is not, something that we just, add on to, what we can contribute, to our salvation.

[ 34 : 45 ] Grace is everything. Everything. In salvation. And this night, if we've learned, nothing else, help us to focus, on that statement.

That it takes, as much grace, to save us, as it did, to save Saul. That unlikely convert.

God. And so, this night, to respond, to that grace, in thanksgiving, and gratitude, to our God, who is the God of grace, in Jesus name, we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Am I not guilty? rogen give versión on it. Amen. Amen.

[ 35 : 59 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.