

AM Acts 9:1-31

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[0 : 00] It's on page 1105 of the Church Bible. So we're going to look just in a few minutes, particularly verses 19 to 31, but we're going to read the chapter 19 to 31.

! But we're going to read the chapter up to that. At that point. So Acts chapter 9 from verse 1. 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 flashed around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

[1 : 11] 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 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.

[2 : 27] 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. 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.

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.

[3 : 45] And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon his 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 let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples.

And they were all afraid of him, for 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.

[5 : 04] 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 and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. May God bless to us that reading from his word.

And we're looking this morning at Acts chapter 9, verse 19 to 31. I'm sure you've seen adverts that have maybe two pictures, a before picture and an after picture.

So one example of this might be a hair restorative. So on one side, the before picture, you'll have someone like me with not much hair. And then on the after side, you'll have somebody who's taken the hair restorative and has a full head of hair.

[6 : 22] Or another example might be a washing liquid. You have on the before picture, dirty clothes, dirty cloth. And then on the after picture, this gleaming, beautifully cleaned clothing because it's had the washing liquid.

So I'm sure you've all seen those kind of advertisements with a before and an after picture. And the whole point is to show the change, the transformation that has taken place.

Well, the last two times I've been here, we've looked at the transformation in the life of Saul of Tarsus.

And Acts tells us, and also Saul, or later Paul, in his letters in the New Testament, tells us something of the before picture.

What Saul was like. He was obsessed with, or obsessed against, Jesus of Nazareth and against his disciples.

[7 : 33] And he persecuted them. He traveled great distances to arrest people, arrest the disciples of Jesus, to imprison them. He used violence and even supported the killing, the murder of those who followed the Lord Jesus.

And then in Acts 9 verses 3 to 19, it tells us of the transformation that took place in Saul's life. And through encountering the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. He was blinded by the glory of that great light.

And he sat in darkness, in blindness, for three days in Damascus. And then through a disciple, Ananias, he is healed. And he receives the Holy Spirit.

And he gets up and he's baptized by Ananias. And he's baptized by Ananias. Well, now we come to the after picture in these verses, verses 19 to 31.

[8 : 40] Now, we have to take a bit of care, I think, with the application of this transformation in Saul's life.

Because there are other conversion stories in the book of Acts and in other parts of the New Testament. And this is probably the most dramatic one.

This is the most, you know, just astonishing turnaround in a person's life. Other conversion stories are often more gradual, more of a process.

Or, in fact, for many of the disciples that we encounter in the New Testament, we don't even know how they came to faith. We're just not told that. And I guess it's not interested in that.

But what that reminds us, what that tells us, is that every disciple of Jesus Christ is unique. And Jesus, the Lord, deals with us as individuals.

[9 : 41] There is no one standard conversion experience that applies to everyone. We are all different. The Lord deals with us differently as individuals.

And so, you don't have to worry if you don't have a dramatic conversion experience like that of Saul. But one thing that we can do is to look at our lives, to examine our lives, and ask, Is my life being changed by the Lord Jesus Christ?

If I look back a year ago, or five years ago, ten years ago, is my life different? Is my life better than it was there? Not better in terms of having more money, or better health, but better in terms of the quality of my love for God, my love for other people, my attitudes, my heart, and working itself out in my actions.

Jesus Christ not only forgives us our sins, he also changes us. He makes us into better people. He makes us more and more like himself.

Well, so, we've seen something of the before picture. And just another description of that is given by Paul himself in 1 Timothy. In 1 Timothy 1, verses 12 and following, this is Paul, or Saul, writing

about his own experience.

[11:10] He says, So, we come now to the after.

Another picture, which is this passage in Acts 9, verses 19 to 31, which shows the immediate aftermath of Saul's conversion.

And it's a tale of two cities. First of all, in Damascus, and then secondly, in Jerusalem. So, let's look at Damascus first. In verse 19, we're told that for some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

This is the first fellowship of believers that Saul is part of. The first church, congregation, that he is a part of.

And that is important because, although Saul is in many ways special, he's been chosen by Christ. That's what Ananias tells him, or what the Lord tells Ananias, that Saul is the Lord's chosen instrument to take his message to Gentiles, to the people of Israel, to the people of Israel, and to kings.

[13:19] He's an apostle of Christ. And yet, Saul also needs the fellowship of the church. And he could only do the task that he's been given to do by the Lord as part of the church.

It reminds us that we're not meant to be isolated believers. Following Christ is a communal activity. We do it together as the people of God.

And Saul, for all his distinctness, for all his giftedness, giftedness is no exception to that. He needed the fellowship of the church. And so, the first thing we read is that he spent time with the disciples in Damascus.

He was with them. He is part of that community. And if you are a believer in Jesus Christ this morning, and you're not part of a fellowship, a congregation, then this reminds us that that is really essential for following Christ, that we are part of a group, part of a congregation, a fellowship of his people.

And so, the importance of joining that, of seeking Christian fellowship, of joining a church. And also, to value the church, to value the people in the church. They may be annoying at times.

[14:46] I know people find me annoying at times. But, to value, to cherish others in the church. To be with them. Which is what we see here in the experience of Saul.

But then we see Saul immediately begins preaching in the synagogue. So, Damascus had a large Jewish community. They had synagogues where they would meet together, particularly on Sabbaths, on Saturdays, for communal instruction and worship.

And, it seems that Ananias was part of that community. He was a Jewish believer in Jesus as the Messiah.

And Paul immediately begins to preach, to proclaim Jesus, that he is the Son of God. And in verse 22, he proves that Jesus was the Christ, or the Messiah.

And, I think here that probably means the same thing. That the Son of God and the Messiah. It harks back to passages in the Old Testament. So, for example, in 2 Samuel chapter 7, where David has that desire to build a house for God, the temple for God.

[16:02] And, God's message comes to David through the prophet Nathan, saying, No, you're not the one to build a house for me. But, I will build a house for you. Meaning, and there's a play in that word house.

David wants to build a building. God is going to build a house for David. Meaning, a dynasty, a household. A line, a family line. And, that after David, his son will reign.

And, he will be the one to build a house for God. That's Solomon, fulfilled in Solomon. And, that I will be a father to him. And, he will be a son to me. And, so, Solomon initially, and then all of the kings in David's line, were in some sense, a son of God.

Psalms 2 speaks of that. It speaks of the Lord's anointed. Which, that actually means it's the Messiah or the Christ. Who is, on the day of his coronation, becomes the son of God.

Now, in one sense that was true of every king in the line of David. But, it's supremely true of Jesus. He is the supreme king in the line of David.

[17:09] The king who will reign forever. He is the Messiah. The son of God. So, Saul's special calling is to take Jesus' name.

To proclaim Jesus' name. First of all, to Jews. And, he's fulfilling that here in verse 20 to 22.

And, he's preaching to the people of Israel. To the Jews. In their synagogues. Now, again, Saul has a special task. A special ministry calling.

That is not the same as what we all have. Still, we should all have a desire to speak about Jesus Christ. To share him. To spread the knowledge of him.

To those that we have contact with. Those that we come into contact with. And, we should pray for opportunities to do that. Well, all who hear Saul are astonished at the transformation that takes place in his life.

[18:16] They know the before picture. They know what he was like as someone who persecuted the church. The disciples of Jesus. But, now they're seeing the after picture.

And, of a Saul proclaiming the one whom formerly he had hated and despised. And, they're astonished. They're amazed at that.

In verse 22, we read that Saul grew. He increased all the more in strength. In his preaching. In his persuasion. And, that he confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus. By proving that Jesus was the Christ. The Messiah. So, he left them.

He confounded them. He left them without any answer. Without any arguments against. So, powerful was his persuasiveness. And, he was persuading them that Jesus was the Messiah.

[19:18] The promised deliverer and king. The one who fulfilled. Old Testament expectation. The expectation of the Israelites. That Jesus is the one who fulfills that. And, we read that Saul proved that Jesus was the Christ.

The gospel is not some sort of irrational thing. It's just a matter of feeling. Saul proved it. It's based on rational, reasonable argument. And, in particular, in this case, I think it's based on the Old Testament scriptures.

That there are these scriptures that look forward to a coming one. The Messiah. Who will deliver his people.

Who will redeem his people. And, Paul is showing how Jesus is the one who fulfills that expectation. And, of course, he confirms that with his own eyewitness testimony.

Of how he himself met Jesus on the road to Damascus. As the one who was crucified. But, is now alive. And, powerful. And, who is able to appear from heaven.

[20:29] And, transform and turn around Saul's life. Well, the Jews in Damascus. They conspire to kill Saul. They have the gates of the city guarded.

This takes place after. This is when many days had passed. And, actually, in Galatians. We're told that it's three years later. That Saul leaves Damascus.

He spends some time in Arabia. Which, Arabia at that time. Is basically the area just sort of to the south of Damascus. It's not, we think today of Arabia as being like, say, Saudi Arabia.

The Gulf states. But, Arabia then is. If you can imagine a map. I should have a map here, really.

But, if you can imagine just the area to the south of Damascus. Saul spends three years there.

And, then, based in Damascus. He's back in Damascus. And, the Jews there conspire to kill him.

That's the unbelieving Jews. And, we have.

[21:33] It's kind of a parallel. With what happens in Acts chapter 6 and 7. With Stephen. Stephen preaches there. About Jesus being the Messiah.

And, those who listen to him. They lose the argument. Because, there Stephen. And, now it's Saul. So, powerfully proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.

That their opponents are left without any convincing answer. And, they don't want to believe. So, they resort to violence. Of course, that's happened many times since.

And, it still happens today. That when persuasion fails. When the argument is lost. People resort to violence.

Violence. But, when violence is used to uphold. A religious teaching. It's a sign of. A weakness. It's a sign of failure. And, one thing we see in the New Testament.

[22:36] Is that believers often suffer. Violence against them. But, never do they use violence. Against their opponents. Well, Saul escapes from Damascus.

The disciples let him down in a basket. Through a gap in the wall. The city wall of Damascus. And, he flees for his life. And, Paul himself refers to this in 2 Corinthians 11.

He speaks of his own experience. This is part of his suffering. Part of what he undergoes. For the sake of the gospel. And, part of it is this. Just this. I suppose. This.

Extreme experience of being. Having to run for his life. Being let down in a basket. Through the wall. So, we come secondly to Jerusalem.

And, there's a similar pattern of events. Saul tries to join the disciples. In verse 26. But, they're afraid of him.

[23 : 40] They don't believe that he's really a believer. Maybe they think. Well, maybe he's just doing this. He's trying to infiltrate. He's trying to do this. And, then he'll betray us.

This is highly dangerous. And, it's similar to Ananias' initial reaction. When the Lord asked him to go to the house where Saul was. They suspect him.

They're afraid of him. Because of his former violent lifestyle. And, then Barnabas steps in.

And, takes Saul under his wing. And, he takes Saul to the apostles. And, relates Saul's experience. His conversion on the road to Damascus. And, how the Lord had saved him.

[24 : 34] And, changed his life. Now, Barnabas has been introduced to us earlier in the book of Acts. At the end of chapter 4. And, there we read of Barnabas' generosity.

How he sold a field. And, he brought the products to the feet of the apostles. For them to use. For the help of the poor. And, needy. In their midst.

So, there we see. In that introduction to Barnabas. His generosity. His kindness. His sharing of his possessions with others.

Now, we see Barnabas' courage. Barnabas is risking his life here. He's also risking his reputation. If he gets this wrong.

Then, his name will be mud. In the believing community. And, yet his concern for Saul. Saul. And, also his belief in what God.

[25 : 30] The power of God can do. Overrides that. And, he takes the risk. And, he goes and brings. Takes Saul under his wing. And, brings him to the apostles.

And, the result. And, the result. Again, is fellowship. Saul stays with the church. In verse 28.

He went in and out among them at Jerusalem. That just basically means he was sort of at home among the believers in Jerusalem. And, again. We see the importance of being part of a congregation.

A fellowship of God's people. And, he speaks boldly in the name of the Lord. Or, preaches boldly in the name of the Lord.

And, in particular here. It highlights his contact. His speaking. His disputing with some Hellenistic Jews.

[26 : 29] So, these are. It says Hellenist. That means Greek speakers. So, these are Greek speaking. But, they're Jews. They're living in Jerusalem. They'll be in a synagogue community.

Indeed, it was a group of Hellenistic Jews. Who were so opposed to Stephen. In chapter 6. Of the book of Acts. And, these Hellenistic Jews.

They, like the Jews in Damascus. Attempt to kill Saul. And, again. Saul is forced to flee. To escape. And, he goes down to Caesarea on the coast. And, then to Tarsus. Which is his hometown. Tarsus in what is now. Southwest. Sorry. Southeast.

Turkey. So. In both Damascus and Jerusalem. Saul experiences these plots. To kill him. And, it fulfills the words.

[27 : 26] Of the Lord Jesus. In verse 16. The words of the Lord. To Ananias. That I will show him. That's the Lord speaking. The Lord says. I will show Saul.

How much he must suffer. For my name. And, we see this really from. From the start. Of Paul's discipleship. He's on the move.

He's having to flee. For his life. He's persecuted. Previously he had caused suffering. Now he's on the receiving end of that. It's interesting that Acts chapter 9. Begins with Saul.

Leaving Jerusalem. To persecute. The followers. Of Jesus. And, here at the end of. It's not the end of the chapter. But, it's. The next verse. Moves on to a completely different.

Topic. And, people and place. At the end. We see Saul. Leaving Jerusalem. Being persecuted. As a follower.

[28 : 23] Of Jesus. But, the call to be. A disciple of Jesus. Is a call. To suffer. In Luke 14.

Verse 33. Jesus says. Unless you give up everything you have. You cannot be my disciple. Unless you. Hate. Even your close family. Even your own life.

You cannot be. My disciple. Everything we have. Everything we are. Now belongs to. Jesus Christ. Now.

Of course. That doesn't mean. That we literally hate. Either our own life. Or. The people around us. Our family members. Our parents. Our children. Our brothers and sisters. We're to love them.

We're. Those around us.

We're called to love. And the Bible. You know. Tells us that. So many times elsewhere. But. What that means is that. Our first love. Is for.

[29 : 19] Jesus Christ. He is the first priority. In our life. And if other loves. Come into conflict with that. We have to choose. Him. And Saul.

We see here. Chooses. Following Jesus. Proclaiming Jesus. Over his own. Personal comfort. His own. Career prospects.

His own ambitions. His own popularity. He chooses. Being obedient to Jesus Christ. Above those. Now. Most of us probably. Won't. I hope.

We don't have. We don't have. So severe. Suffering. As a soul. I know. In my own experience. I've. My suffering. Has been very. Very minor. In relation to souls. And yet.

In every. Christian life. There is. At some stage. Or other. A choice to make. A choice to. Go the hard path. In obedience. To Jesus Christ.

[30 : 12] Christ. But. The perspective. Of the Bible. The perspective. Of the New Testament. Is that. He is worth it. He is. Infinitely worth it. Because he is the one. Who has loved us.

And has given himself. For us. And also. Because. The Bible. Holds out. A prospect. Of the future. It tells us that this life.

Is not. All there is. It is short. It is transitory. It is temporary. There is an age to come. In which there is. An eternal life. Saul. Saul.

Later Paul. Writes. In Romans 8. Verse 18. He says. I consider that our present. Sufferings. Are not worth comparing. With the glory. That will be revealed. In us.

And he goes on. In that chapter. To speak of. Of the new creation. And of the resurrection. Of the body. And the eternal life. That God. Gives to those. Who. Who love him. So the cause.

[31 : 09] Of. The gospel. Jesus Christ. Is worth. Giving up. Our time. Our money. Our freedom. Our reputation. Even. Our family. If we call to that.

For. For him. Because. There is that promise. Of life eternal. Which is with him. Forever. Well finally. We come just to. Um.

The last. Verse. Verse 31. Which is a kind of. Summary statement. And these sort of. Appear. Every so often. In the book of Acts. It sort of just. Summarizes things.

What's going on. With the church. It says. 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.

And in the comfort. Of the Holy Spirit. It's multiplied. So. Speaks of a time of. Of peace. And rest. So there's been. Persecution.

[32 : 05] And of course. Saul was. Was. Perhaps the main. Persecutor. And now. His life has been changed. He's no longer. A persecutor. But. It speaks of. Arrest.

From persecution. So the persecution. Is periodic. It's not. A constant thing. In the book of Acts. It will come. Again. Later on.

In the book. But we read. Of two types of. Growth here. In the church. First of all. There's internal growth. And the second. External growth. Faith. So the. The internal growth.

It speaks of. Of being built up. Or being strengthened. In the faith. So. As the disciples.

As they. Meet together. As they learn together. As they follow Christ together. They are built up. In their faith. They are strengthened. In their faith. And then it talks about.

[32 : 59] Living or walking. In the fear. Of the Lord. So it's living in the light. Of the Lord's. Presence. Living in fear. Of offending God.

It's the fear. Like the fear. Of a loving father. Who we. We don't want to. We don't want to. Displease. And in fact. The word fear. Really. Here. It has the kind of.

Sense of awe. As well. Awe. Fear. There's a kind of. You know. They. You can see how they connect. With each other. So it's living in. Awe. Of the Lord. God. But I want us to notice.

This. This. This. This phrase. To fear the Lord. Is a. It's kind of like a stock phrase. In the Old Testament. Meaning. To. To live in awe. Of God.

To worship God. And. I may have. I may have missed some. But I counted 42 times. In the Old Testament. Where this phrase. Appears.

[33 : 55] To fear. The Lord. Lord. And of course. In the Old Testament. To fear the Lord. Is to fear Yahweh. That's. What it is in Hebrew. It's the fear of Yahweh. Yahweh. The name.

Of. God. The God of. The Israelites. The Hebrew name. In. When the. The Old Testament. Was translated into Greek. That was translated. The word Yahweh.

Was translated as. The Lord. The Greek for Lord. And that's come. Into. Into. To English. Versions as well. Now. But when it. Speaks here about.

Fearing the Lord. The remarkable thing. Is it's speaking about. The Lord. Jesus. That's. Clear from the context. In. Verse 27. We read of Barnabas.

Taking Saul. And. Bringing him to the apostles. And declaring 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.

[34 : 52] So. Who is the Lord. Who. Met. Paul. And spoke to Paul. Saul. On the road to Damascus. It's the Lord. Jesus. And so. When it speaks of the Lord. Here. At the end of the. This passage.

It's speaking of the fear. Of. The Lord. Jesus. And. We see here. And we see it elsewhere. In Acts as well. So often the Lord. Is.

Referring to Jesus. But. It's applying to Jesus. All that. Material from the Old Testament. That. Applies to. Yahweh. Yahweh. So it's telling us really that.

Jesus is regarded by. The church. By Luke himself. And should be by us. As Yahweh. As God. He is the one who receives worship. He is the center. Of the church's.

Life. And existence. And experience. Well then they're also. They're encouraged by. The Holy Spirit. Or comforted by the Holy Spirit. The word.

[35 : 49] There is. If you can. Remember the. In John's gospel. In chapters 14 to 16. It's. Speaking of. Conversations.

Between Jesus. And his disciples. On the evening. Before Jesus crucifixion. And Jesus there says. I will send you. Another. The Greek word is. Paraclete. And. Different. English translations. Translate it differently. Comforter. Helper. Counselor. Because the word. Really includes. All those. Terms. And that's the word.

That's used here. The. The encouragement. The comfort. Counsel. Of. The Holy Spirit. And then finally. There's. External growth.

The increase. In. In numbers. It. It. It. Multiplied. The church. Multiplied. Because. New people. Came. And joined it.

[36 : 43] People who were saved. By Christ. Just as. Saul. Had been saved. And added to the church. Many others were saved. They believed. In the Lord Jesus Christ. And they were added. To the community.

Of God's. People. Let's join together. In prayer. Lord. We thank you for. Your work. In. The life of Saul. We thank you for.

The ministry. That he had. Which we still. Benefit from today. Through his letters. In. In the New Testament. And we thank you. That you are the same God. Today.

That you. Are at work. In the world. And in the church. And we pray. That you would. Work in our own day. And in our own place. We pray for this congregation. And for its growth.

For its internal growth. That we would be. Strengthened. And built up. In. In the faith. That we would live. In the fear of the Lord. And that you would be. Transforming us. By.

[37 : 36] The power of the spirit. By the power of your word. And we pray too. For. Growth. In terms of increasing numbers. That you would add. To the church. That you would bring people.

To salvation. And that you would. Add them. Even to this congregation here. We pray. In Jesus name. Amen. that night. Thank you.