

AM Acts 8:1-3 & 9:1-19a

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[0:00] To 8 on page 1104 of the Church Bible. So Acts, beginning with the time after Jesus rose from the dead.

! And then right at the beginning of the book we read of His ascension, His being taken up into heaven after commissioning His disciples to be His witnesses, to take His good news to people.

And the first few chapters are set in Jerusalem and it narrates the preaching of the gospel and the performing of miracles in Jesus' name in that city.

And then in chapter 7, and we looked at this a few weeks ago, we read in chapter 7 of the martyrdom of Stephen, one of the disciples of Jesus.

At that martyrdom, we read in verse 58 of chapter 7, that those who were opposed to Him, those who were putting Him to death, that they cast Him out of the city, Stephen out of the city, and stoned Him.

[1:16] And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. Well, Stephen is stoned to death.

His last words are a prayer. He called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep. So we'll read just verses 1 to 3 of chapter 8. And then we'll read chapter 9. So Saul approved of Stephen's execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. And they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house.

[2:22] He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. And then the rest of chapter 8 deals with, well, it's focused on one particular character, Philip.

And we've looked at that over the past couple of times I've been here. But we take up the reading again in chapter 9, verse 1, and we read to verse 19. 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?

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.

[3:55] 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.

[5 : 10] 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. May God bless to us that reading of his word. We're going to sing a passage that we read in chapter 9 of Acts.

[6 : 17] And we're looking at particularly verses 1 to 9. So Acts 9, verses 1 to 9.

In the past week, the government in Westminster have been accused of making a series of U-turns. Now, of course, they are not the first government to be accused of that.

And they probably won't be the last. But a U-turn in terms of government is where maybe the government announces a policy that it's going to do something. And then there's a public outcry.

And so it changes its mind and reverses its decision. Sometimes the language is used of a screeching U-turn. And that, to my mind, conjures up the image of the kind of thing you see in car chases in films.

Where you've got a car hurtling along. And then it suddenly slams on the brakes. There's a handbrake turn and screeches round and goes back in the opposite direction.

[7 : 28] Well, the mother of all U-turns is what happened to Saul of Tarsus in the passage that we read.

You can maybe imagine a contemporary fanatical terrorist. A religious terrorist. And you can take your pick of terror organizations.

Very suddenly renouncing violent terror and immediately becoming a leading advocate for non-violence.

And that would begin to give you a picture of what happened in Saul's life. What accounted for this dramatic and sudden and radical change in the life of Saul?

But it was an encounter with the risen, exalted Lord Jesus Christ. This event is so important in Acts that it's repeated not once but twice in Acts chapter 22 and chapter 26.

[8 : 38] And on those two latter occasions, it's Saul, also known as Paul, telling his own story. Now we're in Acts chapter 9, which is Luke who writes Acts, narrating it in the third person.

But we will also draw on some of the extra details given in Saul or Paul's own account of what happened on this occasion.

So it's really a drama in three scenes. The first scene is in Jerusalem. The second is on the road, the road approaching Damascus. And the third scene is in Damascus itself.

So first of all in Jerusalem. And the passage opens by telling us that Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.

Here's a man with a fanatical and violent obsession. And again, think of modern day suicide bombers, violent religious terrorists.

[9 : 50] And you'll kind of get the feel, the measure of Saul. In Acts chapter 22, where Paul is telling his own story, he says, I'm a Jew born of Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, that's in Jerusalem.

I was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, strictly in accordance with the law of our ancestors. I was zealous for God, just as all of you are today.

I persecuted the followers of this way to death, putting both men and women in chains and throwing them in jail. So Saul was motivated by zeal for God, as of course are many religious terrorists today.

But zeal, of course, can be dangerous if it is in a wrong cause or exercised in a wrong way.

So back to chapter 9, verse 1, we read that Saul 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.

[11 : 09] Now Damascus had a large Jewish population. It had several synagogues there. And so Saul goes there with the suspicion that maybe among them there will be some followers of the way.

That's people who followed the way of the Lord Jesus Christ, who were believers in Christ, in Jesus. And notice that the initiative for this trip to Damascus, to arrest people, it doesn't come from the high priest.

It comes from Saul himself. Now the high priest and those around him, the Jewish leadership, were also opposed to Jesus and his people.

They were the ones who'd handed Jesus over to be crucified. They had harassed the apostles in Jerusalem and presided over the stoning of Stephen. But they were perhaps content to just a clear Jerusalem and Judea of these Jesus followers.

But not Saul. Saul is not content with that. He wants to rid the entire earth of these disciples of Jesus. And so he goes to the high priest and asks for letters.

[12 : 27] Now, both Jerusalem and Damascus were within the Roman Empire. So any Jewish authority, the Jewish high priest had limited authority within that.

But he would have authority over Jewish communities. Or at least some authority. So that if Jews just ignored it, if they disobeyed what these letters said, they risked being put out of the Jewish community, of being kind of dispossessed.

So these letters would carry quite considerable weight. Saul also, we see, is not content just to arrest the men. He was going to arrest women as well.

He wants to stamp this movement out. Going to chapter 26, where Saul, Paul, is narrating his own story. He says, I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests, I put many of the Lord's people in prison. And when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

[13:45] Many a time, I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished. And I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

Where he speaks of forcing to blaspheme there. That's to blaspheme the name of Jesus. And he speaks of going to foreign cities. Damascus was about 150 miles from Jerusalem.

It would take a week to get from Jerusalem to Damascus on foot, as he most likely traveled. And then another week to go back again. And so here we see this man, Saul, utterly obsessed in his opposition to Jesus and his followers.

What was it that motivated Saul to be so obsessed, so fanatical, so violent in his opposition to Jesus and his people?

Well, he himself talks about it in some of the letters that he later wrote. In Galatians chapter 1 verse 13 and 14, he says, You have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism.

[14:57] How intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people.

And was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. And then also in Philippians, another letter that he wrote later on, he describes himself.

He says, I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. In regard to the law, that's the Torah, a Pharisee.

As for zeal, persecuting the church. As for righteousness, based on the law, faultless. So, we get sort of a bit of a picture into who Saul was and what motivated him.

Saul was a Pharisee. Now, the Pharisees had fairly orthodox beliefs. They believed in the Torah, the law, the prophets, the Psalms, what we call the Old Testament.

[16:01] They believed in God's promise that God would one day lift his people out of their current low position. As slaves of foreign pagan enemies. And that God's kingdom would come in the future.

They also believed in the resurrection of the dead on the last day. And just as a sort of, by the way, that was very different from the high priest who Saul got the letters from.

The high priest was a Sadducee, a different party of Jews. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. They only believed in the Torah. That's the first five books of the Old Testament.

And they saw Jesus as a threat to their comfortable position as leaders, sort of under and within the Roman Empire. But the Pharisees, which Saul was part of, they believed that Israel, the Israelites, must be purified to prepare for God's coming to reign.

And so they devoted themselves to keep the law of God, even in minute detail. And they weren't content just to observe the written commands in the law, in the Torah.

[17:12] They also had what they called an oral Torah. That was things that were sort of passed down orally from teacher to student and then to the next generation. And it was far more detailed.

It was, you know, details about how you kept the Sabbath, how far you could walk on the Sabbath, what you could carry or what you couldn't carry. Very, very detailed laws. And they followed all of these.

And many Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat to their agenda. Jesus performed miracles. He taught with great authority and gained a large following.

Crowds followed him. And he made self-directed claims that the Pharisees regarded as blasphemous. Claiming that Jesus had authority to do what only God could do.

From their perspective, Jesus was lax about observing the Sabbath and other laws. And he ate and drank with tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners.

[18:19] Just the sort of people who made Israel impure. The kind of people who were the problem for the Israelites. And they'd hoped that having got rid of Jesus by crucifying him, that that would be the end of all this.

But now his followers were going around saying that he was risen from the dead. And they were leading huge numbers of Jews astray.

According to their thinking. And so this had to be stopped. And Saul was prepared to go further than most in stopping it.

And I think Saul illustrates a danger for us. The danger of being very devout. Of being religious. Of being zealous for God. Of devoting one's life to serve God.

Or for some great cause. And yet to be utterly wrong. Saul knew the Bible. The scriptures. The Old Testament.

[19:20] He had been trained in them. He probably memorized huge chunks of the Old Testament. And yet he failed to understand those scriptures.

And failed to understand the God of those scriptures. He was fixated on law. On attaining righteousness. But in his pride and arrogance.

He totally missed the central thrust and message of those scriptures. Which was its preparation for a saviour and king. And when that saviour and king came.

In the person of Jesus Christ. He totally failed to recognize him. As the fulfillment of the law and the prophets and the psalms. The fulfillment of the scriptures that at one level.

He knew so well. Now. The problem for Saul was.

[20:21] A misplaced devotion and zeal. And perhaps the problem was that. Although at one level he was very zealous for God. At another level what he really valued.

What he really prized. What he idolized. Was the traditions of his fathers. Judaism. The Torah. The Pharisee way of life.

It seems that Saul prized these more than God himself. Well we come to the second scene. Which is the road to Damascus.

So Saul is on his way to Damascus. To persecute and harm disciples of Jesus. But the Lord Jesus has other plans.

In verse 3 we read that. 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.

[21:21] Saul. Saul. Why are you persecuting me? In the later accounts. We read that this happened at midday.

The middle of the day when the sun was at its height. And yet this light. From the sky. Suddenly beams around him. Brighter than the sun as he says in chapter 26.

And he hears a voice calling to him. And we have to understand this. It's not some private vision. Some private experience that is just sort of going on inside Saul's head.

We know that because in verse 7. We read that the men who were traveling with him. Stood speechless. Hearing the voice. But seeing no one. In chapter 22.

Saul says that. My companions saw the light. But they did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. Now that may seem to be a bit contradictory.

[22:23] But I think if we can put those two together. And what they all saw was the brilliant light. They all saw that. But only Saul saw the person within the light.

And they all heard the sound. But only Saul heard a distinct voice. Addressing him. Because the message was for him. But the experience of Saul's companions.

Shows that this was not. Just something going on in Saul's head. It wasn't just a personal private experience. It was a real objective experience. Of an appearance of the risen.

Exalted. Lord Jesus. Jesus. As Jesus says to him. In Saul's account in chapter 26.

Jesus says. I have appeared to you. To appoint you. To be a servant. And a witness. Of what you have seen. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

[23 : 24] Verses 5 to 8. Saul. Or Paul. Lists. Some of the appearances. Of the risen Lord Jesus. To different. Disciples. Or groups of disciples. After his rising from the dead.

And in verse 8. He says. Last of all. Jesus appeared. To me. Also. And that's. Talking of this. Experience. On the road.

To Damascus. And it's vitally important. That we understand that. Because it's part of a sequence. Of. Of appearances. Real.

Objective. Appearances. Of the risen. Lord Jesus. And it tells us. That the gospel. Is not based on. Just something. Psychological. It's not just some.

Psychological change. It's based on events. Events that were witnessed. And the climactic event. Is the resurrection. Of Jesus Christ. Now some people.

[24 : 24] Regard this passage. As a kind of a paradigm. Or a pattern. Of. Conversion experience. That. We should expect to be. Repeated at some level.

In all people. Who come to faith. In Jesus Christ. And of course. We've got. It's almost like proverbial. Isn't it? A Damascus road. Conversion. But I think that's.

A mistake. Now of course. Many people do have. Dramatic. Conversion experiences. But probably many more. Have.

Very different. Kinds of experience. Often not dramatic at all. Maybe very gradual. I remember. Hearing about the. Experience of. Everett Koop.

Who was a surgeon general. In the United States. In the 1980s. And. His story was that. His wife was a Christian. And she. Sort of. Badgered him to go to church.

[25 : 18] And so he went to church with her. And. He said. He listened to the sermon. And. He agreed with almost nothing. That the preacher said. But he kept going.

And. A year later. He suddenly realized. That. He was agreeing with everything. That. The preacher said. And that. Somehow in that last year. Almost without realizing it. He changed.

And. He. Became a. A well-known. Christian. Some of you may. Not even remember a time. When you did not trust. And love. The Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as. As long as you can remember. As early. In your life. As you can remember. You have loved him. You have believed. And. Of course that. Shouldn't surprise us too much.

Now it can be. A problem to some. Because. Some people. Just feel. I've got to have an experience. I've got to have a conversion experience. That is really. You know. Tangible and dramatic.

[26 : 15] To know that I'm. A believer. How do I know. That I was born. I don't remember being born. I have no recollection. Of being born.

I know I'm born. Because. I'm alive. And. We can know that we have. Spiritual life. Not because we remember. Necessarily. The. Exact point.

That we. Were born. Anew. Born spiritually. But if we have. Spiritual life. If we love the Lord. If we seek to obey him. And love. And follow him. Then.

Those signs of. Spiritual life. That's how we know. That we are alive. So. What happens to Saul here. Is not necessarily. A pattern. For.

Conversion. That's. Applicable to all people. What it is. More importantly. Is. The risen Lord Jesus. Physically appearing.

[27 : 09] To Saul. So that he. Becomes a witness. Of his resurrection. So that he becomes an apostle. And of course. Saul. Or Paul's. Career.

As. An apostle. As a preacher. Fills the second half. Of the book of Acts. So the voice. Is. For Saul. It addresses him.

By name. And. With a question. Saul. Saul. Why. Are you persecuting. Me. Saul's. A devout Jew.

He's a Pharisee. He knows. That the Jewish scriptures. Is what we call the Old Testament. And. In the Old Testament. There are. There are narratives. Of God revealing himself. In a startling.

In startling. Overwhelming. Glory. And light. To different people. People like Ezekiel. Or Isaiah. Jeremiah. And in fact. When Saul.

[28 : 05] Or Paul. Recounts. This event. In Acts 26. The language. That he uses. To speak of his own experience. There are many parallels. With the language of God.

Appearing. And calling. And commissioning. Particularly Jeremiah. And Ezekiel. But this must have been. Shocking. And. Disorientating.

For Saul. Here is this. Divine voice. This voice. From heaven. At the very least. An angelic voice. Calling him. To account. And asking him.

Why are you persecuting. Me. And so. In his. Bewilderment. And confusion. He asks. Who are you Lord? At the very least.

Saul recognizes. The authority. Of this voice. He calls. The. The owner of the voice. Lord. And the answer. It comes back. That I am.

[29 : 02] Jesus. Whom you. Are persecuting. And we can. Only begin to imagine. Saul's. Shock. And horror. At this.

In his. Misplaced. Zeal. For God. He had hated. The name. Of Jesus. And all. Who associated. Themselves. With that name. How could he have. Got it. So.

Badly. Wrong. But notice. The. The Lord. Jesus. Words. Why are you. Persecuting. Me. I am.

Jesus. Whom you. Are persecuting. Now as far as we know. Saul had never met. Jesus before. He hadn't. Directly. Persecuted.

Jesus. And yet. In persecuting. Jesus. People. He was persecuting. Jesus. That's what. Jesus is accusing him of. So how we treat.

[29 : 59] Those who belong to Jesus Christ. Equates with how we treat. Jesus Christ. Himself. Perhaps. A kind of insight. Into that would be.

If you think of a. Say a child at school. Who's being bullied. And the parent finds out. And the parent just feels. You know. The horror. And the pain of that. But I think an even better.

Illustration is. One that. Saul. Later Paul. Uses himself. That believers. Together. Make up. The body. Of Christ. He speaks of that.

In 1 Corinthians 12. And a number of other places. That together. Believers in Christ. We make up the body of Christ. Which is made up. Of many parts.

And. We know that. In a body. That if one part. Feels pain. It affects the whole body. I remember. Some years ago. I had a septic toe. And you might just think. Well a toe. It's just a.

[30 : 54] You know. It's a small thing. Just right at the end. Of your body. And. You know. You could just sort of. Ignore it. But. It was painful. And. And I was in pain. And I'm sure.

You've. Probably have similar experiences. Maybe. You've had toothache. And you know. Tooth is just a tiny bit. Of your body. But. If you've got. Really bad toothache. You know.

You can't think of anything else. You're distracted by it. Because. The body is. Organic. Whole. And as believers. All believers.

Are part of the body. Of Christ. Anyone who is persecuted. Or oppressed. Oppressing. It's oppressing. Christ himself. And we see here. That Jesus is.

With. And in. His people. He is united to his people. Bound together with them. So that to persecute. Or ill treat. Any one of them. Is to persecute.

[31 : 46] And ill treat. Jesus himself. And that reminds us. To be careful. How we treat each other. How we treat. Other believers.

If you treat a believer. With contempt. Or disrespect. Or unkindness. It is actually the Lord Jesus. You are treating. In that way.

Well third. The third scene. Is in Damascus. In verse six. Saul is told to get up. And go into the city. And there he will be told. What he had to do.

And so in verse eight. We read that 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. This was an utter humiliation.

[32 : 43] For Saul. He discovers. That he has been blinded. By this experience. That he has to be led. By the hand. Into Damascus. Because he who had gone there. To arrest.

And drag people out. Lead them to Jerusalem. He has to be led by the hand. Into Damascus. Where he sits for three days. Unable to see. And not eating or drinking anything.

And Saul has plenty to reflect on. As he sits. In the darkness. He may have reflected on. Words from. Deuteronomy. Which. He no doubt would have known. Which speak of the terrible curses.

That would come down. On the Israelites. If they broke. Their covenant with God. God's covenant with them. And among these curses. Is the following. This is in Deuteronomy 28.

Verse 28 and 29. Where it says. The Lord will strike you. With madness. Blindness. And confusion of mind. You will grope about.

[33 : 42] At midday. Like a person. A blind person. In the dark. And later. We know from the later passages. That this encounter took place. At about midday.

So there is Paul. Saul. Groping around. In blindness. In darkness. In the middle. Of the day. And so. He's sitting there.

In Damascus. Thinking. Here I am. I thought. I had been doing God's will. I thought. I was serving him. And yet.

Here I am. Personally. Suffering. The curse. For covenant breaking. The Lord. I thought. I was serving. Turns out. To be Jesus.

Whom I had hated. And opposed. And his blindness. Represents. A spiritual darkness. He had been zealous. For God. And yet. So.

[34 : 35] So. Deceived. And again. Reminding us. That it's possible. To be. Devoutly religious. Zealous. Even for God. And yet.

To have got it. Utterly. Wrong. In. Chapter 26. In. Saul's own account. There. We have a detail.

That's not given. In chapter 9. In 26. Verse 14. Jesus there. Says to Saul. Saul. Saul. Why. Are you persecuting me? It is hard. For you to kick.

Against. The goats. Or against the spikes. And. The word. It's just. You know. I often see railings. With. They kind of. Come to a point. A spike. And if you imagine.

Those sort of. Facing out. Horizontally. And trying to kick. Against them. And if you do that. You're going to just. Really hurt yourself. But it. Suggests that.

[35 : 29] Saul. Was perhaps. Willfully. Deceived. That there was an. Inward battle. Raging in Saul. And that he was battling. He was fighting. Against God. Did Saul.

Deep down. Have a sense. That there was. Something compelling. About Jesus. And his claim. To be the Messiah. And that this was something that. Really ought to be looked into.

Of course. Gamaliel. His teacher. We. Come across him in chapter 5. Of Acts. And. Gamaliel. Is very cautious. About dealing with. With the disciples. Of Jesus. But Saul.

Had thrown that caution. To the wind. He didn't want it to be true. He hated. The idea of it. And he could always. Remind himself. That of course. Jesus was a Sabbath breaker. A law breaker.

A blasphemer. That he. He mixed with the wrong people. With sinners. And prostitutes. And tax collectors. So he was obviously. A deceiver. A false messiah. But Saul was.

[36 : 28] Kicking. Against. The goads. He was fighting God. With the result. That he was only. Damaging. Himself. Now.

If you are. As. Vehemently opposed. To Jesus Christ. As. Saul was. Or so. You know. Obviously opposed. To Jesus Christ. It's perhaps unlikely.

That you'd be here. This morning. And yet. There are. Many ways. Of keeping. Jesus Christ. At arm's length. And maybe. This morning.

You hear his call. Come. Follow me. And. You find. Something. Something compelling. In that. And yet.

You don't want. To come to him. You don't want. All that that would entail. In your life. The disruption. That it would bring. To your life. Because you're comfortable. As you are.

[37 : 23] And so you battle it. And you struggle. And you're. What you're doing. Is you're struggling. Against God. You're kicking. Against. The spikes. Against the goads. You're.

Against. But if you do that. You are the one. Who will ultimately. Get badly hurt. If you stand. Defiantly. In the path. Of a tsunami.

You won't affect. The tsunami. At all. But you will be. Devastated. By it. But Saul. Is also praying.

In verse 11. We read that. Ananias is told. That he's praying. And he's also fasting. He is seriously seeking God. And seeking the truth.

About God. And if you today. Feel that you are. Lost. You feel that you're in. Spiritual darkness. Then pray.

[38 : 18] Give yourself. To seeking. After God. Even if you're. You're not. Convinced. That God exists. But you feel. Your lostness. You can still pray.

God if you exist. Then. Make that clear to me. Show me who you are. And God promises. That all who truly. Seek him. Will be found.

By him. They will find. And as we see. From Saul's experience. He is to be found. In. God is to be found. In and through. The Lord.

Jesus Christ. Well Saul reminds us. Never to. Write. Anyone off. As beyond hope. Remember that Stephen. His last words were.

Lord do not hold this. Sin. To their charge. Very much similar to. Jesus. Not quite his last words. But the. His prayer from the cross. Father forgive them.

[39 : 13] They do not know. What they do. You. And. That prayer. Just maybe seemed. Just so unlikely. To be answered. And yet. Here we see. Saul. An answer.

To Stephen's prayer. So it's the power. And the grace. Of the Lord Jesus. That. Changes. And saves Saul. And if he can do that for Saul. He can do that for you. He can do that. For anyone. So I'm going to close by. Reading.

Saul. Or Paul's own words. About his experience. In 1 Timothy 1. Verse 12. To 17. Where he writes. I thank him.

Who has given me strength. The Messiah Jesus. Our Lord. Because he judged me faithful. Appointing me to his service. Though formerly. I was a blasphemer.

[40 : 10] Persecutor. An insolent opponent. But I received mercy. Because I had acted. Ignorantly. In unbelief. And the grace of our Lord.

Overflowed for me. With the faith and love. That are in. The Messiah Jesus. The saying is trustworthy. And deserving. Of full acceptance.

That the Messiah Jesus. Came into the world. To save sinners. Of whom I. Am the foremost. But I received mercy.

For this reason. That in me. As the foremost. Jesus the Messiah. Might display. His perfect patience. As an example. To those.

Who were to believe in him. For eternal life. To the king. Of ages. Immortal. Invisible. The only God. Be honor. And glory. Forever and ever.

[41 : 04] Amen. Amen. Well let's sing to. I'll see you next time.