

Murderer turned Missionary

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We ready to get after it? Acts chapter 9. If you've got a Bible, Acts chapter 9. We've been in a series now the last several weeks through the book of Acts, and we're just kind of going verse by verse, following the flow of the book of Acts.

And I trust it's been a great encouragement to you. I mean, we have learned so many things, like being reminded of the mission that we're on, being reminded of the power of Jesus, being reminded of the salvation that has come, the new covenant that has now been offered because of what Christ has done.

And so tonight we're going to look at a very familiar passage, but it's so rich. There's so much here as we look at the conversion of Saul. And so we're going to dive in, and if you're ready to get after it, please stand if you're able to do so, as we honor the reading of God's Word.

Acts chapter 9, and we're going to look at verse 1 down through 19. And remember, this is Luke that is writing this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

[1:50] Here's what he writes. 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. And 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. And 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.

But there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord had said to him in a vision, Ananias, and he said, here am I, Lord. And the Lord said to him, rise and go to the street called Straight.

[3 : 19] 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, Ananias, come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.

But Ananias answered, Lord, I've heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.

And here he has authority of the chief priest to bind all who call on your name. 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. And then he rose and was baptized. And taking food, he was strengthened.

[4 : 43] Lord, help me teach this passage tonight. So pray for me, and pray with me now as we ask God to talk to us from his word. Lord, thank you that by your grace, by your spirit, you had Luke write these for us, that we on this Saturday night could study them and reflect on them.

They are powerful. They are deeply encouraging. And the beauty of the gospel is found here. So help me proclaim your word and teach your people the truth that is found here, all to the glory and only to the glory of Jesus.

And we ask it in his name. And God's people said, Amen. You can be seated. I cannot think of anyone playing the role of Michael Corleone other than Al Pacino.

But according to an article that was in the New York Times a few months ago, had the decision been left up to the powers at Paramount, he would have not been given that part.

And by the way, if you have never seen the Godfather movies, or if you do not like the Godfather movies, as someone who has a degree in theology, I'm not sure you'll make it to heaven. I'm just not sure.

[6 : 01] Like, I think the Lord's going to say you need to watch these movies before you come in. I'm joking, obviously. But they are only some of the greatest films ever made. And all God's people said, Amen.

All right? Anyways, according to the article, they listed several reasons why Paramount didn't want Al Pacino to play the role of Michael. For example, number one, he had no track record.

At the time of the filming of the first Godfather, Pacino was just a young actor making his way through the New York theater scene. In fact, he had only starred or only played in one movie role, a 1971 drama called The Panic of Needle Park.

So he was young. And not only was he young, he's short. I don't know if you know this, but he stands at a whopping 5'6". And they didn't feel that he had the physical characteristics to play the part of Michael.

In fact, this was a quote from the article that the Paramount producer said, they didn't want a runt playing that role. Close quote. They said that, not me.

[7 : 06] Right? In fact, even Pacino himself didn't really think he was the best fit for that role. He actually thought he was a better fit for the older brother, Michael. The last reason that they gave was that he wasn't as good, in their opinion, as other actors they could have used.

In fact, Paramount actually wanted to use actor Ryan O'Neill or actor Robert Redford. They thought they were better actors than Pacino.

But listen, when writer and creator of The Godfather, Francis Ford Coppola, when he saw Pacino, even though, listen, even though no one else wanted him for that role, no one else could imagine him in that role, he knew he was the man for the job.

And the rest is history. The Godfather won three Oscars and many, many other awards.

Let me ask you something tonight. Have you ever experienced or have you ever observed something that turned out to be a success, even though it went against conventional wisdom?

[8 : 23] I mean, that was the last person you would have chosen. That is certainly not the way you would have done it. It's not the strategy you would have used. So, for example, like you would have never put that player in to take the final shot.

You would have never made that move so early in the game. You would have never used those ingredients to make that dish. I mean, you would have never put your money into that investment.

You would have never made her the leader of the organization. And yet, even though these things went against conventional wisdom, it turned out to be a remarkable success.

Faith family, listen to me tonight. Not only is that how the kingdom of God works, it is exactly what God is doing here in Acts chapter 9.

Let me explain what I mean here. As we've noticed in these first eight chapters in the book of Acts, the mission is advancing. The kingdom of God is expanding.

[9 : 30] And we're starting to notice, particularly recently in the book of Acts, that it's going beyond the Jewish community. It's reaching out to people that are not Jewish.

In fact, we should expect this because Jesus starts the book of Acts. You remember in Acts chapter 1 verse 8, remember this? Jesus said, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, so the Jewish community, and Judea, but also Samaria and the ends of the earth.

And is that not exactly what we're seeing happen right in the book of Acts? How many of you remember last week? I hope so. It was just last week, all right? Acts chapter 8, do you remember what happened?

Literally the chapter before where we are tonight? In Acts chapter 8, the Samaritans. You're not shocked by that, but if you were Jewish, you'd be shocked by that.

The Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. These half-breeds, these people hated by the Jewish community, now have the Spirit of God. And this is so astounding that the apostles have to come and bear witness to this, otherwise nobody would believe it.

[10 : 47] And not only are the Samaritans receiving the Spirit, but remember at the end of chapter 8, there is an Ethiopian man who happens to be living in a chariot down by the river, and now he is being brought into the people of God.

This mission is expanding. And by the way, all the Gentiles should be saying, Amen. Praise God. I'm glad this mission is expanding to all peoples.

Now here's my question for you. If you were God, and I am so thankful you're not, right? But if you were God, who would you choose to play the leading role in the mission to the Gentiles?

Answer, anybody, and I mean anybody, but the one God chooses. Because do you know who God chooses to play the leading role in the mission to the Gentiles?

Only the most Jewish Jew ever. A man who not only hates Gentiles, he has devoted his life to get rid of Gentiles.

[11 : 55] So when God decides who he's going to have play the leading role in the mission to the Gentiles, he says, I choose Saul.

That's right. I choose Saul of Tarsus. Don't you love God's sense of humor? Have you ever wondered if God has a sense of humor?

Here it is. It's the crazy logic of the gospel. That is, take the actor that nobody would ever pick to play the part and give him the leading role. That's what the grace of God does in Saul's life.

And here is why you and I would never in a million years ever pick Saul to play this role. Look at chapter 8, verse 1. Go back to chapter 8 and look at how that chapter begins, verse 1.

Saul approved of his, that is, Stephen's execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

[13 : 00] And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea, 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, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Now add to that how chapter 9 starts. Look at chapter 9, verse 1. Let's start off by just talking about Paul's sinful life.

Because listen to me, there is so much we love about the apostle Paul. Now by the way, just so you know, I'm going to go back and forth between Saul and Paul. You know I'm talking about the same person.

I was taught growing up that Saul was Saul until he became a Christian. And then he took on the name Paul post-conversion. I actually don't think that's true.

[14 : 23] I think it's more likely that Saul takes on the name Paul because it's more friendly to Gentiles. Saul is, if you know your Old Testament, a very Jewish name.

And Paul is going to spend the majority of his ministry not with Jews but with Gentiles. And so Paul, I believe, Saul uses the name Paul because it's less of a stumbling block to Jews.

That was all free and doesn't count against my time. All right, so my point is if I say Saul or if I say Paul, I'm talking about the same guy. All right, not a post, pre, post-conversion, but same guy, just uses different names.

Here we go. There's so much about the apostle Paul we love. I mean, talk about a guy dedicated to the mission. You know, writer of much of the New Testament. I mean, again, we're starting to get into some of the things I experienced on sabbatical as I followed the footsteps of the apostle Paul.

And I told you, like, what really struck me was at the end of that journey, like, I was just blown away at this man's life and how he had poured his life out for the sake of the gospel.

[15 : 31] And we're so honoring to the apostle Paul, I think we forget he had a very, very dark past.

If Paul or Saul were here today, he would be, people would try to cancel him and let him be no use of the kingdom of God.

Saul was from Tarshish. You'll notice the map here all the way here on the far right. It's a very cosmopolitan town about north of Jerusalem. And so this is where Paul was from.

He studied under a person by the name of Gamaliel. Paul is going to grow up to be a Pharisee, as you know. And studying under Gamaliel, to give you some idea, would be like studying coaching under Bill Belichick.

Okay? Even if you don't like the guy, you can't deny the fact that he's a great coach. Or maybe studying art under Picasso. This is what it would have been like to study under Gamaliel.

[16 : 29] And Paul was, he graduated top of his class. Think Philippians chapter 3. He devoted his life to Judaism. He's memorized much of the Old Testament.

And he is as zealous as he can be for Judaism. So as word starts to spread that thousands, and I do mean thousands of Jews, are being converted to this thing called Christianity, Paul thinks it's blasphemy.

And why does he think it's blasphemy? Because in Deuteronomy, which he would have likely memorized, it says, Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree. Well, I don't know if you know this, but one of the symbols of Christianity is that Jesus died on the cross.

So a movement, based on a guy who was crucified on a cross, is blasphemous to the Old Testament, according to Paul. And so Paul thinks it's his right, his calling, and did his privilege to shut this thing down by any means necessary.

And that's what Luke describes for us in the verses that we just read. Let me point a few things out. First, Saul approves of Stephen's execution in chapter 8, verse 1.

[17 : 50] He thinks Stephen being stoned to death is exactly the right punishment for him. He's getting exactly what he deserves.

Secondly, in chapter 8, verse 3, it says Paul is ravaging the church. That is like a tornado ripping through a Midwestern town. He is ripping Christians from their homes.

Chapter 8, verse 3 says this is men and women. Paul does not care what gender you are. He does not care if he rips families apart.

This is all justified in the name of Judaism. And by chapter 9, verse 1, he is still breathing threats. In fact, that imagery is an animal that is like standing over its prey, breathing on top of it.

Paul is breathing hatred towards Christians. And he wants them either in prison or dead. He is a bad, bad man.

[19 : 01] He is to Christians what Ted Bundy was to women. And if you think I'm being too hard on Saul, do you remember what he says to Timothy in some of his last words, what he refers to himself or what he was?

This is 1 Timothy 1.13. He is a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent opponent. An insolent means an arrogant lack of respect.

Paul thought he was superior to Christians, that he was self-righteous. In fact, he will even refer to himself as the chief of sinners.

He's a bad, bad man with a really dark past. But before we move on from this point, it would be important for us to view this from a different angle.

And here's what I mean. You could look at Saul's life as he's as bad as you can get. I mean, murderer is pretty bad. Let me say that again.

[20 : 01] Murder is pretty bad. Amen, right? Hating people, hating a group of people, wanting them wiped off the face of the earth, that's pretty bad. Being a blasphemer, that's pretty bad.

Paul was, in one angle, really, really bad. But another way you could look at this is that Paul is as good as you can get. And why would I say that Paul is as good as you can get?

It's because he's doing this in the name of religion. In fact, chapter 9, verse 1 says that Paul gets the approval to do this from the high priest.

In other words, if you are a Jew living during this time, you look at Saul and you think he's nothing more than a sincere, zealous, deeply committed young man.

Now, listen, come in here for just a minute. I'm not going to name groups and I'm not going to name names. I'm smarter than that. I'm not always smart, but I'm smarter on this one. There are political groups today on both sides of the aisle that will justify violence in the name of the cause.

[21 : 11] Right? I'm not naming names. You can think of some. In other words, think through that lens. Paul's not doing anything wrong. It's what these Christians deserve.

I don't care that he's throwing people into prison. I don't care that he's ruining lives. I don't care that he's killing people. That's what he should be doing.

In other words, apart from Christians, very few people would have seen Saul as doing anything wrong. And I say all of that to make this really important gospel lesson.

Are you ready? Are you with me? Here it is. Notice it on the screen. Whether you're really bad or really good, you still need Jesus.

I mean, however angle you want to come at this, like, he's really, really bad. Like, I've committed lots of gross sins. I'm a murderer, a blasphemer. Or if you want to come at this at the angle of he's really, really good.

[22 : 13] He's a religious person. He's church going. He's highly respected in the community. Guess what? Both need Christ. So whether you're here tonight or listening online and you've got an awful, awful background check.

I mean, there are all kinds of things in your past. You need Jesus. Jesus. And if you're here and it is squeaky clean. Man, you haven't done a thing.

You don't even have a parking ticket or a speeding ticket you're so good. Guess what? You still need Jesus. And you need Jesus just as much as the bad person.

Quote, unquote. Quote, in other words, Paul teaches us this important lesson by his own life that whether you're very religious or unbelievably gross in sins, Jesus is the only hope you have.

That's Paul's life. He is blind to this reality. And so Jesus is about, by his grace, to turn on the lights. Pick it up at verse 3.

[23 : 23] So he went on his way and 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'm Jesus whom you're persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do. So the men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

Saul rose from the ground and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. And they led him by hand, brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight and neither ate nor drank.

So now we're going to shift from Paul's past life to his experience with Jesus, an experience of surrender. His life is about to be changed forever.

Ever. And here he is going down his journey full of pride. He's got all the support of the people. He's passionate and zealous. And Jesus stops him in his tracks.

[24 : 28] This man who thought he was doing everything right in his own eyes is about to have his eyes shut. Now listen to this. Listen to this. God made Paul blind in order for Paul to see.

Now think about that. God made Paul blind in order for him to see. Because without this experience of just total knock him on his face and blind his eyes, Paul would never be able to see the beauty of God's transforming grace.

Three quick things this reveals here, this encounter with Jesus that Saul has. First, it tells us something about the nature of sin. It tells us something about the nature of sin. Because the question that Jesus asks Saul is this.

Why are you persecuting me? To which Paul could or Saul could have said, I'm not persecuting you. I'm persecuting Christians.

Right? I don't have any issue with you. It's Christians I don't like. But of course you can't make that distinction, can you? Because sin, first and foremost, is against God before it is against anybody else.

- [25 : 41] Psalm 51, David even says, against you and you only have I sinned. This was a wake-up call for the Apostle Paul. Why? Because he realizes now that sin is not violating the law. Sin is rebellion to Jesus. Sin is not violating the law. It is rebellion to Jesus, number two. He sees here the need for surrender. Paul cries out, who are you, Lord?
- Saul has been living as though he is in control of his life. And now he realizes there's someone more sovereign than him. Amen. Sin turns us into our own lords.
- And in Acts chapter 26, when Paul is sharing his testimony, he will even say of this encounter in Acts chapter 9, that Jesus asked him, why do you kick against the goads?
- A goad is simply a device used by farmers to direct the oxen as they would plow the fields. And the oxen would kick against that. Why? I don't want to be led.
- [26 : 51] I don't want to go where you want me to go. I want to go where I want to go. And Saul was going where he wanted to go. And Jesus said, no, I got a different plan. You're my chosen instrument, as we will see.
- And you are going to go my way. And I'm going to use you for great things that you never could have dreamed of.
- And Saul had to learn the beauty of surrender. Total and complete surrender on his face saying, who are you, Lord?
- You are sovereign over me. Third is we see the nature of God's grace. The nature of God's grace. What Jesus says to Saul is this, rise and go to the city and you will be told what to do.
- Now, here's why I see the grace of God in this, is that Jesus doesn't destroy Paul like Paul has destroyed the followers of Jesus. I've made this comment before, but I've always said if people mess with my children, I see that as the Lord calling me to prison ministry.
- [28 : 04] Right? You just, you don't mess with my kids. And so I assume the Lord wants me in prison to do ministry or something like that. Right? In my point, obviously I'm being sarcastic, but my point is Saul has purposely harmed the kids of God.
- The children of God. He has violently gone after him. And what does God do through the person of Christ? Wait, and I'm going to tell you how I'm going to use you.
- I'm not going to wipe you out. I'm not going to cancel you. I'm not going to treat you the way you've treated my kids. I have a mission for you.
- Look at verse 15. This is the beautiful grace of God. Look at it. But the Lord said to him, for he, that is Saul, is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.
- And my question is, who treats sinners this way? The grace of God. Think about this. The grace of God takes a man headed to Damascus to harm Christians and turns him into one.
- [29 : 17] The grace of God takes a man whose mission was to destroy Christianity and is now going to use him on a mission to advance Christianity. A man who devoted his life to make Christians suffer is now going to suffer the rest of his life for Christianity.
- This is the transforming grace of God. I'm not going to remove you. I'm going to use you. No one else would want you for this role, but you're just the one I've chosen.
- This is God's grace. And, of course, Paul is never going to get over this. I trust you have never gotten over your conversion. I hope that you are still amazed that God has shown grace to you.
- This is what Paul says, again, to Timothy. I quoted it earlier. It's 1 Timothy 1, 12 through 14. Paul says, I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he's judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent, but I received mercy. Because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.

[30 : 35] And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. He never got over God's grace in his life.

Jonathan Edwards says this. This is such a good quote. Edwards writes, When I get to heaven, I will be amazed that people are there I thought would not be there.

I mean, you're going to get there and be like, what are you doing here? I never would have dreamed you'd have been here. Really? Wow. God's grace really is sufficient. But then he keeps going.

And that there will be people not there I thought would be there. And I will be amazed that I am there at all.

This is what Paul could never get over. The fact that God would use him and transform him. Let me give you just a few implications we don't like a lot longer, but a few implications of this.

[31 : 42] Number one. And I mean this. I mean this with every fiber in my body. That no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy. No one.

We believe here at Faith Family that our sins are many, but his mercy is more. Our sins, they are many, but his mercy is more.

No one is beyond the reach of God's grace. I don't care how messed up your marriage is. I don't care what's on your background check. I don't care how many skeletons you have in the closet.

I know this. We serve a God merciful enough to forgive every sin. There's no one in this place beyond the reach of God's mercy.

And a thing I would add here too is that some of you have been praying for someone for a long time, and you just think, okay, they're just beyond God's reach. They're never going to be saved.

[32 : 44] Listen, Saul is the answer to Stephen's prayer earlier in Acts. Never stop praying for God's redeeming work in someone else's life.

Because you never know when they're going to be walking on their own road to Damascus with their whole day planned, and God stops them in their tracks and transforms them by his grace.

Don't stop praying. The second implication is this, is even in your worst sin, Jesus seeks you. Even in your worst sin, Jesus seeks you.

And here's why I say this, is that most of the time we think that in our sin, Jesus runs from us. But the beauty of what Acts 9 shows us is that Paul is on his way to commit violent sin.

And Ananias will call it evil. Do you know the evil this man has done in the Christians in Jerusalem? And yet even in that, what is Jesus doing? He is seeking him and pursuing him.

[33 : 51] It reminds me of the words of the hymn, Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God. Jesus comes to us.

He pursues us even in our sin. And then thirdly, this will hurt more. We love the first two because it's about us. The third one's about us too.

But it's really hard, and it's this. If the Lord can forgive, so must we. If the Lord can forgive, so must we. Remember, sin is more about God than it is you.

And that is not to undermine the way you've been sinned against. But clearly, Jesus can forgive Saul, right? It's obvious Jesus has forgiven Saul.

But watch what happens in verse 10. I think this is beautiful. We're almost done. Hang with me. Now, there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias, and he said, Here am I, Lord.

[34 : 52] 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. By the way, his name's Saul. I don't know if you've heard of him.

But behold, he's praying, and he's seen a vision that a man named Ananias will come in and lay hands on him so that he might regain his sight. Now, awkward pause.

Ananias answered, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.

He's got the authority of the chief priest to bind all who call on your name. Do you see the resistance there? Like, do you know what this man's done? And do you know what he's done to our people?

Do you have any idea the evil he's done to our brothers, our sisters? There are people who are not even alive anymore now because of what this man has done.

[35 : 54] There are people who are now in prison now because of what this man has done. Do you know what you're asking me to do? And watch verse 15. The Lord said to him, go.

And here's why I want you to go, because he's a chosen instrument of mine. To carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

And Ananias departed. Oh, Lord, help us feel this. He departed and he entered the house. And laying his hands on him, he said, Brother!

Brother Saul! You're my brother! You're a part of our family now!

You were a persecutor. You were a violent opponent to Christianity. And now you're one of us.

[36 : 54] Are you seeing the grace going down in Ananias' life? 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, like scales fell off his eyes and he regained his sight. And he rose and he was baptized. And taking food, he was strengthened. Here's the point I'm trying to make.

Saul was the last person Ananias wanted to minister to. The last person he wanted to embrace. Certainly the last person he wanted to give a meal to and share hospitality with.

But Ananias received Saul and called him brother. Because listen, and I know this is really difficult.

Are you listening? If Jesus can forgive him, so must we. Because his sin is greater to Jesus than his sin is greater to us.

[37 : 58] It doesn't mean he hasn't sinned violently against us. But first and foremost, he has been in rebellion to God. And God has said, he's mine.

Which means he's also your brother. And Ananias, I'm sure with a bit of hesitation but clear obedience, embraces him.

And calls him brother. And feeds him. It's a picture of how we express grace to one another. Are you seeing the grace of God all over this text?

The transforming Saul's life and using Ananias to minister to him and to call him brother. Well, I'm almost finished. God is not finished with Saul after saving him.

This is an important point. He's not finished with Saul after saving him. He's now ready to send him. News flash, God wasn't finished with you when he saved you. He now has a mission for you.

[38 : 59] Let me show you this and we'll wrap it up. Verse 15 again. But the Lord said to him, go, he's a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles, the kings and children of Israel.

I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. So now we see the sending of Paul. And we're going to be seeing this the rest of the book of Acts.

It's one of the most important verses in the book of Acts because Luke will repeat it later. That is that he is a chosen instrument of mine to the Gentiles. God put Saul on earth for a divine purpose and he always gets his man.

Listen, we can debate free will and predestination. I'm happy to have that conversation. Just know this. Know this. This is of no debate according to the scripture. God had a plan for Paul before Paul ever had breath in his lungs.

And this was a chosen instrument of God for the purposes of God. And who will play the leading role in the mission to the Gentiles?

[40 : 05] Saul. The most Jewish Jew you could find who spent his life hating Gentiles. God looks at that and says, looks like the perfect qualification for me.

That way the transformation of this man's life, the glory of it won't be given to anybody else but God alone. For who could turn a man like this around and use him for this mission?

And as we're going to see through the rest of the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament, Saul is going to take this mission very seriously. He is going to describe his life as a drink offering, a living sacrifice.

He is running a race because he knows that God has given him a mission to do. And so I end by just saying this to you. What has God called you to do? What is the mission that he has set you apart for?

Listen to me. It may not be a missionary to the nations. It might be to a neighborhood. It might not be that you're going to other countries. It might be at your company.

[41 : 18] But make no mistake. He didn't save you just to save you. He saved you to call you into this great mission that we are on.

And faith family, that is every day of your life. Every day of your life. If you were writing this script in Hollywood, I guarantee you Paul is the last person that we are putting in the leading role to the mission of Gentiles.

But that's just how God works. It's the foolishness, or should I say the wisdom of God. Because after all, the last person you would have picked to be savior of the world would have been a carpenter, son.

And the last person you would have picked to be Messiah would be a man who was followed by fishermen and tax collectors. The last person you would have picked to be king of kings and lord of lords would be someone who would die on a cross.

But faith family, Jesus is not only the right pick for the role of savior. He's the only way. He's the only way.

[42 : 31] And all God's people said, amen. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this just beautiful passage. We could spend so much more time studying so many more things out of this passage tonight.

But I trust that we have heard the gospel. We have beheld the beauty of your grace, your transforming grace in our lives.

Oh, I plead, Father, if there is anyone here tonight that has never had that experience, it may, it won't be just like it was for Saul.

But that experience of total surrender and putting faith and faith alone in Jesus Christ. If there is someone here tonight that has never done that, that has never turned from their sin and put faith in Jesus, I pray, I plead that tonight would be that night.

That they would trust you. That they would believe in you. That they would surrender all that they are to you. There is no one outside the reach of your mercy.

[43 : 45] Because though our sins are many, your mercy is more. And for those of us who have believed, who have experienced this grace, we are now going to enter into a time of remembrance where we are reminded at the cost of this grace, of the sacrifice of our Savior to make our redemption and salvation real and possible.

So help us now in these few moments to worship and remember and reflect on the good news of the gospel.

And oh, that we would be like Paul and just never get over it. Be astounded tonight that your grace applies to us.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.