

The Fall of a Sinner and Rise of a Saint

Acts 9:1-19 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² 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. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ 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. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ 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, ¹² 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." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened.

❖ Recap

- **The church is being persecuted by the Jewish leaders**
 - Saul is the main instigator of persecution
- **The church is scattered away from Jerusalem into Samaria and Judea**
 - As the church is scattered, they are sowing the seeds of the gospel to those they meet
- **Last week we see God send Philip on a journey to meet with an Ethiopian**
 - Who was reading from the book of Isaiah
 - And Philip shares the gospel with him from that point
 - The man gets saved, and church history tells us, he went on to take Christianity into Africa
 - And was the founder of a huge church in Africa
- **As we will see today**
 - The church has continued to spread further and further
 - So that now, it is even already in Damascus... which is in another country north of Israel
 - And that is where we see Paul headed to pick up more Christians

❖ Introduction

❖ 3 Main Things

- 1) Man is Depraved and Unable to Change
- 2) God is Gracious to Men
- 3) We are Chosen Instruments
 - These three main points are illustrated in the life of Paul
- **Paul serves as an example**
 - To who we once were, or would have been (I say this for the case of young people saved)
 - How God is gracious toward us
 - That we are called to be an instrument in the hands of God

❖ **Paul Recounts his story twice in the book of Acts**

- Once in Acts 22 before a Jewish Crowd at the Temple
- Also in Acts 26 before the Jewish King Agrippa
- **They are very similar accounts, but the other two do add a few more details**
 - Paul also gives us bits and pieces of who he was before and now is because of Christ
 - Throughout his many letters
- **So, We See Here in Acts 9... and from Paul's accounts**
 - After receiving letters from Jewish priests, who ran the country
 - Paul had authority to track down Christians
 - And He was very proficient at it
- **During one of these trips as he is headed to Damascus**
 - The beautiful capitol city of Syria
 - Syria is just north of Israel
 - And the distance b/w Jerusalem and Damascus is about 135 miles
 - Today that is about a two hour trip in an interstate...
 - Back then they are on horse, or donkey or on foot
 - So the trip takes a lot longer
 - We see the church has spread on past Samaria and is headed even further north
- **During the trip, as we read**
 - Saul sees a bright light, and hears a voice
 - As we know from this account and the others
 - He fell down, and so did his men
 - He says that the light was brighter than the sun, and it shone all around them
- **He Hears a voice**
 - He does not see Jesus,
- **The others saw something bright but did not know what it was**
 - They heard something but did not understand it
 - But they are all on the ground
- **Paul Heard someone speaking in the Hebrew language and asking him**
 - Why are you persecuting me?
 - Paul asks, who are you Lord...
 - And Jesus says, **"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting"**
- **Persecuting the Church is Persecuting Jesus**
 - **⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**
 - **Jesus makes it clear that every person persecuted for Him...**
 - That Jesus himself is being done wrong
 - God takes persecution personally...
 - And He is there for those that are persecuted...
- **Jesus tells him that He has been chosen**
 - Then tells him to continue on to Damascus and meet with Ananias
 - And He will be given further instruction
- **So, Paul, now blind, is led to Damascus**
 - Where He meets with a hesitant Christian named Ananias
 - Jesus had already appeared to him to give him a heads up about Saul
 - He prays for Saul, and scales fall from his eyes and he is able to see
- **Ananias then tells Saul**

- What are you waiting for...
- Get up, Get baptized, Have your sins washed away, Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus
- And somewhere in the midst of all that He was filled with the Holy Spirit
- **It was a big day for Saul...**
 - And I think we can learn a number of things from this real account
 - Of the conversion of a real man that existed in history
 - **And the lesson is glorious for us to consider**
 - It gives us a great hope for our selves, and those we know without Christ
 - ◆ No matter how lost and unbelieving they may seem
 - It should also cause our hearts to leap with thankfulness toward God for His grace

❖ 1) Man is Depraved and Unable to Change

- Saul's default position was sin...
 - Our default position is sin
- **Why is understanding this so important?**
 - When you understand this, you begin to see God's grace so much differently
 - You see your faith and God's grace as a gift from God
 - You leave behind any ideas that you could earn God's grace
 - And you begin to see God as loving you "apart" from anything you could have done to earn it
- **If God does not intervene, we would do all sorts of evil**
 - Let's look at Saul's Actions

❖ 1) Saul Lived to Persecute Christians

- **But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest² 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.**
- **He thought He was Serving God**
 - He had a clear conscience
- **He was an Evil Man**
 - Sincerity does not make a person innocent
- **Many Believe the guilt of Stephen's Stoning was weighing Heavy on Paul**
 - It is unlikely
 - He is not living like a man feeling sorry about stoning a Christian
- **He is doing the opposite...**
 - He has not sit down to evaluate his current life state
 - He is moving forward with more persecution
- **Saul is the ring leader here**
 - He is known by all the Christians as a man you should stay away from
- **"Breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord"**
 - **This was His life, his being, with every breath he had he was breathing threats against Christians**
 - We all know or have heard of people like this
 - For me, I have been around racists... Who can not stand people of a different ethnicity
 - Hitler was like this, He hated Jews
 - Many radical Muslims are like this... they hate Christians, and Jews, and liberal Muslims
- **Paul tells of his hatred:**
 - Also in 22:4 **⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,**

- And in 26:9-11⁹ “I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

➤ **Paul was a very evil man**

- On his own, he persecuted and opposed God
 - His default position was open rebellion against God
- **Satan had so warped his mind, that as Saul persecuted God**
 - He thought he was doing God a favor...
 - He thought himself to be a man zealous for God
- **He says of himself in 1 Timothy 1:13**
 - ¹³though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.
 - ◆ Blasphemed God
 - ◆ Persecuted God and His Church
 - ◆ Was a Violent man... means... Insolent opponent...

➤ **The only good thing about Saul...**

- Was that he did these things in ignorance... it did not excuse him though
- He says: **1 Timothy 1:13b But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,**
 - On his own, Saul just did not know better...
 - And that is a lesson for us who have heard and know better, yet still remain unrepentant

❖ **1) Man is Depraved and Unable to Change**

➤ **What do we see here with Paul?**

- Do we see a man ready to turn his life around for Jesus?
- Do we see a man that has some quality about him that makes him more useful to Jesus?
- Do we see a man with good intentions and a good heart?
 - No... we do not, we see a man lost in his trespasses and sins

➤ **We were/are like this as well...**

- We may not realize it...
- We may not have been breathing threats against the church
- But we all were far from God

➤ **Paul describes our state without Christ as children of wrath**

- **Ephesians 2:3³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**

➤ **Our Nature is a Fallen Nature before Christ**

- **Romans 3:10 “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”**

➤ **On our Own...**

- We would be left to die...
- We would continue in our rebellion toward God...
- It is our nature... It is who we are...

➤ **Everyone is born with a Nature that is already in rebellion against God...**

- Even if it is ignorant rebellion, it is still Rebellion...

➤ **But: You may argue...**

- Then we are not to blame... right... if we are just born this way...
- I think the Bible speaks to that...
- **I think we learn from Adam and Eve who were not born with a fallen nature...**

- That we would willingly rebel against God on our own...
- Even when we know we should not
- **I think we have learned from our own actions...**
 - That even after we are told of right and wrong before God...
 - We still willingly and knowingly sin against God...
- **Our Sinful nature may be one we are born into, but it is still ours, and we own it...**
 - But thanks be to God...
 - God has been merciful

❖ 2) Jesus is Gracious to Saul

- **It would be sad if the story just ended there for us and Saul... it doesn't.**
 - ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ 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. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
- **Jesus Comes in and Overwhelms Saul**
 - Wow... he certainly got Saul's attention here
- **Saul Had No Intention to Repent and Believe**
 - The many times he had heard the gospel seemed to have had no effect on Saul
 - Seeing Stephen die right before his eyes seemed to have had no effect on Saul
- **There are some that think:**
 - The bad things he had done were weighing heavy on him...
 - And he was living with so much guilt
 - And this was the turning point... I disagree... this is all God
 - Saul never mentions feeling guilt over his actions before Jesus appeared to him
- **This was an absolute miraculous intervention by Jesus**
 - Into the life of Paul...
 - Paul was ready to arrest more Christians...
- **God is not gracious to Saul because Saul deserved it...**
 - He was not gracious because there was something inherently good in Saul
 - As opposed to others out there...
 - Paul would be unable to give himself any credit for his own salvation...
- **God is merciful to Saul because God wanted to be merciful**
 - You need to understand this...
 - And I think that Saul's encounter with Jesus is a great example...
 - **Do not think you deserved for God to save you...**
 - It will leave you with an unbiblical idea of yourself
 - And it will leave you void of understanding the depth of grace that God has given to you
- **Paul would later write:**
 - **Romans 5:8** ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.
 - **Paul saw the grace of God as coming to us as we are an enemy to God**
 - Then He goes further to tell us God's grace continues

- ◆ If He did something like this when we were His enemies...
- **How much more will God be gracious to us now...**
- ◆ God was gracious to us when we were enemy sinners...
- ◆ God will be even more gracious to us now that we are His

➤ **Saul is Saved... Paul Recounts Ananias' words to him**

- Acts 22:16 ¹⁶ **And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'**
- **So, we see God uses his Instrument Ananias to lead Saul to Jesus...**
 - Yes, Jesus appeared to Saul, but it is not until he meets with Ananias
 - That he is told to call on the name of Jesus
 - And to be baptized and have his sins washed away...

❖ **2) Jesus is Gracious Toward Men**

➤ Saul's Salvation is an Example for Us of God's Grace

- **1 Tim 1:16** ¹⁶ **But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.**

➤ **Jesus has Displayed his perfect patience**

- As an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life

➤ **God is Rich in Mercy**

- **Ephesians 2:4-5** ⁴ **But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,** ⁵ **even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—**

- **We can ask the question. Why is God so good to us?**

- And the answer is because He loves us...
- **We can ask the question, Why does He love us?**
 - ◆ And the answer can not be found in the value of man
 - ◆ The answer is found in the nature of God
 - It is the nature of God to love and show mercy

➤ **When Moses asked to see God... God passed before him and declared Himself to Moses saying:**

- Exodus 34:6-7 ⁶ **The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,"** ⁷ **keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty,**

➤ **Understand:**

- We are valuable because God places such value on us...
- In our economic system...
 - We assign certain values to objects that people want to purchase...
 - Certain vehicles you can get for a couple thousand dollars
 - Others are so valuable it would take millions to purchase them
- Paintings:
 - Some painting can not be given away...
 - But others are so valuable you could not even put a price on them...
- Why? Because man has placed value on those things

➤ **The Father has demonstrated our value to Him**

- Because His price to purchase us:
- Was the Death of his Son Jesus...
- **Jesus has shown us His love...**
 - Because He took all the shame, and beating, and death on a cross

- To redeem His people
- See yourself Clearly:
 - On your own, you are of no value and deserving of just being thrown away
 - Into the trash heap to be burned...
 - That is literally the way God describes it through the Bible
 - Now, do not let that make you depressed
 - Own it, and **embrace** it...
 - See your own sinfulness...
 - And let the love of God **fill** you this morning with **thankfulness**
 - How Glorious it is:
 - That God has placed great value on you...
 - To Him, you are very valuable...
 - And He has invested so much into you...
 - He has **invested** His very life into you
- Therefore rejoice and lift up your heads because the God of all Creation
 - Loves you greatly...:
 - Have your hearts overflow with thankfulness and gratitude: **For the love that God has toward you**
- We can say with Paul
 - Romans 7:24-25 ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
 - Paul put it this way to the Corinthians when speaking of God's grace:
 - 2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!
- If God Can do this for Saul
 - There is hope for your loved one... Never stop praying
 - God hears your prayers...
 - He can overwhelm anyone today, just like He overwhelmed Saul with His grace
- Because of God's Grace, those that receive it, Express it in their lives

❖ 3) Saul Was a Chosen Instrument

- ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."
- Ananais is told by Jesus that Saul is a chosen instrument
 - What is an instrument?
 - We usually think of music, right?
 - ◆ A piano or the flute, etc.
 - ◆ And in the hands or mouth of the right person they make beautiful sounds
 - **But it does not only refer to musical instruments...**
 - ◆ It can mean a vessel... or a fork or spoon
 - ◆ It just means something of use for a particular purpose
 - ◆ It can also refer to military weapons...
- In this context God is saying the Paul would be His Instrument
 - Paul would refer to himself as a vessel...
 - I see God using Paul almost like a Military Weapon
 - To spread the gospel in the darkness
- Paul Tells his Jewish Audience what Ananais told him

- Acts 22:14-16 ¹⁴ And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

➤ **Paul tells King Agrippa what Jesus called him to do:**

- Acts 26:16-18 ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

➤ **We see Paul had a Mission:**

- His Mission was to be a Servant and a Witness
- To open eyes... so they will turn from darkness to light
- From the power of Satan to God
- That they will receive forgiveness of sins
- And a place among those sanctified by faith in me...

➤ **What a mission!**

❖ **3) We Are Chosen Instruments**

➤ We have been chosen to Glorify God

➤ **Paul writes:**

- **Romans 6:13** Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.
- We are to be instruments of righteousness...
 - Because we have been brought out of death and into life
 - We are to be used as an instrument for God...
- **Paul would also write:**
 - **Romans 12:1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
 - I think Paul wrote this from personal experience...
 - Give your lives for God in every way possible

➤ **We have a mission as well: It may not be to the scale of Paul's**

- We are to live our lives in a way that it glorifies God
- We are to live our lives in a way that we are leading other people to Jesus.

➤ **We Need to Take on Paul's Mission from God**

- To turn people from darkness to light, out of the power of Satan and toward God

➤ **Peter writes to tell us about who we are and who we are to be**

- **1 Peter 2:9** ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
- We are chosen... to proclaim the excellencies of God
- Is this your life mission?

❖ **Invitation**

➤ If you have never received the mercy of God

- He is offering it to you today
- You have no promise He will continue his offer