

## Acts 9:1-19 – A Wolf Becomes a Sheep

**Get on Bus: It's been a rough week – I could use your prayers this morning:** *Came back from out of the country and my living room flooded, my internet cable outside had been cut, my DirecTV wasn't working (so couldn't catch up on Blacklist) and on top of all that... Duke won the national championship – which I am sure made a few of you all happy... and the Taliban!*

- **But... now I get the wonderful privilege to preach to you all about the amazing, wonderful, scandalous Grace of Our God** – And if you are here and not a Christian today you will get to hear about an aspect of Christianity that is different than any other religion... and that is the Grace of God in salvation!

**Pray** – *so lets pray and then let us marvel at and be encouraged by GRACE!*

**Opening Illustration: We all like good stories** – *that's why we are captivated by shows like Lost and Blacklist and I guess if you are in to that kind of thing good books have good stories*

- **But as Christians we are drawn to hear the stories of people's conversion, especially when it portrays such a dramatic turnabout**

I love Piper's biographical sermon on Judson entitled, "How Few There are that Die So Hard" and here is what he says about Judson's conversion, a man who has many similarities to Saul: *Adoniram was being lured away from the faith by a fellow student name Jacob Eames who was a Deist... He kept this concealed from his parents until his 20th birthday, August 9, 1808, when he broke their hearts with his announcement that he had no faith and that he intended to go to New York and learn to write for the theatre... It didn't prove to be the life of his dreams. He attached himself to some strolling players, and, as he said later, lived 'a reckless, vagabond life, finding lodgings where he could'... One night he stayed in a small village inn where he had never been before. The innkeeper apologized that his sleep might be interrupted because there was a man critically ill in the next room. Through the night he heard groans and gasps. It bothered him to think that the man next to him may not be prepared to die. He wondered about himself and had terrible thoughts of his own dying. He felt foolish because good deists weren't supposed to have these struggles. When he was leaving in the morning he asked if the man next door was better. "He is dead," said the innkeeper. Judson was struck with the finality of it all. On his way out he asked, "Do you know who he was?" "Oh yes. Young man from the college in Providence. Name was Jacob Eames."... His conversion was not immediate. But now it was sure. God was on his trail, like the apostle Paul on the Damascus Road there was no escape.*

- **But the truth is we all have miraculous and dramatic conversions – mine is quite different than Judson's** – *I was raised in a Christian home, heard the gospel often, but it was still God's miraculous and merciful pursuit of me that saved me – It was Grace that I was born into the home I was born into!*
- **I couldn't help but be struck by that last week when I was in East Asia speaking to hundreds of kids who had never even heard of the resurrection...** *It was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved*

**Main Idea:** *And that is what I want us to be struck by today that God is gracious to change anyone's story and save them and to use them! And its is my prayer that at as we behold and marvel at God's GRACE in this conversion that we will be reminded of grace in our stories and then emboldened by it for the Mission!*

**Context:** Luke is continuing to show us outworking of Acts 1:8 as the Eunuch is saved and now he turns to a decisive moment in setting the stage for fulfillment of that mission in the most famous conversion in history as a man goes from Persecutor to Preacher

### **I. Marvel at the Grace of God in Conversion (9:1-9)**

**(READ V. 1-2)** – The story picks up from 8:3 as the man who was there as people were throwing bricks at

the head of the 1<sup>st</sup> Christian Martyr is still on the rampage – *I get the image here by the language that he is like a roaring lion or wolf seeking whom he may devour*

- Calvin calls him a “wild and ferocious beast” and Stott says – The breathing out gives the idea of panting or snorting wild beast and the ravaging (ch. 8) gives the image a wild beast ravaging an animal carcass. **How’s that for Graphic? You’re Welcome!**
- *He requests and gains essentially extradition papers per the permission of the High Priest to go to Damascus and arrest Christians* (or those belonging to the WAY, the earliest Christians were not called Christians but those belonging to the way – I love that name, echoes of John 14)

What was Saul like before his conversion? **Hateful, Angry, and active in this rebellion to God as breaths out threats and murder, this was Saul before he met Christ!** – Consider what you were like before meeting Christ? *Drunk? Promiscuous? High? Violent? A self-righteous Southern Baptist? As we recall in our stories what Christ saved us from we will marvel at grace!*

- The issue here is that Saul thinks what he is doing is right (and you may think that to in your rebellion) – *He thinks he is on God’s side and that the stoning of Stephen was a good thing because he was stamping out this “heretical” movement that wasn’t pleasing to God*
- Try to put yourself in his shoes, it’d be like trying to silence Jim Jones – That’s how Saul felt about Stephen – *However it is clear that his violence is not having the intended effect as he hasn’t stopped the progress of the gospel but instead scattered it outside of Jerusalem and thus why he’s having to go to Damascus*

**Saul is the #1 enemy of the gospel dead set against Jesus (whom he must have thought was dead) and not searching for Him at all** – so Jesus in grace comes searching for him to redirect his zeal and passion for the sake of His name

**(READ V. 3-6)** – “As he went on his way” to persecute/arrest our brothers and sisters in Damascus Jesus intervenes – **What a phrase** – As he went on his way no doubt thinking his acts would hold the spread of the Way... BAM! *Around Midday a light engulfs him that would change his life and world history*

- **Illustration** – **Ever been startled by sudden light?** *So I was in China recently and when I asked for them to provide me a Chinese name they named me after a Chinese cartoon Bear (Shion Da) and they named Jonathan Terrill after his bear counterpart (Shion R).*
  - o This lady also later told me I would enjoy China more if I lost some weight (A real Barnabas) – **so on this trip we had to take an overnight train and so the bears took the top bunks that would even fit my shoulders when I laid on my back – Terrill and I are less than 2 feet apart and we are big fellas (cartoon bears apparently) so there we are two bears in a closet basically lights completely out** – Terrill snoring like a champ and about 12 inches from our face is the ceiling and the ceiling light.
  - o **And I don’t care how nice the Chinese elevator music they began to play was, it doesn’t prepare you for how bright that light that’s only 12 inches from your face will be** – *Shion R did not like it!*
- **Now imagine the one who created the Sun suddenly appearing to you in a bright light** – *It’d knock you down too and it does Paul the #1 enemy of the gospel now beholds the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (he actually sees the risen Christ)*

And then he hears the voice of the King – **Jesus confronts the man seeking to put an end to His Church and he must be stunned by this cause he was sure that Jesus wasn’t the Messiah** – *and now it must don on Paul that his whole life is misdirected.* **Christ in a sense arrested him before he had the chance to arrest any Christians**

- **But notice what Jesus does** – **He calls Saul by his name (Saul, Saul)** – *in the gospel there is a personal address and it is as though all of the sudden the message is for you, he speaks to Saul personally*

- And He lists off Saul's sins, his persecution (we cannot hide our sins and must be confronted with them) – *but this isn't a hey I caught you, it is instead a plea, why are you doing this? This not an act of hate, but an act of love (it his kindness that leads us to repentance saying why would you go on in this direction toward judgment?)*

But notice also the stunning words of Jesus – He doesn't say Saul why are you persecuting the people that believe in me? He doesn't say why are you persecuting Stephen? He says "Me" – **How closely does Christ align with His people?** As though He is the one being stoned!

- *When our brothers and sisters are crucified in the Sudan, or when they are hunted down in Kenya, those doing this are not taking on people who believe the same things we do, they are taking on Christ*

**Implications of the Head and Body union of Christ with His church:**

- **It means in NO way can it make sense to say I love Christ, I just don't care for His body/Church (try that today with your wife) – He identifies so closely with His church, AND we must identify this closely with His church (one of reasons we have covenant membership because Christ is committed to a specific body, we want to be as well!)**
- **That also means that if you are in this church and you are stirring up things through gossip, slander, backbiting you are actually attacking Jesus – But on the reverse if you are serving and loving and building up brothers and sisters in this church, you are actually doing those things for Christ! We cannot miss how radical this is!**
- **This is wonderful news because it means God so aligns with His people that an assault on them is an assault on him – And it also means that everything that is true about the Son is true about us, we are loved by the Father and seated at His right hand! Paul thought he was taking on a heretical sect, Jesus says you are actually taking on me!**

You have to wonder what is going on in Saul's mind, but Saul responds asking who is this? Jesus responds – *and in this Paul is humbled*

- *This man who was brilliant, had the right pedigree, had the power to arrest (wouldn't you like that power sometime? Almost every day as I drive!), knew the scriptures, probably walking in to Damascus head held high, chest out, likely barking orders to these men around him – But now in one great moment this prideful one is blinded and put prostrate before his King and having to be led by others to even make it around*
- **Again this is painful but it is gracious – All of us before we come to faith need a moment like this where Jesus drives us to our knees as our darkened minds are opened to see the light and we are set free (That Great song by Wesley speaks of the dungeon suddenly flaming with light) – we had been going on along justifying our behavior and then BAM in His grace He intervenes, but unless you will be humbled and honest about your sin then you won't be changed by this Amazing Grace!**

Let's not be dismissive of the Grace of God in our stories as well – **Sometimes people will say "I had no Damascus Road experience" but your conversion is not unlike Paul's – the source of your conversion and your commissioning are similar even though you've likely never been on the Damascus Road.**

**Let's consider some of the aspects of conversion as seen in life of Paul and us:**

- **A) The gracious electing purposes of God stand out in the narrative – Saul did not decide for Christ, he was an opponent, it was instead that Christ decided for him – Calvin speaks of the grace of God "not only in such a cruel Wolf being turned into a sheep, but also in his assuming the character of a shepherd" – same for you, He came after you! B) Conversion involves a personal encounter with Christ C) As we've seen humbling repentance D) Conversion involves faith alone in Jesus and His work on the Cross not our works or good life (Paul had tried works and great devotion – AND THIS IS WHERE CHRISTIANITY IS DIFFERENT THAN ANY OTHER RELIGION we are not saying if you will just be good enough you will escape hell, we are saying turn in faith to christ!)**

- **And in this conversion we see how God's sovereignty and human responsibility go hand in hand** – *Jesus did not crush Paul's personality or make him a robot he simply appealed to him through his sin but Saul was not so overwhelmed that he could not reply*

**An Implication from Election – Election (particularly seen in God turning around this one who was radical in his opposition) should give us great confidence in evangelism** – we must not think of people in terms of “likely and unlikely” but instead be more expectant in a God who radically saves

- **There may be someone in this room who is passionate about the doctrine of election** – *You can pontificate about it and line up the decrees and yet you are afraid to go downtown and share the gospel with someone because of how many piercings they have, or their skin color, or you have given up on family members because of how many times they have said “NO”*
  - **As one preacher said** “you can prance around in your GENEVA GOWN all you want to... but if you are not **MORE** evangelistic now than you were when you came to understand the doctrine of election you never understood the doctrine of election!”
- **The doctrine of election is a missionary doctrine** – *God created Arabs for Jesus, God created Koreans in North Korea for Jesus, God created Sauls for Jesus... if we truly understand the scandalous nature of God's grace in salvation then we will be on our faces with tears **PLEADING** for men and women to be saved, and we will **ALSO CONSIDER LIKE JUDSON** how we might go to what seem the toughest places in the World to share about this scandalous grace that changed our story!*

**We see in Paul Purpose driven predestination** – **Now his passion and zeal are pointed in the right direction** – zeal and passion are not enough if not informed by Truth!

- **What amazing patience Christ showed toward this now brother** – *This should encourage us and be an example to us as well! No one is too far-gone!*

**(READ V. 7-9)** – We see that this was a historical event as he had men traveling with him and they hear voices and see the light but cant see anyone or understand – *These men were spectators of the event but not participants*

- **And we also see here a physical depiction of Saul's previous spiritual life** – *He was blinded to the truth but now he has seen the light, maybe that is you today?*

## ***II. Be Strengthened by the Grace of God for Mission (9:10-19)***

**(READ V. 10-16)** – **Now God will employ Ananias in His work of turning the wolf into a sheep** – *He will use a faithful disciple who doesn't stick out in our minds as one of the heroes of the faith (only gets 3 sentences in the NT) but who is used mightily of God* – encouraging that God is not preoccupied with big names like we are in Evangelical culture as I am going to TGC!

- **God gives him these instructions in being the one who will tell Saul what his mission will be but Ananias is a bit fearful** – **it's possible Saul has hurt or even killed someone close to Ananias and he may be skeptical that Saul is faking to infiltrate** – and he is so fearful he dares question God?
  - **When you think about it, it is a little humorous like he's letting God in on the secret and talking to the one who has all authority about authority** – *It'd be like talking to Arnold and saying you should be a little concerned about this Tony Merida guy, he is pretty strong, he does T25!*

**But put yourself in Ananias' shoes** – **what if in America they started showing up at our gatherings and taking people to jail, walking in and beating Tony, slapping me around?** *And then one of the most zealous of them has presided over the death of Drew Raynor over in Cary and he's now on his way to Raleigh with papers and God says to you, “this man is on Capital Blvd at San Jose's, go and put your hands on him and pray*

*that he will regain his sight” – How would you respond? **And yet even in his fearfulness he proceeds obediently***

- **There is much to learn in Ananias – 1) that we should trust that God can save the really hard cases** (*we must not discriminate in our evangelism – have I made this point?*) and **2) And trust in the Word of God – may that be us each week as we come here as listeners not to be entertained but to be confronted by the Word and then go do it... even when it seems difficult. May we be Ananais’**
- **And because of his faithfulness he is used in one of the most pivotal moments in the history of the World**

The Lord responds with what he will do through Saul which is played out in the remainder of Acts (READ TEXT) – *because he is a chosen instrument and because of how God used him we now have the gospel here in Raleigh 2000 years later and thousands of miles away*

- **One implication** – if you are saved then **YOU TOO ARE A CHOSEN INSTRUMENT** to be used of God in promoting His name in the world – **you like Paul have been brought in because you have an intended mission field, you are converted so you can be maximized for the glory of God – there are some of you in this room who think you know how your story should go (good jobs, toys, family cars, vacations, etc) but I pray we would all humble ourselves under the voice of our King and say send me where you want me to go!**
- **This involved for Paul great suffering and could for us – read 2 Cor. 11– Judson to suffered in being a chosen instrument to get the gospel to a completely unreached group:** *Judson lost 2 wives, 7 children, imprisoned with rodents all around, 7 years without any converts and yet later many would believe because he suffered for the sake of the name!*

(**READ V. 17-19**) And so now Ananias goes strengthened by the grace of God – **And notice the grace extended to Saul in both the touch and words of a man who should have rejected him**

- He calls him “**Brother**” and puts his hands on him – (imagine that moment) how do you think he felt to be embraced by a man who should’ve rejected him? *For all we know Saul oversaw the murder of someone close to Ananias (this is gospel forgiveness brothers and sisters!)*
- **And the first words he likely hears from a Christians lips as a now converted man and formerly archenemy is “brother!”** – Lets not let that become common place!
  - o *Imagine for a moment getting to walk in and place your hands on the shoulder of Kim Jong Il or an Isis solider and whispering to him “brother”*
  - o **Questions:** Are we like Ananias? Do we receive in the hard cases (even those that have hurt us) as brothers? Do we accept them in the gospel? Are we warm like him? Forgive like him? **Or are we skeptical?** Legalistic (why would God save one who has done so many bad things)? Will we go to Sauls/hard cases? To tough areas? Will we be empowered by Grace?

God uses the Christian community (Ananias) now to show great grace to Saul and reveal his plan for Saul – **HE SENT ME so you can recover sight and be filled with the Spirit – AND IMMEDIATELY!** The scales came off – oh those are glorious words

- **His spiritual and physical blindness gone and he sees – I couldn’t help but go back to my childhood hymnal as I read that in preparation:** *“it was there by faith I received my sight and now I am happy all the Day!”* (**Struck by this when I was in a Buddhist temple in EA how so many still have scales on**)

And we see the total transformation of Paul – He is now obedient in identifying with Christ and His community in a public declaration of Believer’s Baptism by Immersion (he rose!) – this is a mark of true conversion we are obedient to the words/commands of our King and 1<sup>st</sup> step of that is Baptism

- **And best thing to do after a baptism? Eat! He must have been a Baptist!**

**CONCLUSION – Christian/Unbeliever, God is still in the miraculous converting business today!**

**Unbeliever** – Today could be your Damascus Road day – You are where Saul was, Judson was, and I was, opposed to God even if you do not see it that way – **but God in His grace has so orchestrated events that you are here in this room, He’s on your heels so that you can hear the same message Saul heard, Judson heard, and I heard...**

- **That on that day outside the gates of Jerusalem One became that scapegoat for sinners** – *The one who knew no sin had our transgressions/sins laid upon Him bearing the punishment our sin deserves AND if we will repent and place faith in Him He will change your story!*
- **He has the power to do for you what He did for Saul because He isn't dead anymore (on a Sunday like this one He triumphantly vacated a middle eastern Tomb) and He is alive still saving Sauls!**

**Believer** – lets marvel at grace today – don't forget it... remind yourself: *“if it weren't for that light, for that encounter, for that Ananias in my life I would be in hell right now”* – *as one country music song says, “Thank God I'm not what I almost was”* – **Blind now seeing is GRACE! Do we see it?**

- For some of us response this morning may need to be – **Baptism (obedient) or Identify with Christ (Covenant Membership w/ this local body)**
- **But for all of us, Christian** – Let's be empowered and driven by this Grace that has been lavished on us – *Toward the end of praying fervently for God to open the eyes of even the “hardest cases” and toward the end of sharing promiscuously about the grace of God in Christ*
- **We were converted so we could be commissioned and maximized for the glory of God in the Mission of God**
- **Lets go forward with confidence and marvel at the grace of God** – *the next Saul might be a cross-dresser right now, the next Judson may be hung over right now... but God's grace can turn a Kim Jong Il into a Billy Graham!*

**We all love stories with great endings** – Saul's ended but still goes on, Judson's ended but still goes on – *in Burma today there are 3,700 Churches and 1.9 Million adherents to the faith that can be traced to Judson*

- **What will your story be like? Will you be a Saul? Ananias? Will you be an Ananias to your children or another so that is possible that one day one of the children in this room will go on to a suffering life in Saudi Arabia where thousands will come to know Christ through their suffering?**
- **How will your story end?**
-