

A Defining Moment
Acts Part 2
Downtown
Week 2
September 5, 2022

Intro:

Chapter 9 is a pretty big turning point in Luke's account of the church's origins. Up to this point, the narrative has been primarily focused on the events surrounding the initial 12 apostles and God spreading the Kingdom through Jerusalem, Judea, & Samaria and starting to trickle out to Gentiles like the Ethiopian Eunuch.

But, the event recording in Chapter 9 becomes another catalytic moment for the expansion of the gospel across the known world and it all starts with one person coming to faith in Jesus. One incredibly unlikely person, a man named Saul. You know him by another name, Paul, the largest contributor to the New Testament.

The rest of Acts will start focusing attention on Paul and his many missionary journeys across the Roman world but all of that is set up by the events that happen here create one defining moment that changed the course of Paul's life forever.

Tell his story...

Acts 9:1–2 [1] 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.

- Verse 1-2 - Saul was a persecutor of the church.

Paul saw himself as part of the "zealous" tradition within the history of God's people - so in the Hebrew Bible, if someone blasphemed the name of God, someone in Israel had to step up and snuff it out before things got worse. Their actions would be a cancer to the community so it had to stop before it spread.

So when Paul's hearing people saying "Jesus is God" it sounds like they just committed this unspeakable act. You can't do that. And if you let it go on further, you're risking God's judgment on the whole nation. Someone's gotta stop this before it gets worse.

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.

JD Greear makes a big deal out of how Jesus comes to Saul and asks him why he's been persecuting "me". Notice that this is how Jesus feels about His church. If you're too good for the church, you're too good for Jesus... send me all the emails and I'll delete them.

- C.S. Lewis - reluctant convert stuff.
- Invite people to meet Jesus

- Invite people to never stop praying.
- “Yeah but you don’t know my uncle? He’s so antagonistic! Is he breathing murder? No... he just likes to argue... well, good then he’s still in the game.

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.

This is teasing up Paul’s story coming up in the book of Acts, so, spoiler alert.

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.

- God stops him in his tracks.
- Ananias is sent to help him.

3 Things to draw out:

1 - What does it mean to become a believer?

- Paul sees Jesus and he’s immediately aware of reality.

He missed the point. He missed the fact that the Old Testament, his Jewish faith, had been pointing to and looking ahead to the Messiah all along. Jesus is the snake crusher in Genesis 3:15, the king from the line of Judah in Genesis 49:10, the promised prophet from Deuteronomy 18, the seed of David from 2 Samuel 7, the suffering servant from Isaiah 53.

Now with all that in mind, Paul, who has oriented his life around the teaching of the Hebrew Bible, suddenly the light bulb switches on. Because if this is true, if Jesus is the point, then not only did he get the story wrong, but now his life has to reorient around the person of Jesus.

- Essentially, he sees Jesus and then sees himself - his sin, his mistake, his failure... and there’s only one option for him now... worship this Jesus. Give his life to this Jesus. Submit to this Jesus. Trust Jesus. if *he* can, *everyone* can.
 - This should give you all kinds of hope... not just for you... but, also for anyone you think is too far gone.

- Whoever was on your list of least likely to be a Christian... it was this dude... he was literally breathing murder.
- But this is what the Spirit of God does. He's working and active. Here's how you know it might be happening to you. Here's how God is chasing you down.
 - Your eyes are opened.
 - You see things differently
 - You're aware that God is actually communicating with you... even if the people around you aren't sure, you know and you know you know.
- This is what it means to become a Christian: see Jesus, see ourselves, respond with faith.
 - For some it's a real lightbulb moment like Paul on the road to Damascus. You were living a life in full steam rebellion and God just plucked you up, dramatically. You hit rock bottom and the scales fell off your eyes and the Spirit showed you your need for Jesus.
 - For some of you your stories are a bit different and it was less lightbulb and more sun rising. You were raised around people who trusted Jesus. They taught you about him from the earliest time you can remember. And all you know is somewhere along the way... you saw Jesus for who He really was, and yourself for who you really were, and responded with faith.
 - For some you came from a deeply religious background. Where you thought "because I was born into a Christian, I'm good. I just gotta get my act together, put on the good church face, and God will accept me." And at some moment in time you learned it is by grace you have been saved through faith. You couldn't save yourself. You needed a Savior.
 - Regardless of the details of your story the process is the same... see Jesus, see your sin, respond in faith.
 - For what it's worth, this is what makes a Christian. It's not cleaning yourself up. It's not doing a bunch of religious things. It's not etc... it's faith in Jesus to save you from sin... It's seeing Him for who He is, seeing yourself for who you are, and trusting Him.

2 - The help of Annanias

- I love Annanias' part here. He's scared and a tinsy bit reluctant, but he's willing to do what Jesus said. He goes and literally helps Saul see.
 - It's not always wise to play the conjecture game, but I imagine if Annanias' said no. "Nah, God, too risky. This is the man who is having people stoned. I'm gonna sit this one out." Who would blame him?!
 - What could that have meant no Paul? No missionary journeys? No spreading of the gospel to Gentiles? Who knows but Annanias' faithfulness here became a key piece in Saul's defining moment.
- Everyone needs help to see and follow Jesus.
 - I'd be willing to bet your story of salvation has at least one Annanias in it... maybe more. A person who came to you to help you see. A person who explained the gospel to you. A person who wouldn't give up on you. A person who kept

inviting you to church or to group or just wouldn't stop talking to you about Jesus. A person who helped you see what it meant to trust Jesus and take your next steps as a disciple.

- You don't know how God might want to use that person either.
 - The child in Kidtown could be a LG leader, a pastor... a missionary, etc. You don't know what God is going to do.
 - Michael Scott "the man who made the man who made 1000 people laugh laugh."
 - Dude got saved, never thought he would, and wound up going to Waffle House and sharing Christ.

3 - Saul was saved for a purpose... and so are you...

- If you're a follower of Jesus, it is no accident that God has you where He has you. And while you may not be hearing an audible voice from God like Ananias heard, the truth is God is speaking to you right now through His Word to direct you to people.
- So I wanna give you a moment to think about that. Who are the people God has placed in your life right now? If you're a parent, that's an easy one b/c no one's born a Christian. If you work at an office, God has you there to be an Ananias to others.

Acts 9:15–16 [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."

- God doesn't always give the specifics like He did for Saul's life here, but Scripture tells us enough... you are saved for a purpose.
 - "Christianity is incendiarism; Christianity is fire setting; a Christian is a person set on fire." - Kierkegaard

Conclusion:

- Invite people to faith. For some of you, it's a lightbulb. Others it's like the sun rising. Some of you have been coming here for weeks, months, years and maybe you're waiting on God to cause you to go blind. I dunno but you need to see it ain't on accident. God is chasing you down.
 - See Jesus, see yourself, respond with faith.
 - It's time for some of you to get off the fence.
 - Some of you haven't even realized this happened to you... but, now you are.
 - Call people to get baptized. For some of you, today needs to be your defining moment.
- Invite people to consider who they can help take next steps towards Jesus and what they might could do to do so.