

ACTS 9:1-19

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

- [Welcome]
- [Read Acts 9:1-19]
- [Pray]

INTRODUCTION

- Every hero has an **origin story**.
 - A moment where everything changes—now and forever.
 - **Bruce Wayne** watches his parents being murdered.
 - **Peter Parker** is bitten by a radioactive spider.
 - **Clark Kent** lands on Earth as his world is destroyed.
 - And from that moment on, nothing is the same.
 - They are all forever changed.
 - Batman, Spiderman, Superman.
- Well, our passage has a **real-life origin story**—and it's far more shocking than any comic book or blockbuster.
 - Saul. A radical interruption. A light from heaven. A voice he never expected to hear.
 - And he is forever changed:
 - He's even given a new name—not a superhero, but the Apostle Paul.
 - The missionary to the nations, the church planter par excellence, the theologian whose letters make up much of our NT.
- As we enjoy our way through this story, we're going to see two foundational truths of the Christian faith.
 - The first has to do with **conversion**—how we become Christians.
 - The second has to do with **transformation**—how we grow as Christians.
- And as we see these truths, we'll discover that this isn't just Saul's origin story.
 - It's a story of what God can do in any life.
 - It can be our origin story too.

[Transition]: So, let's dive in and see our first truth—which has to do with conversion—and it's this...

1. CONVERSION: God saves us as he finds us.

[State]

- Last week, we met a man on a spiritual journey.
 - He was reading Isaiah.
 - He was asking questions.
 - He was seeking the Lord.
- This week, we meet a man on a very different kind of journey.
 - He's not searching for God.
 - He's hunting Christians.
- We've met Saul twice in Acts already:
 - In **7:58** when he stood—approving of Stephen's execution.
 - And in **8:3** when he ravaged the church—going from house to house, dragging off men and women and throwing them in prison.
- Now in **chp 9**, the violence escalates.
 - As the gospel is spreading from Jerusalem to the surrounding regions...
 - So Saul makes his way to Damascus with a missional, evangelical zeal—for blood.
 - **V1** tells us he's breathing threats and murder against the disciples.
 - **V2** that he has authority to imprison any man or woman who belongs to the Way.
 - He's searching alright—but not for God.
 - If we were in the early church, his name would make us afraid.
 - And we'd all be praying that God would stop him in his tracks.
- Which God does in **V3: As he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly...**
 - No warning. No buildup. No spiritual awakening.
 - A light falls from heaven. Saul falls to the ground.
 - And then a voice: **V4: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**
 - **Who are you, Lord?** Saul asks.
 - Then he hears it: **I am Jesus (V5).**
 - What an introduction.
 - I am he.
- In that moment, Saul realizes:
 - I thought he was dead—but he's alive.
 - I thought he was buried—but he's reigning.
 - I thought he was rotting—but he's ascended on high.
 - And worst of all—imagine it—I've been opposing him.
- Everything he thought he knew about God collapses at the voice of Jesus.
 - And in a few short verses his self-righteousness collapses too.
 - He believes, he's baptized, and he becomes a Spirit-filled follower of the Way.

[Illustrate]

- There's a danger that we sanitize this story because we know how it ends.
 - But it's shocking that God would save Saul—just as he is.
 - He's not a confused young man who's lost his way.
 - He's an execution-approving, Jesus-persecuting, Christian-hunting, woman-imprisoning, breather of threats and murder.
 - And yet God saves him—exactly as he is.
- It makes me think of someone like Jeffrey Dahmer—have you heard of him?
 - A notorious serial killer and cannibal.
 - Convicted of 16 grotesque murders.
 - Sentenced to 957 years in prison.
 - But there he met a pastor who introduced him to Jesus and baptized him.
 - In a 1994 interview with MSNBC Dahmer said: *"I have accepted [Jesus] as my Lord and Savior... I've come to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God."*¹
 - (Dahmer was murdered in prison later that same year.)
- Now, of course, we can't see the heart.
 - Only God can.
 - We won't know the sincerity of any profession until we make it to heaven.
- But if you don't like the thought of a murderer being saved—you probably shouldn't like this text.

The King shows up. Says, **I am Jesus. And forgives his enemy.**

[Apply]

- This kind of grace seems scandalous at first.
 - If we're honest, it's natural for us to resist the idea that someone like that could be forgiven.
 - I say natural, because it's easy to believe that grace should have limits.
- But grace doesn't have limits—which is what makes the gospel such good news.²
 - It gives us great hope for **ourselves**.
 - He doesn't wait for you to clean yourself up or improve.
 - He shows up, says, **I am Jesus**, and forgives.
 - It gives us great hope for **others**.
 - The hardened child. The cynical coworker. The aggressive atheist. The person you've written off.
 - He can show up, say, **I am Jesus**, and forgive.
 - And it drives us to give all the **glory to God**.
 - We take no credit for our salvation—it's a miracle that we've been saved.
 - The only reason we'll make it to heaven—with Saul and others who will shock us—is because God saves us as he finds us.
- Dear ones—do not underestimate the grace of God.

[Transition]

- Conversion: God saves us as he finds us.
- That's where the story begins—but it's not where the story ends.
- After saving Saul, he changes him, which takes us to our second truth.
- After conversion...

2. TRANSFORMATION: God does not leave us as he finds us.

[State]

- Having started something in our lives, Jesus continues to work.
 - He doesn't save us and then leave us waiting for heaven.
 - Instead, the grace that saved us changes us—and leads us into a better life.
- Let's see how he does this with Saul: **V10: Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias.**
 - We've never met him before.
 - And we won't hear of him again.
 - Like so many in Acts—he is unknown, ordinary, and faithful.
- And look what God calls him to do—**V11: Rise and go.**
 - Sound familiar???
 - This time, however, the command feels dangerous.
 - Ananias doesn't know Saul has been converted.
 - So, he responds honestly—and I love that he doesn't question God, he just wants to make sure the Lord has all the information.
 - **VV13-14:** I have heard about this man, he's done much harm to your people, and he's coming here to do more of the same.
- Well, it turns out God Almighty—the Maker of Heaven and Earth—was already in possession of the facts, but he's happy to give Ananias some assurance.
 - **V15** is the key verse: **Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.**
 - Do you see the transformation—the turnaround?
 - The hunter will become the instrument of God.
 - The persecutor will become the preacher.
 - The destroyer of the church will become the builder of Christ's church.
 - The one who wanted to kill Christians will end up writing half the books in the New Testament!
- So Ananias rises and goes—and in **V17** he lays hands on Saul with two astonishing words: **Brother Saul...**
 - Who is the last person you would call brother or sister?
 - Who would stretch your definition of grace?
 - Here's Ananias—welcoming Saul with a family embrace.

[Illustrate]

- It's quite the redemption story—and it's not the only one.
 - **Augustine:** The most influential theologian in Christian history—started out as a womanizing low-life.
 - **John Newton:** The abolitionist who wrote *Amazing Grace*—started out as a slave trader.
 - **C. S. Lewis:** The author who led millions to faith—started out as an atheist.
 - **And us:** Our spiritual resumes aren't impressive—yet here we all are following God.
- Again, we say—do not underestimate the grace of God:
 - He saves us as he finds us.
 - BUT he does not leave us as he finds us.
- He changes us.
 - This is not personal development or self-help.
 - This is Spirit-filled, resurrection power at work in a human life.

[Apply]

- How does that happen?
 - How does God do that work?
 - It's an important question if we want to grow.
- Well, God changes us in many ways—but our passage highlights one way very clearly.
 - And it's this: God changes us through his people.
 - Through other believers, through fellowship, through community.
- Did you catch the moment in **V4** where Jesus so identifies with his church that he asks Saul: **Why are you persecuting me?**
 - To attack the church is to attack Christ himself—bc the church is his body.
 - Which makes sense of how Jesus changes Saul.
 - He could have changed Saul any way he wanted.
 - Through an angel. Through a vision. Through another word from heaven.
 - But instead, he chose to work through his people.
 - He makes his word and touch known—through his body, the church.

[Transition]: Which opens up two invitations for us.

THE CLOSE

1) Find your Ananias.

- If you want your life to change, if you're struggling with something you want to different, or if you've fallen asleep at the wheel and become complacent about your growth in Christ—you need an Ananias.

- We all do—we all need someone to do what Ananias does in **V17**:
 - Speak truth to us.
 - Remind us about Jesus.
 - Be affectionate with us.
 - Call us brother or sister when we're down.
- Do you have someone like that? Here are some ideas if you don't...
 - Invite a believer you respect to coffee and ask them to disciple you.
 - Sign up to serve where relationships form naturally.
 - Head out to the Connections Team after service.
 - Go deeper with an existing friend—tell them something raw you're struggling with instead of keeping it surface level.

2) Be like Ananias.

- What a legend: He's not famous or impressive or even fearless.
- And yet, without him:
 - Saul never steps into his calling.
 - Thousands of churches never get planted.
 - And we don't have half the books in the NT.
- You may not preach to kings or plant a church—and please don't try to write Scripture!
- But there are people in your life—and in this room—who need you:
 - Your presence. Encouragement. Experience. Listening ear. Advice.
 - In the noise of our world these things are in short supply!
- I believe Jesus is saying to all of us: **Rise and go**.
 - And if we ask the Spirit to open our eyes, we'll see to whom.
 - A family member, spouse, or kid; a friend, roommate, or colleague at work.
 - Your obedience might be someone else's beginning.
 - Their origin story might be waiting for you.
- Transformation happens in community:
 - You need an Ananias.
 - And someone needs you.

CONCLUSION

- Every Christian has an origin story.
 - Not Batman, Spiderman, or Superman.
 - But a moment when Jesus says your name. A moment when he tells you his name. A moment when the old story ends and a new one begins.
- Saul's origin story happened on a road outside Damascus.
 - But the same Jesus still saves us as he finds us.
 - And the same Jesus still refuses to leave us that way.
- Almost always, he does his transforming work through his people.

- The question isn't whether God wants to change lives—he does.
- So, here's the question:
 - Will you let someone walk with you?
 - And will you be willing to walk with someone too?
- Don't underestimate what the grace of God will do—with you and through you.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1*.

Endnotes

¹ A section of the interview can be accessed [here](#).

² I owe the three sub-points in this section to Rachel Joy Welcher, *Sharing Heaven with Serial Killers*, accessed [here](#) 2/26/26.