



OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

CHANGED BY THE RESURRECTED JESUS

ACTS 9:1-31

APRIL 26, 2020

MAIN POINT

The truth of the gospel and the resurrected Jesus changes us.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Over time, what is something on which your views have radically changed? Who or what was influential in this transformation?

2. Has this shift in your thinking directly impacted any of your relationships or changed the way people view you, for better or worse? Explain.

Leader: The dictionary defines metamorphosis as “a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means.” Every Christian has experienced metamorphosis. We all have a story to tell because we have been powerfully changed from death to life by the gospel of Christ. There are few more radical transformations in Scripture than that of Saul on the road to Damascus. In an instant, Saul was transformed from a persecutor of the church to one of its greatest champions.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 9:1-9.

3. This passage begins with Saul seeking to stop the advance of Christianity as much as possible. Read Philippians 3:4b-6. Based on the beginning of Acts 9 and these details from Philippians 3, how likely would you say Saul was to become a Christian?

4. In verse 5, Jesus said that Saul was persecuting Him. What does this statement reveal about Jesus' close identification with His followers?

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5. Why do you think Saul was struck blind? What might God have been trying to teach him through blindness?

Leader: Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Him personally. Christ so identifies with His followers that to attack them is to attack Him. Jesus revealed Himself to Saul and gave him further instructions, and Saul's response was immediate. Saul's fasting and blindness were not a punishment, but an appropriate response to the intensity of his encounter with Jesus. This encounter with Jesus resulted in a dramatic transformation in the life of this proud, Christian-hating Pharisee.

6. How do you think Saul felt when confronted by Jesus? Given his previous activities, what might he have been thinking about during those three days of blindness and fasting (v. 9)? How were you confronted with your past before Christ when coming to know Him?

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 9:10-19.

7. In verse 13, Ananias responded to Jesus with his concerns about going to meet Saul. How might Ananias have justified not going to see Saul based on what he knew about him?

8. What did Ananias' response to Jesus' directions reveal about his own life and obedience?

Leader: Ananias' response of, "Here I am, Lord" revealed a heart that was eager to please the Lord and obey Him. This incident clearly shows us that God's assessment of people is often radically different than our own. Where most Christians would have looked at Saul with warranted fear and trepidation, God saw a "chosen instrument" whom He would use to carry the gospel to the known world.

9. How did Ananias address Saul? What did this reflect about the change in Saul's life? How did Saul respond after his physical healing?

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 9:20-31.

10. What might the crowd have expected Saul to say when he came to the synagogue? When he proceeded to preach about Christ, how did they react (v. 23)? Why do you think some of the people were upset by Saul's preaching?

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11. Barnabas risked his own reputation and credibility by standing up for Saul. What might have made him take this risk? Are there people whom you have given up on? Who has taken a risk on you?

Leader: Saul's earliest ministry was characterized by bold witness, Jewish persecution, and a timid response from the rest of the church. Barnabas provided another example of discipleship. As a result of Barnabas's defense, the apostles accepted Saul into their fellowship and opened doors of opportunity for him to minister and spread the gospel in Jerusalem.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

12. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul called himself the worst of sinners. What about Paul's past may have led him to make this statement? What about your past do you view as irredeemable or unforgivable? How is God speaking to you about that today?

13. Is there anyone that you feel is beyond redemption? How does Saul's story show us that God can change the hardest of hearts? How might God want to use you in the life of this person as He did with Ananias and Barnabas?

CLOSING THOUGHT

God and your church love you.

PRAYER

Thank God for using the most unlikely people for His kingdom. Praise God for His grace in your life that transformed you into a new person living for Jesus.

MEMORIZE

¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. – Acts 9:18

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

ACTS 1:1-31

9:1-2 As the word of God spread and the number of disciples increased, the church met strong opposition. Saul, who had held the clothing of those who had stoned Stephen, was intent on destroying the church. This persecution was the most severe threat believers had faced to this point in the church's brief history. Saul was breathing out threats against the disciples. The verb translated breathing out also means "inhaling" or "being bent on" some activity. Threats and murder had become the very breath Saul breathed. Saul's hostile mission was to place believers under arrest, whether men or women, and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. There they would stand trial before the Sanhedrin. Saul clearly demonstrated himself an enemy of Christ and His people.

9:3-5 As Saul and those traveling with him neared the completion of their journey to Damascus, an unusual thing happened. Saul encountered the resurrected and exalted Christ. A blinding light flashed around him, and he heard a voice. The question Saul heard was succinct and accusatory. Saul was on a mission of hate to persecute Jesus' followers. The resurrected Christ, however, so identified with His people that He said the persecution was against Him personally. When Saul inquired about the identity of the One speaking to him, he used the title Lord. Saul quickly learned the Lord's identity and soon learned the deeper significance of the lordship of Christ in his life.

9:6-7 After securing Saul's full attention and revealing His identity as the risen Christ, Jesus commanded Saul to go into Damascus and await further instructions. Saul was not told at this point what his mission or purpose was. That was reserved for when he encountered Ananias later in the city of Damascus. This stepwise introduction to his future kept him from being overwhelmed all at once with the changes Jesus had initiated in his life, and it also allowed the Christians in Damascus to meet and accept the one whom they feared. This is the first of three accounts of Saul's conversion that appear in the Book of Acts (Acts 22:6-11; 26:12-18).

9:8-9 Saul's encounter with Jesus also impacted him physically. He was unable to see when he got up from the ground. His traveling companions had to lead him by the hand into Damascus. For three days Saul was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. Certainly his meeting with Jesus had been a traumatic experience. His life would be changed radically by this encounter with the resurrected Christ.

9:10-12 Ananias received no special identification here other than that he was a disciple in Damascus. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and informed Ananias that he was to go to Saul and place his hands on him so that Saul's sight would be restored. As is clear from verse 17, the designation Lord refers to Jesus. The Lord Jesus informed Ananias that He was at work in the lives of both persons involved in the situation. The Lord had given Saul a vision of Ananias coming to him.

9:13-14 Ananias was reluctant to obey the Lord's command for he was aware of the havoc Saul had caused among the Christian community in Jerusalem. Although Luke did not record a detailed account of Saul's activity in Jerusalem, it is obvious from reading Acts 8:1-3 that his persecution had dealt a serious blow to the Jerusalem church. Reports of the intense persecution in Jerusalem already had reached the Christian community in Damascus. The Christians in Damascus also were aware that Saul had come to their city to arrest believers. Naturally Ananias was reluctant to place himself in what he viewed as jeopardy. He knew Saul's reputation and thus protested the Lord's call. Ananias's honest response helps to emphasize the radical transformation that had occurred in Saul's life.

9:15-16 Ananias eventually followed the Lord's command but he did so only after the Lord assured him that He had chosen Saul. The risen Christ referred to Saul as my chosen instrument.

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To further encourage Ananias, the Lord briefly outlined Saul's future as a believer: he would carry the gospel to a broad cross section of the population in the Roman world of the first century. Both Gentiles and Jews would be among those to whom Saul would proclaim the message. The Lord also told Ananias that Saul himself would be called to suffer for Jesus' name. Saul, who had persecuted Christ's followers, would experience as a believer the same kind of suffering he had inflicted on others. We are not to understand this message as one of divine retaliation for what Saul had done prior to his conversion. Rather, the Lord's words to Ananias were a prophecy about a privilege Saul would experience as he followed the Lord.

9:17-20 The ordering of events in Saul's conversion may have been altered from the standard pattern so that baptism rather than the filling of the Holy Spirit was the final event. The process may have been extended over several days rather than occurring all at once. But the result was the same: Saul became a follower of Jesus Christ. Saul stayed in Damascus for some days, likely becoming oriented to basic Christianity even as he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues. He gave priority to the synagogues throughout his ministry, starting there before being forced to take the message elsewhere.

9:21-22 Understandably, the initial response to Saul was skeptical amazement, but as he grew more capable he was able to confound unbelieving Jews, proving that Jesus is the Messiah. Apparently, he was able to explain the messianic connections between the Old Testament and Jesus so clearly that the Jews in Damascus could not refute him.

9:23-25 After many days pictures Saul dutifully preaching Jesus as Messiah for long enough to become the uppermost enemy of unbelieving Jews in Damascus. He had come to help their struggle against the growing Christian movement, but now he had become the chief cause of its growth. Thus they conspired to kill him. Unable to leave via the city gates, Saul escaped in a most undignified but effective manner: he was placed in a large basket and shoved through an opening in the wall (literally "through the wall").

9:26 Unable to refute Saul in debate, the Jews plotted to kill him. His disciples helped him escape from Damascus (vv. 23-25). Saul traveled south to Jerusalem and attempted to associate with the disciples there—the Christian community. He sought to be attached to them, to be known as one of them. Understandably, they were all afraid of him. After all, shortly before this time he had persecuted the Jerusalem church, hunting down, and imprisoning believers (see 8:3). The disciples did not believe his commitment to Christ was genuine; they thought it was a trick to enable him to capture them. They seriously doubted he was a genuine disciple.

9:27 Barnabas, "Son of Encouragement," took a tremendous risk. He was a respected believer whom the disciples trusted. He had generously contributed to Jerusalem Christians' needs (see 4:36-37). Barnabas took Saul to the apostles—the Twelve. Convinced Saul was a genuine believer, Barnabas was willing to act as a mediator with the apostles. The Greek text will allow the explanation in the latter part of the verse to be Barnabas's or Saul's words. The explanation recounted Jesus' appearing to Saul on the road to Damascus, their conversation, and Saul's bold preaching about Jesus in Damascus.

9:28 The apostles accepted Saul into their fellowship. That he was coming and going with the apostles indicates his full identification with them. The implication may be they opened doors of opportunity for him in Jerusalem. He was speaking boldly about Jesus in Jerusalem's synagogues, mainly in those of the Greek-speaking Jews.

9:29 Saul conversed and debated with the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews. Saul took up Stephen's work and likely advocated Stephen's view that the gospel is for every person. Saul's background as a Jew who was born and had lived in a Gentile area, Cilicia, equipped him to speak to and debate with these Jews. If Saul had debated with Stephen, that experience—coupled with his viewing the manner in which Stephen died—doubtless had a profound effect on him. The Hellenistic Jews reacted to Saul as they had responded to Stephen: they attempted to

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kill Saul. His claims for Christ enraged the synagogue members; they considered him to be a traitor to Judaism and sought to eliminate him.

9:30 Members of the Christian community discovered the plot to kill Saul. These believers escorted him to Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, where he boarded a ship bound for Tarsus, his native city in Cilicia. Saul's name does not resurface in Luke's narrative until Acts 11:25, in events of about 10 years later. Saul demonstrated his intense commitment by going to Jerusalem and meeting with the disciples. In addition, he preached about Jesus and risked his life by debating some Greek Jews about Jesus.

9:31 This verse marks a significant point in the development of the early church. The church, having been forced by persecution to scatter outward from Jerusalem, was at peace in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. This set the church up for a second stage of growth, which would see the gospel boldly taken outside Israel.