

Acts 9:1-31 "Saul to Paul" June 30, 2024

Intro & Review:

Today's text is the story of how the guy who wrote 13 (Q1) of the 27 books of the New Testament came to know Christ. It is the story of how the primary persecutor of the Gospel became the primary spokesperson for the Gospel. The story is about how Saul became Paul. The story is told again by Paul in chapters 22 & 26. Remember that we are in part 2 of Acts. The gospel has gone to Jews. The Samaritans were half Jews, half gentiles. We will see how the gospel becomes primarily to gentiles but to understand that, we need to understand the one who would become known as the apostle to the gentiles. This one, who had previously persecuted Christians. This one who was steeped in Jewish thought and practice. You can see his testimony from Paul himself in Philippians 3:4-6. This is Paul's background (Q2). Unlike Simon Magus or Simon the Sorcerer, Saul's conversion is real and he is not only baptized but immediately begins to proclaim the gospel (v20).

For us, the story is not as shocking as the original event was. For the first century Christians, the conversion of Saul was a hard thing to believe. He had participated in the stoning of Stephen. He had been actively traveling to gather up and imprison Christians. He was very zealous in his persecution of the church.

The Gospel:

Please note that Jesus did not say, "Saul, I love you so much. Why don't you love me back?" Jesus did not say Saul, "You are my son and what you're doing is breaking my heart." Jesus did not say, "I have a perfect plan for your life and you are messing it up." Jesus said, "Why are you persecuting me?" Jesus identifies Himself with His people whom Saul is persecuting. This is probably why Jesus is standing in chapter seven when Stephen is being killed. Jesus is with His people. They are His bride, His body, His sheep, His temple, His house. If someone were doing your bride, body, property, or house harm, you would defend it. Jesus says, "Why are you persecuting ME?"

Jesus is the same today as He was then. He converts those who are suspicious to saved. He transforms hearts and minds. The story today would be like if he converted Bill Mahr or Richard Dawkins or Stan Harris or the late Christopher Hitchens or recently late, Daniel Dennet. Today, the risen Lord speaks and says to repent and believe the good news that He suffered under Pontious Pilot, died on the cross for sins, was buried, was resurrected, appeared to over 500 people over a period of 40 days, ascended to heaven and is coming back to judge all mankind. Repent and believe before it is too late. Repent and believe the glorious gospel and He will save you, He will change you. God will adopt you as His son, welcome you into His family, and give you life eternal. If not, you will be forever judged, in fact, you stand judged

already. Flee the wrath to come and come to Jesus! If you understand, if you have ears to hear and eyes to see, repent and be baptized in the name of the triune God.

Suffering:

Now, we could stop right there, having heard the message of the gospel and that would certainly be enough for any sermon. However, there is even more good news. It is the good news that believing the good news about Jesus not only changes lives but gives meaning to suffering. We can be assured that God sees our suffering (App 1). God told Annanias in v16, that He would show Paul how much he must suffer for the gospel. (Q6) Why is suffering such an integral part of the Christian faith? It is because, as Paul will later say, suffering brings about perseverance (Romans 5:3-5). James 1:2-4 basically says the same thing. Paul will say later in Romans 8:18 "For I don't consider the present sufferings worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us." You'll never suffer for the Lord in this life, and get to heaven, look at Jesus, and regret it. If you want something to base your entire life on, the glorious gospel of Christ is it! The rest of Romans 8, "the great 8", probably the most wonderful chapter in the entire Bible, IMO, tells of the assurance of hope that the believer has in an undefeatable Lord that is incomparable with anyone or anything in the history of the world. Acts 20:23 Paul says that the Holy Spirit told him in every city that He must go through imprisonment and persecution. That is exactly what happened, and Paul still wrote what he wrote.

If you are going through difficulties for your faith, (App2) you need to reject the common lies that are sewn by the enemy. Lie #1 is that God is not good. Lie #2 is that God is not in control. Both of those things are in complete contradiction to who God is. He is our loving Father who will never leave us or forsake us. He has put us in the circumstances we find ourselves in for His purposes. We would do well to remember that and trust Him. Rest in the goodness and sovereignty of God. In our text, verses 23 and 29 talk about how the Jews plotted and attempted to kill Paul. And yet, God was with him. Verse 22 says that he kept gaining in strength and was confounding the Jews by proving that Jesus was the Christ. I wonder how we are using our suffering to grow and move forward. Are we proclaiming the gospel **through** our suffering? Or simply bearing it, trying to hold on. It is only when we believe that He is truly good and in control that we will be able to flourish in difficulty. In verses 20 and 28 Paul was proclaiming Jesus boldly (Q:8; App 4).

Barnabas:

In verse 26, it says that the disciples were afraid of Saul turned Paul. This is to be expected. Of course they were afraid. Wouldn't you be suspicious? Then Barnabas shows up in v27 (Q5). You remember Barnabas don't you? He was there back in chapter 4:36-37. He was a Levite who's actual name was Joseph and he donated the proceeds from his land sale to the church. He was

given the nickname “Barnabas” which means “son of encouragement.” He is mentioned 22 times in Acts and 5 times in Paul’s letters. Everyone is afraid of Saul until Barney shows up and vouches for him. Saul was trying to hang with the brothers, but they were not having it. We don’t know exactly how Barnabas came to know Saul but we do know that he talked with him at Damascus and witnessed Saul’s boldness (v27). Barnabas does not write any of the books in the New Testament. He is not an apostle in the formal sense. However, he is a mentor, a leader, a servant and obviously an encourager. We will see him again, but for now, perhaps it is that the Lord is giving us an example to follow... **App3** Be a Barnabas.

-Believe the gospel. Preach the gospel boldly. Trust God in suffering and be a Barnabas.

Closing Prayer:

Lord God of heaven and earth, our Father, help us today by Your Spirit to know and trust your word. Impress upon our hearts and minds the message that You intend. Make us bold mouthpieces for Your gospel and help us to walk with You faithfully. Today would you save those who need to be saved and encourage those that are? For Your sake we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

Questions:

1. How many books in the New Testament did Paul write?
2. What was Paul’s background?
3. How is Paul described in v15?
4. What is the response of the disciples in v26?
5. Barnabas shows up in v27. Where was he before in the story? What does his name mean?
6. Why is suffering such an integral part of the Christian faith?
7. What other passages speak to the purpose of suffering?
8. Why does Luke emphasize the boldness of the disciples (v28)? Where else does he mention this?

Application:

1. Know that God sees our faithfulness and our suffering.
2. Reject the common lies that are sewn when facing difficulty:
 - A. God is not good.
 - B. God is not in control or sovereign.
3. Be a Barnabas.
4. Be like Paul and be bold (v28), even in the face of death.
5. Fear God and be encouraged by the Holy Spirit (v31).