



## The Conversion of Saul

*Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ*

Acts 9:1-31

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We are going to look this morning, beloved, at what I believe, next to the collective miracle of the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the greatest miracle in the NT – the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, whom we know as the Apostle Paul. We are at the end of a string of surprising and unexpected conversions – the Samaritan “half-breeds,” the Gentile Ethiopian eunuch and now Paul. Paul’s salvation is the most sudden, abrupt and unexpected conversion in Scripture – unique in its events beyond anyone else who has ever come to Christ and the consequences of his salvation -- utterly amazing. From despiser of Christ, persecutor and murder of Christians, to devoted slave of the Lord and champion of the gospel.

It is no stretch to say that Paul was the holiest, most faithful, most devoted man to Jesus Christ who ever lived. After his conversion he was a theologian, missionary, evangelist, pastor, a warrior for the truth and a lover of souls – all a result of God’s saving and transforming grace.

Without him there is no NT as we know it -- none of the emphases on sovereign grace, justification by faith, all of the aspects of the cross, all the aspects of the resurrection, union with Christ, monergistic regeneration, progressive sanctification, the unity of the body of Christ -- and on and on it goes. He was the chosen instrument of God for the expansion of the gospel to the Gentile nations, the chosen instrument of God to stand before kings and governors and preach Christ and Him crucified, the chosen instrument of God for the preaching of the gospel last of all to his Jewish brethren, and the chosen instrument to write the vast majority of the NT.

And if we ask, “What was it that caused Saul of Tarsus to be saved?” The answer can only be one thing – the sovereign grace of God in Christ. It is in this text that we see, God’s grace

displayed, as John Calvin says, “not only in such a cruel wolf being turned into a sheep, but also in his assuming the character of a shepherd.” I want us to approach this text in the same way that we did the martyrdom of Stephen – I want us to read through this text and make application as we go and my goal, as it always is when I preach, is that you would see the incomparable worth of Christ, that you would be moved in heart and soul to love Him and follow Him faithfully and in full submission to His glorious reign, and that you would be moved to greater worship of our Lord than when you came into this sanctuary this morning. So let’s pray together that God will use this time for making much of Christ, much of Himself and His grace and glory as we look at this text, and then let’s break open the bread of life together. Pray with me...

As we look at this text, the first picture that Luke gives to us is of

Saul the Hunter (1-2) Luke writes: “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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.” (Acts 9:1–2, ESV) When the great persecution began in Jerusalem and the disciples fled into the neighboring countries, some of them, slipping through Saul’s dragnet went some 150 miles away to Damascus in Syria. In Damascus there was a sizeable Jewish colony and a number of synagogues where they could hide out. Realizing this and not satisfied merely to drive them from Jerusalem but wanting to wipe them from the face of the earth Saul went to the high priest and secured letters of extradition in order to bring any who belonged to the Way back to Jerusalem for trial and execution. That is what the earliest Christians were called, followers of the Way in reference to what Jesus said in John 14:6 -- “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6, ESV) Saul is driven to destroy every possible remnant of the church.

Now I want you to see something here that is very significant. I want you to see the beastly terms by which Saul is described. His mindset, his temperament is revealed by the words that are used to describe him. They are animalistic. Back in Acts 8:3 he is described as “ravaging” the church -- a word that speaks of sadistic cruelty and brutality and was used of an animal mangling its prey. Later in this account, the people of Damascus will describe him in verse 21 as causing “havoc” – a word used to describe an animal mauling its prey, and then here in verse 1 he is “breathing” threats and murder. It is word used of the panting and the snorting of a wild

beast. That was the atmosphere in which Paul lived. He was breathing in and snorting out threats and murder. He is like a wild beast.

Beloved, I want you to see that this is always the goal of Satan for humanity, to reduce those who were made in the image of God into the image of beasts. It started in Genesis 3 and it has continued ever since – murder, sexual immorality, a lack of conscience, no morality, callousness, cruelty – beastliness. This is the goal of sin and Satan for humanity, to eradicate every last vestige of God's Image. This is what Saul had become. We need to put to rest any thought that perhaps Saul was having doubts about what he was doing, that Stephen's martyrdom was somehow nagging his conscience, that the life of the Christians was somehow causing him a crisis of belief – the biblical record simply does not support that idea at all. He was not in the process of making a decision for Christ as he saw more and more of the truth. No, Saul was fully and gladly an instrument of Satan for the destruction of the church, plain and simple.

What is worse is that Saul was a slave to Satan and a slave to sin and he did not even know it. Who ever does? If you would have asked Saul he would have told you that: "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless." (Philippians 3:5–6, ESV) He would have boasted great things about himself but the truth was this – though he was well-educated, well-thought of, accomplished amongst his peers – he was a beast, and animal, a slave of Satan and of sin, ignorant of his true condition, a dupe of the prince of this world. He was in the worst kind of bondage, believing that he was truly serving God while he was an enemy of Christ and of his gospel.

It was later as he reflected on his salvation that Saul could see the truth: "Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." (1 Timothy 1:13–15, ESV) For now, he was in the clutches of Satan, being used of him to do his will and doing it gladly, hunting the church and seeking to destroy it but in the divine plan of God, it was now time for the hunter to become the hunted.

The Hunter Becomes the Hunted (3-9) Look starting in verse 3: “Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”” (Acts 9:3-4, ESV) Looking at the other accounts of his conversion, we know that it was at midday when all of sudden, with no prior warning, with no inclination that this would happen at all, a blinding light, greater than the sun shone all around Saul, knocking this proud Pharisee to the ground. But it is not just a light that he sees, as Paul repeatedly testified, he saw the Lord. He saw Christ in all of His resplendent glory, in His majesty, in His exalted splendor. But he does not recognize this as Jesus – not right away. He cannot make sense of what he is seeing. He sees what he clearly knows is a God-like figure, an appearance of the Lord for certain, but he does not at first know who and what he is seeing.

And the question – the question -- “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” What does that even mean? His senses are overloaded, his mind a jumble of thoughts; he is terrified. Please don’t make the mistake of reading this as if Saul immediately recognized Jesus – he doesn’t. He doesn’t even know what to answer to this question.

In another account, Paul mentions that Jesus said to him: “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (Acts 26:14, ESV) Goads were sharp sticks that were used to force oxen to be compliant to the will of the cart-driver. Fastened to the front of the oxcart, whenever the ox would get ornery and kick against the commands of the driver, all they would do is injure themselves. The will of the driver was irresistible. That is true of the Lord Jesus Christ; He cannot successfully be opposed, cannot stand against His will, and cannot prevail against Christ. Jesus tells him in essence, that resistance is futile. So Saul says the only thing he can say.

“And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” Then comes the answer that completely the disintegration of Saul on that road. The Isaiah moment for Saul. And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” (Acts 9:5, ESV) This was the most terrifying thing that Saul could have possibly heard. This glorious, majestic, shining, powerful being who outshines the sun in its strength. speaks to him and says, “I am Jesus.” “I am Jesus!” Saul was shattered to the core. He who had been strong and mighty, was struck down, made weak and defenseless. The one who had been self-confident and self-righteous was made to question his entire existence and to realize the horrible error of his ways. The heavens opened above him. All of reality quaked beneath his feet. His entire life was undone.

Christ was alive, not just alive but ascended to the right hand of God, not just ascended but reigning, not just reigning as God, but is God! Saul's whole life was a lie. Everything he believed, everything he had done, all that he thought he had accomplished for God – all of it a sick, grotesque, twisted lie. All the while he had been rounding up Christians, persecuting them, killing them, he had been warring against God, acting as an enemy of God, thrusting the sword into the side of the One who so identifies with His people that every blow against them is a blow against the sovereign God. In one instant, Saul's entire world crumbled around him. It was the worst nightmare imaginable. In a moment, everything he believed was destroyed and he came to know by fear, at first, that Christ is God.

As he lay there prostrate in the dust, Jesus gives him this command: "But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." (Acts 9:6, ESV) Saul has no choice. His imagined power and strength has evaporated in the noonday sun. He is compelled to go to Damascus and he has no choice but to comply, not yet knowing what will become of him. He deserves death, beating, stoning. He deserves to be treated as the wild beast he had been. If he were to receive only justice, it would mean his certain death.

As for the other men with him, Luke says: "The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one." (Acts 9:7, ESV) From other accounts of Paul's conversion, what we see is that although these men saw light, they did not see Christ, and although they heard a noise, they did not understand Christ's words. You know what that tells me, The Lord was not seeking to save anyone else that day but Saul. And by God's grace, Saul was an utterly broken man. Just like all of us, he must be broken before he can be saved.

Verse 8 says: "Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus." (Acts 9:8, ESV) Saul gets up from the ground and the man who once thought he saw things so clearly is now blind. What a turnabout. This encounter with Christ had left him prostrate and blind at the feet of his conqueror. He who had expected to as the captor, in the fullness of his pride and prowess, as self-confident opponent of Christ, was actually led into it, humbled and blinded, a captive of the very Christ that he had opposed. He was taken, as we will see in a moment, to the house of a man named Judas, a believer in Damascus, and there he entered into the dark night and the eventual liberation of his soul.

Luke records: “And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” (Acts 9:9, ESV) Luke does not give us a theology of conversion here. We do not know for sure when it was that Saul was saved – on the Damascus road or at the house of Judas -- but I believe that it was during these three days that was sightless and could neither eat nor drink that He came to saving faith. Though he was blind, he had seen Christ and as he saw Christ he also saw himself for the first time. His life had been utterly wrong. He was a criminal before God. It is a very hard thing to come to the reality of your sinfulness, to know and embrace the depth of your depravity. So often we want to think of ourselves as basically good people who do a few bad things. But that is not who or what we are. Saul had to come to grips with this. Imagine what was going through his mind, the great mourning over his sin – that is why he did not eat or drink. Not eating or drinking is what someone does when they are in deep mourning. They just can't. He can't.

Saul had to come to grips with the truth that he would so eloquently confess in Romans 3:10-18: “As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”” (Romans 3:10–18, ESV) Saul’s heart had to be rent by the Spirit of God. Charles Spurgeon says: Heart-rending is divinely wrought—and solemnly felt. It is a secret grief which is personally experienced, not in mere form—but as a deep, soul-moving work of the Holy Spirit upon the inmost heart of each believer. It is not a matter to be merely talked of—but keenly and sensitively felt in every living child of the living God. It is powerfully humiliating and sin-purging! But also, it is sweetly preparative for those gracious consolations which proud unhumiliated souls are unable to receive! This heart-rending distinctly belongs to the elect of God—and to them alone. Beloved, here is no salvation apart from this.

But that is not all that was taking place in Saul’s soul. From heart-rending comes the fruit of salvation. Jesus promised, ““Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4, ESV) And it was during this time that I believe what Paul described in Galatians 1 in this way, took place: ““...He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me...” (Galatians 1:15–16, ESV)

In reality, that verse doesn't say "to me" as some translations like the ESV have it, but "in me." Something is taking place in his soul, in his heart, in his spirit, that affects him forever. Christ is being revealed to him in a saving way. He's becoming aware of who Jesus is, the identity of Jesus Christ, the glory of Jesus Christ, the salvation of Jesus Christ. God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," was shining in Saul's heart to give him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ – to save him from the dark night of his soul, to save him from destruction and death he deserved and to give to him forgiveness, to grant him eternal life – full, free, and undeserved. (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV) At the end of three days, Saul would know the forgiving love of Christ. In fact, he would see the love of Christ made manifest through the body of Christ.

The Love of God Made Manifest (10-19) From the home of Judas, Luke shifts the scene to a man named Ananias. "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." 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, 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.'" (Acts 9:10–12, ESV) As unexpected as Jesus' appearance to Saul was on the Damascus road, is this vision that Ananias has from the Lord. You have to know that they reputation of Saul had preceded him. The Christians in Damascus heard that Saul was on his way to round them up and ship them back to Jerusalem. Now God comes to Ananias in a vision and tells him that the very man that was coming to bring chaos was at the home of Judas, praying, communing with the Lord, worshipping Him. We can only imagine the content of his prayers but it makes sense that he would be praying for the forgiveness of his sins – His self-righteousness and cruel persecution of the true people of God, for wisdom to know what God would require of Him, breathing out worship and praise to the God who had shown him indescribable mercy. The one who once breathed out threats and murder now breathed out praise, prayer and supplication. Ananias is understandably shocked and so he responds like most of us would have.

"But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.'" (Acts 9:13–14, ESV) He is astounded and he is saying in essence, "Lord, this doesn't make sense. How can this be? Saul is an evil man, an opponent of Christ and His church, the chief reason for the persecution in the first place." But the Lord comforts Ananias' fears.

“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. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”” (Acts 9:15–16, ESV) God’s words to Ananias ends all debate. From Ananias’ limited perspective, Saul is a wicked man, the worst of men. But from the eternal perspective of God, Saul is His chosen instrument, chosen of God for salvation and chosen of God to carry His name to Gentiles, before kings, and before the children of Israel. God had chosen Him to bear the name of God, to testify to the salvation that is in Christ, to preach Christ and Him crucified, and it would be a costly task for the bearer of this good news --- as a former persecutor of Christ’s people, he would know the cost only all too well.

“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.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.” (Acts 9:17–19, ESV) I can only imagine the sweetness of those words ringing in the ears of Saul. Brother Saul...brother, enemy no longer, but son of God, brother to Christ, brother to the disciples. What sweet words to his ears. They may have been the very first words that he heard from Christian lips since h was struck blind. Ananias laying hands on Saul, not to drag him off to death, but to confirm him in life. The Lord has sent me to you so that you may receive your sight and so that you may be filled with the Holy Spirit. Again, like the Samaritans, the Spirit of God was already striving with Saul, convicting him of sin, regenerating his once stony heart. But now, he would receive the Spirit in His fullness – His power, His sealing, His indwelling, His comfort, His joy.

How gracious of Christ to do it like this, by the touch of Ananias’ hands. If there was every any question in Saul’s mind about the reality of Christ’s love, about his full forgiveness, about his acceptance in the family of God, it vanished in this instant. He had to be overwhelmed by the love an the care of Christ for him. No wonder Paul would later write: “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold,



the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:14–19, ESV) He knew firsthand the reconciling love of God in Christ. He was a new man.

“And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.” (Acts 9:18–19a, ESV) Something literally fell from his eyes, something scale-like or scab-like, and his eyes were opened both literally and figuratively. And before eating, Saul, compelled by the new life within him, washed the vestiges of the old away, being baptized into the fellowship of Christ, testifying that he was repentant, believing, converted, forgiven and in union with Christ his Lord, but he is far from a finished product. In the rest of this account, we get a picture of the bumpy road that Saul walked as he got his spiritual feet underneath him.

A Bumpy Road (19b-31) Not in a hurry to go anywhere, we read that “For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.” (Acts 9:19–22, ESV) Now beloved, you need to know that Luke is giving us sort of a rough chronology here. He does not include everything that took place during the span of time covered here. Of his time in the region of Damascus, Paul later writes these words: “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” (Galatians 1:15–17, ESV) The total time frame that Paul was in the Damascus area and in Arabia was three years.

Where does the Arabia trip fit? A lot of commentators put Saul’s departure into Arabia between verses 22 and 23 but I don’t think that’s right and here’s why. The key to understanding the timeframe of Saul’s departure to Arabia to be taught by the Lord Himself is indicated by the change in the emphasis in his preaching. Immediately he preached that Jesus is

the Son of God -- he starts proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ; that Jesus is God, that He is Lord, that He is seated at the right hand of God as the Lord of heaven and of earth. All things exist for Him and consist in Him for His glory. When he saw Jesus in all of His resplendent glory he was convinced of this one undeniable truth -- Jesus Christ is God. Here is the man that had come to persecute the followers of Christ, now preaching that Jesus is God. And the people are understandably amazed to hear these words coming from His mouth, shocked by the change that has happened to him.

But then notice in verse 22 that the emphasis of His preaching changes. From this point he begins to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. He increased all the more in strength, in His understanding and he began to confound the Jews who would debate with him by proving, from the Scriptures is the idea here, that Jesus is the Messiah. How did he increase in strength like that -- by spending time alone with Christ in the Scriptures in Arabia. It would have been like this. After his conversion, Saul could testify that Christ was God -- he had seen that with his own eyes. But how did this square with the Scriptures? That is what he had to find out and so he went out into the desert, to Arabia, to meet with Christ in the Word of God. It was like an Emmaus road experience, but this time with the glorified Christ. As he poured through the Scriptures, he saw Christ on every page -- in Moses, in the prophets, in the psalms, the proverbs, the history of the nation of Israel -- everywhere -- and he saw all the prophecies that pointed to Him as the Promised Messiah. Once he understood by faith the Scriptures that he once understood only in word, Saul was able to prove conclusively from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ -- how He is the propitiation for our sins, the fulfillment of the sacrifices, the true offering for sin, the light to the Gentiles and King of the Jews. Saul grew strong in the truth, strong in the Lord and coming back to Damascus, he preached a fuller gospel -- Christ is Messiah, the Son of God, God in the flesh.

He comes back to Damascus, filled with zeal and preaches the truth and what happens? "When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket." (Acts 9:23-25, ESV) It doesn't go like Saul had planned. He has to escape for his life, his disciples lowering him in a basket through a hole in the wall. Later, this would be one of the things of which he would boast -- "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands." (2 Corinthians

11:30–33, ESV) Saul needed to learn humility. He needed to learn dependence upon God. Saul was not a finished product.

Stung by what happened in Damascus, he goes to Jerusalem. “And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.” (Acts 9:26, ESV) When he came to Jerusalem, Saul attempted to join with the disciples, with the church, to have fellowship with them, to love them, to be loved and encouraged by them. The Greek tense shows that he kept trying to join with the church repeatedly and was turned away. They were afraid. This is the guy who had overseen Stephen’s execution, who had thrown many of their loved ones in jail, who had killed other disciples. They just weren’t sure about him.

Thankfully, Barnabas intervenes – and what faith in God and in the power of His gospel, what compassion and forgiveness toward Saul, what mercy to do so. “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.” (Acts 9:27–28, ESV) Barnabas, the son of encouragement, stands in the gap for Saul and he is received by the Apostles, going in and out among them, received into the fellowship and he takes up preaching once again to the Jews in Jerusalem.

Everything is going great, right? Wrong. “And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.” (Acts 9:29, ESV) It seems that Saul’s ministry is doing little but stirring up strife. Why is that? Paul gives us insight into what was going on in Acts 22. ““When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’” (Acts 22:17–18, ESV) God told Saul that his testimony would not be accepted and that he was to leave Jerusalem. He was not where he was supposed to be. Saul, in his immaturity argued with the Lord. “And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’” (Acts 22:19–20, ESV) In other words, “I’m the best witness you have in Jerusalem. I’m a convert after all that I have done to destroy the faith. Who could be a better witness to me?” “And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”” (Acts 22:21, ESV) In no uncertain terms, God told Saul to leave Jerusalem. That

was not to be his field of ministry. Again he had to learn – humility and obedience, submission, to be small in his own eyes. Every faithful and usable follower of Christ must.

“And when the brothers learned this – of the plot to kill Saul, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.” (Acts 9:30, ESV) Saul is sent home to mature, sent home to learn humility, sent home to learn obedience, sent home to learn to be small in his own eyes, sent home for at least 6 years before Barnabas will seek him out to assist in the ministry in Antioch.

With his departure, Luke says: “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” (Acts 9:31, ESV) The church entered into a much needed time of peace, of rest, of spiritual growth, of growing godliness and of multiplication as the Apostles continued in the power of the Spirit to faithfully witness to Christ in Jerusalem.

What a story. What do we need to take away from it? There is much we have talked about already, but let me just highlight a few things.

Saul’s salvation, like our own is a work of sovereign grace...

While salvation is instantaneous, sanctification takes time...

Do not despair, God is in control...

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