

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 9 as we continue our study through the Word of God. As we have seen in our study so far, Acts chapter 1 through chapter 7 primarily deal with the Gospel message spreading through Jerusalem.

We are now in another phase, you might say, of the spreading of the Gospel to Judea and Samaria. And this will cover Acts chapter 8 through Acts chapter 12. We are following the outline that was given to us by Jesus in Acts 1:8, where He said, **“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

If you remember from our studies, persecution was growing in Jerusalem against those who had come to Christ. We saw when Peter spoke in Acts chapter 2 that 3,000 people got saved in one day! And now, with the martyrdom of Stephen, it was like the heavy foot of religion came down upon these believers in Jerusalem.

But that heavy foot seemed to come down upon this fire of faith and it did not put out the fire, but spread the embers of faith out to Judea and Samaria!

And this evening we are going to be focusing on the life of a man who came to stamp out Christianity, and in the end, he came to saving faith. It is an amazing conversion story of a man named Saul, who we know of as Paul.

Before we get to our study this evening I would like to look at this man named Saul, so you understand where he is coming from. You see, Saul or Paul is going to play an important role in spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth!

In fact, as you look at the twenty-seven New Testament books, four make up the Gospels, and there is the book of Acts and of those twenty-seven books, Paul wrote thirteen of them and if you include Hebrews, it is fourteen!

So, the conversion of Saul was not only the turning point in his life, but it became the pivotal event in the life of the Church.

Saul was born in Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia, a Roman citizen by birth, his father was a Roman citizen, and a Jew. Now Tarsus is located at the corner where Asia Minor meets Syria north of Israel. It was a very distinguished city, famous for its university and along with Athens and Alexandria, Tarsus ranked with the three greatest universities of that day.

As every Jewish boy had to do, he learned a trade and in Tarsus, one of the larger industries there was tent making. So, Saul learned this trade that consisted of weaving cloth from the hair of goats. They would then take these strips and tie them together to make tents, and this is still practiced in the Middle East!

Then, at the age of 13 Saul was sent to Jerusalem to be schooled in Judaism, according to the rabbinic tradition of his father, who was a Pharisee. (Acts 23:6 – Paul was the son of a Pharisee)

His teacher was Gamaliel, and he was called the “Beauty of the Law” because he had this incredible gift of teaching. In fact, he was considered one of the seven great teachers in Israel’s history!

As part of his studies, Saul was required to memorize great portions of the entire Old Testament!

Also, Saul's name means "requested one" and that is how he thought of himself, important, influential, and he thought he was serving God with zeal. But, as much sincerity as Saul had, he is going to find out how wrong he was and the transforming power upon his life will be like night and day as we will see!

As we will also see, Saul was like a madman coming after Christians, or those who had come to saving faith in Christ.

I think it was Saul's witness of Stephen that impacted him greatly. He saw how Stephen spoke of the Scriptures with authority. He saw Stephen speak to the Lord. And Saul desired these things and yet, came up short.

The Law can never allow us to have a relationship with God like that because the Law can only show us how far we have missed the mark of perfection. That is what God requires and thus, our sins have separated us from God and I think Saul understood that but now was fighting against it with a passion!

You see, I think Saul was hit right between the eyes, harder than the stones thrown at Stephen, as the Holy Spirit was going to implant those seeds of conversion for Saul!

Now, back at Jerusalem Saul is still breathing fire against the Church. Apparently, he has been somewhat successful in Jerusalem in his opposition because as we come to chapter 9 we see him leaving town and is determined to persecute Christians anywhere he can find them.

He hears that there is a group of Christians up in Damascus, so he purposes to get up there and bring them back to Jerusalem to be thrown into prison.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Acts chapter 9, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study through His Word.

ACTS 9**VERSES 1-2**

As you read this you can just picture in your mind the anger, the hostility, the hatred that Saul had for the followers of Jesus in which Saul calls “**the Way**” here. I believe this name was taken from something that Jesus said in John 14:6, “**I am the way . . .**”

Now let me say this. This name that they first used was very appropriate because Christianity is more than just a religion, a set of beliefs, a set of opinions, a set of doctrines. No, Christianity is a **WAY** of life! It is living what we say we believe! And that is just as important for us today!

Now why was Saul so hard, so angry, at these people who had come to Christ? Why was he so vengeful against them that he wanted to arrest them?

Because I believe Saul thought he was a good person, a keeper of the Law, a holy man of God, and yet, Stephen’s face was angelic, his face glowed the presence of God, his heart was not angry or bitter to those who were putting him to death, but he said, “**. . . ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ . . .**” Acts 7:60.

And I think this bothered Saul so much that he just wanted to destroy these people who were eating away at his own heart, bothering his consciousness so much. Conviction was heavy upon Saul and instead of coming to Christ, he wanted to destroy the followers of Christ!

Yes, Saul thought he was a lover of God and yet, these followers of Jesus had something that he didn’t have; that joy, that peace, that love, they had Jesus!

And from the death of Stephen till now, Saul is still attacking the church. In Acts 26:9-11 Paul, called Saul at this time, said **“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”**

Also, in Acts 8:3-4 we are told of Saul and what this persecution was doing in the lives of these believers, **“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”**

Saul persecuted believers in Jerusalem and now, maybe thinking his work is done in Jerusalem, he is going to go to Damascus and get the believers there!

And think about this. There was a Christian community large enough in Damascus for Saul to be concerned about. Christianity – **the Way** – was spreading everywhere.

We need to understand that Damascus had a large group of Jewish people and Saul hears that many of the Synagogues are filled with Christians now, the people of the Way are there, this is where the Jesus followers are hanging out.

You see, of the total population of 150,000 in Damascus, there were about 20,000 Jews living there. Also, it has been estimated that there could well have been thirty to forty synagogues in the city.

Therefore, Saul goes to the High Priest, Caiaphas, for a letter to arrest and bring back these Jesus followers, and the Roman government would honor this.

Just a little side note on this High Priest named Caiaphas, “In December 1990 an ossuary (something like a burial urn; essentially a bone box) was discovered in Jerusalem. The ossuary was inscribed with the name of this Caiaphas and positively dated to this period. Inside were discovered some of the remains of a 60-year-old man, whom many researchers believe was this same Caiaphas. If true, these are the first physical remains (such as bones or ashes) of a specific person mentioned in the New Testament.” (David Guzik)

Also, keep in mind that Damascus was about 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem, about a six-day journey, but that didn’t bother Saul, he was on a mission, he was on a crusade for God, or so he thought!

In reality he was actually on his own crusade, his own mission and in direct opposition to God!

That is a powerful lesson for us. How often we do that, we are on our own crusade and think God is with us, and we miss the boat completely, even though we may be very sincere!

And here is Saul, on a mission to eradicate this cult, or so he thought, from the face of the earth. Let’s read on and see what happens to this man who is on a mission of destruction and, as we will see, God is on a mission of restoration!

VERSES 3-5

Please understand that this event did not happen at night but according to Acts 22:6 it happened in the middle of the day, at noon. And in Acts 26:13 Paul tells us that this light was **“brighter than the sun.”**

You can imagine how bright this light must have been, brighter than the sun, to knock Saul to the ground!

Think about this for a minute. Saul is charging towards Damascus, and now God slows him down and causes him to come to a complete stop, dead in his tracks you might say.

Why did God do this? God wanted to get Saul's attention. You see, he was a man on a mission and nothing was going to stop him, nothing until this light from heaven that shined down upon him!

Now Saul is not sure what is going on and then he hears this voice from heaven saying, **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”**

Saul, confused by whose voice this is, or maybe he really didn't want to know, maybe his biggest fear of who this is was going to become a reality, and he hears the voice say, **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”** That must have sent shock waves through Saul!

And I truly believe that Saul knew whose voice this was, and he is trembling that all that he held onto was wrong and he was persecuting the one he said that he loved!

Now let me also say this. Saul is coming after the church, persecuting the church and yet, we see Jesus say, **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”** and **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”**

Yes, Saul was persecuting the church, but Jesus so closely identifies Himself with the church that when the church is persecuted the reality is, He is being persecuted.

Saul thought he was serving God and now he finds out he was persecuting God by his actions!

Jesus then tells Saul, **“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”**

A goad was a long, sharp stick that was used to get an ox to move the way you wanted him to move. Jesus is telling Saul that he is like an ox, he is fighting against what his Master wants, Jesus, and it is hard.

How true that was, especially after seeing the way Stephen was martyred for His faith. He could not get the face of Stephen out of his mind, the peace he had and the only thing he could do is try to destroy that, but even after Stephen's death, there were more and more followers of Jesus that expressed this same love and peace! And the Lord is telling Saul to stop kicking, stop fighting against God, against Jesus and surrender to Him!

What a lesson for us. You see, maybe the Lord is speaking to some of you this evening. You know what God wants you to do but you are fighting against it.

And the Lord is saying to you **"It is hard for you to kick against the goads."**

Stop kicking and surrender!

Some of you may not know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are kicking and fighting, and He is calling you to surrender.

Those of you who know the Lord and are involved in things He doesn't want you to be in, stop kicking and fighting and surrender to His will.

In either case you won't win fighting against God and if you think about it, if you could win you would still lose!

Notice what Saul says next!

VERSE 6

I believe what is taking place here is the conversation of Saul to Jesus Christ. He gets saved somewhere between verse 5 and verse 6.

Now you may be wondering how can that be, it seems so fast? We need to understand that Saul has been under the constant conviction of the Holy Spirit for some time and was now simply surrendering to what he knew was true.

Some may not be impressed, but this is a radical change in his life. Listen to what Paul tells us of his life before Christ in Philippians 3:3-6, and keep in mind that Saul the “*requested one*” became Paul the “*little one*” as he saw himself now in Christ!

We read in Philippians, **“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the Eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”**

If anyone could boast in his flesh, before he was saved, Paul could. He was circumcised on the eighth day, a child of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee or a keeper of the Law or so he thought, persecuting those that opposed his views – specifically the church, and he saw himself as blameless!

But, Paul continues to say in Philippians, **“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I**

do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:7-14.

Paul is saying everything he thought was important, when the light of Christ shined upon him, he saw it all as worthless, as dung!

All his schooling with the famous Gamaliel, all his upbringing, he says is worth absolutely nothing when compared to Christ and what He has given to him.

Paul, who saw himself as great before Christ, now sees himself as the chief of sinners. He realized that the Law couldn't save him, it only showed how far short of perfection he really was, and it was only through Christ that our sins are cast as far as the east is from the west to be remembered no more.

If you live by the Law, you will die by the Law! Thus, this is a radical change, a radical transformation of this Pharisee named Saul!

Again, you may be wondering how I know that he is saved at this point? Look at his response here in verse 6. He calls Jesus "**Lord.**"

You see, Saul answered a very important question – "*Who is Jesus?*" And by calling Jesus "**Lord**" Saul was identifying Him as God, the One who has come to save us from our sins!

Next, Saul asks Jesus, "*Lord, what do you want me to do?*" That is what we ask once we are saved, what does God have for us, what does He want us to do! So, I believe that at this point Saul is saved.

VERSE 7

Now this seems to contradict what is said in Acts 22:9, “**And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.**”

There is no contradiction here. You see, the difference is that they heard the sounds, but they did not understand what was being said; only Saul heard, understood and saw Jesus!

VERSES 8-9

Think about the status that Saul had within the Jewish religious circles and now, after this incident we see this powerful man broken, humbled and lead to Damascus by his companions, blinded for three days! Why did this happen? Maybe because Saul needed some time to process all these things.

Think about it, he was going 110% against Jesus by persecuting the church, and the Lord stepped in and stopped him dead in his tracks, and now he is going to be turned around and go in the opposite direction 110% for Jesus and building up the church. Paul didn't do anything half-heartedly!

Think of what is happening to Saul like taking a picture. Saul was in spiritual darkness until the light of Jesus shined upon the film of his heart and then his eyes were closed, the shutter snapped shut after the picture was taken.

Now the developing process is taking place and when it is finished, exposed and developed on the film of Saul's heart, Jesus will be seen!

I think he is saved, like I have said, but he now has to process all that is happening to him.

And God is so good. At the right time He will bring the right person to come to Saul and speak words of encouragement to him. Let's read on and see what takes place.

VERSES 10-12

Here we are introduced to a very interesting man named Ananias. Ananias was a disciple of Jesus and attended the church in Damascus and the Lord speaks to him and he responds.

Now think about this man's credentials. He was not an apostle, a deacon, a prophet or anything else but a disciple of Jesus and God used him because God uses ordinary people for extraordinary work!

How come God doesn't do that today, speak to us like He did to Ananias? I think He still does, but I think we are so busy we can't hear Him!

Remember the story of Elijah fleeing from wicked queen Jezebel and as he is hiding in a cave, we are told in I Kings 19:11-12, "**Then He [the Lord] said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.**"

Notice God speaks in a still small voice, a delicate whisper. Thus, we need to put out all the other noise, the other distractions so we can hear Him and be directed by Him! And I believe the primary way that God speaks to us today is through His Word!

Now we read of this city named Damascus and that there were believers there and we don't think much of it. But I want you to notice how the Gospel message is going forward, it is spreading.

And this city of Damascus is the oldest city in the world that is still in existence. And it is there in Damascus that the Lord told Ananias to go to Straight Street which ran east and west and go to the house of Judas and see this man named Saul from Tarsus. You see, he was waiting for Ananias because the Lord already spoke to Saul in a vision about this!

Interestingly enough, you can go to Damascus today and you will find Straight Street running east and west, it is the main road through the downtown section of this city!

What I also want you to see here is that Saul has been fasting and praying there for three days, which was different than his formal prayers that were repeated over and over which he prayed before he knew the Lord.

Saul could now boldly come before the Lord through Jesus Christ and make his requests known! He may have said many prayers in his lifetime, but the reality is, he never really prayed till now!

So here is this great man of faith, Ananias, and he is going to be on the move to go and see Saul, right? Not exactly. He is struggling a little with what the Lord has instructed him to do.

VERSES 13-16

I don't know about you, but for me, I understand completely what Ananias was going through. In fact, it is kind of funny. The Lord tells him to go and see Saul and Ananias basically says to the Lord, "Are you kidding me? Don't You know this guy is on a rampage, going after people of the Way and now you want me to go and see him? We heard he was coming to town, and now he is here! Are you sure about this?"

You can understand Ananias concern for I am sure that he was on Saul's hit list! And was Saul just pretending this conversion experience to find where the people of the Way were? That is what Ananias is struggling with!

Now, to give you a perspective of what he was like before he was saved, Paul tells us this, as he spoke to King Agrippa in Acts chapter 26, "**Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.**" Acts 26:9-11.

And they heard of Saul and what he was doing to the church all the way up in Damascus and now God tells Ananias that he is to go and see this man!

Now the Lord is not angry with Ananias, but He confirms what He wants him to do. This is God's will for Ananias to go to Saul for God was going to use Saul mightily before Gentiles, before Kings and to the Jews themselves!

God is going to give Saul so much, show him so much, that according to II Corinthians chapter 12 God gave to him a thorn in the flesh, a tent spike worth of pain to keep him humble so he would not exalt himself but the Lord!

In fact, Paul lists some of the things he went through in just a short period of time besides this thorn in the flesh.

In II Corinthians, which was written around 56 A. D., Paul tells us “**Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool - I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.**” II Corinthians 11:22-28.

In all that he was concerned not about his own life but the church. Yes, Paul was used mightily by God, but he also suffered mightily. It has been said that you can tell how much a person has been used by God by how much they have suffered in their life!

Now with this confirmation from God, Ananias is going to see Paul. Let’s read on and see what takes place.

VERSES 17-19

We see here that Ananias trusted the Lord's directions and went to meet with Saul of Tarsus at the house of Judas.

And notice that Ananias calls Saul "**Brother Saul.**"

First of all, that tells me that Saul is saved. Some feel that Saul is saved here, but, like I have said, I believe Saul was saved between verses 5 and 6 of Acts chapter 9. You see, apart from Christ we are not brothers!

Also, to Saul, these were his enemies but now in Christ, they were brothers and Ananias extends that greeting to this former persecutor of the church and the Holy Spirit comes upon Saul empowering him for service and his eyes are opened once again, he can see not only physically, but spiritually. The picture of Jesus has been developed on the film of his heart!

Again, some say this is when the Holy Spirit entered Saul and he is saved. But as you read through this, I don't think that is correct.

The expression "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" is used in the Book of Acts to denote the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Spirit always empowers for service. It's the yielding to the Spirit's control which brings about power for service. I believe that is what we are seeing here.

VERSES 20-22

As Saul is in Damascus he is going to the Synagogues and sharing Jesus with the people, with the Jews, that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the World!

Now, when some see that phrase, “**the Son of God**” they feel that it is saying that Jesus is not God, that He is inferior or a lesser God. The problem with that is it goes against the Scriptures, there are no other Gods!

Secondly, “. . . in Jesus’ day, everyone knew what this title meant. To be called the “son of” something meant you were totally identified with that thing or person, and their identity was your identity. When Jesus called Himself *the Son of God*, and when others called Him that, it was understood as a clear claim to His deity.” (David Guzik)

How can we be so sure? Let the Scriptures speak for themselves and please understand we can spend all night looking at this but just a couple of verses to show you what I mean, that Jesus is Almighty God and the Jews knew exactly what Jesus was saying when He said that He is “**the Son of God.**”

In John 5:17-18 we are told, “**But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.’ Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.**” I think that is pretty clear!

And in Matthew 26:63-68 we are told, **“But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, ‘I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?’ They answered and said, ‘He is deserving of death.’ Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, saying, ‘Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?’”** Again, they knew exactly what Jesus was saying, that He is the Son of God or that He is God, equal with the Father!

So, when Saul was sharing Jesus with the people, they were **“amazed.”** This word comes from a Greek word that means, “they were besides themselves, they were struck out of their senses.”

To put it in our vernacular, they were blown away! Why were they blown away? Because this is a radical change from a man who was persecuting the church and hated Jesus to one who is now embracing the church and loving Jesus!

But how could Saul so powerfully defend his faith in Christ against the Jews when he just got saved?

Because Saul was a student of the Scriptures, Genesis through Malachi and thus, once he came to the faith, the Holy Spirit showed him that it is Jesus that the Scriptures testify of.

Jesus said in John 5:39-40, **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”**

The words of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 were now seen by Saul as Jesus! Thus, Saul just shared Jesus in the Scriptures that he knew and now had come alive to him!

One more thing here. Between verses 22 and 23 of Acts chapter 9 many believe that there is a time gap. In Galatians 1:17 we learn that Paul left Damascus and went to Arabia for a period of time where he waited upon God and I think this is where Paul learned even more from the Lord.

You see, Paul needed time for God to equip him for the ministry. The Scriptures tell us, “Don’t lay hands on any man quickly.” Even Paul needed a foundation established before he got into ministry.

VERSES 23-25

As I have said, Paul spent some time in Arabia and then back in Damascus and now in Damascus they want him dead! You can read of that time in Arabia in Galatians chapter 1.

And Saul’s picture is in the local Post Office, he was a wanted man. And they put guards on the gates of this walled city, looking for this short, crooked-nosed Jesus freak and when this plot was discovered, his brothers in the Lord put Saul in a basket and let him down over the wall of the city to escape.

Remember what the Lord said, “**For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.**” That suffering, that persecution against Saul had just begun!

So, the total time that Paul was in Arabia and Damascus was three years before he went on to Jerusalem, as we will see in the next verse.

Just a side note on Saul's conversion, David Guzik said "In 2 Corinthians 11:32-33, Paul refers to this incident and mentions it happened under Aretas the king. This means that this escape from Damascus happened between 37 and 39 AD. So, taking into account the three years mentioned in Galatians 1:18, and that this incident happened at the end of those three years, we can surmise that Paul was converted sometime between 34 and 36 AD."

VERSES 26-30

During this first trip to Jerusalem as a believer, Saul lasts only fifteen days because; once again they wanted to kill him, the unbelieving Jews. (Galatians 1:18)

Interestingly enough, when he first arrived, the Christian's didn't want to accept him, they didn't trust him, they thought it was some kind of trick.

And I love the one who comes to his aid? Barnabas or the Son of Encouragement!

People like that in the church are such a blessing because they are always trying to bring people together, build them up, and encourage them and that is exactly what Barnabas has done here.

He not only brings Saul to the apostles, but he backs Saul up by testifying to Saul's changed life, that he has seen the risen Lord on the road to Damascus and is now speaking forth the Good News of Jesus Christ. Saul was thus accepted!

Now, once again, because of his faith in Christ, the Jews, specifically the Hellenist Jews wanted him dead. And the brethren send him to the area of Caesarea, which was a seaport city on the Mediterranean and then to his hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia.

Somewhere between 8 and 12 years passed in the life of Saul before he again entered into prominent ministry, being sent out as a missionary from the church at Antioch. At that time, it would also be Barnabas who reached out to Saul, remembering him and loving him. (Acts 22:17-21)

VERSE 31

Now when it says that they “**had peace and were edified**” it does not mean that the persecution stopped! What is being said is that they had peace through these storms, the peace of God in their lives.

The church was strong; it was growing because they walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

It has been said; God afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted. There are times that God tries to get our attention, to get us moving and He will use affliction to do that! But our God also comforts us as we are afflicted!

I like the way that one writer summed this up for us as he wants us to learn the lessons that we see here. He wrote,

“Is it not already but too evident that the church of our day has little or no conception of the pricelessness of blessing involved in this paracletic of the Spirit? What if once more this lesson could be learned? What ‘rest’ would the church have from internal dissension and division, from heresy and schism! What edification, ‘being built up’ on the most holy faith! What holy ‘walking in the fear of the Lord,’ what rapid multiplication, and what world-wide evangelization! There is not an evil now cursing or threatening our church life which this ‘comfort of the Holy Ghost’ would not remedy and perhaps remove.” (Pierson)

VERSES 32-35

For the next three chapters Peter is going to be the focus as Saul spends the next several years in Tarsus and we will pick-up on his work again in chapter 13 of Acts and he will be the main focus through the rest of the book of Acts.

And we see that Peter is ministering in various places. He goes to Lydda, about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem, and there was a man who was crippled for eight years there, Aeneas.

In the healing please notice who gets the honor, the glory, the credit – not Peter but the Lord!

Folks, no matter what we are doing for the Lord, He gets the honor, the glory, the credit. He will share His glory with no one!

And what this miracle did was that it opened the door for Peter to share the Word of God.

As I have said so often before, miracles don't save us, God's Word does!

Paul said in Romans 10:17, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”**

Let us not forget that. Today people are running after signs and wonders and they are putting the cart in front of the horse. Mark tells us that signs and wonders will follow after those who are following after Jesus! (Mark 16:15-18)

VERSES 36-38

Now, about 10 miles northwest of Lydda was Joppa, a seacoast city. And as Peter is ministering in Lydda, news comes that a dear saint has died, her name in the Greek is Dorcas and in Aramaic it is Tabitha and it means “Gazelle” or “Deer.” I guess you can say that she was a ***DEAR WOMAN!***

Now before you grown too much, notice this woman's reputation. She was loved by all and she ministered to all.

I like what Luke tells us here, she not only had all these things in her heart and mind, but she actually did them.

Many Christians have many good things they want to do in their heart and mind, but they don't do them.

Dorcas went the extra mile, she did them, and her faith was living, not dead!

So, what does this busy and probably much requested man named Peter do in a situation like this where he is asked to come to Joppa? He says, "Talk to my agent, he books all my engagements!" No, he doesn't say that. Let's read on and see what he does do.

VERSES 39-41

As we can see, Peter goes to Joppa and the people are weeping over the loss of this dear saint. And Peter clears the room and calls Tabitha to arise and she does, and he presents her back to her friends, those who loved her.

Now wait a minute, why did God raise Tabitha and not Stephen?

We don't know all the how's and why's of God but what we do know, that is what we must fall back on.

God is a God of love and all He does is perfect, it is fair, it is just, and thus, we can rest in that.

You see, in Stephen's death he didn't miss out on anything, he is with the Lord. It is those who are left behind that will miss this person and the blessings he bestowed upon them.

For Tabitha, she was going to die again, but as she lives she will face pain, suffering, heartaches. So, when you think about it, who really got the better deal, Tabitha or Stephen?

Also, here in Acts chapter 9 we see for the first time Christians called “**saints.**” We see this in in verses 13, 32 and 41 of Acts chapter 9.

It is the Greek word HAGIOS and is means “set apart ones.”

The Roman Catholic Church looks at saints as those appointed by the church because of good works, miracles they have done, and they have to be dead!

The Bible says all who are in Christ are saints, set apart ones for His glory, set apart from the world!

In Ephesians 1:1 we are told, “**. . . To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus . . .**” Paul was writing to the living not the dead!

VERSES 42-43

As we have seen, people were getting saved, the church was growing and yet, there is even more going on than what we see here.

You see, Peter stayed at the house of Simon the tanner. Now, for a Jew who was a keeper of the Law, this was a big no, no!

It was forbidden for anyone to associate themselves with someone who routinely worked with dead animals as a tanner would. According to the laws back then, you had to live 75 feet outside the city because you would be ritually unclean.

Morgan put it this way, “The trade of a tanner was held in such supreme contempt that if a girl was betrothed to a tanner without knowing that he followed that calling, the betrothal was void.”

But what we see here is that God was softening Peter's heart, preparing him to work with the Gentiles, who the Jews saw as unclean; in fact, they believed that Gentiles were only created by God to fuel the fires of Hell!

That wrong concept is going to be corrected in the next chapter as Peter's eyes are opened to what God is going to do.

And yes, Peter opened the door to the Gentiles and then Paul took over and ministered to them. For Peter, his work was with his fellow Jews, at least it will be as Paul comes on the scene!

Now here is a lesson for us in all of this. May we not get our prejudices or preconceived ideas in the way of what God wants to do, but be open to His Spirit and His Word!

Also, like in our own lives, bigger challenges will come to Peter, and we will see that next time!