

God Even Saves His Enemies (Acts 9:1-19)

I. Saul Continues His Violence Against The Church (1-2)

A. Saul the Zealous Persecutor (1a)

1. Saul was perhaps the greatest enemy of the church
 - a. He was absolutely centered on eradicating the Christians
 - b. He believed they were blaspheming God
 - c. The text says he was breathing out threats and murder
 - i. Literally, the word means to inhale
 - ii. This shows that every fiber of his being was set on doing whatever needed to be done to destroy this new church
2. Saul was systematically hunting the Christians
 - a. He was doing this over an extended period of time
 - b. This wasn't just a short period

B. Saul Receives Authority to Hunt Damascus Christians (1b-2)

1. Saul Himself took the initiative to get these documents
 - a. Evidently, he believed the Jerusalem church was contained
 - b. There must have been a growing number of believers in Damascus that drew the attention of the Sanhedrin
 - c. He went to the High Priest (which was Caiaphas) and asked to have letters to arrest Christians in Damascus
 - i. These would be shown at the synagogues in Damascus and would grant him authority to arrest people
 - ii. These letters would also allow him to investigate members of the synagogue to determine who was a Christ follower

II. Saul is Broken By the Risen Christ (3-9)

A. Jesus Confronts the Wicked Saul (3-6)

1. Saul is Forcefully And Divinely Opposed (3-4a)

- a. Saul is Confronted By a Bright Light From Heaven (3)
 - i. Acts 22:6 and Acts 26:13 tells us that this light happened at noon
 - ii. Acts 26:13 tells us that this light was brighter than the sun
 - iii. An incredibly powerful light is a common occurrence throughout the Bible when God's presence is manifested
- b. Saul is Knocked to The Ground By its Force (4a)
 - i. The power of the light is so great it knocks Paul to the ground

- This is the typical response when men come face to face with the awesome presence of God
 - This is much like Moses' and Isaiah's encounter with God's presence – they are all overcome by God's terrifying holiness
 - ii. Notice that no horse or donkey is mentioned in the text – it is often asserted that Saul is knocked from his donkey. This may be the case but the text never says Saul was riding an animal.
 - iii. Saul is not lying on the ground in humble submission. He was forced to the ground by the power of the one who appeared to him
2. Saul is Introduced to the Risen Lord (4b-6)
- a. Saul is Asked Why He is Persecuting Jesus (4b)
 - i. Saul hears a voice saying, "Saul Saul, why are you persecuting me?"
 - Jesus spoke to Saul in Hebrew (Acts 26:14)
 - Notice that Jesus is united with his people so that when his people are persecuted, he is persecuted
 - Jesus said to his disciples that those who accept you, accept me and those who reject you, reject me
 - ii. Saul has come face to face with the one whom he has been persecuting
 - Saul's mission to Damascus is not the only thing referenced here
 - Saul's whole life has been focused on persecuting Jesus – He is truly the enemy of the cross.
 - Saul is being accused in the same way Stephen was accused but here it is the Lord Himself who accuses Saul
 - b. Saul Asks Who Is Speaking (5a)
 - i. Saul understands that he has been persecuting the Christ followers but asks who is this speaking
 - ii. As a devout Jew, Saul would have recognized the magnitude of a heavenly light and a voice from heaven
 - iii. Either God Himself was speaking or the angel of the Lord – so Paul's question is not one of ignorance but one seeking clarification

- iv. He understands full well that he is in the presence of divinity
 - c. Jesus Identifies Himself to Saul (5b)
 - i. The voice answers Saul's question saying that He is Jesus – the one who Saul is persecuting
 - ii. In this moment, Saul realizes that Jesus is truly God and Messiah
 - He realizes that Jesus has truly risen from the grave like the Christians say
 - He realizes that He has rejected the fulfillment of God's covenant
 - iii. How terrifying it must have been to be faced with the realization that Saul has been murdering God's people all this time
 - d. Jesus Commands Saul To Rise and Go to Damascus (6)
 - i. Saul had been on the way to Damascus to persecute Jesus – now Jesus overpowers Saul and commands him to go to Damascus and wait for instructions
 - ii. Saul will go to Damascus, but not as conqueror or persecutor – but as a subdued enemy of God
- B. Saul Is Helplessly Led Into Damascus (7-8)
- 1. Saul's Companions Heard the Sound But Saw Nothing (7)
 - a. Saul's encounter was not just a personal vision or a hallucination– it was real
 - b. His companions heard the sound of the voice, although they did not understand what was said (Acts 22:9)
 - c. Perhaps they did not understand because Jesus spoke to him in Hebrew (Acts 26:14) – Many Jews in the first century did not speak Hebrew anymore, they spoke only Aramaic and Greek.
 - 2. The Blinded Saul is Led By His Companions (8)
 - a. Saul opens his eyes and he is blind
 - i. This seems to indicate that while Jesus was speaking Paul's eyes remained closed
 - ii. He was obviously terrified and his eyes remained shut in fear
 - iii. Blindness at midday is one of the curses for breaking the covenant listed in Deut. 28:29
 - Saul's blindness was a consequence of his rejection of Christ and the persecution of his people
 - To be without Christ is to be outside of God's covenant
 - b. Saul is now helpless and must be led to Damascus

- i. The great and feared persecutor of the Church is now rendered helpless and must be led to the city
- ii. Saul is now broken and helpless – cursed with blindness for breaking God’s covenant
- iii. Saul had been spiritually blind for his whole life, now he was physically blind – He is blind in every sense

C. Saul is Broken And Fasts For Three Days (9)

- 1. Once in Damascus, Saul is completely broken
- 2. As a devout Jew, he understands that he needs forgiveness for all that he has done
 - a. He prays and fasts for three days (Ananias will be told that Paul is praying)
 - b. Imagine what is going through Saul’s mind. Before today, he considered himself righteous in God’s sight as a devout adherent to the law. Now he realizes he has broken God’s commands with every breath
 - c. He probably descends into hopelessness as many OT scriptures about wrath and the curse race through his mind
 - d. He probably can see the faces of those he has imprisoned and murdered because of their faith in Jesus
 - e. In his blindness, he can see nothing and his mind probably runs wild in despair and repentance.

III. Saul is Reborn By Faith in Jesus (10-19)

A. God Instructs a Disciple to Minister to Saul (10-12)

- 1. The Lord Appears to Ananias (10)
 - a. Ananias is an unknown disciple in the city of Damascus
 - i. He may have been known by those in Damascus
 - ii. He was certainly on Saul’s list of people to arrest
 - b. Unlike Saul, Ananias immediately recognizes the voice of his savior
- 2. The Lord Commands Ananias to go to Saul as He is praying (11)
 - a. Jesus gives Ananias the exact location of where Saul is
 - b. Jesus tells Ananias to go to Saul right now as he is praying
 - c. Saul was in the midst of praying and fasting, moving further and further into conviction and despair as he assesses his situation
 - d. Now is the time for God to use Ananias to minister to Saul
 - i. Notice that God could have easily spoken to Saul himself and told him what needed to be said

- ii. God uses his people to bring the gospel and the redemption of salvation
 - iii. God will use you and I in the same way
- 3. The Lord Says Saul Has Been Given a Vision of Ananias' coming (12)

- a. God has indeed prepared Saul for Ananias' coming
 - b. Saul has been told that a servant of Christ is coming to restore his sight

B. God Reassures the Disciple of His Purpose (13-16)

1. Ananias Expresses Reservations About Safety (13-14)

- a. Saul has become famous for arresting and killing Christians
 - i. Ananias is skeptical about going into the den of one who has such a reputation
 - ii. Ananias is essentially walking to his death if Saul is the man the Christians have heard of
- b. Saul's mission to kill the Damascus Christians is also well known
 - i. Ananias is afraid that he will be first on Saul's list
 - ii. Ananias knows that Saul has been given authority by the High Priest to arrest those who call on Christ's name
- c. We often are afraid to step out when God calls – sometimes it means walking into danger but God always has a perfect purpose in mind

2. Jesus Explains His Plans For Saul (15-16)

- a. The Lord Calls Saul a Chosen Instrument (15)
 - i. Jesus has chosen Saul to be one of the most influential Christians of all time
 - ii. Jesus has chosen Saul to spread the gospel throughout the known world
 - iii. Jesus has chosen Saul to pen many of the books of Scripture
 - iv. We never really know what impact a simple obedient witness will have on the kingdom of God
- b. The Lord Says Saul will Suffer For His Name (16)
 - i. Saul has caused much suffering for the kingdom of God
 - ii. Saul will now have to suffer himself for the furtherance of the gospel

3. Saul is Brought Into the Kingdom of God (17-19)

- a. Ananias Obediently Comes to Saul (17)
 - i. Ananias calls him "Brother Saul"

- ii. Ananias lays his hands upon Saul (which is probably the first human contact Saul has had in three days)
 - iii. Ananias is the hands of Jesus as he brings the gospel to Saul
 - He has come to return Saul's sight
 - He has come so that the gospel of the new covenant will be manifest in Saul and he will receive the Holy Ghost
- b. Saul is Converted (18)
 - i. Saul's blindness disappears as he trusts in Jesus
 - ii. Saul is converted into a new creature
 - iii. Saul chooses to follow his conversion by obediently being baptized before he eats – after fasting three days
- c. Saul Stayed With the Disciples in Damascus (19)
 - i. Saul then eats and regains strength
 - ii. Saul has embraced the forgiveness Jesus offers – even for the most hated enemy of God
 - iii. Saul remains with the disciples in Damascus as a brother to those whom he came to kill

Application: There is no one beyond the forgiveness of God

God uses His people to bring conversion and redemption to sinners
We never know the impact of our witness – we could share the gospel with someone God intends to use mightily for the kingdom
God is never afraid to knock someone into the dirt in order to get their attention
Fellowship is the natural state of those who have embraced forgiveness