

ACTS 9:1-19 FEFC The Road To Damascus

REVIEW/INTRO

Last week we saw Philip lead the Ethiopian Treasury Secretary to Christ on the road to Gaza. Philip baptized the Ethiopian as a sign of his commitment to Jesus Christ.

This week we see Saul reappear in the storyline. Let's take a look at the events of Acts 9:1-19.

BIBLE VIDEO ACTS 9:1-19

PREACHING THE TEXT

Acts 9:1-19 (NIV)

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

Saul was a Pharisee on the Sanhedrin Council in Jerusalem when Jesus was arrested and brought before the council. He was there when Peter and John and Stephen were brought before the council. Saul was a student of the most respect teacher and Pharisee on the Sanhedrin Council, Gamaliel.

Saul was there when Stephen was killed by the Sanhedrin Council. And he wanted to do away with this

Jesus stuff once and for all. But it kept coming up again and again.

MURDEROUS THREATS

Saul persecuted the church in Jerusalem and scattered the church to the neighboring territory of Samaria and Judea. But instead of hiding, the scattered members of the church began winning people to Christ in those places and growing more churches.

Saul is out of his mind with rage. This church won't die. Instead of fizzling out in Jerusalem, now the church was growing and spreading into Samaria as a result of persecution.

We can tell that Saul is out of his mind with rage because he is breathing murderous threats. Have you ever looked in the mirror when you are having a hissy fit? You are breathing in and out really quickly. Your eyes narrow. And each time you breath in your chest swells and each time you breath out Yosemite Sam noises come out of your mouth.

(Saul) went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

LETTERS TO THE SYNAGOGUES

So Saul got arrest orders from the Sanhedrin. This would work like an arrest warrant from one state for the arrest of a criminal that had fled to another state.

DAMASCUS

Damascus is Northeast of Samaria. Some believers went through Samaria and then kept going north to spread the word of Christ to the whole world.

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

HALEY = **SLIDE**: GREAT BLINDING LIGHT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT...(make it difficult for people watching to look at the screen if we can pull this off)

SUDDENLY A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

This was not a storm that approached gradually on rolling clouds. With no warning suddenly a great blinding light from heaven flashed around him. This light surrounded him. It enveloped Saul and probably those who traveled with Saul.

There was no thunder to accompany the blinding light. Saul must have felt pressure in soul and spirit and whole

being. He was crushed to the ground as if to lay prone in front this great light.

This light is the Lord Jesus Christ. When people experience the presence of the glorified Christ they feel the crushing weight of His holiness. Have you ever had the weight and light of God's holiness drive you to your knees?

We know this was the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul claimed to be a witness of the resurrection. One of the qualifications of being an apostle was that you had to be a witness of His resurrection. And by seeing Christ raised and glorified he met that qualification.

1 Corinthians 9:1¹ *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?*

So the resurrected Jesus Christ appears to Saul in a great and brilliant light of glory. What is Paul's response?

4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

HALEY: **SLIDE** OF PERSON LAYING ON HIS FACE IN FRONT OF GOD

HIS RESPONSE

Paul's response to God's unveiled glory is an automatic response. When Jesus Christ returns every knee with bow.

No one can stand in front of the glory of Jesus Christ. Who can fight against God or make war against Him?

God's revelation of Himself is the beginning of salvation. Saul feels the weight of God's great holiness unveiled in his presence. His body and soul and spirit are crushed to the ground under the presence of God.

THE VOICE

The voice of Jesus Christ spoke from the light. Everyone in Saul's traveling party heard the voice of Jesus.

WHY DO YOU PERSECUTE ME?

"Why do you persecute me?" The people of Jesus are the body of Christ. When you feel pain or persecution Jesus feels it deeply. You have the Holy Spirit and that connects you to Jesus Christ. And whatever you experience and feel and see and hear is also experienced by Jesus.

When someone persecutes a Christian Jesus is literally with the one who is going through difficulty. And Jesus really does feel your pain. He knows what you are going through. He is with you in this world. So Jesus speaks to Saul and tells Saul that he is attacking his body. Jesus knows and feels this attack because the attack is on His own body.

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom

you are persecuting,” he replied. 6 “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

WHO ARE YOU LORD?

Saul heard a voice that he had never heard before. He knew it was the Lord. But he needed to understand how he could possibly be persecuting the Lord. Saul thought he was serving the Lord by getting rid of these Christians who threatened the Jewish faith.

I AM JESUS

Saul was probably in the Sanhedrin when Peter and John were whipped for preaching about Jesus . He was a witness of the events when the angel broke Peter and John out of jail. He was there when Philip addressed the Sanhedrin and Philip's face shone with the glory of God. All of these things occurred while the name of Jesus was being preached. Yet Saul was spiritually blind and needed a God sighting to wake up his spirit and give him eyes of faith.

So here is Saul the great persecutor of the church, laying in the dirt. Head hung low and probably shocked and suddenly aware that he was not serving God like he thought he was. He was on the wrong side of the battle. And he must suddenly realize the entire Sanhedrin Council is on the wrong side of God's blessing. They actually did kill the

Messiah. And what about Peter and John he might have thought; no wonder they drew crowds of tens of thousands. No wonder Steven said he saw Jesus sitting at the right hand of God when we were stoning him to death. Oh my! What have I done!? Is Jesus going to kill me? How can I make this right? How can I let others know what is going on?
GET UP

Jesus knows he has Saul's attention. He sees Saul laying face down. Instead of killing Saul, Jesus paid enough on the cross for Saul's sin. So he tells Saul to get up. Go into the city. Let's get this thing going the right way.

If you think you have gone too far Jesus died for your sin. Don't stay where you are. Get up. There is a great purpose waiting for you. Get up and do what Jesus says.

Back to Saul...all of his traveling companions heard the voice speak out of the blinding light. How did they react?

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

SPEECHLESS

There are times when God reveals to people His glory and awesome power. People use the word awesome, or huge or greatest of all time. But when you actually see the greatest of all time the words are not enough. And often when people get a glimpse of God's own glory they end up on their face or knees. Their mouth is hanging open and they stutter and search for words. The physical and spiritual shock of seeing the Lord of glory is probably beyond words and must be experienced in order to comprehend.

BLINDNESS

Before meeting Jesus Saul had spiritual blindness. Now because of his opposition to Jesus - Saul is physically blind. There are other occasions in scripture when God stops the enemies of his people by striking them with temporary blindness.

2 Kings 6:18-20 (NIV)

18 As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike this army with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

FASTING (HE DID NOT EAT OR DRINK ANYTHING)

So Saul's traveling companions, probably members of the temple guard led him by the hand into town.

Saul does not eat or drink anything for three days. What does he care about food and water for when he has just found out that he has acted as an enemy of the Lord of Glory. He is blind. He is fasting. And Saul does what the Lord Jesus tells him to do. What choice does he really have.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias.

The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. Ananias knows the Lords voice. When the Lord speaks he does not have to ask; "who are you Lord?" Ananias has been speaking with and listening to the voice of Jesus for years like many of you.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

Ananias must have thought: "I hear you Lord, but haven't I heard this name before? Hmmm! What else Lord?" Then the Lord said in verse 12:

12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

Ananias must have thought: "So Lord, this man Saul has seen a vision of me coming to lay hands on him to restore his sight. Well good thing he is blind because I know

who you are talking about Lord. This is a spooky thing you are asking me to do."

13 "Lord," ..., "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

"Lord are you sure you have me talking to the right guy? Seriously, this guy came here to throw me in jail. His guards are with him. They have handcuffs and weapons. And they are not afraid to use them. Maybe there is another guy names Saul on South Straight Street. I think you are sending me to North Straight Street. Lord, I don't want to try your patience, but can you just verify the address for me please?"

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

"Okay" Lord Ananias thought. "When you say the word GO to me. I know you are telling me to take the great commission seriously. I know that we are supposed to go to all kinds of people everywhere. So I am going to listen to you Lord. I am choosing to trust you right now, even though you

have asked me to do something that makes me afraid. If you are asking me to face my fear and if you have chosen this man as your own, then I know he will respond when I go into the house and lay hands on him and pray for Him. So Lord please begin working on his heart right now because here I go. Please go with me Lord. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit Lord because I need your power to be at work. And if I should be called to suffer I am willing. But I will obey you. Thank you for your reassurance."

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again.

Ananias must have thought: "Wow Lord I can feel your power all over me as I am praying over Saul right now. Look at that! Scales fell out of his eyes. You told me to pray for him that his sight would be restored. And then something popped out of his eyes. Now that is awesome. Now I know that you are ministering to him and blessing him. Now I know that he is truly called to your purposes."

Ananias turned to Saul; "Saul, now that you have believed in Jesus Christ to forgive your sin and you have repented of your sin why don't we go and baptize you in the river just down the road. Then we can get something to eat.

God told me that you have a great purpose and you need your strength to take the next steps that God is wanting you to take."

(Saul) got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

The result of Ananias' obedience is that he got to be part of welcoming the most influential person to the Christian Church. Saul would change his name to Paul and become a leading apostle, and write much of the New Testament. And here he is in front of Ananias born again. He is no longer an enemy. He is a brother. He is no longer on a mission to destroy the church. He is on a mission to build the church. We usually do not hear much about Ananias. However, there are many uncelebrated heroes like Ananias;

John Staupitz - led Martin Luther to Jesus Christ

John Eggleston - led C.H. Spurgeon to Christ

Edward Kimball - Was a shoe salesman and mentored D.L. Moody

Mordecai Ham - Preached the gospel the night that Billy

Graham received Jesus Christ

Ananias - Ministered to the Saul who would become the Apostle Paul.

We never know how God will use our efforts and obedience to make a huge impact in our world. It all begins with the word GO and the action of OBEDIENCE.

And now it was no longer time for Saul to fast and pray and mourn over his sin. It was time to rejoice and celebrate. Because now Saul is on the right side of what God is blessing.

SUMMARY

So Saul gets orders from the Sanhedrin to pursue the people of Jesus all the way to Damascus and take them back home in chains. He takes several people with him on the journey. Some to handle the gear and some soldiers to help him round up the people of the church.

On his way to Damascus a brilliant light shines all around Saul. That light forces him to the ground. A voice speaks out of the brilliant light. Saul, why do you persecute me? All the guards and traveling companions hear the voice and see the brilliant light. They are speechless.

Saul asks; "who are you Lord?" and the voice in the brilliant light say; this is Jesus whom you are persecuting. Every Christian is in union with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Whatever we experience is also experienced and felt deeply by Jesus Christ. In fact we are called the body of Christ. Anyone that has something happen to their own body feels it and identifies it in their mind. Saul was persecuting the body of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is there in our suffering. He knows our pain. He feels our pain. He has an answer and a reason for whatever you are going through today.

His answer was to save the person that was persecuting his own body. He did this by showing up and he helped confirm these events through his servant Ananias the prophet. It would be difficult for Saul to be accepted into the body without the witness of Ananias.

Sometimes God leads us on a road that is not one we would design for ourselves. But as Ananias discovered God's blessings are found on the other end of obedience.

There are many people like Ananias who had a profound effect on the body of Christ and church history. You never know what God can do when you are obedient and

ready to follow through on what God tells you to do.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Where are you today? Has Jesus Christ revealed himself to you?
2. Are you coming under persecution for the name of Jesus? If so, God knows what you are going through. You are a part of His own body.
3. Is God calling you to walk on a path that you would not design for yourself?
4. If so, know that God will give you reassurance from His word and His Holy Spirit.
5. What step do you have to take today in order to follow through with what God wants you to do?