

An Amazing New Apostle—Acts 9:20-22—12/14/25
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Open to Acts 9 & let's begin by reading again this account of Saul's conversion on the Damascus road & what God did in him. [READ]

As I prepared & preached verses 10-19 last week, I was increasingly awoken to how important this chapter is.

The more I considered why God gave us this chapter, the more I was impacted with how vital it is for us to know this man Saul.

As I mentioned last week—God put these verses in our Bibles to ground us with reasonable, undeniable trust in His Word.

The Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write about Saul's salvation & calling because he wrote 13 of the 22 books of the NT as the Apostle Paul.

The Lord Jesus appeared to Saul to humble him & show him that Jesus had risen from the dead & ascended to heaven.

Everyone around him heard & saw the undeniable divine appearance.

And Luke recorded it so that we would know how trustworthy the writings & ministry of the Apostle Paul are.

Of course, the Holy Spirit is the divine author of all Scripture, but we know the human author Paul from what's in Acts.

Understanding the majestic transformation of Acts 9 brings so much of the NT into vibrant color & anchored certainty.

So we want to marvel at the work of God in Saul's life again today to further deepen our appreciation of the NT Scriptures.

And we also want to learn from what made Saul so fruitful that can also abound our fruitfulness in life & ministry.

I mean, most of you want your life to matter, right?—you want your life to have an impact that lasts.

You want eternal significance in the ways you bless others & you want heavenly reward to await you.

So in secondary applications today, we want to take lessons for our lives from God's work through Saul's life.

As with last week, I'm impressed increasingly with the purpose of Acts 9 being the undeniably divine call on Saul's life.

We want to deepen that supreme certainty that the Lord Jesus moved Saul to become what he was in ministry.

So we'll outline 3 ways God worked through Saul to testify so powerfully to the Person & work of Jesus.

But then secondarily by application, we also want to let those 3 points shine light into our own lives to point us to maximum fruitfulness.

We want God's work through Saul to show us the path of eternal impact in our testimony & relationships & ministry.

The 1st of those is that God worked through Saul's preaching of Jesus.

That may seem obvious, but it's worth pondering.

Point #1—God worked through Saul's preaching of Jesus.

Saul had been humbled to trust Jesus & had been filled with the Holy Spirit & baptized & added to the church at Damascus.

But then what happened?—read verse 20 again to see it. [READ]

Then immediately—immediately after some number of days with the disciples at Damascus discussing Jesus' fulfillment of Scripture—Saul became a preacher for Jesus.

He did not begin preaching a new religion or a moral code & he did not preach his testimony because that spoke for itself.

The verb *kerusso* in verse 20 that's translated *proclaim* is the word for a herald or reporter from the king or from a divine source who publicly announces the message.

It's the imperfect tense in verse 20 meaning he *began* to do it and was continually doing it—proclaiming Jesus was the pattern of Saul.

This was *immediately* or suddenly or at once, as if the weight of Saul's salvation & Jesus' words to him had hit him.

Saul enjoyed the fellowship of the saints in Damascus, but then he felt the urgent compulsion to talk about Jesus, to tell people.

And since Jews should have known the OT Scriptures, he started with preaching to them.

He was proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues, verse 20 says, where Jews would be regularly gathering for worship & reading Scripture.

That was an obvious starting place & should've been fertile soil for the Word of God to be explained.

And now that Saul knew who Jesus was, he could not contain it.

He could not hold back from trumpeting this news to others.

That's like what Peter & John told the Jewish leaders who threatened them to stop speaking in Jesus' name.

Acts 4:20 says they said, *we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen & heard.*

And that should be expected, shouldn't it?—it should not be strange.

We've seen it in others & hopefully in our own lives—when God saves us from our sins & we realize who Jesus is & what He has done for us who trust Him, it's uncontainable.

If your relatives or friends were not Christians when you came to Christ, then you likely understand this compulsion to tell them.

If you felt the weight of your eternal guilt fall off like John Bunyan depicted Pilgrim's pack fall off at the cross, then you feel the relief & joy that must be reported.

If you see the destructiveness of your sins & the transforming power of Jesus to free you to walk in newness of life, you must tell others.

You sense the sad slavery of others in the lifestyle you once lived & you rush to speak of Jesus to see them saved.

What we see in the immediate evangelistic impulse of Saul should be normal for a new Christian & habitual for all Christians.

If it's not—or when it's not—then we need to ask why not?

I mean, right?—shouldn't we ask why we would not be making public the proclamation of Jesus as much as possible?

Aren't the reasons we keep quiet basically selfish & senseless?

Why fear men when Jesus said in Luke 12:4-5, *do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!*

Understanding who Jesus truly is should be a motivation to drive out fear & all other temptations to stay silent about Him.

Note at the end of Acts 9:20 what Saul said in his preaching of Jesus—he was saying "He is the Son of God"—this One is the Son of God.

I may unpack that terminology more next week as we meditate on the wonder of Christmas together.

But for today, just realize that Jesus is equal with the God the Father—He is the Promised Son of God who would reign in divine majesty.

Or to put it like Peter did in Acts 2—Jesus is Lord—He is Yahweh God of the OT & He is the Master & King before whom we all must bow in reverence.

There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved, as Peter preached in Acts 4:12.

There is no other Son equal to the heavenly Father.

There is no One like Jesus who is the God who became flesh as a Man.

It's not like we cheer or support Him & His cause, but worry that some other branch of government could override His rule or vote Him out or appeal to a higher court than Him.

It's not like Jesus is merely the best competitor in the cosmic war.

No. Rather, He is the Creator of the cosmos—He made the universe & He is accomplishing all His good & wise plans.

So don't resist Him & don't shrink back from proclaiming Him.

Saul made significant eternal impact because he preached Jesus, because that was his immediate, unstoppable impulse.

He could make a tent or help others make tents as his occupation to provide, but what he really wanted was to tell people about Jesus.

Rekindle that flame of exaltation of Jesus in your life.

Pray for awareness of opportunities to speak of Jesus to others & even to do so publicly where many can hear or overhear you doing so.

Be devoted to preaching Jesus, to bringing every conversation, every conflict & every issue back to Jesus somehow.

And to come back to the main point—realize how God worked through Saul's preaching of Jesus.

That's how God used Saul & it's how God can use us.

But it is also how God uniquely used Saul.

It seems Jesus made Saul an evangelistic preacher first & that was particularly powerful because of Saul's proven life change.

So let's consider that as a 2nd point in seeing how God worked through Saul—note 2ndly how God worked through Saul's proven conversion.

#1, God worked through Saul's preaching of Jesus, & then #2, God worked through Saul's proven conversion.

And by that I mean Saul was irrefutably a new man, that Jesus had converted him, changed him, transformed his life.

That's what conversion means—it's the move of turning away from the old in repentance to turn toward the new in faith.

As 2nd Corinthians 5:17 describes: *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

It means Jesus was undoubtedly Saul's newly trusted Lord & that was evident to everyone as we read in verse 21. [READ]

All who were hearing him were astounded, awestruck, astonished.

This was unbelievable & yet it was obviously happening before their eyes with the messages going into their ears.

And it was not merely some who were amazed, but all who heard him.

And they were not merely amazed once, but again an imperfect verb indicates that this was ongoing, continual amazement.

It's like they were leaning over to one another saying, "Is this REAL? Pinch me, I can't believe this is really happening!"

But what they said was more specific & graphic as Luke wrote.

They were continually saying, "Is this not the destroyer in Jerusalem, the one wreaking havoc & pillaging those who call on this name?"

And it was this name, the same name he was now preaching.

Saul was preaching in the synagogues where he had planned to search for & bind Christians to persecute.

The most zealous opponent became the most ardent evangelist.

How could he so quickly & radically be changed?

Because God had made His power known in the life of Saul.

This conversion & commissioning for ministry was not explainable according to human power or reason.

As in verse 14 of this chapter, those who call on Jesus' name are believers in Jesus, disciples & followers & Christians.

That was the same name that Saul was now calling on & preaching.

Those hearing Saul were continually saying what Ananias had said when Jesus told Ananias to go to Saul.

It was public knowledge that Saul had come to Damascus in this purpose of bringing those who call on Jesus' name to the chief priests in Jerusalem after he had found them & bound them.

Everyone knew that & Christians like Ananias had feared him & now the Jews that might have cheered him were baffled.

What happened to Saul was drastic & undeniably divine.

And realize that when Saul was persecuting Christians, he was well-respected & likely well-funded in his efforts before this.

He had government support & cultural affirmation & recognized fame.

So ask—why would he give all that up & turn from it all?

And he did not give it up to go on vacation or escape the stress of it.

No. Rather he became one with the people he had persecuted.

He had completely switched sides in this ideological war.

The only explanation was that he knew Jesus had risen from the dead & proven to be the Son of God.

As Jesus had said before the chief priests at His trial, He was the Son of God, claiming equality with God.

And now that Saul knew that, he would never be the same.

Think of God's choice of this man to be the Apostle to the Gentiles.

There could be no one less likely to choose for this role, no one so completely opposite & unexpected for this role.

But that's what God did to prove without question that He had made this choice, that God alone was the sovereign initiator & orchestrator.

As always, God had chosen to show grace to Saul in this way for God's own glory in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Saul was a vessel of mercy, as he would later write in Romans 9.

So when we read Romans 9 & all the NT texts by him, we can marvel & be assured that God alone had prepared Saul.

Jesus was glorified & continues to be glorified by how God worked through Saul's proven life-changing conversion.

Do you see that 2nd point?

And although Saul's story & Apostleship were unique, this lesson still applies to believers today when God proves each conversion genuine.

The newness in Christ described in 2nd Corinthians 5:17 is not merely what God did with Saul—it's true of every Christian.

That's Paul's argument in Romans 6 that we who died to sin will surely not want to live in it anymore.

As those raised to new life by the Spirit, we surely will want to walk in newness of life & not in the old slavery to sin.

Or as Jesus put it in Matthew 7—you will know them by their fruits, whether a good tree with good fruit or a bad tree bearing bad fruit.

As God makes people new & bears good fruit, He is honored & His Gospel is proven as glorious & powerful.

That's why we sing His praise & exalt Christ & rejoice in the treasures of the Gospel week by week as we remember His grace together.

It's also why it's so fun to hear stories of God's grace in *your* lives whether those are testimonies in baptism or otherwise.

I recently told one faithful couple that they need to share their stories because they started a beautiful new generation by God's grace.

What they experienced growing up is not what they have lived & passed on to their kids because Jesus has transformed them.

They have conversion that are proven & so do so many of you.

We can praise God for His grace to save us & to keep on changing us & even using us to serve others by His power.

As with Saul, it is the filling of the Spirit that strengthens us.

And listen—if you think your salvation testimony seems boring because you grew up in a Christian home & never remember a time when you did not believe the Gospel, celebrate that!

Do not be sad or discouraged that you do not have tragic stories of rebellion & the pain of lostness that God rescued you from.

Praise God for every extent of sin He preserved you from ever becoming a slave of & rejoice in that sovereign mercy.

And realize that the root of every sin can rise in your heart—& so you are a sinner against God who needs His grace in Christ as we all do.

We all can only be saved by God's gracious initiative to reach into our hearts with His truth & show us the glory of Jesus.

So if Jesus is precious to you—if you praise Him for living & dying & rising again & you have new life in Him—then seriously worship Him.

Don't think your sin is not a big deal & that you don't need to surrender all to Him.

Your sin is worse if you knew more truth & your need is greater because you are tempted to treat the most holy riches as bland.

To be preserved from sin is wonderful, but we all continually need to be pried away from sin inside us increasingly.

As we take that seriously—as we display the importance of following Jesus with everything—then our proven life change will shine.

Then even your siblings & church friends & others will be able to see—"wow, he or she is different"!

That's what we want—not for our own glory, please get that—not so that people praise you, but that Jesus is praised.

We want our conversion proven so that people praise Jesus because He has rescued His enemies & made them His friends.

God can then work through our testimonies to preach Jesus, to spread the wonder of His saving Gospel.

And like Saul, we can be encouraged when God uses His transforming testimony in our lives to reach others.

Read how that occurred for Saul in verse 22. [READ]

Saul was being strengthened continually & that verb's passive voice indicates that someone else was strengthening Saul.

Obviously, it was God, by the filling empowering of the Holy Spirit, that was increasing Saul's ability to do what he was doing.

And what he was doing was confounding the Jews dwelling in Damascus, confusing their unbelief & leaving them troubled.

The Jews had no answer or ability to refute Saul as he was proving that Jesus was the Christ.

Saul was bringing the biblical facts together as that word prove pictures—uniting all the fibers of evidence to make the case.

He was weaving together OT prophecies & themes & expectations to lead to the logical conclusion that this Jesus is the Christ.

He put forth an argument that was compelling & convincing.

He was demonstrating that from OT Scripture, instructing & teaching & advising to make connections from the evidence.

He could do so because he knew the OT from his upbringing & from his training under the respected rabbi Gamaliel.

And he had also studied further to try to contend against Christians.

But now that Bible knowledge was channeled into persuasive argumentation & proclamation of Jesus as the Christ.

So we might note as a 3rd point that God worked through Saul's persuasive instruction.

#3—God worked through Saul's persuasive instruction.

By persuasive I mean he spoke to make a difference, to change minds, to show the truth in a way that was inescapable.

Such persuasiveness commands action & demands a response.

Yet this was instruction—it was not emotionalism as if Saul turned on the syrupy music & ramped up the repetition to move people.

No, not at all—God has given words, truths written in logical & clear sentences in various genres of literature to study.

And God uses those truths—He uses understanding—to change lives.

The word prove includes that idea of instruction because God takes truth into the mind for understanding that then shapes the will to move to action.

So please don't miss that Saul was confounding those who tried to oppose him by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

The means he used was persuasive instruction, compelling proof that he would have shown from OT Scripture.

He did not merely present facts or share information.

He spoke with urgency to demand a response.

His presentation was not for performance or entertainment.

It was not for listeners to take it or leave it.

What he said mattered greatly & he labored to make it clear.

This Jesus truly is the Christ & that cannot be denied & it cannot be shrugged off as nice but not life-changing.

And I'll also likely say more about that term *the Christ* next week as we consider reminders of the wonder of Jesus' coming at Christmas.

But for today, just remember that the Christ is the Hebrew word for the Messiah, the Anointed One, the King chosen by God to fulfill all His promises for a kingdom.

The Christ is the Long Expected One, as we sang last week.

He was expected for a long time because from Adam's first sin, God had promised a Deliverer to come to crush sin & Satan.

That was the expected Christ & Saul had seen those themes of salvation in the Scriptures & the promises of that Deliverer.

And so he was proving that Jesus was that Christ.

He was doing so in a way that shut the mouths of Jews in Damascus.

It was like Stephen had done as Saul had likely heard.

As Acts 6:10 said of Stephen's preaching: *they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.*

So here with Saul, listeners could not figure out how to argue against him or disagree or make a defense for their unbelief.

And that happened because God had prepared Saul with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, a solid foundation of Bible knowledge.

By the way, that's what's so exciting about the numerous resources for your spiritual growth that are available today.

Even our own church website can be overwhelming in the options for studying & growing the truths of Scripture.

You can be equipped & ready to share with others the eternally saving truths that can shower their lives with blessing.

Why would you waste your time doing other things of lesser value?

Why would you be an expert on entertainment or passing fads that will not matter in two months, much less two millennia?

Saul's example shows us how powerful a mind packed with biblical truth can be as a tool put to work by the Holy Spirit.

So pack God's truth into your heart & mind & pray for him to train you & use you greatly for His glory.

And recall what Saul did with his Bible knowledge—he persuaded.

That means, first, that he talked to people—that's a struggle for some of you & you need to start there & work on that.

But we all need to labor to be persuasive, to be convincing, to gather truths & connect the Scriptural links to demonstrate proof that Jesus is the Christ, the one & only Savior to trust & follow.

That's something to think about & practice & work at.

And don't do it so you can feel important or powerful or to pad your pride or intellectual ego or to put others down.

Don't seek to be persuasive to manipulate people to follow you or like you or be controlled to give you what you want.

The model here is to be persuasive with the truth of Scripture.

It is to explain passages that point to Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus is the focus—His is the glory.

I pray that we are all being more thoroughly equipped for that as we have been studying Acts & seeing the sermons point back to so many OT prophecies & themes about Jesus.

I pray that you are able to trace the line of the Seed from Genesis 3:15 to Genesis 12 with Abraham all throughout the OT.

I pray you grasp the building expectations & the significance of the biblical covenants with Abraham & David.

We want to grow increasingly in being able to make that clear case of Jesus as the Christ from the Scriptures.

We want to present that persuasively in a way that can be followed, that's not mysterious or cryptic or forced.

We want people to be able to follow the connections & see it all for themselves in the Scriptures so that they learn to trust God's Word.

That's why you need to bring your Bible to church as we do expositional preaching—exposing you to what's written so that you can put your finger on the words & verses & see it there.

Then you can go show & tell others what the Bible says—not merely what your pastor says—but what God has said in His Word.

You can give persuasive instruction to your children as you train them in the home & correct & counsel & motivate & love & shepherd them day after day.

God can use your preaching of Jesus, your proven conversion, & your persuasive instruction in the lives of everyone you know.

Be encouraged by that & be motivated to pray & grow & speak & serve & trust God to work as He wishes.

And again, God prepared Saul for exactly this impact by all the training in Scripture that he had & the gifts for speaking & more.

Jesus rescued & raised up this man Saul to be a persuasive preacher of Jesus the Christ & Son of God.

Then Jesus used Saul as a proven instrument to write much of the NT that explains the theology & practice of Jesus coming as the Christ.

Jesus prepared Saul & had him travel to the Gentiles & write letters to churches that would shape the theology of the church.

So be amazed at the trust in the NT that gives you—be encouraged by this marvelous work of God in the life of this man the Apostle Paul.

Let it challenge you personally & deepen your trust in the NT.

Be amazed at God's work through Saul's preaching of Jesus, through Saul's proven conversion, & through Saul's persuasive instruction.

Let's pray for God's work in our response to these truths.

Pray with me as we close.