SERMON TRANSCRIPT

11.08.2026 | Jesus Turns Things Around| Acts 9:19-43 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, let's go to Acts chapter nine. We've been walking through the Book of Acts and we've been considering how we see throughout the whole Book of Acts, the word of God and the spirit of God working in and through the church of God. One thing that we've seen over our last few times of studying the Book of Acts is that the spirit and the word reach unlikely people, new people. See the gospel going forth and reaching people who we maybe would have never thought would have been reached with the gospel. Last week we saw Saul who was persecuting the church be reached by the gospel. Today we'll see his life being changed. This is a theme, the gospel reaching unlikely people see in the coming weeks as well. So we see the gospel going to the Gentiles. But today we kind of have a section of the Book of Acts in which we're not seeing the gospel go necessarily to new people as much as we're seeing the way that the gospel changes people's lives. The way the word and the spirit brings change to people, to circumstances, to whole situations.

And today we're gonna look at kind of a longer section of the Book of Acts. Anytime you're walking through a whole book, you have to kind of try to decide how we're gonna divide it up. And today I've decided to kind of take a longer section and see a few different narratives that I think all come together under one kind of major theme. So just so you know, today we'll see that the same Saul who was just converted on his road to Damascus, his life is being radically changed. We'll see that in Damascus and then in Jerusalem. We'll see how that affects the whole church. Then we'll see Peter kind of reenter the story of the Book of Acts and Peter is used in different situations, the life of a man named Aeneas and then a woman who's named Tabitha or Dorcas. And God is using Peter to change people's lives. And this is what I think is the major theme throughout this whole section of Acts chapter nine. That is that Jesus is changing lives. Jesus is changing circumstances. That any situation that might feel hopeless, that we might feel discouraged, we need to have hope that Jesus can turn things around.

And so I want to read to you this section of Acts chapter nine starting in verse 19. We'll go all the way through the end of the chapter which is verse 43. And I want you just to get this glimpse of how Jesus is working to turn things around. Speaking about Saul who was just converted, he was baptized in the name of Jesus, Luke writes, "And taking food, he was strengthened. "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. "When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him. "But the 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. "When he had come to Jerusalem, "he attempted to join the disciples. "They were all afraid of him. "They did not believe that he was a disciple. "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, 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. "He spoke and disputed against the Hellenists, "but they were seeking to kill him. "And when the brothers learned this, "they brought him down to Caesarea "and sent him off to Tarsus. "To the church all throughout 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, he'd multiplied. "Now as Peter went here and there among them all, "he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. "There he found a man named Aeneas, "bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. "And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you, "rise and make your bed. "And immediately he rose. "And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him "and they turned to the Lord. "Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, "which translated means dorkus. "And she was full of good works and acts of charity. "In those days she became ill and died. "When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. "Since Lydda was near Joppa, "the disciples hearing that Peter was there "sent two men to him, urging him, "please come to us without delay. "So Peter rose and went with them. "And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. "All the widows stood beside him weeping "and showing tunics and other garments "that dorkus made while she was with them. "But Peter put them all outside, knelt down and prayed. "And turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. "And she opened her eyes. "And when she saw Peter, she sat up. "And he gave her his hand and raised her up. "Then calling the saints and

widows, "he presented her alive. "It became known throughout all Joppa "and many believed in the Lord. "And he stayed in Joppa for many days "with one Simon, a tanner."

Tomorrow is November 9th, and it will be the 37th anniversary of the Berlin Wall coming down. Not when the wall was physically torn down, but when the wall was opened up. And they had not originally planned to open up the wall on November 9th. On that day, there was a large kind of crowd of people who had just grown so unrestful that they were gathering at the wall. And East German spokesmen got up to speak about how they were gonna start changing some of the rules and making it easier for people to pass from East to West Germany. And somebody asked him, when would these changes go into effect? And he was kind of unsure, and he kind of mistakenly said, "They're effective immediately." Even though that wasn't the plan. And so when this announcement went out, people just began to rush the Berlin Wall. And guards were really unsure what they were supposed to do because they thought maybe the rules have been changed effective immediately.

And they began to open up the barriers and the wall came down. This was a wall that had stood for 28 years. It was a wall that was a symbol of oppression, keeping people in East Germany under a brutal regime. I mean, people who were trying to flee East Germany as refugees were often killed near the wall. There was a section near the wall called Dead Man's Zone where people were shot trying to flee. I mean, some people had lived their whole lives only knowing the Berlin Wall. And there on November 9th, it was just open. Circumstances had just been changed like that.

You know, each one of us, I think face in our lives, in our world, circumstances that we might think will never change. Like people who had always known the Berlin Wall, there's probably things going on in our lives or in our world that we might think are hopeless. We might think that they are stuck like that. We might think that they will never change. Maybe it's something very personal in your life. Maybe there is a sin that you have been struggling with, that you can't conquer, and you think it's always going to be like that Maybe it's a physical ailment that's plaguing you, and you think it's never going to be healed, it's never going to be changed. Maybe it's a relationship. Maybe somebody has wronged you, you wronged them, and you just assume that that relationship is never going to be healed, it's always going to be broken. Or maybe you've been sharing the gospel with someone and praying for them, and yet they're not coming to faith, and you begin to feel hopeless and nothing's going to change. Maybe it's something broader in our city, in our country, in our world, where you might tend to feel hopeless.

I think a passage like this reminds us that we can have hope because God can change any circumstance. God can change any person. Jesus can always turn things around. Now, it doesn't mean that Jesus is always going to turn things around in the exact way that we want him to. My hope this morning is not to give you a hope that your circumstances will specifically change. My hope is that you will place your hope in the one who changes every circumstance. My hope is that we would come to trust that Jesus can change every circumstance, and that we would trust that he is going to work in a way that is best. So what I want you to see from this story is a few ways that we see Jesus turning things around.

One of the ways that we see it is that Jesus changes lives. Would you like to follow along in your notes? This is the first kind of aspect of the story that I just want you to see. Jesus can always turn things around, and one of the ways that he will turn things around is he changes lives. We pick up the story right where we left off last week. Saul was on the road to Damascus, and he was going there to persecute the church just as he had been doing. There on the road to Damascus, God confronts him, he converts him, and now we see this radical change that has happened in Saul's life. He's not only been forgiven of his sins and been saved, but his whole life is being changed. Look in verse 20, it says that after he was strengthened in eight immediately, he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue, saying he is the son of God.

Think about how different that is for Saul. Compared to who he just was. He thought that there was only one true God, there was no son of God, but now he believes that Jesus is the Messiah, says that they could not argue with him, that he showed them from scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. He's claiming that Jesus is the son of God, and where is he doing it? In synagogues. Why was he on the way to Damascus? Because he wanted to go into synagogues to find people who believed in Jesus and drag them off to prison. Now he's going to those same synagogues, but yet he is proclaiming Jesus. And this throws people off. I mean, it says in verse 21, "All who heard him were amazed, said, is this not the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? Does he not come here for this purpose to bring them down before the chief priests?" I mean, people are shocked by the way Jesus has changed Saul's life. This is a radical

transformation. And of course, not everybody likes it. Certain people are astonished, certain people are skeptical, but those who were of the Jewish religion, who Saul was a part of, he was a part of trying to stop this movement of Jesus, that's kind of seen as a sect of Judaism at the time, these Jewish religious leaders in Damascus, they don't like this. It says that they want to kill him. Verse 23, "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 led him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket."

Isn't it interesting that the man who is persecuting the church and causing people to scatter from Jerusalem is now having to sneak out of town in a basket? I mean, just how much has changed about Saul's life in just a few short verses. The man who is persecuting the church is now part of the church and is being persecuted himself. Why? Because Jesus changes lives. How many alcoholics and drug addicts are now sober because Jesus changed their life? How many atheists now worship a God that they did not once believe in because Jesus changed their life? How many religious people were humbled out of their own self-righteousness and woke up to see their sin because Jesus changed their life? How many of you this morning would say that Jesus has changed your life? Am I by myself this morning? Like, has Jesus changed your life? Jesus does this. He changes our lives. It means that we are never beyond hope. No person you know is beyond hope. That means for you yourself. You are not beyond hope.

Maybe you're here this morning and you wish things would change within you, but they have not. Sometimes it happens in a radical quick way like it did in the life of Saul. Sometimes we will see people who were addicted, who were in bondage, and they will be changed in a moment. It'll be a radical quick transformation. Many other times it's much more gradual. Jesus changes lives quickly sometimes like Saul, but sometimes he changes lives in a more gradual process. So people are set free from the power that sin has in their life. Now if you're here this morning and you've been dealing with the same sin for years, I don't want you to give up hope. Jesus can still change your life. He is still at work. The same God that you just sang about can work in your life. Continue to turn to him. Continue to turn to his people. Invite in accountability and support and don't try to do it in your own strength. Believe that Jesus is the one who changes lives. He's the one who gives you his spirit. Bible says when you trust in Jesus, the spirit comes and makes you alive. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. That means there is hope for us to be changed.

Jesus can always turn things around because Jesus changes lives. Now, just because we are changed, doesn't mean that we can change the things that we have done. Saul couldn't change his past. And because of that, at times, you can't change how people think about you. People still knew Saul's past. One of the things I love about this story is it gives us this picture of the way the church brought Saul in over a process. And that's because God not only changes lives, Jesus can turn things around by changing perspectives. This is the second thing that I just want you to see, that Jesus can always turn things around. He not only can change someone's life, but he can change the way that people view that person. Saul was met by Jesus on the road to Damascus, as we saw last week. And we talked last week about how when Jesus saves somebody, he doesn't just bring them into a private relationship with him, but as Pastor Clark was talking about earlier, we are brought into his people. That means Saul is brought into the people of God. Not only now is he part of the persecuted, but he has to be joined with the people that were once persecuting him.

Isn't it interesting to think about Saul having to wrestle with that, having to live with that? We find that in Damascus, excuse me, he is there with the disciples and they are welcoming him in, they are protecting him from the persecution. Then we read that he is going to Jerusalem. Now we don't know exactly when Saul went to Jerusalem. Saul will write to the Galatians later on in his life that he had a period of time when he went off by himself and the Lord revealed himself to him directly. This was to show that he was not just the associate of an apostle or learning from an apostle, but he was an apostle himself because the Lord had revealed himself to him. Some people think this happens before Saul ever goes to Jerusalem here in the middle of the chapter. Some people think it means after he left Jerusalem. But we know at some point, Saul is off by himself being trained by the Lord, but we also know that he goes to Jerusalem in order to be identified with the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ.

And understandably, people are skeptical. We read in verse 26, 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. You can understand why they would be skeptical. We heard Ananias last week be a little hesitant, but then he was obedient. The people, the church in Jerusalem is skeptical. But, verse 27, 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, how a 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. We'll talk about him a little bit later, but Barnabas is a hero of the faith. We saw Barnabas earlier in Acts selling his land, all his possessions, and then giving the proceeds over, acting in generosity. His name means a son of encouragement. Here he is an encouragement to Saul. When the rest of the church was skeptical of Saul, Barnabas welcomed him in. And because Barnabas welcomed Saul in, it helped change the perspectives of all the Christians in Jerusalem. Notice how now Saul is part of them. He is going in and out doing ministry with them. Even later, when they hear that people want to kill him, they now protect Saul because they believe that he is one of them. We know just a little bit later that Saul is an Antioch he is a elder at the church there. He went from persecuting the church to helping pastor the church. Then he is sent out of the church as a missionary to bring the gospel to places it had not yet gone.

The church totally accepted Saul. I mean, think about that. Think about what Saul had done. Think about how easy it would be for the church to keep this perspective that Saul, I mean, maybe he could be a Christian, but he could not be a leader in the church after what he had done. But God changed their perspectives. See, God not only changed his view of Saul by, or his relationship with Saul, by saving Saul and bringing him into a right relationship, but he changes Saul's relationship with other people. He works in the lives of people to change their view of Saul that they actually don't hold Saul's past against him, but trust him as a leader in the church and a missionary of the church.

You might be here today and you might worry about how people in a church will think about you because of things that you've done.Maybe you often feel like God's forgiven you, but you're not sure how other people are going to think about you. I want you to know that God can change perspectives of even other people. God can give them new eyes to see you, to see the work that God is doing in your life, to see the way that you are not your past, that he is working you out in the present for something glorious in the future. Trust him to change perspectives. He may not always. Some people might refuse that change that God wants to do in their lives, and that has to be between them and the Lord. But my encouragement to you is, if God is changing your life, keep pursuing him. Keep seeking him. Don't be discouraged if other people don't believe it right away. Keep allowing the Lord to change you, and trust that he changes perspectives. Jesus can always turn things around because he can change lives. He can change the way people view your life. He can change perspectives.

But then lastly, just most broadly, he can change circumstances. Jesus turns things around because he changes circumstances. What I mean when I say this is, it's kind of similar to him changing lives, but what I mean is, he's not just changing how one person is acting or behaving, how one person believes. He is changing through that whole broader circumstance, a whole situation. So think back to how we started Acts chapter eight, verse one, kind of set us in this trajectory that we've been on for the last couple of chapters. We read that Stephen had just been killed and Saul is now persecuting the church, and it talks about how the church was under threat, and so they started to scatter. Now thankfully, God used that persecution to bring the gospel to new places, but it was still a hard season in the church. People were being dragged off to prison. People were having to live in fear. Now listen to what Luke writes in chapter nine, verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

Think about that. I wonder if the people in the early church in those days thought it's always going to be like this. We're always gonna have to live in fear. We're always gonna have to live under threat that somebody might come into our homes or come into our synagogues and drag us off to jail. But now there's this season of peace throughout this region. Because God changed one man's life and Saul, he's changing the experience for the whole early church in this region. God works to change whole circumstances that seem far beyond our control. We see this in the last two stories of the passage. There's this man named Aeneas who has circumstances that have to be discouraging. We read in verse 33 that he was bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed. After eight years, I have to think that Aeneas probably had given up a lot of hope that his circumstances would ever change. Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you, rise and make your bed. Notice Peter doesn't heal him, but Jesus turns things around. Jesus changes his circumstance and immediately he rose. And then it says, and all of the residents of Leda and Sharon saw him and they turned to the Lord. Because God worked in one person's circumstances, all these people are now seeing that Jesus turns things around and they are trusting in Jesus.

Similar thing happens in Joppa. There's this lady named Tabitha or Dorcas. She is a godly woman serving the church faithfully. People have garments that have been made by her. She is a dear friend to them and she dies. And Luke explains to us that she is washed and put in an upper room. This means like she is really dead. It's not like she just kind of just died recently. Like there's enough time to prepare her body. Put her aside, ask Peter just to come. They're in this whole season of mourning because they've lost a dear sister and Jesus turns things around. Peter put them all outside, verse 40, and knelt down and prayed and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha arise." And she opened her eyes. When she saw Peter, she sat up and he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. It became known throughout all Joppa and many believed in the Lord. Jesus took the season of mourning in Joppa and turned it into a season of rejoicing. He took death and brought new life. And not just bringing Tabitha, Dorkus back to life, he brought new life to people that heard about the way that he turns things around. Jesus can change whole circumstances.

Now listen, it doesn't mean that Jesus always changes our circumstances in the ways that we would want. Doesn't mean that Jesus always does the same turnaround that we would have planned or that we would have done. Saul himself will write later on that there was this thorn in his side. We don't know exactly what it was, but we know he prayed to God to take it away and God never did. I'm not here trying to preach a feel-good message saying, well, if you just believe hard enough, if you just trust enough, then God will certainly change your circumstances exactly in the way you want him to. That's not what I'm trying to say. I'm trying to say that we should never be without hope because Jesus can always turn things around. We should never be without hope because God can work in any situation.

This morning, I don't want your hope to be in your circumstances changing. I want your hope to be in the one who can change any circumstance. I want our hope to be in Jesus who can always turn things around, who can change your life, who can change how people view you. He can do this work. Would you allow him to do this work in you today? Would you trust that Jesus can do this work in your life? But not only that, we are called to have this hope that Jesus can work in our lives, but we're also called to join him in this work.

So while I wanted most of this time in God's word to really just be giving us this hope, I want to close quickly with three points of application. How do we join Jesus in this work of seeing things turned around in our lives and in the world? Three ways that we can join Jesus in this work of turning things around. One, proclaim Jesus. How do we join Jesus in the work of bringing change, of turning things around? Tell people about Jesus. Saul is on the way to persecute the church, and now he is preaching about Jesus. Verse 20, "Immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue, "saying he is the Son of God." Saul wasted no time. He went straight from being a persecutor to a preacher. Immediately he is proclaiming Jesus. As he goes to Jerusalem, he has the opportunity. Verse 28, "He went in and out among them at Jerusalem, "preaching boldly in the name of the Lord." That's kind of a simple question, but just want to ask you this morning. Why is Saul telling other people about Jesus?

Why is he proclaiming Jesus? I think at least in part, he knows that Jesus has just changed his life, and he wants to see other people's lives changed as well. If we really believe that Jesus is the one who changes lives, we will tell people about Jesus. I think so often we don't tell anybody about Jesus, because we either think they don't actually need him, or we don't actually think that he's the one who can meet their need. I think we really believe that people need a savior, and that Jesus is the one who can be that savior, then we would tell everybody about Jesus. We wouldn't be able to stop talking about him. Have you ever talked to somebody who's just found like a new life hack, or a new book that they read, a new diet, a new app, and they just won't stop talking to you about it? We love to tell people about things that are changing our lives. Then I hope if you find one of those men who went on the men's retreat this weekend, I hope that they'll just tell you how awesome it was, and try to convince you to go on the next men's retreat, or the women's retreat that's coming up in the spring.

Like I hope when we experience something, we want to tell other people about If Jesus is really changing your life, and you believe he can change other people's life, then the natural response is to proclaim Jesus. As we come to the table this morning, as Pastor Clark said, be reminded of the mercy and the grace of God towards you. Reflect on how Jesus has changed your life. Allow him to continue to change your life, and then go out and tell other people that their lives might be changed. We can join Jesus in this work of seeing things turned around when we go out and we proclaim Jesus. Secondly, not only do we proclaim Jesus, but we build his church. The goal is not just that we would go out and tell

people about Jesus, so that just as individuals, they could believe in Jesus, but so also they could be connected to the people of God. Saul is now being part of this people, and he is seeking to bring other people into the way. Before he was seeking to stamp out the way. Now he actually wants to draw people into this. He wants to grow the following of Jesus.

I love how we see in this passage the way that the church is embracing Saul, bringing him in, because together they are building up the church. We saw Ananias last week, he was worried, but he was obedient. And he went to Saul and baptized him. We see disciples in Damascus embrace Saul. In fact, they're even willing to protect him. Verse 25, it took him by night, let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. The man who had come to persecute him, them, now they are protecting him. They're watching over him. Why? Because they've embraced him. I love that at some point, Saul goes to Jerusalem because he knows he's not just been saved to be in this individual relationship with Jesus, but he's now part of the church of Jesus. He could have said, listen, I don't need those disciples. They're gonna think of me what they will. I can do my own thing.

But he goes to Jerusalem because he wants to be part of the people of God. And thank goodness, thank God Barnabas was there. Barnabas took him, verse 27, brought him to the apostles, 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. Have you ever had a Barnabas in your life? Someone who believed in you when nobody else did? Someone who welcomed you with open arms when everybody else tried to keep you away? Oh, I pray that we would have more Barnabas in our church. I pray that we would be so focused on building up the church of Jesus Christ that we would be welcoming people into this body. Yes, they might have a past. Yes, they've got things that Jesus needs to work out in their lives, but we wanna build his church by welcoming people in, by being sons and daughters of encouragement.

Who can you be a Barnabas to this week? Who's struggling to see their place in the body and you can reach out to them and let them know God is a place for them here. How can you be a part of not just going out and proclaiming Jesus to other people, but considering the communion we have with each other? If you come to the table this morning, remember not only that Jesus is working in your life so that you can go tell other people about him, but also consider all the people that are gathering around this table with you. How can you welcome them in? How can we build this church together? How can we be a Barnabas to each other?

We proclaim Jesus, we build his church and through this, this is kind of just a point that I think kind of underlines them both. It's just such a great summary statement in this passage. I just wanna leave you with it. That together we walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. As we are proclaiming Jesus and he's changing our lives and changing the lives of people around us, as we're building his church, we together as the people of God walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Think back to how we began this sermon. Thinking about those areas in our lives, in our world that make us hopeless, discouraged. Times when we feel stuck like things aren't going to change.

What if we really believe that Jesus can always turn things around, that God's always working in every situation. We would not walk around so much with this anxiety or this hopelessness. We would walk as the early church did. Verse 31 says that they were experiencing peace and they were being built up. And together the church was walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit and it multiplied. I love this that the church is not walking in fear, but in faith, they're walking in the fear of the Lord. That means they believe that the Lord can work in every situation. They believe the Lord is sovereign. They are trusting him and they are receiving the comfort of the Holy Spirit. And it's clear that it's not just for them personally or even just for their church, but it's for other people as well.

God comforts us that we might be a comfort to others. As the church is walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it is multiplying. Many more people are coming to faith. Why? Because there are so many people outside of our doors this morning who feel like they are without hope. There are so many people in the neighborhood around our church, in your neighborhood where you live, that feel stuck. They feel like things are never going to change. And we have the opportunity to bring to them this message of hope. We have the opportunity to bring to them this comfort of the Holy Spirit. Hope in every situation that Jesus can turn things around. If we will truly live in this and walk in this, we will see people coming to faith. Our church will be multiplied. Because Jesus continues to turn things around.

I love singing about the same God that worked in the Bible is still working now. I love thinking about how the same God, the same Jesus, who's changed Saul from a persecutor to a pastor, who changed from Aeneas to being, from bedridden, to being able to walk, from Tabitha, from being dead to alive. He is the same Jesus who can work in your life. Can change things, He can turn things around even right now. Why? Because He experienced the greatest change, the greatest turnaround in all of history. Well, we remember what we celebrate this morning as we gather at the table is that Jesus died on a cross for our sins and then He turned things around by rising from the dead. Just a moment after communion, we'll sing about how He turns graves into gardens. He's the only one who can, why? Because He is the one who has experienced death on our behalf and then conquered that death to give us new life. Because Jesus has done this, He can turn things around. Do you believe that in your life?