SERMON TRANSCRIPT

11.01.2026 | The God Who Saves | Acts 9:1-18 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I wanna invite you to turn with me to Acts chapter nine. This morning, we're gonna be in Acts chapter nine, as we continue in our study through the book of Acts. We've been walking through the book of Acts, verse by verse, considering how the word of God and the spirit of God work in and through the church of God. We see that in the book of Acts through the early church, but with a recognition that that same Holy Spirit, he still works today. The same word of God is still powerful today, and the spirit and the word want to work in and through the church today. And so we're studying Acts with the hopes of gaining understanding so that we might apply these things to our lives, that we might be a church that the word and the spirit work in and through.

Now, one thing that we've seen over the last couple of times that we've studied the book of Acts is that the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, that word of God, it reaches unlikely people. We've seen that nothing can stop the spread of the gospel. We see that when God opens doors, nobody can close them. So we saw this a couple of times ago as we were in the beginning of Acts, chapter eight, and we saw the gospel going outside of Jerusalem into Judea and even Samaria, that group of Samaritans that the Jews so often avoided. Now the gospel, the good news of Jesus was going to them. And it says that as the gospel reached the Samaritans, there was great joy in that city. People were being reached by the gospel. Last week, the Holy Spirit led Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch, a man that the spirit had been leading for some time to encounter him, God, in the scriptures so that he might receive the gospel message, that the gospel could reach another person and a whole new group of people, a whole new area of the world. The gospel is continually going out and reaching these people.

And today we see another person, another unlikely candidate, a zealous Jew who is persecuting the early Christian church. Luke told us just a little bit about this man named Saul. We know that he was at Stephen's execution. Though he didn't pick up a stone, he was there approving of what was being done, holding the cloaks of all those who were killing Stephen. We know that he was going around finding people, men and women in their homes who were followers of Jesus and dragging them off to prison. And now as we come to him in Acts chapter nine, we see he's finding new ways to persecute the church. Let's read our passage for this morning, which is Acts chapter nine, verses one through 18.

Luke writes, "But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground and although his eyes were open, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight. And at the house of Judas, look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying. And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized."

Our family has been watching the Spider-Man movies together with our boys. That's what I have to tell you, maybe it's just because of my age, but I'm still team Tobey Maguire. I think he's the best Spider-Man, just throwing that out there. But one of the things that I think you find in the Spider-Man movies, and it's probably true of other superhero movies as well, but maybe especially true of Spider-Man movies, is the fact that the greatest conflict that tends to show up in the story isn't actually with villains. It's something much more internal. Like yes, there's this physical struggle and there's

these great fight scenes with like villains and bad guys. But what Peter Parker is really struggling with, what's really weighing on him is his own sense of identity. It's relationships, it's his friendships, it's his love interests. It's the things that every high schooler wrestles with. I think it's what... (Audio Cuts Out)

I was thinking about that this week as I was just studying the book of Acts and thinking about our passage for today. Now so many times we read the book of Acts, especially passages like this one, we think, well, that's a story that will never be mine. In fact, I love by God's providence, he worked it out to where E.J. was baptized on the same day we were talking about Saul's conversion. Because I knew what E.J.'s testimony was, she had shared it with me. The fact that sometimes we all wish that we had a story that was a little bit more like Saul's. I mean, we wish there was something dramatic that had happened in our lives. We wish that we had moved from this terrible life of sin to being some great missionary. But so many times our story doesn't match up with Saul's. We read these stories in Acts and we think, well, how could I ever relate? How could that ever be my story?

But actually I think these stories in Acts, including Saul's story today, is a lot like a superhero story or a Spider-Man story. Now while it's unique in so many ways and there's aspects of the story that you might never be able to actually relate with, actually what's going on at the center of the story is something that resonates with each one of us. At the core of what's happening here is something that actually relates to anybody who has ever placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. What happens to Saul here is actually not about one man's radical conversion. It's about the God who saves sinners. And what happens here in the story is the same thing that happens every time God saves a sinner.

If you're here this morning and you've been saved through faith in Jesus Christ, Saul's story here in Acts 9 is your story as well. If you're here this morning and you don't yet know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, what happens to Saul at its core can happen to you this morning. Oh, it might not look exactly the same, but God will still work in the same way because what I think this passage shows to us is how does God save sinners. This passage, this story, I think kind of shows four actions, four steps that God takes to meet sinners right where they are and to bring them into a relationship with himself. The story helps us to see how God saves sinners. And I hope you'll follow along in the story with me so that it might resonate with you a little bit more closely.

So four parts of the story that I just want you to see. The first, how does God save sinners? Well, he confronts us in his grace. God saves sinners by confronting us in his grace. Mentioned earlier, we've seen Saul doing some pretty terrible things so far in the book of Acts. Not only was he there just approving of Stephen's execution, but we read in Acts chapter eight, he was going into people's homes and Luke always lets us know it was both men and women. He wasn't showing any favoritism, he wasn't giving anybody the benefit of the doubt, dragging people out of their homes. Now he's going into places of worship. Did you catch that? Why is he on the road to Damascus in verse two? Luke tells us, he was going to ask the high priest for letters to the synagogues at Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Here we find that before they were called Christians, they were called people of the way. And what Saul wanted to do is he wanted to go into synagogues, places of worship, find people who were followers of Jesus and bring them bound back to Jerusalem. Can you imagine somebody doing that today? Going into places of worship and dragging them off to take them to prison? Can you just think of the names or the titles we would call those types of people today? This is who Saul was. This is why he's on the road to Damascus. This is when God confronts him. And God had every right to send a lightning bolt and just strike Saul dead before he did any more damage. But what he does instead is he sends a light. Why? Because he's going to confront Saul, but he's going to confront him in his grace. Notice how gracious God is even as he speaks to Saul, how gracious Jesus is as he speaks to Saul. Verse three, it says, "Now as he went on his way, "he approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven "around hi and falling to the ground, "he heard a voice saying to him, "'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'"

Think of all the things Jesus could have said to Saul. Saul, Saul, why are you such a terrible person? Like Saul, you stink. Like why are you doing this? Saul, he confronts him in grace. He says, "Saul, I know you think you love me, "but you're actually hurting me. "Saul, I know you think you're serving God, "but you're actually working against God. "In his grace, he confronts Saul." It's the same thing that must happen in each one of our lives. Again, we read this story and sometimes we think that this is just a radical story that we can't relate to. But actually, it's very similar to each one of us. I

know you've probably never had people arrested or put in prison. You never dragged people out of their homes or approved of their execution. The Bible says that each one of us are actually straying away from God. You see, one thing that relates us, I think, to Saul is that Saul thought he was a good person. Like in all these things that Saul was doing, he thought he was contributing to society. He thought he was helping his people.

I think that's how so many of us would think about ourselves. Most of us would look at our lives and say, "I'm probably a pretty good person." I think what I do actually helps society here. At least it doesn't hurt people. And there must come a time in which God must confront us and help us to see that we've not been living according to the way he designed this world to work, but living rather according to our own design. But even though we've not been outright hurting people, we've been working against what God has created his creation to do. Maybe for some of us, it's kind of the opposite. Maybe we don't think of ourselves as good people. Maybe we identify a lot with Saul and we think we've done a lot of terrible things. And we wonder, are we beyond the reach of God? God in his grace will confront us in our sin. He will reach us wherever we are. He will stop us to help us to see that we're not just on the road to Damascus like Saul was, but we are on the road to death and destruction. Bible says that when we choose to live in our way we have separated ourselves from him and from the life that is in him.

And while each of us are not maybe on a road ready to do more quote unquote terrible things like Saul was, we are all on a path that is leading us away from God and towards a eternal life apart from him. And God confronts us and he does so because he is gracious and loving. I wanna point that out because I do think sometimes we think about being confronted by someone and we don't think of it as a gracious thing. The city and the culture we live in would probably often tell us that it's better just to let people do what they're doing and not tell them that they're wrong. Kind of let each person have their own truth and live it out as long as they're being true to themselves. But nobody gets mad when a doctor tells you that you need to change your diet tells you that you need to have surgery. Why? Because we know that that confrontation is done with your best interest and heart.

God in a similar way confronts people in their lives. He tells them that the path that they are on is headed towards death and destruction. They might think that they are living in a way that is in accordance with him or they're being a good person but they're actually not walking in that relationship with them that they were designed to have. He confronts us in his grace. You see to be in this relationship with God, to be saved by God from your sins, you have to allow God to confront you. You might have shown up here this morning thinking that you are a good person. Would you this morning allow God to confront you right where you are? Would you recognize that he does so only by his mercy and his love and his grace? This is what Saul came to believe, that this was an act of grace of God towards him.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Saul writes to the church that is in Corinth and he talks about Jesus' resurrection. He says Jesus died and then rose from the dead and he appeared to all these people so that they might be eyewitnesses of him and then he talks about how Jesus appeared to him. And this is how he recounts what happened on this road to Damascus. In verse eight of 1 Corinthians 15 he says, "Last of all, as to one untimely born, "he, Jesus, appeared also to me. "For I am the least of the apostles, "unworthy to be called an apostle "because I persecuted the church of God. "But by the grace of God, I am what I am, "and his grace toward me was not in vain." Saul recognizes that when the light shone on him on that road, when Jesus' voice spoke to him and confronted him in that moment, it was an act of grace to save him from his sins. Would you allow God to confront you this morning? Would you see it as an act of his mercy and his grace?

If you're here this morning and you're a believer, sometimes you might feel uncomfortable going out and sharing the good news with somebody because you feel like you're telling them that they're wrong. You feel like you're telling them that you know better than them. That act of confrontation feels uncomfortable. I understand. But there is this act in which God does tell us to proclaim his mercy and his grace in such a way that it might confront people in the way that they're living their life and what they're doing that day, but in a way that's an expression of his love and his grace. God saves sinners by first confronting us in his grace, but then secondly, he converts us by his resurrection power.

How does God save sinners? First, he must help us to see our sin, to see the road that we are on and what it is leading to, but secondly, he must change us. He must transform us. He must convert us. And he converts us by his resurrection power. Saul begins Acts chapter nine as we've already seen him. He is not a follower of Jesus. In fact, he hates those who

are belonging to the way. He thinks that they are corrupting the Jewish religion. So he's seeking to stop that movement. And by the end of our story, he is baptized in the name of Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is a follower of Jesus, ready to go out and start proclaiming the name of Jesus. What brings about this radical shift? What brings about this shift from being a persecutor of the way to a preacher of the way? Well, here it is in verse five. He says to him, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Notice he recognizes this voice is from heaven. It must be from one whom he would call Lord. It's from God. But he doesn't know who this voice is. I mean, he thought he knew God. He was a Pharisee. He had studied the Torah. He thought he was living for God, but God needed to reveal himself to him in a new way. And what does God say? What does Jesus say? I am Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus who was just crucified, Jesus who has risen from the dead and now is seated at the right hand of the Father.

What brought about the conversion in Saul's life? What brought about this radical transformation? It's the fact that he had met the risen Jesus. Notice what convinces Saul. It's not an intellectual argument. It wasn't looking at all the prophecies in scripture and helping him to put them all together in a way that matched up with what Jesus had done. It wasn't seeing some miracle performed. These aren't the things that brought about the conversion in Saul's life. What changed Saul's life is that he met the risen Jesus. The fact that he knew Jesus was from Nazareth and had died and now he hears this Jesus in heaven. This is the central truth of Christianity and it is what converts people. It is what changes people's lives. You might be here this morning and you might be considering whether or not you should be a Christian. You should be a follower of Jesus. And maybe you've got questions about how the earth was created and how does that line up with what we read in the book of Genesis?

Maybe you've got concerns with some things that the Bible says and how that matches up with what you see people do in their everyday lives. Maybe you've got concerns about how the church has acted for the last couple of thousands of years. Maybe you yourself have had a bad experience in the church and these things seem like hindrances to you being a follower of Jesus. I want you to know this morning that none of those things are the central truth of Christianity. None of those are what actually converts somebody. What really changes somebody's life is the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. If Jesus really died and got up out of that tomb three days later, then it doesn't actually matter any of these other questions we have, we have to believe in him and follow him.

I mean, how do we account for all the historical facts and all the eyewitnesses and all the people that's lives were changed by the fact that Jesus seemed to rise from the dead? This is the true center of Christianity. This is what you should base your faith upon. I'm not saying those other questions aren't important. My hope would be that as you trust in Jesus and hopefully maybe find your church home here, we would help you walk through those questions, those doubts, those concerns. They aren't unimportant, but they aren't the central truth of Christianity. What changed Saul's life? What changed those apostles' lives? What caused them from being people who were scared and shut in the room to going out and preaching, even if it meant being imprisoned or even if it meant their death? It's the fact that they knew that Jesus had risen from the dead. Do you believe this today? This is what changes our lives. And again, I know you wish your story was more like Saul's.

You wish you could hear Jesus audibly, but doesn't it matter to you at all the fact there are so many eyewitnesses who talked about the fact that they met Jesus? I mean, doesn't it strike you interesting at all that people were willing to die? Saul was willing to die for this testimony that he gave? Eventually, Saul will give this testimony and it will lead him to be killed in Rome. The fact that he knew that he had met the risen Jesus, does that change your life at all, your perspective at all? But don't you know that conversion doesn't just happen because of a historical fact that Jesus rose from the dead, but the fact that the same spirit who rose Jesus from the dead is actually the same spirit who makes you alive. It's the same spirit that converts you, that transforms your life. Yes, it might not look so radical as it did in Saul's life, but it is a powerful experience to be converted, to be created anew, to be born again, as the Bible talks about. And it happens through the resurrection power of Jesus.

Listen to what Peter writes in 1 Peter chapter one. He says, "Blessed be the God and Father "of our Lord Jesus Christ. "According to his great mercy, "he has caused us to be born again to a living hope "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The same power that got Jesus up, that allowed Jesus to speak to Saul in this moment and change his life, is the same power that you can experience, your life can be totally transformed, you can be converted by his resurrection power. God will meet us on our path and confront us in his grace. He will convert us, he will change us, he

will transform us through his resurrection power. Third, God saves sinners by connecting us to his people. God meets Saul as he's on this road and confronts him in this way that he's been living. He thought it was right, but it wasn't. God confronts him with this great light, blinds him, speaks to him, changes him by knowing that Jesus is real, he's really risen from the dead and speaking to him from heaven. But I want you to notice how personal Jesus is as he speaks to Saul. Just notice what Jesus says as he speaks to Saul in verse four. Saul hears a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

There's personal in two levels there. One, you notice how he repeats Saul's Hebrew name twice. He wants him to know that he knows him. He knows that he's a Hebrew, he's a Pharisee of Pharisees, he lets him know that he knows Saul personally. But then do you notice how he ends the question? Saul, why are you persecuting me? Isn't that interesting? Jesus is in heaven. But Jesus doesn't say, Saul, why are you persecuting my followers? He doesn't say, Saul, why are you persecuting my church? He says, Saul, why are you persecuting me? He reinforces that in verse five. Saul says, well, who are you, Lord? And he says, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Why does Jesus speak of this persecution in such a personal way?

I think here's the reason. Because those who trust in Jesus are united to Jesus in such a significant way that if you persecute the people of God, it's as if you're persecuting Jesus himself. Saul, I think, begins to grasp this. And later on, when he writes that letter to the church in Corinth that I read from earlier, in 1 Corinthians 12, he says, don't you know that you are members of Christ's body? We as a church are called the body of Christ because we are the physical representation of Jesus here on the earth. We are united to Jesus in such a way that if you persecute the church of Jesus Christ, it's as if you're persecuting Jesus himself. I think we significantly undervalue our union with Jesus Christ. Such a way that he would so identify with us that he would say, when you're persecuting my people, it's as if you're persecuting me.

And I think because of that, we significantly undervalue the communion we have with each other. We talk about membership at our church. And it's not membership in like some club in which you would normally be a member. We use that language because the Bible says we are members of Christ's body. That as we are Jesus's body here on the earth, his physical representation, we are made up of each one of us. Not just in his room, but believers all over the world, members brought together in our union Jesus Christ, and that means we have a relationship with one another. Even if one of us has been terrorizing the other.

I mean, when Saul makes it to Damascus, God goes to this man named Ananias. He says, Ananias, I want you to go and find this man named Saul of Tarsus. And I want you to help him regain his sight. And Ananias has a response that you might expect. Verse 10, Jesus says to a disciple at Damascus, named Ananias, the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. He said, here I am, Lord. Lord said to him, rise and go to the street called straight. At the house of Judas, look for a man named, man of Tarsus named Saul. For behold, he is praying. And he has seen in a vision, a man named Ananias, come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.

I mean, I kind of get Ananias's point, don't you? Like wouldn't you be hesitant if God told you to go and find this man Saul, help him regain his sight? We'll read later on in Acts chapter nine next week that when Saul makes it to Jerusalem and tries to meet up with the disciples, a lot of them are afraid. They don't know his motives, but Ananias, he obeys the Lord. And in fact, whenever he gets there to that house, he calls him Brother Saul. Sounds like the way you might greet somebody in church. He recognizes that this man who was on his way to Damascus to get permission to arrest people like Ananias and bring him into prison was now his brother. Listen, if someone else has placed their faith in Jesus Christ, that means you too are members of the same body. It means that that person is your brother or your sister. And if Ananias can go to Saul, who was trying to get permission to have him arrested, maybe you can go to somebody.

Maybe you can just extend forgiveness to them. Maybe you can ask for their forgiveness. Maybe you can seek reconciliation. Listen, I'm not saying that people won't wrong you. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have boundaries. I'm just saying, I don't think God saves us to be individuals. He saves us in community. When God saves us from our sins, he connects us to his people in a very significant way. That in our union with Jesus Christ, we have a communion with each

other that we need to walk in as we live in this community together. Jesus brings Saul into his family and now Ananias calls him Brother Saul. And he tells Ananias, I've got something for Saul because you see, when God saves us, he not only saves us from our sin, but he saves us for his service.

This is the last part, that as we see how God saves sinners, he connects us to his people and then he commissions us to his service. But as God brings us into his family, he saves us from our sins, he connects us to his people and then he commissions us for his service. This is the last part of your outline, if you're looking to fill in those blanks. As God saves Saul from his sins, it's clear that he is bringing him into this community. He's involving him in the people of God, but then he is going to call him to do something. He is commissioning him for his mission, for his service. And it happens right away. As soon as Jesus tells Saul who he is, he gives him instructions, verse six. "But rise and enter the city "and you will be told what you are to do." Jesus says immediately, "There is something that I have for you. "I want you to begin to follow my commands right now. "I need you to start obeying me." Listen, if Jesus really rose from the dead, you should not only believe in him as your savior, but you should follow him as your Lord.

Saul recognizes that this voice from heaven is his Lord. And if it's Jesus, I'm gonna begin to do what he says. I want you to go, and you will then receive further instructions. Then when Ananias gives pushback, he says, "I don't know about this Jesus, this man Saul, "he was coming here to arrest me." Jesus tells him, "Listen, I've got plans for Saul." This is what he says in verses 15 and 16. "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine, "to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings "and the children of Israel, "for I will show him how much he must suffer "for the sake of my name." Jesus says, "I've not only saved Saul from his sin, "but for my service." Now again, Saul's story is unique. I mean, Saul was the zealous person. No matter what Saul was given to, he was gonna devote everything he had to it.

So yes, his story might look a little different than yours, but I think the calling is still the same. Yes, you may not be called to suffer in the exact same ways that Saul was, but you are called to the service of the Lord. Listen, when God looks at you and confronts you in your sin, saves you by his grace, brings you into his people, he is saying, "You are my chosen instrument." It's not just Saul who is a chosen instrument, but you. God saves you for a purpose. He doesn't just save you from your sins, he has things that he wants to do for his service. He has things that he wants to do in you and through you.

Now, don't say this to put a guilt trip on you as if you owe God one or you need to pay him back by doing all these things. No, I think this is to say he has given you a new identity that we've just been singing about. He has given you a new purpose in life. There is something he wants you to do. That is to carry out his mission, to bear witness for him. Every member of the body of Christ is also a missionary for Christ. Now, that doesn't mean that you need to quit your job and move to another part of the world. In fact, usually it just means the opposite. Usually means that you need to be faithful to let people know who Jesus is right where he's already placed you. So we've been talking about a lot this fall. We've been doing a course on faith and work. Even this morning at our 9 a.m. class, we were thinking about how God equips us, calls us to use our places of work as a place to live out our faith. When I say that you as a member of the body of Christ are a missionary, I mean right where God has you. In your home, in your neighborhood, in your workplace, you are his chosen instrument. You have been called by him commissioned to be his ambassador, to bear witness to him, to live for his glory.

So I have to ask you this morning, is Saul's story your story? I love how similar Saul's story and E.J.'s story actually line up. Yes, they sound totally different in some ways, but I love how I just ended where we ended the passage, at least for today. How an anodized comes and speaks to Saul and Saul believes it says in verse 18, immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight, then he rose and was baptized. Saul was baptized in the same way that E.J. was baptized. Their conversion is much more alike than it is different. Their stories are very similar. And the fact that God met them in their sin and by his grace, he helped them to see their need for a savior. He changed their life by his resurrection power, brought them into his people and has now given them a new calling in life.

Is that your story? Would you this morning allow God to confront you in your sin, let you know that the path that you're on maybe isn't the best path? Would you recognize that it is by his grace and he wants to change your life? He wants to bring you into this new community, into this new family that he is forming and he wants to give you a new purpose.

If that is your story, then let us begin to live like it even more. Let us see ourselves as being brought into this community together, as members of the same body. Let us see ourselves as being commissioned for his service and let's go share our story with others. So this story might be the story of many more.