

Unstoppable Kingdom **With Diversity: Members of the Movement**

Acts 9:19b-43

We do not seek diversity in our local church or in the kingdom of God because it's popular in this modern age. We seek diversity within our own church because our surrounding community is diverse, and we want our church to reflect the neighborhood. We seek diversity for the kingdom of God because that is in the heart of our God. We know that not every individual will be saved, but we do believe that people from every people group in human history will be saved. God gave John a vision of the end of days...

*"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from **EVERY nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" **Revelation 7:9-10***

We know where we are headed in God's unstoppable kingdom. But how do we get there? As the book of Acts is showing us, we advance the unstoppable kingdom one disciple of Jesus at a time. Last week we reflected on the glorious conversion of Saul of Tarsus, now we will see how he fits into an incredible group of people I'm calling Members of the Movement...

"For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' 21 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?' 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. 23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. 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. 27 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, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 31 So the church throughout all 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, it multiplied. 32 Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.'" And immediately he rose. 35 And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. 36 Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. 37 In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 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." 39 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 Dorcas made while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all outside, and 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. 41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner." **Acts 9:19b-43***

Main Idea: The Unstoppable Kingdom Grows through Members of the Movement

Four Types of People that the Movement Needs in Acts 9:19b-43

I. Passionate New Believers Like Saul

As a new believer in Christ, Saul started sharing Christ boldly!

*"And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God...But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ...So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord'" **Acts 9:20, 22, 28** (Immediate obedience to share the gospel!)*

*"The dramatic change in Saul's life was a source of wonder to the Jews at Damascus. Every new convert's witness for Christ ought to begin right where he or she is, so Saul began his ministry first in Damascus." **Warren Wiersbe***

A church without new believers is a dead church. I've been in many of them. The preaching may be sound, the Bible studies may be enlightening, the music may be excellent, the volunteer lists may be overflowing, the offerings may be strong, & the building may be spotless. But when everyone at a church has been saved for 10+ years and nobody is coming to Christ, the Spirit of the Lord seems to be completely absent. There is a passion, excitement, energy, and evangelistic fervor that only newbies can bring!

Are you new to the faith? Don't sit back & wait before getting involved. Realize that you will never have more credibility with and interest from your unsaved friends to share the gospel than right now...get going but expect opposition!

*"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 let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket...And 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." **Acts 9:23-25, 29-30***

II. Hopeful Encouragers like Barnabas

Naturally, the disciples back in Jerusalem (where Saul's violence against the church started) were hesitant to believe and receive him. So...

“But Barnabas took him & brought him to the apostles & 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 & out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.” **Acts 9:27-28**

“It is not only that converts must join the Christian community, but that the Christian community must welcome converts, especially those from a different religious, ethnic or social background.” **John Stott**

The church needs people who are not easily offended who will lovingly vouch for new believers with those who may be easily offended. And, who will play a hands-on role in discipling new believers into the Christ-life.

III. Faithful Leaders like Peter

Peter shows up again for a few chapters in Acts before he will disappear from the pages of Acts for good. At this point, he is the unquestioned leader of the Apostles & of the early church. What’s he doing? Sitting on a throne with servants and flying around in his private jet? No, to the contrary...

“Now as Peter went here & there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda... And all the residents of Lydda & Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord... 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 & went with them... And it became known throughout all Joppa, & many believed in the Lord.” **Acts 9:32, 35, 38-39a, 42**

This is in contrast to Jonah who went to Joppa to avoid the Gentiles of Nineveh. Peter went in order to share Jesus with the Gentiles!

Elements of Authentic Miracles (Stott)

- **The Example of Jesus**
- **The Power of Jesus**
- **The Salvation of Jesus**
- **The Glory of Jesus**

Faithful leaders make it all about Jesus. Especially those with unique gifts that draw attention and build a platform. A faithful leader will always leverage their platform, influence, and efforts to magnify Jesus over themselves!

IV. Servant-Hearted Saints like...So Many!

There are important secondary characters in this passage like:

- the **disciples** who lowered Saul in a basket out the window to sneak him out of Damascus (vs. 25)
- the **brothers** who rescued Saul from the Hellenists who tried to kill him in Jerusalem (vs. 30)
- the **saints** in Lydda like bedridden **Aeneas** (vs.32-33, he didn’t even ask to be healed),
- **Tabitha/Dorcas** who was *full of good works & acts of charity* grieved in her death by those she generously served, and
- **Simon the tanner** who housed Peter even though he would have been considered unclean by their Jewish friends. Love them all!

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:10**

There are no small people or jobs in the Unstoppable Kingdom!

We are all members of what? Members of Christ Jesus himself...

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” **1 Cor 12:27**

What can we expect in the Unstoppable Kingdom when every member embraces and faithfully fulfills their roles in the church?

“So the church throughout all 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**, it **MULTIPLIED**.” **Acts 9:31 - The Kingdom Growd Song: Holy, Holy, Holy**

Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *Word Pictures in the New Testament* – A.T. Robertson (1933)
- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)
- *The Kingdom Agenda* – Tony Evans (1999)