

# Acts 9:1-31

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Date: 16 February 2024

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Do turn to Acts chapter 9. One of the most important things you can do as a Christian disciple is to try and get a true view of the Lord Jesus.

It's really easy to get a partial view and a distorted view of the Lord Jesus. And not to keep a true and a complete view of the kind of saviour that the Bible presents for us. And that's what you have in Acts chapter 9.

I think what we have in Acts chapter 9 is really a view of the Lord Jesus that maybe is really surprising for us. Acts chapter 9 is really well known.

It's the conversion story of Saul into Paul. In our culture we talk about people seeing the light that's taken from this passage. But it's much more than a conversion story.

[ 1 : 13 ] Because what Jesus is doing in Acts chapter 9 is he is capturing his premier witness. In Acts chapter 9 the risen Lord Jesus is starting a new stage of church history.

The Apostle Paul doesn't stand really on the same level as us. I'm not saying that the Apostle Paul is a God or anything like that.

But the Apostle Paul is a special servant of Jesus. He doesn't quite stand on the same level as the rest of us. He is God's chosen instrument.

He is God's premier witness. And he was going to be a witness that the Lord Jesus would use to take the gospel to the Gentiles, to the world.

To the pagan population of the ancient world. There is a sense in which the Apostle Paul is in a special class. But the reason that I think we need to change how we come to Acts chapter 9 is that our premier interest shouldn't really be in the Apostle Paul.

[ 2 : 22 ] We shouldn't come to Acts chapter 9 and say well this is the kind of psychology. This is what it looks like to be converted. Or this is what goes on in conversion. What Acts 9 shows us is Jesus.

And what Jesus is about here. And the point of Acts chapter 9 is that Jesus shows us who he is. When he captures his premier witness.

What do we see about Jesus here? What does Jesus show us about himself? And first of all I want to show you the violence of Jesus. That's right, you didn't mishear me.

The violence of Jesus. It's a really strong word isn't it? And I use it because it's a strong act. So can you look at verses 1 and 2.

You've got Saul of Tarsus. And we've not heard about Saul since chapter 8 and verse 3. Chapter 8 and verse 3, do you remember that?

[ 3 : 21 ] There is Saul ravaging the church. Entering house after house. Dragging off men and women. And committing them to prison. He's there bringing them.

Dragging the church. Capturing the church. And now we see, don't we, in verses 1 and 2. That here is Saul again. Breathing out murderous threats. Towards Jesus. He goes to the chief priests.

The religious leaders. And he gets letters to give him authority. To go to Damascus. To see that he can bring any Christian disciples. Followers of Jesus. To Jerusalem. For justice.

He's breathing out threats. And murder. He is a violent opponent. Of the Lord Jesus. And his church. And against the disciples. And so whatever.

What is it that's going to turn this man. From a violent opponent. To a servant. To a servant of the Lord Jesus. How is Jesus going to do that?

[ 4 : 26 ] Well you've seen verses 3 to 5. Saul is on his way to Damascus. And suddenly a bright light shines from heaven. Saul falls to the ground. And he hears this voice saying.

Saul. Saul. Why are you persecuting me? What are you meant to do.

When you have a man who is. Livid with you. When you have a man who is. Enraged against the people of Jesus. And he will do anything he can. To destroy Jesus people. And if you're going to make him a servant. If you're going to make him. A bond slave of yours forever. How are you going to get. This violent opponent. To acknowledge your Lordship. So what does Jesus do?

He brings him. He brings his face to the ground. He brings him to his knees. On the Damascus road. He makes him eat dust.

[ 5 : 26 ] Can you see the violence of Jesus? You could say. What Jesus did with this man. What Jesus did with this man.

Who so opposed him. And he knocks him to his backside. He puts him on his back. He knocks him out. The violence of Jesus.

Jesus. Doesn't always have to do that. Does he? Not all of us. Have got a conversion story. Like this. In fact.

Not all conversion stories. In the Bible. Are the same. Which ought to teach us something. As a church family. If you go back to last week. Do you remember chapter 8. Verses 26 to 40.

You've got one of those. Episodes of conversion. Where it's. It's very gradual. Apparently. You've got a eunuch. Who is treasurer. To the queen of Ethiopia. And he is a convert.

[ 6 : 24 ] To Judaism. And he's gone to Jerusalem. To worship. At the feast. But now he's coming back. And in his chariot. He's going back to Ethiopia. And the Lord tells Philip.

Go to the desert road. And join yourself. To that chariot. And Philip jumps up. And the Ethiopian. Is reading aloud. From Isaiah 53. Isn't it? That. The servant of the Lord.

Was led like a lamb. To the slaughter. Like a sheep. Before her shears. Is silent. So he opens his mouth. And Philip says to him. Do you know what you're reading? And he replies. Well how can I. Unless somebody explains it to me.

Is he speaking about himself? Or someone else? Why don't you come up. And explain it to me. And Philip begins. On that passage. And he explains. And preaches Jesus.

To this man. And that man. Is baptized. On profession of faith. There's no stopping. In his tracks. There is no. Dropping to the floor. There is no.

[ 7 : 19 ] Blinding light. He's just reading. The Bible. Somebody explained it to him. And he slides. And he slides. Into the kingdom of God. By faith in Jesus.

And he's baptized. And joins the church. But Jesus doesn't always work that way. He doesn't always work the same way.

But what Jesus does do is this. Jesus is going to make you willing to come to him. He will make you willing.

If you are his. To come to him. But it takes more for some people. Than it does for others. When you have someone like. Saul of Tarsus.

Livid with rage. With murderous threats. Against Jesus' people. If Jesus is going to bring. Someone like him to himself. Jesus is going to have to exercise. A holy violence.

[ 8 : 18 ] And bring him to his face. On the floor. On the Damascus road. And almost as it were. Force him into the kingdom of God. Now what does this do.

For the case of Saul. And the way Jesus brought him to himself. What does this do. For our image of Jesus. And there is.

Isn't there. In the Christian church. In the UK. To have a really false. Image of Jesus. JB Phillips. Talked about. Gentle Jesus. Meek and mild.

Who was certainly meek. But never mild. And we have to be careful. We almost.

When we talk about. The gentleness of Jesus. And the tenderness of Jesus. And all that is true. But there is a tendency. To corrupt that.

[ 9 : 17 ] There is a tendency. To make it become. Something of the weakness. Of Jesus. And all. Almost. The wimpiness. Of Jesus. And that kind of.

False image. We need to really beware of. We may not have the right image. Of Jesus. And we need to see. That sometimes. Jesus exercises.

Holy violence. To bring someone. To himself. Samuel Stone. Was an Anglican.

Clergyman. He was a poet. In the east end. Of London. It was in the 19th century. It was a very poor area. He stayed in. That parish. In the east end.

For eight years. And this. Anglican clergyman. Who was also a poet. Samuel Stone. One day. He was walking. Through the east end. And he happened to see. A young woman.

[10:11] Being attacked. By three men. And she was on her own. She was helpless. She was friendless. And she cried out. For help. Samuel Stone. Heard her cry.

He ran. To the scene. And with one blow. He knocked out. One of the attackers. Cold. He jumped on. The other attacker. And he pummeled him. Until the guy. Plead.

For mercy. Crying. The third guy. Got away. Before Samuel Stone. Could get hold of him. And Samuel Stone. Said in the report. The only regret he had. Is he wished he could get hold.

Of the third guy. Who was. Samuel Stone. Take your service sheet. And turn to the final hymn. He's the author.

Of the final hymn. The church's one foundation. Is Jesus Christ. Her Lord. And you might think.

[11:08] I don't want to sing the hymns. Of such a violent man. I love it. I absolutely love it. We don't often think of the. Combination. Do we.

Of an Anglican clergyman. And poet. And somebody. Who beats people senseless. We don't often think. That someone who can write. Beautiful hymns. Of praise and worship.

And confession. Can at the same time. Punch someone in the face. And knock them out cold. But it's wonderful. We don't tend to think of. Hymn writers. Doing that kind of thing.

Do we? And so we have to keep. The balance. Of Jesus Christ. Our Lord. Our Lord. That in his meekness.

And in his gentleness. Draws us. To himself. But there are others. Out there. Who resist. And they are dead set.

[12:03] In their refusal. And their reluctance. And their rebellion. Has to be overcome. In a far more dramatic way. And what the conversion of Saul. Tells us. Is this.

If Jesus Christ. Has chosen. To make you. One of his servants. No matter how rebellious. You may be. Against him. He will bring you. To your knees. And he will do that.

If he must. With holy violence. He will bring you. To himself. You see.

I think. We have this vision. Don't we. Of Jesus. In Revelation chapter 3. Have you heard this?

Sometimes. And the gospel. Is presented in this way. Then Revelation 3. There is a door.

And Jesus. Stands at the door. And he knocks. And the picture. That is often given. Is that there isn't a latch. On the outside. But the latch.

[13:00] Is on the inside. And Jesus. Is the perfect gentleman. He stands. Just knocking. And he knocks. And Jesus. Will never force himself.

Upon you. Have you heard that? There is an element. Of truth in that. But there is a great element. Of error in that. Ask Saul of Tarsus.

And I think. If Saul of Tarsus. Heard us say. Well Jesus. Is the perfect gentleman. He would never force himself. Upon you. And so on. I think he would say. Well where on earth. Did you get that idea from? You see.

Sometimes Jesus. Exercises. Holy. Violence. Upon us. Not in order. To distress us. But in order. To bring us. To his kingdom.

Sometimes. The risen Lord Jesus. Breaks into our circumstances. In ways. That we would never want. And never choose. In order to bring us. To himself. Because he always gets.

[14:02] His man or woman. The violence of Jesus. Secondly. Let's see the closeness. Of Jesus. When Jesus. Addressed Saul.

In the Aramaic. Verse 4 and 5. Saul. Saul. Why are you persecuting? Why are you persecuting?

Can you see it? Why are you persecuting? Me? Why are you persecuting me?

Saul says. Well who are you Lord? And he said. I am Jesus. Whom you are persecuting. What had Saul been doing?

We've seen it already. He'd been persecuting. The followers of Jesus. And yet. Jesus' followers. Are so closely united. To himself.

So united. To himself. That Jesus says. Why are you persecuting me? That is. Why are you trying to destroy. My people. My church. My disciples. Why are you persecuting me?

[15:05] Do you see what Jesus is saying? Jesus is saying. When you make my people suffer. When you seek to destroy my people. When you seek to afflict my people. You are afflicting me.

You are seeking to destroy me. I am so united. Closely united to my people. That when you make them suffer. You are making me suffer.

I am Jesus. Whom you are persecuting. Because you are seeking to destroy my disciples. How close is the bond.

Between Jesus. And his people. There is a beautiful text. In Isaiah. Isaiah 63. In verse 9. If you want to write that down. And in that text.

In the Old Testament. It makes exactly the same point. It is talking about. The time of Moses. When Israel was in the wilderness. And so on. They were in Egypt. They were in bondage. And Isaiah says this.

[16:05] He says. In all their affliction. That is in all of Israel's affliction. The Lord was afflicted. The Lord was afflicted. In all their afflictions.

So can you grasp this. Whenever God's people suffer. And especially. When they are persecuted. For Jesus sake. What is done.

To God's people. It is. As though it is done. To the Lord Jesus. He is so. Closely united. With his people. And you.

May need to remember that. When the day may come. When that truth is. Of immense comfort to you. Maybe of immense comfort to you today.

It may be because. Some of the people. Discriminate against you. Because you are a Christian. In your job. You are looked down upon.

[17:11] Because you are a follower. Of the Lord Jesus. In school. You are not on. In the in crowd. People make fun of you. Because you are a Christian. In.

Or they hold you. In some kind of contempt. And not for any fault. Of yours. But because. It just. Sticks in their craw. It rankles them.

That you are a follower. Of the Lord Jesus. But when they do that. They are doing it to Jesus. So closely. So closely. Are you. So closely.

Are you. Bound to him. United to him. And you will need to keep that in mind. Won't you. In some very dark hours.

The closeness of Jesus. And then thirdly. The program of Jesus. The violence of Jesus. The closeness of Jesus. The program of Jesus. Look at verses 15 to 16. What is Jesus up to.

[18:10] When he brings. Saul. Into the kingdom of God. When he. Disarms him. Overcomes his resistance. And makes him willing. To bow the knee. To Jesus Christ.

As Lord. What is his purpose. Well. And he tells you. His purpose. When he speaks to Ananias. Ananias. Is. Naturally.

Hesitant. To go and lay hands on Saul. I. I think. If I were Ananias. To carry my name.

Before the Gentiles. And the kings. And the sons of Israel. And so. Here is a new moment. In church history. Here is a new departure.

The apostle Paul. Is not just. Any other witness. But Jesus. Is beginning. To carry out. That program. From all eternity. That program.

[19:05] That's spoken of. In the old testament. In Isaiah 49. Verses 5 and 6. Where the Lord. Is speaking. To the Messiah. The suffering servant. And the Lord. Says. To his Messiah.

The servant of the Lord. Is it too small. A thing. That you should be. My servant. To bring my people. Israel back to me. Is it too small. A thing.

To bring. A remnant. Of the Jews. Back to a knowledge. Of the true God. And restore them. To my favor. Let's do something. Grand. Says God. Let's do something. Greater. Let's do something.

Bigger. I will give you. As a light. To the Gentiles. To the nations. That my salvation. Might reach the ends of the earth. And that is Isaiah 49.

Verses 5 and 6. And that's what Jesus is beginning to institute. In verses 15 and 16. Of Acts 9. He's saying. This man. Ananias. He is a chosen vessel of mine.

[20:02] To carry my name. To the Gentiles. And the emphasis is on that. The pagans. The non-Jews. The people that didn't have the covenants.

The promises. The signs. The scriptures. The folks that didn't have the revelation. From Mount Sinai. Of God's law. The people that didn't have the true worship.

In the tabernacle. And the temple. The ones that didn't have. All of the spiritual advantages. Of being raised in a covenant family. And Paul is going to be. The man.

The main witness. And servant of Jesus. To bring that gospel. Of Jesus. To the Gentiles. And the pagans of this day. And you might be sitting there thinking.

Well that's all well and good. But frankly who cares. But if Jesus Christ. Had not made Saul. His chosen vessel. To bring the gospel. And the name of Jesus.

[ 20 : 57 ] To the Gentiles. Then most of us here. Wouldn't be in the kingdom of God. It's that simple. We wouldn't be here. It may be hard for you to see.

What the connection is. I'm C.H. Spurgeon. I'm a Baptist preacher. In the 19th century. He's a preacher. In the big church. Still on. Elephant and Castle.

A metropolitan tabernacle. And he was asked in 1857. To preach at a service. It was a national fast day. Of feasting and humiliation. For Britain. The UK was.

Britain was having trouble. In the empire in India. And they wanted. The government to have a fast day. And Spurgeon was due. To preach at it. But it was going to be. In the Crystal Palace. In South London.

Spurgeon had to go. The day before. Because they wanted. A test for acoustics. And the way they did it. They didn't have microphones. In those days. And the way Spurgeon did it. Is he announced his text.

[ 21 : 56 ] Saying it in different volumes. And different pitches. In the building. So they'd know where best. To put the pulpit. He hollered out. In a loud voice. John 1 verse 29.

Behold the Lamb of God. Who takes away the sin of the world. Behold the Lamb of God. Who takes away the sin of the world. He'd go to another part of the building. And he would shout it out. So they could test the acoustics.

And what happened. Was one of the workmen. Was working in. One of the galleries. Heard those words. And for some reason. Those words. As Spurgeon shouted them out.

Went straight to his heart. And brought conviction of sin. He put his tools down. He went home. The workmen. Had a time of prayer.

And spiritual struggle. And he began to see. That the Lamb of God. Was the one who could take away his sin. You wouldn't connect the two. Would you? You wouldn't think there'd be any connection.

[ 22 : 53 ] Between testing for sound. And acoustics. And someone coming into the kingdom of God. What have those two things got in common? But in the strange chemistry of the Holy Spirit.

They do. So this text. You might think. What has this got to do with us?

Why should I be concerned. That Saul of Tarsus. Is a chosen instrument. Because in verse 15.

Jesus gives to Saul this message. To bear Jesus name before the Gentiles. And that's what you are. There are probably.

Very few Jews. Here this morning. I can think of one. Those who are of Israelite descent. The vast majority of you. Are Gentiles.

[ 23 : 58 ] You're pagan. In your background. If I can say that. Originally. And that's why the conversion of Saul. Of Tarsus. On the Damascus Road. Matters to you.

And it ought to be important to you. Because you see. In chapter 16. And verses 6 to 10. When Paul is on his second missionary journey.

He's going west. And he wanted to go into the province of Asia. And the Lord Jesus wouldn't allow him to. So he turned north. And he was going to the area of Bithynia. And Jesus wouldn't allow him to go there. And so perhaps.

In partial frustration. They turn west. And they go to the eastern sea. Of the eastern side of the Aegean Sea. And the city of Troas. And it's there.

Isn't it? That Paul sees a vision. Of the Macedonian man saying. Come over and help us. And Paul took that. As the Lord's signal. And his group go over the Aegean Sea.

[ 24 : 51 ] And they walk into the city of Philippi. Why should you care about that? Because when Paul went from Troas. Across the Aegean Sea. And he walks down the Philippian high street.

The gospel of Jesus Christ. Has come to Europe. And it was from there. That it would spread. To the entire western world. And that may not have happened at all.

If he'd gone into Asia. Or if Jesus had allowed him. To go north into Bithynia. And so on. But instead. Jesus closed the doors. And he brought his chosen vessel.

To go across the Aegean Sea. And walk down the streets of Philippi. So that the gospel could come to Europe. And eventually it would come to us. And so we can say.

Can't we. In one sense. If the apostle Paul. Had not been Christ's chosen vessel. To bring the gospel. To non-Jews like us. We would never have heard. Or come quite likely.

[ 25 : 53 ] Within the reach of the gospel. And so when Jesus chooses his servant. In Acts 9. He has you and I in mind. And he has your need.

And my need. To enter into the kingdom of God. By means of his premier witness. That is the program of Jesus.

Let's lastly look at the servants of Jesus. The servants of Jesus. And you see that in verses 10 to 19. And then also in verses 26 to 28. There are two servants of Jesus there.

Aren't there? And you've got Ananias and Barnabas. And as we said. We can understand. Can't we. How Ananias was just a bit reluctant. To go to Saul. But he goes.

Nevertheless. And you know. When Ananias went to Saul. He entered into the house of Judas. On straight street. And he did a wonderful thing. Can you see. The wonderful thing he did.

[ 26 : 52 ] Look what he does in verse 17. This man. Who has been breathing out. Slaughter. And murder. And he says to him. Verse 17.

Brother Saul. The Lord has sent me. Even Jesus. Who appeared to you. Brother Saul. See what he's saying.

This persecutor of the church. This destroyer. Of Jesus disciples. Has now been brought. Into the kingdom of God. And has bowed the knee. To Jesus as Lord. And. He is a brother.

Along with Ananias. And he's saying to Saul. By implication. Isn't it? You are not alone. You are not isolated. You are part of the family. You are part of the family of Jesus.

And you are my brother in Christ. Brother Saul. What is Ananias doing? He was just. He was just. In the small manner.

[ 27 : 47 ] Of his words. Welcoming. One of Christ's servants. Into Christ's family. And letting him know. That he not only had a relationship. With the Lord. But when he came to know.

Jesus as Lord. He had a relationship. With others. Who were his brothers and sisters. He did not stand alone. And Ananias. In his own way. Made Saul realize.

That he was now. One of the family of Jesus. And welcomed him into it. And then you know. Verse 26 and following. Saul goes to Jerusalem. And they're all afraid. You can imagine.

They're nervous. No one wants to trust him. He tries to join the disciples. But of course. They're a little bit nervous. What would you do? Would you trust a guy like this? We've seen devious people. Try and get into the church before. We know how they operate. Is he going to infiltrate our ranks? And then he'll turn us all in. And wipe us all out. Is that what he's doing now?

[ 28 : 44 ] We're not going to accept this guy. We know that people get converted. In order to get their papers. To get in amongst the people of God. We don't trust him.

But Barnabas verse 27. Took him to the apostles. And told him how he'd seen the Lord on the road. And Barnabas was the one who took up his case.

And got him accepted and trusted him. And he paved the way for the rest of the disciples in Jerusalem to accept all of Tarsus. And so here are two servants of Jesus.

Who made another one. Who'd become a servant of Jesus. Welcome. In the fellowship of Jesus. So that he didn't stand alone.

Ananias and Barnabas. Are kind of second string servants. In the New Testament.

[ 29 : 46 ] They're not the superstars. They're not the apostles. In fact we never hear of Ananias again. Except once. Maybe Paul refers to him later.

But he just drops out of the scene. Barnabas is fairly prominent. But he's not an A-lister. He's not in the first 15. He's not in the 23.

He's kind of a second string servant of Jesus. And that's good isn't it? Because that's what most of us are. And yet if it wasn't for Ananias.

And it wasn't for Barnabas. In making sure that Jesus' chosen vessel. Saul was welcomed into the body of Christ. How different things may have turned out. That's a great lesson isn't it?

That you don't have to be prominent. To give faithful service. In fact it is mostly the Ananias and the Barnabases. That Jesus seems to use.

[ 30 : 43 ] Most of us fall into the category. Of Ananias and Barnabas. People who might not know. Much. But are servants of Jesus.

Who make other believers. Feel welcome. In the fellowship of Jesus. That's why it's always really encouraging. When I go to see somebody who's been ill.

Or shut in. And Mrs. Ananias has been in to visit. Or just been on the phone. As somebody who doesn't blow any trumpets. They're just caring. And showing love.

And visiting that person. Or when I go to visit someone in hospital. And I find that Mr. Barnabas has been there already. And they've read the Bible. And prayed with that person. It's wonderfully encouraging.

And there's no criticism here. There's just that verse. Isn't there from 1 Thessalonians 4. We urge you brothers and sisters. To do so more and more. You see Jesus reveals himself.

[ 31 : 43 ] Through his servants. And you can see the likeness of Jesus. In the actions of Ananias and Barnabas. Who don't see great prominence for themselves.

But seek to make another disciple of Jesus. Feel at home. And wanted. Among the church of Jesus. It's why the ministry of welcoming on a Sunday.

Is such a wonderful ministry. It's true isn't it. That not everyone wants to feel at home. In the church of Jesus. That some people want to be left alone.

Some people want to run away as quickly as they can. But our duty as a church family. Is to make them feel that they have brothers and sisters in Christ. Who care for them.

And if you leave that up to the paid professionals to do it. Let me tell you. It'll never get done. Don't you love Acts 9. It starts with the violence of Jesus.

[ 32 : 41 ] And we end up seeing the gentleness of Jesus. In welcoming the apostle Paul. And you need to realise.

That Jesus may not always be gentle. And if Jesus has made you a chosen vessel of his. You can be sure he's going to get you into the kingdom of God.

And if you are resisting this morning. And you are not willing. He will bring you to the point. Where he will make you willing. Isn't that your story for many of you? And to overcome your resistance.

He may have to execute. His violence. And so I just want to warn you. Jesus isn't always a gentleman. But he never does it to destroy you.

Only to save you. Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.