

# An Unlikely Convert

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Heavenly Father, we who are here this evening to worship You are a testament to Your grace.
- Lord, not a single one of us deserved this salvation to be brought into fellowship with the living God.
- And yet You have saved us because You are rich in mercy because of the great love with which You have loved us.
- And so we ask, Father, now that as we open up Your Word that You would speak to us from Acts chapter 9. Remind us of the grace we have received.
- Renew our joy of salvation and increase our faith to evangelize the lost. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Acts chapter 9, verses 1 to 31.
- [ 1 : 2 9 ]     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 of 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 opened, 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.
- [ 2 : 4 3 ]     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 then 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 and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

[ 4 : 11 ] And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue 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.

While 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.

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. 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.

So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists but they were seeking to kill him.

[ 5 : 30 ] And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 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.

Take a moment now to think of the most unlikely convert to Christianity whose testimony you have heard. Maybe you count yourself among them.

maybe you think of someone like Rosaria Butterfield. She is now a pastor's wife, a homeschooling mother, author, and speaker.

But prior to her conversion she was a professor of English and women's studies at Syracuse University living with a lesbian partner and teaching critical theory specializing in queer theory.

While researching the religious right and in her own words quote, their politics of hatred against people like me end quote. She met a winsome Christian witness who became her friend and confidant.

[ 6 : 39 ] And after repeatedly reading the Bible in large chunks for her research Rosaria Butterfield converted to Christianity and she details her conversion story in her book The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert.

And she says that after she converted it led to a cataclysmic fallout where she lost quote, everything but the dog. Yet she gained eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Or maybe you think of someone like Christopher Yuan who is an author and professor at Moody Bible Institute but prior to his conversion he was promiscuous drug dealer having multiple anonymous sexual encounters every single day and selling drugs in 11 states until he got busted and was floundering in jail with the diagnosis of AIDS.

That's when he encountered Christ through his word. Or maybe you think of someone like John Newton who was a licentious Navy man working as a slave trader before he was converted.

And after his conversion he wrote the famous words of the hymn Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found.

[ 8 : 02 ] Was blind but now I see. This passage is one of these stories. It teaches us that the Lord Jesus sovereignly and graciously gives sight to the blind so that they might speak of his name.

that Jesus gives sight to blind sinners so that they might speak of his name. So we're going to first talk about Paul as an unlikely convert about seeing Jesus in verses 1 to 19 and then we'll talk about an unlikely servant speaking of Jesus verses 19 to 31.

In the last verse of chapter 8 we saw that Philip was engaged in preaching the gospel to all the towns from Azotus to Caesarea. That's the verse immediately preceding this chapter.

And the first verse of chapter 9 offers a sharp contrast but Saul so that's contrasting Saul from Philip 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 of Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the way men or women he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

This is the Saul who is better known by his Roman name Paul the apostle Paul soon to be apostle Paul recall that in chapter 8 verse 3 we were told that Saul was already ravaging the church in Jerusalem he was entering house after house and dragging off men and women and committing them to prison.

[ 9 : 29 ] He wasn't content to just raise the large public gatherings of the Christians of the church he actually interrogated people to find out where these Christians lived and went in house to house to drag them against their will out of their own homes to take them to prison.

And Saul's rampage here expands even further in chapter 9 not content with getting the Christians and committing them to prison in Jerusalem he now gets permission from the high priest to go beyond Jerusalem to Damascus which was 135 miles northeast of Jerusalem.

A six days journey by foot. That's quite a breath that he's trying to cover to find all those belonging to the way in order to tie them up and to drag them to Jerusalem for trial and imprisonment.

This is the first time in the book of Acts that Christians are described as followers of the way those belonging to the way. This is an insightful metaphor for what it means to be a Christian.

First it means that Christians have discovered the way of salvation. Acts 16 17 puts it that way. Jesus had said in John 14 verse 6 I am the way the truth and the life.

[ 10 : 43 ] No one comes to the Father except through me. So Jesus say is the way of salvation and to belong to the way means we are on the way there. We are a follower of Jesus.

We've not arrived but we're on the way. Second to belong to the way is to adopt a new way of life. Second Peter chapter 2 verse 21 speaks of the way of righteousness.

Acts chapter 18 25 to 26 speaks of being instructed in the way of the Lord. And finally Jesus had warned in Matthew 7 14 against following the easy way and told us to go to the hard way that leads to life.

So to belong to the way is to walk in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ. And Saul as you can see here was decidedly not following the way.

In fact he wasn't even slowing, slowly turning toward Jesus. He was running headlong in the opposite direction. 100 miles per hour.

[ 11 : 49 ] The word way occurs several times in this passage. Both verses 17 and 27 tell us that Saul encountered Jesus on the road. Same word, on the way.

And what way was Saul on? He was not on the way to Christ. He was on his way to Damascus so he could round up more Christians and put them to prison and hoping that some of them will be killed.

But it says in verse 3, now as he went on his way he approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. The light of Christ intercepts Saul while he is on the wrong way.

I've seen some media depictions of Saul's conversion where he is portrayed as reflective and remorseful after witnessing Stephen's courageous martyrdom and gradually realizes the error of his ways.

But that's not the picture that we see in the Bible. Saul is still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. Saul is living and breathing persecution and murder of Christians.

[ 13 : 01 ] His life is consumed by this zeal to exterminate the Jesus movement. In Acts 26 verse 14 when Saul is recounting his testimony again he says that Jesus appeared to him and said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

It is hard for you to kick against the goats. This is a proverb that expresses the ultimate futility of resisting God's will. Goads were sharp sticks that farmers used to prod oxen and if the oxen were resistant they would kick back but ultimately it would make the farmers to prod them only harder.

It would be futile. Jesus is telling Saul that his efforts to stamp out the gospel and resist God's will is ultimately futile.

Saul was not gradually coming to his senses. He was kicking and screaming against the will of the Lord and it's precisely at that moment that the Lord Jesus intervenes and turns Saul's life around 180 degrees.

Isn't that how God saves every single one of us? Romans 5, 6 to 11 tells us that while we were still weak, while we were still sinners, while we were enemies of God, that Christ died for us to reconcile us to God by his death.

[ 14 : 34 ] Ephesians 2, 1 to 10 tell us that even when we were dead in our trespasses, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, living according to the desires of the flesh, God, not because he saw some hidden redeeming qualities in us, not because he detected some faint moral merit, but because he is rich in mercy, and because he loved us with a great love, he made us alive together with Jesus.

We were all going in the wrong direction when God intercepted us on the way and turned us around to the way of Christ.

Christ. This is the way God intercepts Saul on his way to Damascus, and the light from heaven that shone around him indicates the presence of God, the appearance of God. God, according to 1 Timothy 6, 16 says, dwells in unapproachable light.

And later in chapter 26, Paul describes this light as brighter than the sun. So after this report of seeing this blazing light, you would expect the description of Saul seeing the form of Jesus.

But there's no such report after the light. Instead, what we find in verses 49 is a report of what Saul and the man with him heard. Please pay attention to words that point to seeing and hearing in verses 47.

[ 16 : 15 ] 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 opened, 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.

It says here that Saul's companions heard a voice but saw no one. Later in Acts chapter 22 verse 9 when Saul is recounting this story again, he says those who were with him saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to him, which is flipped.

This seems like a contradiction on the surface but both accounts are actually highlighting that the revelation of Jesus Christ was reserved for Saul alone. Saul's companions saw the heavenly light but did not perceive that the light was the glory of the risen Christ.

[ 17 : 33 ] They heard the voice but they did not understand what Jesus was saying as Saul did. so while this encounter with Jesus occurs in public and there are witnesses who can corroborate this extraordinary phenomenon, this meeting is also private and personal.

It's between Jesus and Saul. Jesus is revealing himself personally and specially to Saul.

Isn't that an amazing grace? that the God who created the cosmos and sustains it by his might is not too busy or preoccupied to attend individually to us.

This was the case when each of us came to know and believe in the Lord Jesus for the first time. You may have heard a sermon that was preached to a crowd of people but the Lord Jesus was speaking personally and specially to you.

Luke employs a motif of blindness and sight here as a metaphor for spiritual blindness and sight. He did this in his gospel as well in the gospel of Luke.

[ 18 : 55 ] In Luke chapter 4, 18 to 19, he says that the central aspect of Jesus' mission is to recover the sight to the blind. And Jesus does this both literally and even more importantly figuratively throughout the gospel of Luke.

In Luke chapter 6, verse 39 to 40, he uses a parable to refer to spiritual blindness, saying that a blind man cannot lead a blind man. And then in Luke 8, verse 10, Jesus mentions those who are seeing yet do not see.

And that motif of blindness and seeing comes to a climax in Luke chapter 24, where on the road to Emmaus, two of his disciples, as Jesus opens the scriptures to them, it says that their eyes were opened to recognize Jesus as the risen Messiah.

Saul's blindness after this encounter on Damascus Road also functions as a metaphor for spiritual blindness. His physical eyes are open, yet he sees nothing.

In fact, Saul's so blind that he has to be led by the hand and brought into Damascus by his companions. This is instructive for us.

[ 20 : 08 ] Saul was sincerely convinced that Christians were deluded heretics. He was sure that Jesus had not risen from the dead.

He was so certain of this that he was persecuting the church, killing Christians. Yet Saul was sincerely wrong. Christianity has many critics, some of whom sincerely and passionately believe that Christianity is the bane of society, but this is due to their spiritual blindness.

And this spiritual blindness can only be cured by hearing the word of Christ and believing it. Many people in the world say that seeing is believing, that they need to see it to believe it.

But Christians are people who walk by faith and not by sight. And as Romans 10, 17 says, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

And so in this narrative, Saul does not believe because he sees. He sees because he believes. and he believes because he hears the voice of the Lord.

[ 21 : 27 ] This is a tremendous encouragement for us in our evangelistic efforts. Successful evangelism does not depend on our logical or rhetorical prowess. We do not have the power to cure people's spiritual blindness.

However, we can open up God's word to them. We can speak the gospel to them. And when we do, God shines his light in their hearts.

It says in 2 Corinthians 4, 3-6, And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But for those who are being saved, God, who at the time of creation said, let there be light, let light shine out of darkness, likewise brings forth a new creation when he shines into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

[ 22 : 58 ] And it's that reality that gives us the confidence to proclaim the gospel. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 2, we do not need to resort to disgraceful or underhanded ways.

We don't have to utilize cunning. We don't have to tamper with God's word. We don't need to make it, manipulate people or to intimidate people or to change the word to make it more appealing or reasonable to fallen humanity.

But instead, we share the gospel with the simple, open statement of the truth, he says. Why? Because it's God who shines his light.

He saves and opens the eyes of the blind. Jesus himself, the incarnate word, the word made human flesh, shines the light of the gospel in his inscripturated word, the word written in human language.

And from the midst of this blazing light, Saul hears a voice. And what he heard would have made him tremble with fear. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

[ 24 : 14 ] Saul gets confused and responds in verse 5, Who are you, Lord? To which Jesus replies, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Imagine Saul's shock.

He knows well that the light from heaven is a manifestation of a divine figure. When the light of God's glory appears, people fall to their face on the ground.

This is a pattern you see over and over again throughout scriptures, and that's exactly what happens to Saul. He falls to the ground. He knows that he's in the presence of a powerful, divine, awe-inspiring being.

That's why he addresses him as Lord. But this figure says to him, the first thing he says after addressing him is, why are you persecuting me? What?

Me? I'm not persecuting you. I don't even know who you are. But Jesus replies, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

[ 25 : 20 ] The man that Saul had rejected as the Messiah, the man that Saul was sure was dead, now appears to him in his divine glory, and is asking him why he's persecuting you.

Saul must have wanted to crawl into a hole in that moment. This is a wonderful assurance for us. The Lord Jesus so closely identifies with his people that to persecute the church of Christ is to persecute Christ himself.

That's because Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 10, verse 40, whoever receives you, receives me, and whoever receives me, receives him who sent me. the church is the body of Christ, and as such represents Christ who is the head of the church.

To persecute the church is to persecute Jesus, which is to persecute God himself, the triune God. This is such an empowering reality, but that means when we go to evangelize, we have nothing to fear.

People may reject us, people may ignore us, slander us, falsely accuse us, persecute us, but when they do, they will have to deal with the risen Lord Jesus Christ, who will return to judge the living and the dead.

- [ 26 : 49 ] We may not have the power to defend ourselves, but our Lord is able to defend us, and even if he lets us suffer for a little while, he will surely avenge us in the end.

Saul had come to Damascus with the authority of the high priest to persecute Christians, but now that he has been confronted by a higher authority than the high priest, he changes course. Jesus says to him, rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.

That's exactly what Saul does. He rises from the ground and goes into the city of Damascus, and he waits further instructions while praying and fasting. And as he is waiting, Jesus gives parallel instructions to Ananias, verses 10 to 12.

He says, 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. Ananias is a disciple, so he is someone who belongs to the way of Christ.

- [ 28 : 04 ] And in a later account, in Acts 22, Saul describes Ananias as a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived in Damascus. So not surprisingly then, Damascus, when the Lord addresses him, responds humbly and obediently, Here I am, Lord.

But even Ananias is not prepared for what Jesus tells him to do. What street should I go to? Straight street.

Okay, got that. What's the house number? The house of Judas. Got that. Who am I looking for? A man of Tarsus. Okay. Name. Saul.

Saul? Saul? Saul? You mean Saul of Tarsus? You mean the one that's here to kill me?

Ananias boxed and says in verses 13 to 14, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.

- [ 29 : 14 ] And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call out near me. This is an understandable objection. But Jesus overrules it anyway and he assures him that Saul is praying and that he has already seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on it.

There's a remarkable chain of prayers that connect these, this improbable sequence of events. Remember when Stephen was being stoned to death, Saul, it said in chapter 8 verse 1, looked approvingly.

He approved of it. He was glad that Stephen was killed, executed. In chapter 7, when Stephen was being stoned, Saul provided the coat check service.

I'll hold your coats for you. Go throw those stones at him. And as Stephen was dying, he prayed to the Lord, Lord do not hold this against them.

And Jesus doesn't hold this against Saul. And then now Saul is praying. He doesn't know what to make of what is happened.

- [ 30 : 39 ] He's examining his life. His entire life up to this point, it seems, has been a mistake. And he answers, God answers that prayer and sends Ananias.

Everything significant in the book of Acts happens as an answer to prayer and this is no exception. Saul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is converted.

He's baptized, presumably by Ananias, filled with the Holy Spirit. And this is the reason that Jesus gives to Ananias, verses 15 to 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.

Saul, Jesus says, is his chosen instrument. Saul is the unlikeliest of converts. His conversion was so inconceivable that even after his conversion and after several years of ministering the gospel, he says in verses 26 to 27 that the twelve apostles in Jerusalem still did not believe that he was a disciple.

[ 31 : 55 ] There's no way he's a Christian. He's probably posing as one so he could trick us and imprison us.

That's how unlikely his conversion was. Yet Jesus had chosen him to carry his name to the Gentiles. Jesus. Jesus. This account should build our faith for our unbelieving family members, friends, and neighbors.

Are there people in your life that you deem too far gone? People you have written off thinking to yourself, well, he or she will never come to faith in Jesus.

Are there people in your life that you don't bother to share the gospel with because you think it's pointless? Well, then let Saul's conversion inspire you. Saul describes himself as the very least of all the saints because he persecuted the church.

And he says even though he was the foremost of sinners, he says in 1 Timothy 1.16, that God showed him mercy so that in him as the foremost of sinners, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

[ 33 : 19 ] In other words, God saved Saul so that people might look at him and say, well, if God can be so patient with Saul, if God can be so merciful to Saul, then surely he can save me.

That friend of yours who is a militant atheist, a promiscuous womanizer, a violent gangbanger, may yet come to faith in Jesus Christ.

And he or she may become a prolific evangelist and a gifted teacher that you never would have imagined. God radically transforms Saul's life and he can do the same for you and for others in your life as well.

Maybe some of you are in despair thinking that your wayward child will never come to faith in the Lord. Or maybe you've resigned yourself to hopelessness of thinking that you or your spouse can never overcome these sinful habits that you're stuck in.

It is impossible for you to bring about that change, but it is not impossible for God. If you are not a follower of Jesus, don't ever write yourself off either.

[ 34 : 39 ] Don't ever think that you're irredeemable. Don't ever think that you're too broken to be healed or too sinful to be forgiven. Don't ever think that you're too messed up to be loved by God.

Or that you're damaged good. That God doesn't want anything to do. It says in John 6, 37, All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I, Jesus says, will never cast out.

Jesus' arms are open wide, and if you repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection for sinners like you, He will save you.

He will never turn you away. Maybe some of you who are listening think that you're too good for Jesus. You think you're too strong and independent to ever become a Christian.



Maybe you think you're too intelligent or learned to be able to become a Christian. That's what Saul thought to him. But he was wrong. This passage teaches us the Lord Jesus sovereignly and graciously gives sight to blind sinners, and He does this so that they might speak of His name.

- [ 36 : 08 ] That brings us to my second, shorter point. God calls Saul, an unlikely convert, to be an unlikely servant.

It says in verse 20 that immediately Saul proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue, saying, He is the Son of God. Again, Saul, like Philip, obeys the Lord promptly. And this transformation of Saul was so radical that all who heard him were amazed.

This word amazed is the same word that was used at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 and in Acts chapter 8 to describe the reactions of people who witnessed the signs and great miracles that God performed through Philip.

Our conversion, too, is such a miracle that can amaze people. Though most of our conversion stories are not quite as dramatic as Saul's, every conversion is a miracle wrought by the Spirit of God.

No one can go from spiritual death to spiritual life, from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight, from being an enemy of Jesus Christ to being a follower of Jesus Christ without the Holy Spirit.

- [ 37 : 24 ] Despite his former opposition to Christ and his church, verse 22 tells us that Saul increased all the more his strength, confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

Saul was so effective in his ministry that the Jews, who were likely jealous and disgruntled after having been frustrated in their attempts to stop Saul, they start to plan an assassination.

He says in verses 23-25, There's a pattern here, and we see this pattern repeated exactly in verses 26-30 as well.

First, Saul encounters a group of believers who are still skeptical of the genuineness of his conversion. And then second, he is accepted by them, received by them, finally after some hesitation or amazement, and then Saul starts to proclaim the name of Jesus boldly.

And then third, he is opposed by the Jews. Here, and then later, by the Hellenist Jews, the same Jews who killed Stephen earlier. And then finally, with the help from fellow believers, he escapes.

- [ 38 : 44 ] So this pattern repeats itself in this passage twice. This is a compressed account.

So when it says in verse 23, Many days had passed. In Galatians 1, 16-18, we learn that that period of Saul ministering in Damascus, he also goes to Arabia, the desert of Arabia, to the south of Syria, east of Damascus.

And he ministered there for about three years before he goes up to see the apostles. So what we see here in a few verses is a span of three years or more.

But the important thing to grasp from this here is the pattern. Proclamation and persecution. Of course, there are times of peace and security for the church.

Verse 31 tells us that for a time, the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. But in looking at the book of Acts and looking at church history, we see that persecution, not peace, is the norm.

- [ 39 : 57 ] That's why Jesus says in verse 16, I will show you how much, I'll show him, Saul, how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

Proclaiming the name of Jesus entails suffering for his name, but that doesn't deter Saul again and again. What is that toy?

I think Josh told me the name of this before. That boppy toy that keeps coming back. You hit it and then it goes to the ground. It keeps coming back up. Saul's like that toy.

He's getting persecuted everywhere he goes. He's nearly killed many times, but he repeats the same pattern again. And he goes somewhere else, preaches the gospel. Gets persecuted and driven out from there.

He goes somewhere else to preach the gospel. Again and again. Look at how many times that phrase is repeated. Verse 20, verse 22, verse 27, verse 28.

[ 40 : 55 ] He's proclaiming the name of Jesus, who he was formerly persecuting, wherever he goes. Because he knows what a privilege it is to be a servant of Jesus.

Have you ever wondered why God chooses to use any human being in the first place? Why does God use Ananias? I mean, Jesus already appeared to Saul in the blazing light.

Why can't he just tell him what to do? Why can't he just restore his sight? Why does he have to wait three days or wait for the days until Ananias has his own vision so that he can come to him and lay his hands on him?

Why does God do that? Why does God use Saul? Surely, somewhere in the world, probably not that far off, he could have found someone more willing than Saul to serve him.

Recalling this, Saul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, 9-10, I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

[ 42 : 10 ] But by the grace of God, I am what I am. It's all a grace. Though Saul did suffer much for the sake of Jesus' name, he always counted a privilege to serve Christ and to suffer for Christ.

Saul knew well that he was the unlikeliest of servants. Yet God, out of the hundreds of millions of people who were alive in the world at that time, God singled out Saul as his chosen instrument.

I often ask my kids to help me with cooking, not because I need help.

In fact, involving the kids is harder because they need instruction and constant supervision. It takes longer to do everything.

They make more of a mess. So you need to clean up after them even more. But why do I ask them? I ask them to help me because I delight in them.

[ 43 : 31 ] Because they delight to help me. It brings me joy to see them engrossed in the work, giddy with excitement, so eager to please their father, basking in the glory of the reality that they can be useful to me, that they could do something to help their dad.

And as they do so, they grow. They grow in their abilities.

They become more like adults. The privilege of serving God is a gift to us.

God, in his grace, has sovereignly ordained that the great task of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ among all the nations will not be completed without our involvement.

He has given us the most sacred entrustment, the saving use of Jesus Christ, the name of Jesus Christ without which no one in the world can be saved.

[ 44 : 50 ] He has given us the privilege and the responsibility to carry that name. We have been made to see Jesus so that we might speak his name.

Let's pray that God would do that more and more through us.

Heavenly Father, that testimony of John Newton, the testimony of Saul, the testimony of thousands upon thousands of your saints throughout the ages is ours also.

I once was blind, but now I see. Oh God, thank you for giving us sight.

There is nothing more precious to us than the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, in his Holy Spirit. Oh Lord, you have opened our eyes.

[ 46 : 23 ] Lord, now open our mouths to speak the name of Jesus boldly wherever we go. that the praise of your name might be on all the lips of the nation.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.