

10.23.11 / Acts 9

Passage Guide

Jesus saves! Paul's conversion story narrated in Acts 9 is a beautiful example of how even the harshest cynic is never too far from Jesus' grace, mercy and love. Paul was the least likely person to bow before Jesus and proclaim Him as Lord. His hatred and anger towards Jesus is evident in the fact that he was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" even after witnessing and encouraging the death of Stephen in Acts Chapter 7. Paul wanted to rid the name of Jesus from his people and was willing to go to the extremes of genocide to accomplish his mission.

Paul undoubtedly viewed Jesus' claims of being the only way to God as a false teaching that was leading many of his people away from God. Trusting in Jesus' work on the cross to make him right with God would have been absurd to Paul for any man killed on a tree was said to be under a curse (Deuteronomy 21:3). One of Paul's objections to faith in Jesus may have been the fact that he was a man who had strived to earn his way to the Father by good works and rigorous obedience to the law.

Paul was a man who had accomplished several religious feats of his day. He was "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:5). These accomplishments would have garnered great respect and admiration from the religious sect. Paul believed his "ravaging of the church" was a form of service to God. However, none of these things saved Paul. We see in the passage that Jesus alone saved Paul. His good works did not make him righteous and blameless before the Father. God alone made Paul righteous and blameless before the Father (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paul walked along the road to Damascus, encountered Jesus, and was radically changed forever.

Paul deserved wrath and death for his actions against Jesus and the church. He also deserved death for his narcissism that led him to think highly of himself because of his actions. But . . . Jesus took on the wrath that Paul deserved, and in its place, He poured out grace and life for Paul. Jesus calls the very man who persecuted Him and his followers to become one of the most influential leaders of the church. Paul would even go on to be used by God to write a large portion of the New Testament. Paul's unique conversion story showcases how merciful God truly is towards us. We too deserve wrath and death for transgressions, but God chooses to be merciful. This mercy is also showcased in how God uses the church (Ananias) to minister and serve Paul during his conversion.

And so when we read Paul's conversion story we see the grace and mercy of Jesus on display. As we communicate our conversion stories we see how Jesus brought us from death to life by His work alone. We rejoice that God chooses to use us (the church) in others' conversion stories as he continues to save those, often those we think are the least likely to be saved, that He has strategically placed in our lives. Let us be bold in Jesus knowing that He has the power to save. No one is too far away from His grace, mercy and love. Not Paul, not us, and not our next door neighbor. Let us rejoice that we get to be a part of building His Kingdom and sharing this great news!

Application Questions

- We all have unique conversion stories of how God chose to give us mercy and grace instead of wrath and condemnation. Everyone's conversion story is different. What's your conversion story? How did "Jesus flood your heart with grace and radically change your life forever?"
- God used the church, Ananias particularly, in Paul's conversion. How can God use you to reach the most unlikely people for Christ in your life?

- How will Paul's conversion encourage us in our interaction with doubters and skeptics?

Prayer

- For God to save the least likely people in our workplaces, families and friendships.
- That God would use us to bring people to Himself as He did with Ananias in Paul's conversion story.
- For boldness in sharing God's word and reliance on His power to save.