

I. Introduction

Good morning! In our previous message in Acts, we talked about how the Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. And, we also talked about how Ananias was sent by the Lord to go and pray for Saul. Before we go on to today's Scripture, let's take a second look at a couple of key points.

Saul thought that Jesus was a false messiah and he wanted to do everything he could to persecute and destroy the church. With this intent, Saul set out from Jerusalem to go to Damascus and arrest the followers of Jesus. Saul was not looking for Jesus. But on the road to Damascus, Jesus came to Saul. **Acts 9:3, "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him."**



Our Lord Jesus is the Great Shepherd who seeks and saves the lost. In many ways, Saul was like a lost and rebellious sheep that had been ignoring the call of the shepherd. What will the shepherd do with such a sheep? The shepherd will come and find the sheep and use his strong authority to bring the sheep back into the fold. In these verses, Jesus reveals Himself as the Great Shepherd by appearing to Saul in power and with great authority. **Acts 9:4-5, "He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied."**

Here, Saul learns that Jesus is the Great Shepherd and Lord over all. And, here we see that those who persecute Christians are actually persecuting Jesus Himself, because the church is the Body of Christ in this world. Saul had to be led by hand into Damascus because he was temporarily blinded. For three days, Saul ate nothing; he was fasting and praying. But then the Lord sent a faithful man named Ananias to go and pray for Saul. **Acts 9:17, "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"**



Saul was healed from his blindness and he rose up, received baptism, and ate and regained his strength. After his dramatic meeting with Jesus and three days of prayer and reflection, Saul's heart was changed. Saul was born again as a follower of Jesus and he was filled with the Holy Spirit so that he could be effective in sharing the Good News of Jesus with others. Let's read Acts 9:19b-31 and see what happens next.

II. Scripture Reading Acts 9:19b-31, (NIV, 1984)

19b Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

23 After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. 26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached

fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. 30 When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

III. Teaching

We are told of two things that Saul did immediately. The first is that Saul joined the fellowship of believers. **Acts 9:19b, “Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.”** This is a good example for us. We all need to be in fellowship in the church, and it is especially important for new believers to spend time learning, talking and praying together with Christian brothers and sisters. Sharing with fellow believers encourages, strengthens, and protects us.



The second thing that Saul did after being baptized was that he went out at once and began to share the Good News with others. **Acts 9:20, “At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.”** Saul did not wait or hesitate; at once he went out and began to preach Jesus. We can learn something important from Saul’s example here.



Sadly, in some churches, new believers are discouraged from doing evangelism. They might be told things like, “*Wait until you have a better understanding of the Bible.*” Or, “*You shouldn’t spend too much time with your non-Christian friends because you might fall into temptation.*” I saw this happen one time when a woman left the Jehovah’s Witnesses and became a believer in Jesus and got baptized in a good church. She was excited because she had found the truth that Jesus is Lord and God and that salvation is by grace through faith and not by works. If the church had encouraged her, I think she would have been a very effective evangelist. But, the leadership of the church did not encourage her; they wanted her to just sit and listen to the church messages for a time before doing outreach.

I think this was a mistake. I believe that we should encourage new believers to follow the example of Saul by sharing their faith with others at once. Not everyone has the opportunity or calling to preach in public meetings like Saul did, but every new believer can begin to share the Good News of Jesus with family, friends, and coworkers immediately. If you have found the truth and discovered the love of Jesus, then it is natural to want to tell others. With just a little encouragement from the church, many new believers can be very effective witnesses for Jesus.

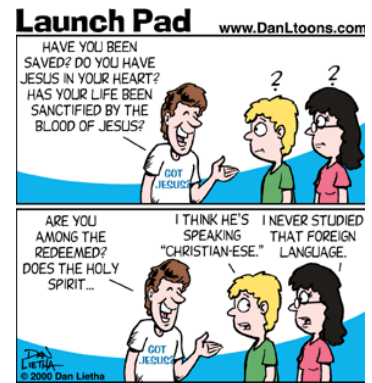


This might surprise you, but, actually, new believers are often more effective evangelists than pastors, or missionaries, or elders. For the work of evangelism, a person who was baptized a few days ago has some big advantages over a person who has been a Christian for many years. Does that sound surprising? Let’s think about it a minute.

If you have been a Christian for many years, then most of your friends are probably from the church. And, long-term Christians often don’t clearly remember what their life was like before they became a Christian. They remember some things, of course, but their memory of their own pre-Christian attitudes and lifestyle are often vague. It is a psychological fact that once we have changed our mind about something, it is hard to remember exactly what our opinion was before and why we thought that.

Most long-term Christians do not understand how non-Christians think and how they see the world. After many years of church attendance, they have even picked up a sort of Christian language, which we sometimes call, “*Christian-ese.*” This special way of talking is very hard for non-Christians to understand. Just for fun, I brought along an example.

Take a look at this cartoon from www.DanLtoons.com. The man asks the young couple: *“Have you been saved? Do you have Jesus in your heart? Has your life been sanctified by the blood of Jesus?”* If you have been a Christian for many years, it is probably easy for you to understand these questions. These expressions are rich in meaning, but basically he is just asking if they are Christians. But for a non-Christian, these words are very strange and baffling. The Christian man continues, *“Are you redeemed? Does the Holy Spirit...,”* but it does not help. Finally the young man says to the girl, *“I think he’s speaking, ‘Christian-ese.’”* But the girl just says, *“I never studied that foreign language.”*



The lesson here is that if you want to tell people about Jesus, you have to use words they can understand. If you have been a Christian for thirty or forty years, this will actually be quite difficult, because to you, *“Christian-ese,”* is normal language. For communicating with other Christians, Christian language is great. But it does not work for communicating with people who have never attended church or read the Bible. Actually, I am not talking just about thirty-year Christians. Some people are very gifted in language learning; they become fluent in Christian-ese within a few months of their first visit to church. That is wonderful! But when you tell your old friends about Jesus, remember to try to speak in a language they understand.

Why are new Christians, even baby Christians, better at evangelism than mature Christians? First, they have many non-Christian friends and family members who have never heard about Jesus. Because of this, they have a lot of good opportunities to tell people about Jesus. Second, they still speak the same language as non-Christians, so it is much easier for them to communicate. Third, new Christians are often full of energy and passion for Jesus. They have just experienced a great change in their life and they really want to tell everyone about it. Older Christians are deeply thankful to Christ for their salvation, but new Christians are totally excited because Jesus is their new, best friend.



Here is the bottom line. Young Christians, be bold like Saul, get out there and share your faith! Immediately after you come to Jesus is your best opportunity to tell others about Jesus. Older Christians, we also need to be sharing our faith; we should be setting the example for young Christians. But sometimes we just need to turn the young ones loose and stay out of the way. Don’t discourage a new Christian who wants to do evangelism, encourage them, support them, pray for them, and help them. They have fifty non-Christian friends and relatives that they can communicate with effectively. So, they will probably be more successful at evangelism than you. That’s okay, praise the Lord!

Let’s move on to a few other things. In many countries, ancient cities were often surrounded by walls like a fortress. In Japan, usually only castles were protected by stone walls, but in many places, including the Middle East, Europe, and China, walled cities were common. In a few places, walls built hundreds of years ago still stand. The walls were generally built to keep enemies out. But the walls could also be effective at keeping people in.

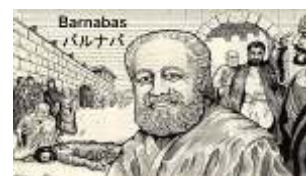


In Bible times, Damascus also was a walled city. Saul was boldly preaching Jesus, but some of the Jews conspired to kill him and they posted watchmen at every gate to prevent Saul from escaping. However, the city wall had rooms with windows built into it. **Acts 9:25**, The Jews of Damascus plotted to kill Saul, **“But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.”**



Saul escaped from Damascus by this method and travelled back to Jerusalem. The Christians in Jerusalem had heard the rumors of Saul’s conversion, but at first they were found it hard to believe, and they were afraid to meet the man who had been fiercely persecuting them a short time earlier.

Acts 9:27a, “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.” Barnabas wasn’t afraid of Saul. On the contrary, he was happy to be Saul’s friend and he stepped up and helped Saul to get connected with the fellowship of believers in Jerusalem. And, with Barnabas’ introduction, Saul was accepted as a brother.



The name Barnabas means, “Son of Encouragement.” Isn’t that a wonderful name! We all need encouragement and this is especially true for new believers. If you are a new Christian, look around and try to find a Barnabas, a brother or sister who encourages you and who can introduce you to more brothers and sisters in the church. When I was a new Christian, our neighbor Bob was a Barnabas to me. He didn’t say a lot, just a few words here and a few words there. But his cheerful faith and willingness to spend time doing things together was a strong encouragement. And he did introduce me to other brothers as well. Everyone needs a Barnabas in their life.

If you have been a Christian for a while, watch for opportunities to be a Barnabas to others. It is a great way to express the love of Christ in the church and it will be a blessing to you and the person that you encourage. Remember, a Barnabas doesn’t need to supervise or correct, and a Barnabas definitely doesn’t need to have all of the answers to the questions that come up. A friendly smile and a willingness to listen and try to understand the struggles people go through is a big encouragement. A Barnabas doesn’t worry about a person’s past or even very much about the present. A Barnabas looks at a person with eyes of faith and sees what they can become in Christ and rejoices. Be a Barnabas, put your arm around a Saul, listen, smile, and pray. Maybe you will have a chance to see a Saul become a Paul.

Acts 9:28-29, “So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.” In Jerusalem, Saul enjoyed another season of effective ministry, sharing the Good News of Jesus throughout the city. But after a time, some of the Greek-speaking Jews became so angry with Saul that they tried to kill him. Just as happened in Damascus, strong opposition arose against Saul’s bold and effective ministry.

But it was not yet time for Saul to become a martyr, and so the brothers took Saul to the city of Caesarea on the coast and sent him off to Tarsus, his hometown. We don’t have much record of Saul’s time in Tarsus, but I am sure that he had an effective ministry there as well. Tarsus was Saul’s birthplace, so in his hometown, Saul would have had many opportunities to tell relatives and childhood friends about Jesus.



Saul travelled from Jerusalem to Damascus as an enemy of Christ, but on the way, Jesus appeared to him and Saul was changed from a persecutor into one of the greatest Christians and evangelists the world has ever seen. First in Damascus, and then in Jerusalem, Saul preached Jesus. Saul preached so boldly that violent enemies arose, no doubt under the influence of the devil, the enemy of all who love Jesus. Finally, Saul was sent home to Tarsus for a time, but we will see him again in Acts 11 and beyond.

IV. Conclusion

Acts 9:31, “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” In our walk with Christ Jesus, we sometimes experience severe trials. Opposition comes, but the Lord provides a way for those who love Him and call upon His Name. And even when we suffer in severe trials, we can remember that times of peace and encouragement will come again, so we need not be discouraged by the temporary troubles of this world. Instead, we should receive the encouragement of the Holy Spirit and encourage one another.

Let’s pray.

V. Prayer