

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE MAKING OF A NEW MAN

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Acts 9:1-22

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The points of my message today are:

- Saul was a hurting person who was hurting people.
- Saul lost his sight in order that he could see.
- Saul and Ananias were called by name.
- Saul and Ananias were called for a purpose.

INTRODUCTION: At the end of Acts 7, we read about a faithful man named Stephen who was stoned to death because of his witness for Christ. When the persecutors took their coats off to do the dirty business of throwing rocks, they laid them at the feet of a man named Saul. First impressions are important, and our first impression of Saul was not a good one. Saul was a devout Pharisee. His religious resume was stellar, and the killing of Stephen seemed to fuel an internal fire. Chapter 8 tells us that Saul approved of the killing of Stephen and that afterwards, he took it as his personal mission to hunt down Christians and destroy the church. To Saul, Christians were blasphemers; it was his job as a good Jew to rid the world of them. If this were a movie, Saul would definitely be the bad guy, the one wearing black.

1-SAUL WAS A HURTING PERSON WHO WAS HURTING PEOPLE

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:1-2

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

EXPLANATION: It would have taken between 6 and 14 days to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus. So, why did Saul go there? After all, there were believers still in Jerusalem. In fact, according to Chapter 8, the believers had scattered all over Judea and Samaria. So, why target Damascus? As the capital of Syria, Damascus was a large commercial area and a transportation center. Maybe Saul was trying to prevent Christians from hitching a ride on the next caravan and getting out of Dodge. Maybe he wanted to make sure that not one single Christian got away. After all, this was more than just a business trip for Saul. A person doesn't "breathe out murderous threats" without having more than a little anger in his heart. Saul was angry. Of course, he might have justified it as righteous anger. After all, he sincerely believed that the Christians were defiling the God he served. He believed that he was acting in accordance with God's law, but I can't help but wonder if it was something else.

Outwardly, Saul had it all together. He was from the right family. He had received the right kind of education. He had followed all the rules, but here he was angrily chasing a group of rule-breakers 150 miles across the country. Is it possible that Saul had noticed something different about the way in which Stephen died? Is it possible that he heard the testimonies of the people he had begun to gather up and cart to prison? Is it possible that he saw a difference in these people, a difference that he could not understand?

ILLUSTRATION: Cockroaches are nocturnal insects. When you shine a light on them, they will often scatter. Like many nocturnal animals, the light makes them uncomfortable. If you turn on a flashlight in a dark room, the light dispels the darkness. As long as the light stays on, there will be a measure of darkness that is pushed away. An invisible friction holds the darkness at bay. However, no matter how thick the darkness, it will not overcome the light. Maybe Saul experienced such strong emotions against the Christians because he felt the tension between the light in their lives and the darkness of his own heart?

APPLICATION: I believe that whether Saul was conscious of it or not, deep inside his heart, he was deeply discontent. Like all of us, Saul would have been aware of his own inadequacies, his own fears, his own failures. Saul was desperate to do everything he could to push that darkness away. He was a hurting person who

was hurting people. Saul thought Christians were the problem, but God knew the problem was sin. The same is true today. Even when the world can't always see it, we know the darkness of our own hearts. We may try to blame people or circumstances, but God knows. The problem is always sin.

2-SAUL LOST HIS SIGHT IN ORDER THAT HE COULD SEE

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:3-9

As he (Saul) neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. ⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

EXPLANATION: We really don't know what work God had already been doing on Saul's heart already. Like the Christians of that day, we can only look at the way he behaved and draw our own conclusions. But one thing is for sure. God decided to do something drastic to get Saul's attention. I wonder how far into the trip they were when the light flashed. I wonder if it was daytime or night, if the light appeared like a lightning strike or like the probing lights of an alien ship? God doesn't give us those details. What we see is Saul's immediate reaction.

Saul fell to the ground. Interestingly enough, his traveling companions didn't have the same reaction. While Saul bowed, they stood. Maybe that's why only Saul seemed to see Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:1). Maybe that's why they heard a sound but did not hear words. They were not in a posture of worship. They were not prepared to hear God's voice. Often, God has to bring us to our knees before we listen to what He has to say.

ILLUSTRATION: A friend of mine is the mother of four boys. When the boys were young, they could be a handful. She tells the story of how one day, her oldest son—who was maybe 7 or 8 at the time—was misbehaving. She was in a hurry to

get out of the house. They had to be somewhere, and she was trying to rush the boys out the door and into the car, but the oldest just kept causing trouble. Finally, he did or said something that sent her over the edge. She dropped her purse and started towards him in anger. “I was going to discipline him,” she said, “and it wasn’t going to be pretty. I was furious, and I was ready to give it to him.” Mid-stride, she hit the floor, on her knees, arms extended in front of her, palms and face down. Her feet had caught in her purse strap, and she had fallen. “In that instant,” she said, “I knew that God had stopped me in my tracks. My son may have needed discipline but not like that. God literally brought me to my knees to get my attention.”

APPLICATION: That’s what God did to Saul. God brought him to his knees in order that he might listen. Saul lost his sight in order that he might see. God had a special purpose for Saul’s life, but before God could use Saul, he had to set him straight. Sometimes he has to do that for us as well.

3-SAUL AND ANANIAS WERE CALLED BY NAME

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:10-16

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. ¹¹ The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. ¹³ “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

EXPLANATION: Names are important. They always have been. In Biblical times, names often had significant meanings. God changed Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah to indicate their future positions as patriarch and matriarch of a nation. Pharaoh’s daughter named the baby Moses which means to “draw out” because she pulled him out of the water. In the New Testament, Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter, which means “rock,” to prophesy Peter’s foundational role in the early

church. We identify ourselves and others identify us by our names. When we call a person by name, we are saying, “I see you. I know something about you. I relate to you.” In verse 4, when Jesus spoke to Saul, he called him by name. In fact, he used Saul’s name twice.

ILLUSTRATION: It makes me think of a father having a serious conversation with a child. Like my dad might have said to me, “Paul, Paul, why did you do that?” Jesus said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And in using his name, Jesus told Saul, “I see you. I know who you are. I know what you have been doing.” But he wasn’t just reprimanding Saul; by calling his name, Jesus conveyed a sense of familiarity and concern. In verse 10, we see God do the same for Ananias.

Ananias knew who Saul was. He’d heard the stories of persecution. It’s possible that he had even experienced some of it firsthand. Yet, God wanted him to go and meet the man. God could have easily demanded Ananias, “Hey you! Go to Straight Street to heal Saul.” But instead, God called Ananias by name. The Lord knew Ananias just as much as he knew Saul. He knew that Ananias was afraid, and he knew why. When God called Ananias by name, he was reminding Ananias that he was not alone.

APPLICATION: In the same way that God knew Saul and Ananias, he knows each of us. He knows our fears and our frustrations, our hang-ups and our insecurities. He knows the desires of our heart, and he knows the purpose for which we have been created. Saul and Ananias were called by name, and so are we (Isaiah 43:1).

4-SAUL AND ANANIAS WERE CALLED FOR A PURPOSE

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:15-22

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” 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.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales

fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. 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 Messiah.

EXPLANATION: God called Ananias for the purpose of going to Saul, to heal him, to encourage him, to baptize him and help lead him in the Spirit. God also called Saul to a new purpose. He did not just command him to leave his previous lifestyle; he didn't just say, "Stop persecuting Christians." He revealed to him a new path. God had a plan to use Saul to proclaim salvation not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles and to kings. Look specifically at verse 16. Let's read it again. God told Ananias, *"I will show him (Saul) how much he must suffer for my name."*

ILLUSTRATION: Suppose I got a call this week from someone offering me a new job. I would expect to hear all about how great the company is, what my responsibilities might be, even how I will be compensated. I wouldn't expect to hear, "Now, Paul, let me tell you. This job is going to be really hard. You are going to work extra long hours. It's going to put stress on your body and mind. It may cause you to miss out on family activities. Some people will hate you for it. It's dangerous work, and you are going to suffer if you take this job." That's not the kind of job offer any of us would want to hear, but basically, that's what was revealed to Saul. He was going to do great things for Jesus, but he was also going to suffer for Jesus.

APPLICATION: Saul could have refused the offer, but he didn't because Saul recognized that he had been a hurting man who was hurting people. He understood that God had taken away his sight in order that he could see. He heard Jesus call his name, and he knew that he had been called for a purpose. In the same way, God knows us. He knows that we are all hurting people, people who are weighed down by the consequences of sin. He wants to get our attention. He calls us by name

because just like he had a plan and a purpose for Saul, he has a plan and a purpose for you and for me.

What about you? Have you had a Damascus Road experience? If so, how did you respond? If not, consider if today could be that day, the day when Jesus is trying to get your attention? 1 Corinthians 5:17 says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* On the road to Damascus, God began the process of making Saul into a new man. He wants to make you into a new man or woman as well. How will you respond?

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