

For the Glory of It All, Part 3

Overcome by the Glory

Acts 9:1-19

September 18, 2011

Focus Passage

¹But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸Saul 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. ⁹And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹And 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, ¹²and 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." ¹³But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵But 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. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷So Ananias departed and 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." ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹and taking food, he was strengthened.

Acts 9:1-19 ESV

Background

This passage leads us to the first account of Paul's conversion. We also find his conversion story in Acts 22 and 26. Two others appear in speeches of Paul's that Luke records. In essence, we have the same story in all three presentations, though there are some slight variations of details.

Saul (later named Paul) came on the scene in Acts 8:3 and is presented as the persecutor of the Christians in Jerusalem. The irony is that this man will become the central figure in the mission of Christ to the Gentile world. His Jewish name is Saul and being from the tribe of Benjamin, it is quite evident that he was named after the first king of Israel who came from the same tribe. Later on we know him by his Roman name, Paul.

Saul was born in Tarsus, the capital of the province of Cilicia. Tarsus was a great cultural center. Saul came to Jerusalem for rabbinical academy under Gamaliel, who was the most competent Jewish scholar of the day. Saul embraced the teachings of the Pharisees and became a member of this religious party of Judaism. Saul was a Roman citizen and on occasion he appealed to his Roman citizenship in a crisis.

In this passage, Saul is on the road to Damascus, which is a key commercial city located about 175 miles northwest of Jerusalem in the Roman province of Syria. Several trade routes linked Damascus to other cities throughout the Roman world.

Overcome by the Glory

In Acts 9:1-2 we see Saul (later called Paul) was so zealous for his Jewish beliefs that he began a persecution campaign against anyone who believed in Christ ("who belonged to the Way").

- Why do you think the Jews in Jerusalem would want to persecute Christians as far away as Damascus?
 - To seize the Christians who had fled.
 - To prevent the spread of Christianity to other major cities.
 - To keep the Christians from causing any trouble with Rome.
 - To prove Saul to be a true Pharisee, zealous for the law.
 - To unify the factions of Judaism by giving them a common enemy.

In verses 3-5, Saul is overcome by the Glory of the Lord. While his plan is to hurt those who are Christian, Christ comes to Saul and shows him His glory. He is confronted by the risen Savior and is brought face to face with the truth of the

gospel. Saul refers to this experience as the start of his new life in Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8, Galatians 1:15-16). Saul's light from heaven was not a vision, but he saw the risen Christ himself (9:17). Note that in verse 5, when he said, "Who are you Lord?," we should not suppose that he recognized Jesus as equal to the God of Judaism. Saul only meant the title as a simple "mister" or "sir."

- Where are you? Like Saul are you on the Damascus road living your own way? Has the Lord confronted you with your sin? Have you responded?
 - Sometimes God breaks into a life in a spectacular manner, and sometimes conversion is a quiet experience. There is no right way to come to Jesus. Beware of people who insist it must be one way. The right way to come to Jesus is whatever way God brings you.

It is significant in verses 6-9 that there are witnesses to this event. There were men with Saul that heard a voice but saw no one. Here we see when Saul arose from the ground; he was not able to see.

The men who accompanied him led him to Damascus. Everyone around him was speechless and Saul was struck in such shock by the encounter with the glory of the Lord that he would not eat or drink for three days and would remain without vision.

- Have you ever been so overwhelmed by the thickness of His presence that you can't sleep or eat? Have you had any encounter with His glory that inspired you to immediate action or transformation?
 - We see with Saul a pivotal moment with the Lord. He will never be the same. Perhaps this moment is capturing because the journey he was on to persecute and harm believers. He witnessed those who were willing to give their life for a risen Savior. The passion of Stephen and other believers left him profoundly changed and at the moment that he heard the voice from heaven and saw a great light he was profoundly changed.
- Would our witness of Christ cause someone to want what we have? Are we passionate about others hearing the gospel and are we ready to share it at all cost?

In verses 10 -14 Ananias enters the story. He is a disciple that lives in Damascus. He has probably been a believer since before the persecution of Christians. After the Lord has called Ananias to go and find Saul, he expresses that he has heard about Saul, has heard that he is a persecutor of Christians and

has authority from the chief priest to bind up all who call on His name. This leads us to believe Ananias is not one who has fled persecution in Jerusalem, rather he has just heard about it. Ananias' fears and questions are normal and do not mean that he was not going to obey. His anxiety should have been more settled when the Lord told him that Saul was "praying" instead of "preying". Saul had already seen a vision of Ananias laying hands on him. Ananias' role was to go and lay hands on him so he would receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

- Ananias was chosen by God to commission Saul for ministry although Paul's says in Galatians 1:1 that he did not receive his apostleship from man. Ananias was a major part of the gospel being scattered to the Gentiles.
- We are called to disciple, empower and help others in Christ to take spiritual next steps – that is what a life group is all about. Are you doing that for someone? Be on the team allow the Lord to use you as Ananias has modeled. Ananias must have been very humbled over the next few years as he realized his role and how the Lord had used him.

In verse 15 and 16, the Lord shares with Ananias who Saul will become. He says "Go for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and Kings and children of Israel." This is a good summary of Paul's life and ministry. It was all of grace, for he did not choose God; it was God who chose him. (1 Timothy 1:14). In this mission Saul has been handpicked for a ministry to the Gentiles. In verse 16 we see there will be suffering. Faith in Christ brings great blessing but also suffering. Saul (later Paul) would suffer for his faith. (1 Corinthians 11:23-27)

- Have you ever thought about the fact that we are called to suffer for His great name? Are you prepared for the journey and suffering?
 - God calls us to commitment, not comfort. He promises to be with us through suffering and hardships not to spare us from them.

In verses 17-19 Ananias departs and enters the house where Saul is waiting for him. Ananias' obedience is notable in this first passage. He has expressed his fears, but by calling Saul "brother" in his greeting he shows a stronger commitment to God and trusting God no matter what. He lays his hands on him and retells the story of what the Lord has done in Saul's life. It is powerful because Saul knows Ananias is from the Lord. Scales fall from Saul's eyes and he regains sight. He is baptized, and he eats, and he is strengthened. In this passage Luke did not mention that the Holy Spirit came to him, but it is assumed in this passage.

- Have you been overcome by His glory? Could you have scales on your eyes that need removing? The fact that you are here today maybe the laying on of hands you need to take that step in Christ. Don't continue to turn the light of faith off. Instead, allow this relationship and this message from Christ to transform you today, and then act on it just as Saul did. Follow through by getting baptized, eating and being strengthened for the next step.

Application

What does this study say to you? In Acts 9 we see the conversion of a zealous persecutor of Christians. This is so powerful because of the grace that has been demonstrated. This passage should motivate us to recognize that no one is too far removed from receiving the free gift of eternal life. It should also pierce our life and make us note that if we have not asked Jesus to come into our lives we can do that now. This could be our moment when we are overcome by His glory. If you have already found that saving grace and received the free gift of salvation, maybe you are overcome by his glory and have seen Christ in a fresh way today and deep inside you there is a spark a fresh fire. What will you do with the glory revealed? In the Experiencing God study by Henry Blackaby he says; " You can not go with God and remain the same." There must be movement. What is your movement? What will happen next with this encounter?

Take some time as a group and pray for one another as we have encountered Christ today. Pray for the direction Christ is calling each group member to and what steps he wants each one to take from our Damascus road experience with him. For the Glory of it all – what's next?

What's Your Story?

In the Bible Study Contagious Christian there is an outline for writing your conversion story. It uses Paul's story in Acts 26. Take sometime as an individual and write down your own story using the outline and questions provided then share if desired with your group as your group leader directs.

Before Christ - BC
(Acts 26:4-11)

1. What were you like before you came to Christ?
2. What made you start thinking Christ would make a difference in your life?

Meeting Christ – MC
(Acts 26:12-18)

1. What was it that finally motivated you to trust in Christ?
2. Specifically how did you receive Christ?

After Christ –AC
(Acts 26:19-23)

1. How did your life begin to change after you came to Christ?
2. What other benefits have you experienced since you became a Christian?

-Tanya McAvoy