

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #21

Acts 9:10-19

I have just completed reading a biography of H.A. Ironside by E. Schuyler English, who was the editor of the Scofield Reference Bible. Dr. Ironside for years was in the Brethren movement that boasts about the fact that they do not have one specific gifted minister in their churches. To them, just about anyone and everyone is a teacher, which in my opinion, having listened to some of them is certainly not true. Now the Brethren movement did have some good men in it and it does stress the importance of having elders overseeing the church, but it is lacking in many ways. Anyway, Dr. Ironside was in this movement and the problem was his wife and children were nearly starving. Literally, there were times when they went a couple days without food. Well, Moody Memorial Church in Chicago had been exposed to the way Dr. Ironside systematically taught the Scriptures and they wanted him to become the pastor of their church. The church seated about 3000 people, and the leaders and congregation called him to become the pastor. When he accepted the call, some of the people in the Brethren movement became angry. Instead of people rejoicing at the grace of God that had raised this man up to become the senior pastor of one of the great churches in the world, the religious leaders of the Brethren movement were mad. But regardless of what they thought, Dr. Ironside's days of wondering when they would eat the next meal were over. A new church family loved him and took care of him.

Sometimes when you are truly being led by God, you can lose some of your old religious friends. When someone truly comes to terms with the grace of God, as opposed to the legalistic religious codes of some system, he will likely be at odds with some of the people once considered to be close friends. When you are blossoming in your relationship with the Lord and you are blossoming in your understanding of God's Word, it will soon become evident that there is a breach in some of your old relationships. However, **God will not ever call us out of some friendships to leave us friendless.** That point is seen in the early moments of Saul's conversion.

There is no other man in the Bible whose conversion story is so documented as it is with Saul. God has inspired a great deal of written information about Saul's conversion and what happened immediately after his conversion. We don't get this kind of information about anyone else.

For example, when the people of Samaria believed on the Lord, the apostles and Philip left the area (Acts 8:25-26). When the Ethiopian eunuch believed on the Lord, Philip immediately disappeared (Acts 8:39). You do kind of wonder what God did with those new converts. Obviously, they had God's Spirit in them and God would not let them down. More than likely He led them to form new churches. Sometimes I think we have made a major mistake of thinking when we see someone believe, if we aren't there to nurture them the whole thing will fall apart. It is God who saved them and it is God who nurtures them.

But when it comes to the subject of Saul, we get to see exactly what happened after his conversion. God sends Saul two key agents to help guide him as he begins his Christian experience. One is Ananias (9:10-19) and another is Barnabas (Acts 9:27ff).

IN THE AFTERMATH OF SAUL'S CONVERSION , GOD DIRECTED TWO MEN TO HELP SAUL AND INTRODUCE HIM TO HIS NEW CHURCH FAMILY, AND BEGIN HIS NEW GOD APPOINTED APOSTOLIC ASSIGNMENT TO TAKE THE WORD OF GOD AND THE GRACE MESSAGE TO THE ENTIRE WORLD.

When you start a new job it is always a big help if someone starts you off by making you feel welcome. The same is true when you go to a new church. It is very helpful if people make you feel welcome. These two men are going to make Saul feel welcome in his new family.

There are four main parts to this part of Saul's conversion story that we want to see:

PART #1 - God verbally and visually directs Ananias to go help Saul. 9:10-12

Ananias did not know anything about the conversion of Saul. Truth is we don't know a thing about Ananias until right here. William Barclay said he is "one of the forgotten heroes of the Christian Church." He was obviously the man God wanted to first use to minister to Saul at this point.

We don't know when or where it was that Ananias believed on the Lord. He had been a devout man dedicated to the O.T. Law, and all Jews in Damascus spoke highly of him (Acts 22:12). But according to **verse 10**, he became a believer in Jesus Christ (disciple), he lived in Damascus, and God gave him a vision. F.F. Bruce does not think he was one of the fugitive disciples from Jerusalem because he had heard reports from many fugitives about Saul (**v. 13**) and apparently wasn't a fugitive himself (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 201). We don't know what happened to Ananias after this episode, but at this point in time he was a man God used in a big time way in the life of Saul. Think about this, **the thing for which Ananias is forever honored in Scripture is for being Saul's friend**. Ananias was not a great expositor or great evangelist; he was Saul's great friend. The greatest of all men of God need a good, trusted friend.

Saul will never forget this man and neither should we. It would be Saul who would take the Gospel to Europe, which eventually came to America and ultimately to us. Ananias was a key agent in caring for Saul in the infant days of his conversion and we can thank God for Ananias' faithfulness and willingness to do God's will in this matter.

Now the vision was very audible in that Jesus Christ spoke directly to Ananias:

Message #1 - Arise and go to Straight street to Judas' house and ask for a man whose name is Saul of Tarsus. 9:11a

We do not have much information about the man named "Judas", but we do know where he lived. He lived in Damascus on "The Straight Street", literally in Greek "the narrow street the one called straight" (την ρυμην την καλουμενην Ευθειαν).

Now “Straight Street” in Damascus was and still is as well known as “Park Avenue” in New York, “Lake Shore Drive” in Chicago, or “Westnedge” in Kalamazoo. At the time this episode occurred, Straight Street was the main east/west industrial street of the city. It had marble pillars, three main sections, and “ornate gates” at both ends of the city. In the center of the street was an open air market with decorated awnings, and a lot of public action. This street still exists in Damascus. It is remarkably straight and narrow. Today the street has lost some of its “ancient splendor.” Tradition says that Saul was staying at the west end of the street.

Ananias learned that Saul was from Tarsus and so do we for the first time. Tarsus was the capital of Cilicia, a country that was located about 250 miles north east of Damascus off the Mediterranean coast, about ten miles. Today this area is Turkey. At the time of this episode, Tarsus had a literary reputation equivalent to Athens. In fact, it was a place known for its schools. Saul must have come from an upper class family because Saul’s parents wanted him to study Judaism in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, and they apparently had the means to fund this.

Message #2 - Saul is presently praying . **9:11b**

This fact would indicate there has been a major change in Saul. Having been a Pharisee, he was used to praying long repetitious prayers. But for the first time in his life, he is actually reverently praying and communicating with God. This is the first thing he does after meeting Jesus Christ. He does not sing, he does not speak, he does not play an instrument, he privately prays. He is no longer breathing threats against Christians, but he is praying to God as a Christian.

We don’t exactly know what the content of the prayer was. It has been speculated that one of the things Saul was doing was confessing his sins and self -righteousness and persecutions of Jesus and His followers. By virtue of the fact that the Lord is telling Ananias this, it teaches us that the **Lord does see and does know who really prays, and He hears the content of the prayers.**

Message #3 - Saul has seen a vision of you. **9:12a**

Now the Lord informs Ananias about a vision Saul is having. Obviously the Lord was giving him the vision. He not only saw what would happen, but he learned the name of the man who would lay his hands on him; Ananias.

Message #4 - Saul is blind . **9:12b**

Saul was able to see a vision, but he was not able to see anything else. He has had a vision that Ananias would show up, lay his hands on him and he will receive his sight, but he cannot see anything at the present time. Jesus Christ does see and know about all of our physical infirmities. When we don’t know what to do and we can’t seem to see which way to go, He sees us and is caring for us.

God does not speak to us today through visions, He speaks through His Word. This is why it is so critical for God’s people to be in a church where God’s Word is “rightly divided” and accurately taught because this is the way God speaks to His people.

PART #2 - Ananias verbally reacts to the Lord's request. 9:13-14

Ananias was skeptical. To Ananias this was a suicidal mission. It seems for a moment he actually forgot who it was that was talking to him about Saul. Ananias saw this as a big risk. Saul had a “notorious reputation” for doing bad things to those who believed in Jesus Christ. This is a major step of faith for Ananias to take; to go and minister to Saul. As Kent Hughes said this would be the equivalent of asking Golda Meir to go and nurse to health Adolf Eichmann (*Acts*, p. 130).

Ananias reacted and said “Lord, don't you know that this guy is out to do great harm to any who call on your name?” Think about the stupidity of this question for a moment. The Lord is talking to Ananias and the Lord has just told him exactly what Saul is doing and thinking and Ananias thinks he can tell the Lord something he has overlooked. Ananias is talking to the Omniscient (all knowing), Omnipresent (all seeing), and Omnipotent (all powerful) God and he thinks He has overlooked something. It is interesting that Jesus doesn't rebuke Ananias for his stupidity, which does teach us that the Lord knows how feeble minded and ridiculous we can be at times. Sometimes people can say stupid things and sometimes we need to just overlook them.

But Ananias does have his theology right. **Here is the first use of the word “saints” in the Church Age; pertaining to those who had believed on Jesus Christ.** What this means is that these believers had been completely set apart unto God. They were the Lord's family. This does not mean they have halos on their heads; it means they have Christ in their hearts and a set-apart status in the sight of God. Even those carnal Corinthians were classified as “saints” by virtue of their calling and election (I Cor. 1:2).

H.A. Ironside witnessed one time to a nun and told her that he was a living saint. She thought he was some arrogant religious nut walking around telling people he was a saint. She believed to be a saint you had to be dead. The nun asked him how he dared call himself a saint and Dr. Ironside proceeded to tell her about the theology of true Biblical sainthood that starts right here. If you are in the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ, you are a saint.

PART #3 - Jesus tells Ananias to go to Saul. 9:15-16

The Lord does not chide Ananias for his concerns, he simply says get going. Now the Lord reveals several important things here about Saul, designed to stabilize him:

(Revelation #1) - Saul is Jesus' chosen instrument. 9:15a

Jesus Christ wanted Ananias to know that Saul was a vessel of His sovereign election. The word “chosen” (εκλογης) is one that means God specifically selected and chose Saul. As G. Abbott-Smith said concerning this word, in the N.T. it is “always” used “of the Divine choice” (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 140). Saul believed this and taught this. In fact, in the first Epistle he wrote, Galatians, he said that God “set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace” (Gal. 1:15). He believed God had already elected him as a baby. In fact, in Ephesians he said God chose every believer “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).

There is an old story about a little boy in a Sunday School class who was asked what part he played in his salvation. The boy said that his conversion was partly God's work and partly his work. The teacher was shocked by the strange answer and asked what part he played in his salvation. He said "I opposed God all I could, and God did the rest." That is the same doctrine of election that saved Saul.

(Revelation #2) - Saul will bear my name. **9:15b**

That word "bear" (βασταζω) is one that means Saul will take up with his hands and lift up and carry and bear the name of Jesus Christ (*Ibid*, p. 78). I understand this to mean that he will write Grace Age doctrine with his hands and he will also endure any hardship necessary for lifting up the name of Jesus Christ. What an amazing transformation. **The name he once was trying to stamp out would now be the name of the One he would lift up**. He would exalt Christ more.

(Revelation #3) - Saul will bear my name before Gentiles, Kings, and Jews. **9:15c**

One Bible expositor said that when a person has been called by God to bear the name of Jesus Christ to the world, there is no higher calling. He said that if someone asked him to be President of the United States he would say "no"; because it is a demotion, because there is no higher calling than to preach God's Word to the world. That is Saul's assignment.

Saul's ministry would be worldwide communication ministry to all kinds of people. There are three specific groups named by Jesus Christ to whom Saul would proclaim His name and His grace:

Group #1 - Saul would preach Christ to Gentiles.

Gentiles refer to those not physically related to Abraham.

Group #2 - Saul would preach Christ to Kings.

Kings refers to those of highest rank in the political and religious world. Saul would stand and declare Christ before the Governors of Cyprus, Achaia and Judea. He would stand before Felix, Festus, Herod Agrippa, and Nero.

Group #3 - Saul would preach Christ to Israel.

Even though Saul's big ministry would be to the Gentile world, he never forgot to preach Jesus Christ to those physically related to Abraham. He always loved and honored Israel.

(Revelation #4) - Saul will suffer many things for the name of Jesus Christ. **9:16**

The word "suffer" (παθος) means that Saul would suffer many misfortunes and hardships for the name of Jesus Christ (*Ibid*, p. 348). He would suffer physically and emotionally. Now Jesus Christ is revealing this and what you see here is that **the message of Jesus Christ is not a**

prosperity Gospel message; it is an adversity Gospel message. Those who teach that if you believe on the Lord and sow money seeds you'll be happy and healthy and rich and free from trouble are heretical liars. Jesus taught Saul and us that if you teach grace and live godly, you will suffer.

Think for the moment of the sovereign claim that Jesus Christ has on Saul. He saves him and has mapped out exactly what it is that he will have Saul do.

PART #4 - Ananias immediately obeys the Lord. 9:17-19

There are four immediate actions:

(Action #1) - Ananias goes to the house that accommodated Saul. 9:17a

(Action #2) - Ananias lays his hands on Saul. 9:17b

This was a real gesture of love and kindness. Some have said that this laying on of hands was the moment Saul received the Spirit; however, the text does not say that. The text says he was filled with the Holy Spirit, not that he received the Holy Spirit.

(Action #3) - Ananias calls him brother Saul. 9:17c

The first word uttered by Ananias to Saul is "brother" (αδελφε). He could have said you "former murderer", "former persecutor" or "former sinner", but that is not what he says to Saul; he calls him "brother."

What this meant is that Saul was now in the family of God. He had the same faith in Jesus Christ that all the other believers had. He had joined a new brotherhood because all believers are brothers and sisters in Christ.

(Action #4) - Ananias told him the Lord Jesus sent him so he could regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. 9:17c

The Greek word "fill" (πιμπλομι) means to fill something so that it is complete. The verb is aorist passive which means this is the moment that God sovereignly caused His Spirit to take complete control of Saul's mind and life (*Ibid*, p. 360). It is possible that this is the moment he receives his apostleship. Later, Saul would say we all may be "filled" with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). As soon as Saul was filled with the Spirit there were three results:

Result #1 - Something like scales fell off Saul's eyes. 9:18a

The text does not say they were scales, but they were like scales. The emphasis is that something was peeled off of Saul's eyes (*Ibid*, p. 267). F.F. Bruce said it was "a flaky substance that fell off" (*Acts*, p. 202). The emphasis of the word seems to suggest that there was something physical that literally peeled off Saul's eyes. As a result, he regained his sight.

Result #2 - Saul arose and was baptized . **9:18b**

There are plenty of questions we may ask about this baptism of Saul, most of which come from his other account in Acts 22:16. For example:

- 1) Since Saul was a Jew and had been in Jerusalem and seen John's baptism, was this related to that?
- 2) Since the word "baptize" in Acts 22:16 is middle voice, did Saul baptize himself or did Ananias baptize Saul?
- 3) How is the baptism of Acts 22:16 connected to the washing away sins?
- 4) Did Saul leave Judas home and go to some water source, or was he baptized in Judas' home?

We will address these when we get to Acts 26. However, for now let us simply say Saul was baptized at this time. This was something he would have never done as a Jew before. He would have never joined any baptism that suggested that Jesus Christ was the God/Savior/Messiah who could take away sin and give Israel her Kingdom. But he did it now.

Result #3 - Saul ate food and was strengthened . **9:19**

Again, we wonder did Judas make him a meal or did Ananias make him a meal. The text does not say, but it does say Saul ate food and was strengthened.

He was strengthened physically by the food. He was strengthened spiritually by the Holy Spirit. He was strengthened emotionally by his new friends.

It is interesting to see that when one believes on Jesus Christ the scales come off our spiritual lives and we are able to see truth of the Word. The more spiritual one is the more truth he will see. The natural man cannot see anything. The carnal believer can only see milk. But the spiritual believer who is in tune with the Holy Spirit sees the deep things of God and is strengthened.

The message that Saul would end up taking to the whole world is this: When you believe on Jesus Christ you are saved forever from all of your sins. This is the grace doctrine he would reveal.

If you accept the grace of God you will probably lose some of your old friends; but God will connect you to a new wonderful family just like he did with Saul.