

Acts 9:1-19 Saul's powerful Conversion with John 9:1-11 13th July 2025

Prayer: Lord, enlighten and transform us by your Holy Spirit as we learn more of your saving grace today. Amen.

Have you seen the light?

Blinded by the light Saul falls to the ground and hears a voice...

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Who are you Lord?

I am Jesus, who you are persecuting...

Imagine the scene; Saul was walking or maybe riding a horse on his way to Damascus...about a week's journey from Jerusalem. He had letters of authority from the High Priest that he may go and round up and imprison any followers of "the Way". Those people who believed that Jesus who had been crucified, was now risen from the dead. He wanted to stop this following once and for all. Saul had approved of the stoning of Stephen who preached and healed in Jesus' name. He was there watching as they killed him, he would have heard Stephen's speech, heard him ask God to forgive his persecutors, he would have seen Stephen's face looking like that of an Angel.

But Saul chose not to listen and believe, rather he chose to hate that which he thought was against all his religious beliefs. He breathed murderous threats to those who did believe. He was blinded to the truth...Until the day he personally encountered the one he was persecuting and was physically blinded so that he could spiritually see and embrace the truth.

The truth that Jesus was who those crazy followers of "the way" said he was. He was the risen Messiah. The one the prophets spoke about.

Paul was a very religious and educated man. He would have known the scriptures off by heart. But he had not believed that Jesus was the "one" they had pointed to. Now he had no choice, for the Messiah who had been sent to rescue the world had chosen to rescue Saul from his blindness, from his disbelief, his hatred and hostility. He had chosen to pour out his amazing grace upon Saul that he may be transformed from hater to lover and proclaimer of Christ. Rather than persecuting others, he would be persecuted and suffer for the name of Christ.

Instead of boasting about himself and his own righteousness, he quickly came to boast about Christ alone and he considered it a joy to suffer for Christ's sake. What a transformation!! What about us? Do we boast in our Anglican tradition, the religious rules we follow – or have we met Jesus and boast about his love and grace in our lives?

Saul was humbled and transformed literally “in the flash of a light!” He who had expected to enter Damascus full of pride and prowess, a self-confident opponent of Christ was now led blinded and dependent, a captive of the very Christ he opposed.

Why would Jesus choose such a man to be his instrument to go the nations to proclaim his name? Because Jesus loves sinners. That’s who he came to save...so of course he would choose Saul. And Saul was perfect for the task, he who was energetic and zealous for a cause, would now be zealous for Christ and what a testimony he had to share! If ever someone says they are unworthy to receive Christ’s love – then just point out how Jesus chose and loved and accepted Saul.

Jesus chooses to heal spiritually and physically as we read in John 9 – he chose to heal a man born blind. All this for his glory.

And what about Ananias? We only hear of him in this passage. We know he was a believer, a disciple of Christ who lived in Damascus. An ordinary regular bloke. But one who listened to the Lord and was obedient...despite some very understandable fear and anxiety around what the Lord was asking him to do!

Imagine his situation. Word had got to town that Saul was on his way to round up the Jesus followers, to imprison them and take them before the authorities. They had probably heard that even worse things than imprisonment had happened to believers. It is a wonder that all the disciples had not fled town!

So how do you think Ananias felt when he had a vision from the Lord telling him to go to Straight St and pray for this persecutor named Saul? (wouldn’t you love to hear some clear audible instructions from the Lord!) But how would you feel about these instructions– terrified?! Ananias tells the Lord his fears and that is when the Lord says more firmly “Go” Explanation mark! Trust me on this one. The Lord seeks to assure Ananias that it will be okay, that he has chosen Saul, that he will find him praying not persecuting, and that Saul too will have had a vision telling him to expect Ananias.

So, Ananias goes and enters the house where Saul is staying. It seems the Holy Spirit had been working on Ananias’ heart too. For how does he address Saul? With the familial term ‘brother’. He welcomes him into the family of Christ. He prays not just for his sight but also for the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

He must have seen that Saul was not the threat he was expecting. Rather he met a changed and humbled man. Saul had been fasting and praying for 3 days, no doubt repenting and worshipping the Lord Jesus who he now believed to be his Saviour.

After Ananias laid hands and prayed for Saul his sight was restored...the scales fell off, that which had prevented him from seeing the truth before. And as a sign of repentance and new life, Saul was baptized, no doubt by Ananias, and given food to eat to strengthen him.

I encourage you if you haven't already done so, go home and keep reading this chapter where you will hear how Saul was amazingly accepted by the other disciples in Damascus and *at once* he began to preach that Jesus was the son of God. (It took a little longer to be accepted by the disciples in Jerusalem.) Once Saul knew the truth after encountering Jesus and receiving such grace, he could not help but proclaim it!

So, what does this story mean to us today?

I hope it has encouraged us...that no-one is beyond God's reach to rescue, to transform, and to be used for his glory.

Those who have been doing Alpha have heard a couple of amazing testimonies of lives totally changed. I shared a few weeks back of the English man – Gram Seed. He grew up in a dysfunctional family, his mother told Gram that he was evil and that he was even worse than his violent Father. Gram became addicted to drugs and alcohol and was violent. Christians had visited him on the street and told him that God loved him, he had rejected them, but when he ended up in a coma in hospital and they prayed for him, he awoke a new man, a new creation in Christ. The scales fell from his eyes and like Paul he became addicted to sharing the good news of the gospel with everyone he met.

In another episode we heard a testimony from Shane Taylor who was in maximum security prison for two attempted murders and stabbing a prison guard. He did an alpha course in prison and Jesus amazingly turned *his* life around. When he was released, he went back into prisons, this time leading Alpha courses. God had chosen and called Shane, like Saul, from one who was a murderer to one who was saved by grace to proclaim the name of the Lord and share the good news of Jesus Christ with many others.

So, transformations like Saul's still happen in amazing ways today.

But so do simple, just as important, ordinary conversions. It's been wonderful to hear testimonies shared over the past months from people sitting here today, how Jesus has transformed and impacted our lives. We all have a story to tell.

Saul may have encountered Jesus in an incredible supernatural way...and there are times when Jesus will meet people in a vision or some other way, but most hear of Jesus through someone else telling them. And even with Saul, God used ordinary Ananias to go and pray for him and to lead him into the community of the Church. Just like those Christians talking to Gram Seed on the streets in England.

My hope and prayer is that you have all encountered Jesus and made the choice to invite him into your life, that his love fills you to overflowing and that his grace is transforming you each day to grow to be more and more like him. That was Saul's goal, and he encouraged the members of Christ's body, the church to do likewise. Saul, later known as Paul, went on to write many letters to churches he had planted, and we are encouraged by Paul through his writings in the bible today. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul writes how we can see the Lord's glory with unveiled faces (or with scales removed from our eyes), and as we contemplate the Lord's glory, we '*are transformed into his image with ever increasing glory...*' (v18) In Philippians 2 he encourages us to have the same mind of Christ who considered himself a servant. He continually prayed for people to be filled with the very nature of Christ.

I pray that like Paul and Ananias, we will be willing to "go" where the Lord calls us to share his love with, may we seek to glorify God in all that we do, walking in the light ourselves and bringing light and sight to others, that many may experience the amazing, life changing, transformative love of Christ.

Let's pray:

Lord thank you for choosing and using Saul/Paul so powerfully that through his words in the bible we are still taught and encouraged by him today.

I pray that we may be zealous for you Jesus, not for religion or tradition, but zealous to share your love and grace.

Pour out your Spirit on your people, where we are blind to your truth, remove our scales and help us see you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly.

May we live in and share your light and love in the world, all for your glory.

In Jesus name! Amen.