

Text: Acts 9:1-19, Title: Turns and Twists, Date/Place: The Road, 3/5/17, AM

A. **Opening illustration:** Read the verse of *And Can It Be*, Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night; Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

B. Background to passage: History is replete with accounts and testimonies of men and women who have been opposed to the gospel, only to be turned around and rescued, turning their lives in a Godward direction. However, none probably are more influential in the course of Christianity, in fact, the course of the world, than that of Saul the persecutor. In our journey through Acts, we have reached several game changing experiences, the coming of the Spirit, the deaths of Ananias/Sapphira, selection of men to serve as deacons, the death of Stephen, but this event will change the course of the rest of Christian history, biblical revelation, gospel missions, regional/international church planting, nearly everything following, because Saul, soon to be known as Paul will be such an integral part of the solidifying and spreading of the faith.

C. Main thought: Saul got turned, Ananias got twisted.

A. **Saul Was Turned (v. 1-9)**

1. Saul was part of the attack against the church in Jerusalem. We talked about the scattering of the church outside of Jerusalem in accordance with God's plan, Saul was being used of God to advance the church even before his conversion. However, at this point, God saw fit to turn Saul around to the gospel side of the force. Saul details in chapter 22 and 26 the details of Luke's brevity of "threats and murders," saying that he killed some, imprisoned some, attempted to force some to blaspheme. He was the radical Semitic terrorist of his day, working in a country that supported his jihad to cleanse the heretics who claimed to serve the God of Abraham. But the manifest presence of the glorified, risen Christ, literally knocked him down to his knees. Christ identifies himself to Paul, and indicates that even though Saul is persecuting the church, Christ is her groom, her Head, and her King, and the real persecution was against him. Knowing that this was something supernatural and serious, Saul's worst nightmare came true when Jesus identified himself. At that point, Paul surrendered to the blinding vision, asked him what to do, and obeyed what he said. This experience traumatized him so that he fasted for three days until Christ finished the story.
2. Matt 23:23, Luke 9:54,
3. **Illustration:** We see Christians get caught up in politics like Pastor Robert Jeffers at FBC Dallas, or gay marriage issues like the county clerk in KY with the marriage licenses, or beer sales on Sundays, "The turning of a Pharisaic persecutor into a Christian apologist and missionary is 'a paradox so profound that it requires multiple retellings, with each version bringing out some further nuances of significance'. Luke, however, is not interested in exploring the psychological dimensions of Saul's transformation. The emphasis in this first account is on the sovereign, merciful intervention of God in Saul's life. This brings him to Christ and makes him 'a chosen instrument', destined to carry Christ's name 'before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel' and to suffer for the sake of that name." tell about the homosexual who gave his testimony during a seminary chapel at SEBTS, and received a standing ovation. Speaking about the night of his conversion, he said, "perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England," –C. S. Lewis
4. 1) Sometimes people get so caught up in their "religion" that they miss Christ. Many Christians do. We defend our positions, our politics, our systems; we get caught up in fanciful bickering about nothingness, when Christ is nothing more than a shadow. Be on guard. Let the life of Christ seep through you. Be more committed to Christ, not to systems. Evangelize to Christ not to churches. Love like Christ, not like your former days before you were called from darkness to light. 2) Remember that people don't go to hell for sinning, but for rejecting Christ. The gospel says come to me, not don't do \_\_\_\_\_. Paul was persecuting Christ, attacking Christ, spitting in the face of Christ. 3) The details and circumstances of Saul's conversion (from the Latin for "to turn") are pretty spectacular, and the repercussions for the NT are immeasurable, but the gospel truths about one's salvation and entrance into a relationship with Christ are taught here. God is the one who initiates salvation. No one would have ever thought that Saul the persecutor of the church would become her champion. But as God told Ananias, Saul was a chosen vessel to carry the gospel to the gentiles, before kings and rulers, and to suffer for the sake of his name. Paul wasn't looking for Jesus; Jesus was the searching shepherd, having died for Saul's sake, he sought him out, and set every circumstance and event in place to ensure Saul's submission to the gospel that he knew the facts of, but had never met the Truth of. God is sovereign over the salvation of men. He strikes men blind in their tracks, and removes the scales of their rebellion as he sees fit and on his timeframe.

## B. **Ananias Was Twisted (v. 10-19)**

1. We are not told if Ananias was praying, studying the OT texts, working in the garden, sleeping, but he gets a message of sorts that was a shocker. Peter has one in the next chapter, but his is to eat some bacon, Ananias's is to go on a suicide mission. Portrayed as a listening, Spirit-filled church leader (and possibly still a synagogue leader), Ananias answered subserviently when the Lord called. However, when the Lord laid out clean and exact instructions, there was hesitation. He felt like maybe clarification was necessary. His fear was understandable, knowing what he had heard. God further informed him that he had a ministry in mind for Saul to carry the name of Christ before gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel. Finally, Ananias relented, and probably with fear and trepidation, went obediently to this house, and did exactly what he was told. Can you imagine what it would have been like to walk into the room, or to touch the head of a man who hated believers so much? He addressed him as Brother Saul, words that he thought he would never utter, laid hands upon him in prayer (assumed), and immediately the scales came off, he was filled with the Spirit, and arose, and was baptized.

2.

Illustration: Priam coming and kissing the hands of Achilles after the slaying and dragging of Hector, *One wintry night in their remote, dilapidated wooden cabin which now served as their home, the three children divided their family's last crust of bread, and drank the last cup of tea in the house before climbing into bed still hungry. Kneeling to say their prayers, they asked, "Where are we going to get some more food, Mama? We're hungry! Do you think Papa even knows where we live now?" Their mother assured them their heavenly Father knew where they lived. For now, He was the one who would have to provide. They prayed and asked for God's provision.*

*Thirty kilometers away, in the middle of the night, God woke up the deacon of a church and instructed him, "get out of bed. Harness your horse, hitch the horse to the sled, load up all the extra vegetables that the church has harvested, the meat, and the other food that the congregation has collected, and take it to the pastor's family living outside the village. They are hungry!"*

*The deacon said, "But, Lord, I can't do that! It's below Zero outside. My horse might freeze and I might freeze!" The Holy Spirit told him, "You must go! The pastor's family is in trouble!"*

*The man argued, "Lord, you've got to know that there are wolves everywhere. They could eat my horse and if they do, they'll then eat me! I'll never make it back."*

*But the deacon said that the Holy Spirit told him, "You don't have to come back. You just have to go."*

3. The story tells itself as the completion of Saul's conversion experience. The part that I want to bear do on in addition to that is the trust that comes along with our salvation as a part of our walk with Christ. We just saw the saving mercy upon the chief of sinners; his sovereignty in salvation and in the future of the church, but Ananias began to trust himself. It doesn't sound as though he didn't understand God's instructions, but like he forgot that God knows about this man named Saul. He forgot that God fully understands all the reasons why His plan is perfect. He is becoming like the Galatians, having begun in faith, and giving way to the flesh. He forgets that God might call him to be a Stephen, or maybe he isn't sure that he is willing to be. Salvation means to come and die. The gospel compels us to obedience because of our trust, and because of the joy that awaits us. Our culture says that we have rights, have entitlements, but before God, we are bought with a price, sheep to be slaughtered, and yet even in death we are more than conquerors. Even though those lines had not been written, these truths are found all through the OT, and Ananias had put his faith in Christ knowing the danger, and yet when danger came, he was hesitant. We are crucified with Christ, we are the walking dead, we are called to die b/c he did.

- A. **Closing illustration: MacArthur's rendition of John Newton's testimony and epitaph**
- B. Recap
- C. Invitation to commitment

Additional Notes

- **Is Christ Exalted, Magnified, Honored, and Glorified?**