

Acts 9.1-31 – Being transformed by Jesus

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Main point – Paul was changed by Jesus and he still changes people today

Two weeks ago, at our 9am service, **Ray(SLIDE)** shared about how he grew up as a strong and committed Roman Catholic - following all the sacraments; all the rules.

And it was at university that he tried to discover again his faith in God.

Ray met some Christians at uni, who had a warm personal trust in Jesus, and they had what he wanted, and needed.

And through reading the Bible he came to a personal commitment to Jesus, in 1972.

It was so encouraging to hear Ray's story, and I recommend watching it on Youtube if you missed it.

Ray met Jesus, and he knew that rule keeping couldn't save him, only Jesus could.---

We've just finished our Meet Jesus Sundays.(**SLIDE**)

And before we return to our series through the book 2 Corinthians, which Paul wrote, we'll consider how he was changed when he met Jesus.

Especially for any new people with us, and to help give the context to 2 Cor, we're looking at Paul's story of how he was transformed by Jesus.-----

And it's important to know that the apostle Paul was called 'Saul', earlier in his life(**SLIDE – Acts 13.9**), as he is in our Acts 9 passage.

So Saul is Paul.

We'll consider **4 points today(SLIDE)** and in each one we'll see how what's said relates to us today.

First, Saul's past.

We read in Acts **ch 8** how Paul/ Saul, agreed with the Christian, Stephen, been stoned.

And to be clear, this 'stoned' is not being high on drugs.

Saul held everyone's coats while they threw rocks at Stephen until he was dead.

Then Saul ravaged the church(**8.3-SLIDE**).

That word describes brutal and sadistic cruelty – him going on a house to house hunt through Jerusalem, to find followers of Jesus, and imprison them.

And in **ch9 v1**, he is still breathing out threats and murder against Jesus' disciples.

He wants all the Christians not just imprisoned, but dead.

In fact in **Acts 26 (SLIDE,v10)** he shares that some followers of Jesus were put to death, and he supported that.-----

And Luke, the author of Acts, actually records Saul's conversion story 3 times – in chapters 9, 22 and 26 – the last 2 in Paul's own words.

It's obviously really important.-----

In fact it's important for the world.

For if Paul had succeeded in imprisoning every follower of Jesus, even killing them, there'd be no Christians today.

But instead, he's converted, and his ministry transforms the lives of many, and impacts the world.

But coming back to Saul's past, he persecutes God's people.-----

In **Acts 9**, with Christians fleeing Jerusalem to other places, Saul's going after them.

He requests letters from the high priest, giving him permission to go to Damascus, and capture those of 'the Way'.-----

That was the early term for those who followed Jesus as the Messiah-King and Saviour.

Saul wanted to bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem and even see them executed.

And news of Saul's actions has spread, hasn't it?

For in **v13-14** Ananias has heard of Saul – doing harm to the saints in Jerusalem.

The ‘saints’ are God’s set apart people – all who follow Jesus as Lord.----

The Christians in Damascus in **v21**, know of Saul’s infamous reputation.

He’s imprisoned and caused havoc for the believers, and that word can even mean, destroyed, or be mauled by.

And in **Acts 22.19,(SLIDE)** Saul/ Paul admits to having those in prison beaten.----

And Christians throughout history have been persecuted.

Let me give you one current example.

I regularly pray for churches in persecuted countries using information from Barnabas Aid.

Last week I was reading about the terrible situation Christians in **Turkmenistan** in Central Asia,(**SLIDE**), what they face from the authorities and Muslim majority.

Converts from Islam get rejected by their family and often lose their jobs.

To worship legally churches must be registered, but applications are normally rejected, leaving Christians to gather illegally.

The police carry out surveillance on unauthorized gatherings, raid Christian homes, and arrest believers, especially church leaders. They’re fined or imprisoned.

In one prison the cells are too small to stand up in, and believers in Jesus are beaten, tortured and semi-starved.

Prisoners have no contact with the outside world and many are never heard of again.

Please pray the Lord will strengthen Christians in Turkmenistan, and other places, and save even their persecutors.-----(**SLIDE-Heb 13.3**)

Do you pray for fellow believers imprisoned and suffering for Jesus’ sake?-----

Maybe you could do that one day each week?

In Saul’s past he’d rejected Christ, hated Christians, and his thoughts were poisoned with prejudice.

But **then he meets Jesus, Point 2.(SLIDE)**

As Saul travelled the week’s journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, and nears his destination, a ‘light from heaven suddenly flashed around him’.(**SLIDE**)

Brighter than the midday sun (26.13)

He falls to the ground and hears this voice: ‘Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?’

And asking who it is, the response is, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting’.

The blinding light was the glory of the risen Lord Jesus.

And **v17 and v24** tell us Jesus appeared to Saul in this vision.---

Saul’s companions saw the light (v7) but didn’t hear the voice, or understand the words (22.9).

The main point is, Saul encounters and meets the risen Lord Jesus.(cf 1 Cor 15.8)

And Jesus says, why are you persecuting ‘me’.

The word ‘**persecute**’ means to chase, harass, hurt; or be hostile to.

It’s coming after someone to force them to give up their faith.-----

And notice that to persecute Jesus’ people, is to persecute him.

Jesus is one with, united to, his people the church, his spiritual body.

So if believers are persecuted, Jesus is.

That why in **ch26 v14(SLIDE)** when sharing his testimony Paul adds that Jesus said, ‘it’s hard to kick against the **goads**’.

A goad is a spiky stick used to train a young bullock.

And it’s hard to keep resisting something spiky and painful.

And to keep resisting Jesus when he wants to do something, will be hard and painful too.

The Lord Jesus is sovereign and has authority over all heaven and earth.

No one can stop him doing what he chooses.
 And Christ can soften and transform the heart of the most hardened person.
 As we shall see.-----

So Jesus tells Saul to get up and go into the city.
 In Acts 26 we're told that Jesus said...(26.16-18-SLIDE)

Saul is Christ's witness, who will speak about Jesus to Jews and Gentiles, to open their eyes to turn them from darkness to light, so they may be forgiven and sanctified by faith in Jesus.-----

And when Saul gets up, he finds that he's totally blind, and needs to be led by the hand. His physical blindness was surely humbling, and makes him dependent, doesn't it?

The once self-confident leader is now weak.

And his physical blindness was really a symbol of his spiritual blindness.

He'd been blind to the truth about God, the truth that God's Son is Jesus the Messiah.

Presumably his not eating & drinking was him grieving his sin, and truly repenting – him doing a total U-turn in his life, now turning to Jesus as Lord.-----

Saul met Jesus in a vision, actually seeing Christ.

And that was foundational for Saul to become the apostle Paul – the witness and representative of the Lord Jesus.(Acts 1.21-22; 1 Cor 15.8).

But we don't have to see Jesus with our eyes, or in a dream or vision.

As we've heard the last few weeks, we actually meet Jesus in God's written word, the Bible.(SLIDE-John 21.31)

And like we sing in the great hymn Amazing Grace, 'I once was blind but now I see', that's true for us too.

Once we were blind to the truth about Jesus, but now we see.

Once we were blind to the way to be saved, turning from sin and trusting in him.

But God opened our hearts, our minds to the truth about Jesus, and for most of us, we see him now too.----

And you don't need a Damascus Road experience, a sudden and dramatic conversion experience for it to be a true conversion.

We've had people stand up the front here at Bundy, and share how they grew up in a Christian family, and they've followed Jesus as long as they can remember.

Because their parents taught them the good news about Jesus, he has always been their Saviour & Lord.

There's others who grew up at Bundy or at church for years, and then as a teenager they had to grapple and work out things for themselves.

Is what their parents believed, or what their Sunday school or youth leaders believed, what they will believe?

To countless people, myself included, we have met Jesus through the written word of God. People are still meeting Jesus and being saved as they read the NT today.

We have people at Bundy who've become Christians by reading the New Testament.

That's why we want to invite people to read the Scriptures.

Because as people read about Jesus they can meet him by faith, and be saved.----

And if you grew up in a Christian family, or came to Christ as a child **don't be ashamed of your story.**

Because Jesus has saved you too.----

You have a testimony to tell.----- Jesus is worth talking about.

And we talk about him because everyone needs saving, don't they?-----

Next point is, Saul's baptism.(SLIDE)

Not only did Jesus appear to Saul, he also appears to another, to confirm to everyone what's happening.

In **v10**, the Lord Jesus calls Ananias, and tells him to go to Straight Street and meet Saul of Tarsus.

Ananias is to go and lay hands on Saul so he may see again.

And Ananias is understandably anxious about this, for news about Saul has got around.

But look at how Jesus replies in **v15**,

"Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Paul will actually become the 13th apostle, and God's chosen instrument to take Jesus' name to the Gentiles, the non-Jews particularly.

But this ministry the Lord calls Saul to, will involve much suffering – much suffering for Jesus' sake.

And we'll hear more about Paul's sufferings next week in 2 Cor 11.

For suffering and weakness as one serves Jesus, has been a key theme in 2 Cor.

In **v17** Ananias obeys the Lord Jesus, and Saul receives his sight and the HS.

In **Acts 22(v13-16-SLIDE)** Saul describes what Ananias said in his words.-----

From this please notice that Saul didn't decide for Christ, Christ decided for him.

Yes, Saul became convinced that Jesus is the Son of God (Gal 1.16), but he's been saved by the sovereign grace of God.

Saul was saved by the sovereign work and free gift of grace.

It was God who choose Saul and intervened in his life.

As happens in all our lives, and it is amazing.

Saul then got up and was baptized, **ch9 v18**.

Just as Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations and baptize them.(Mt 28.19)

If you are a follower of Jesus and are not baptized, you **should be baptized**.

Please come and talk about that if you want.

And baptism, that washing with water, is a wonderful sign of God's grace.

That by God's grace and through Jesus, and our desperate and dependent trust in him, all our sins are washed away, forgiven.

Baptism symbolizes the work of God's HS in us, and that in God's sight we are justified - God looks at us just as if we'd never sinned.-----

The only reason this can happen for Saul and for us, is because of the death of Jesus for our sin, as we'll remember in the Lord's Supper.-----

But it is phenomenal that Jesus death is enough to cover the selfish, proud sins of someone like me, enough to cover the persecuting murderous hatred of a man like Saul, and enough to cover your sins too.

If you've not turned and put your trust in Jesus, there is no forgiveness.

But if you have, be assured of God's welcome and love.

So Saul's been baptized, and **my final point is, his Transformation.(SLIDE)**

V20, immediately 'he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: "He is the Son of God."'

Jesus is no mere prophet, no mere human.

Jesus is no blasphemer as the Jews thought, and no impostor Messiah.

Jesus really is God in the flesh, and now Saul believes it wholeheartedly.

He's now preaching that Jesus is the Son of God. And also in **v22** that Jesus is the Messiah - the Promised King & Rescuer of God's people.-----

V23 says, after many days had passed the Jews conspired to kill Saul.

[When comparing this passage with Galatians ch1, it may be that the 'many days' included him being in Arabia for 3 years before returned to Damascus.]

His life is endangered twice, and he is helped three times.

In **v25** Saul's disciples, his followers, whom he's teaching to follow Jesus, sneak him out of the city at night, lowering him in a basket through the wall.

Then when Saul tries to join the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, they're all afraid. They understandably think Saul is faking it.

Is he just saying he's become a Christian, as a plot and deception; to infiltrate their group, and find out who the Christians are so he can imprison n' kill them?-----

This time it's a man called Barnabas who helps him, bringing him to the apostles.

Barnabas vouches for him, testifying that Saul has seen the Lord, and been boldly preaching Jesus.

Saul hangs in Jerusalem and boldly preaches Jesus there too.

Then he's helped for the 3rd time in **v30**.-----

Saul, Paul's life has been transformed by Jesus.

He once hated Christians, now he is one.

He once wanted to stamp out any mention of Jesus as Lord & Messiah.

Now he preaches that.-----

He once made Christians suffer for their following Jesus, now he is persecuted and suffering for Christ.

And look at what happens to the church through Saul meeting Jesus.

V31 The church all over has peace and is strengthened, edified.

The greatest threat to the church has been transformed into the greatest agent to grow the church.-----

How marvellous is the Lord Jesus. How powerful is our L.J.-----

The Christians are now trusting and obeying the Lord Jesus with godly awe, they are encouraged/ comforted by the HS, and the church is growing.

More people are turning to Jesus as Saviour and Lord.-----

What great things for us to pray for the persecuted church today – that they will experience peace, and be strengthened, comforted and encouraged, fear the Lord and not men; and for more to be saved.

If you're not sure what to pray for persecuted believers, pray that.

And pray that for Bundy too – for us all to be encouraged, to obey the Lord with awe-filled trust, and be encouraged as we follow Jesus.

Pray that we will serve him even when it means suffering, and see many more people saved.-----

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus is still powerful to transform people today.-----

Caleb Campbell(SLIDE) grew up in Phoenix as an angry and insecure teenager with few friends.

At a party, a group of ski-head white guys invited him to join them and have a beer.

They were powerful, they called each other 'brothers', and Caleb came to love the sense of power, security and belonging this group gave him.

They became his new family.

The sense of belonging and inclusion mattered most, and the neo-Nazi ideology followed.

Caleb dehumanized others and was violent towards people of colour and their communities.-----

He was raised by loving Christian parents, but his church only preached about rules – don't smoke drink, dance or watch R rated movies.

And yet the hypocrisy he saw in the Christians and even in the pastors led him to walk away from the church.-----

With police drug busts on the skin-heads the group fell apart, and Caleb's place of security and belonging vanished. He was only left with his anger.-----

Amazingly, he had an add in the newspaper to do drumming, and he was invited to a church to fill in on a church music team.

He kept coming back to church, and a man called Seth invited him for dinner, and he and his wife served Caleb a meal and a cold beer.

And Caleb kept being invited back, week after week - no agenda, just warm hospitality.----

One night Seth asked – 'After dinner how about we talk about what makes you angry about Christianity?'

And Seth just listened to Caleb's rage and frustrations, and all the failures and hypocrisy. Seth wasn't defensive and just said he thought Jesus would share his concerns too.

Over time Seth kept reading parts of the Gospels with Caleb, and his heart softened.

His anger and resentment lessened as he came to like and wanted to know more about Jesus.-----

More than 20 years on, Caleb went to seminary and is now a pastor of that first church that welcomed him.

Caleb says, he is committed to the biblical vision of the church made up of all races and walks of life. By the Spirit he has wrestled with the bigotry in his own heart, and confessed and repented publicly and privately of his racist acts.

He said, God in his mercy has also given me deep friendships with men and women of colour, who have extended forgiveness to me, mentored me, and convicted me of sin. This transformation was slow but real.

And it started with Seth and Jayme embracing him and modelling Jesus' love week after week.

Even the broken neo-Nazi can experience God's grace.-----

www.christianitytoday.com/2025/05/gospel-neo-nazi-skinhead-christian-nationalism-pastor/

Last week, in Melbourne, neo-Nazi Thomas Sewell was arrested after attacking indigenous people and disrespecting the Premier.

Do you know that God's grace can even save him, and people like him.

God's grace saved Saul, it can save anyone.

So let's pray for such hate-filled people, and our enemies.-----

Jesus' death is enough to cover anyone's sin, even when we think they're undeserving.

Paul would later say that he was the worst of sinners. **(SLIDE-1 Tim 1.15)**

But none of us deserve God's grace, none of us deserve salvation or forgiveness.

So please don't think that friend of yours, or that hardened anti-Christian family member is beyond reach of God's grace.-----

Is there someone coming to your mind now?-----

Love them and pray for them.

God's grace changed Saul, and changed Caleb Campbell.

If you've been saved by Jesus I trust you've seen him change, or keep changing you?-----

Let's share with people that Jesus is the Son of God who saves.

And Believe that the Lord still changes people today.

Let's pray