

Acts 9:1-19

The Sound of Amazing Grace

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Intro:

A few weeks ago, one of our elders said that when God saved him, he reached way down low. Newton, who wrote *Amazing Grace*, would agree. So would Saul, or as most know him, the apostle Paul. Paul would probably say that when Christ saved him, not only did he reach down low, but reached into *enemy territory*. Acts 9 is one story with two angles—Paul’s conversion and call to ministry—repeated two other times in Ch. 22 & 26.

It’s so highly significant. If Paul had not been converted, we would be missing 13 books in our NT.

- Paul’s own reflection on God’s conversion in Gal 1:15 gives perspective:

¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,

Salvation is the sound of Amazing Grace, before birth and before the ages began. Let’s listen to the sound of amazing grace in the arrest, surprise, and work of grace.

The arrest of grace (1-9)

- Just like a movie that jumps from one scene to another, Ch 9 picks up where 8:3 left off.
- Saul is a man on a mission (v14) to root out followers of Christ.

First, note the way that the disciples are described: “belonging to the Way”.

—Followers of Jesus are called to “Way” more than Christians in the NT (6 times in Acts).

—It refers to Jesus being the way of Salvation and also a “way of life” of disciples.

- Saul goes to search for Christians in Damascus (v2)—there was a massive population of Jews, perhaps some driven by persecution.
- In an ironic twist, Saul turns out to be one arrested, not by human authorities, but by the unstoppable grace of God.

His arrest comes with elements:

1) v3: Light from heaven. Acts 26:13 notes it was brighter than the sun.

2) The voice: he heard a voice (v4) personally *calling him by name*.

- The arrest of grace comes also with repentance
- Where do we see his repentance? First, Saul stops his mission. We also see him obey the voice of Jesus (v6).
- And we see him fasting (v9), which is an act of repentance.
- Repentance is a key theme in Luke-Acts
- Repentance is essential in conversion.

Our English word conversion comes from the Latin root (*convertere*) “to turn around”.

Basic def:

(Calvin): “The true turning of our life to God”.

(Lk 1:16) “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.”

(Lk 3:18) —Repentance is part of the good news

- We need to make sure we see Saul in the right light, so we can see *the type of repentance* that is called for.
- Saul is not some bloodthirsty man on a Harley, just bent on violence—*he actually thinks he is serving God*.
—In Acts 22:3, Paul says he was “zealous for God”.
*zeal=passionate jealousy on behalf of God.
—similar in Gal 1:14

Yet a person can burn with zeal, and yet be blind by ignorance.

(Rom 10:2) – “they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge”.

“Even the apparently faithful must repent” (Michael Ovey, *Feasts of Repentance*)

**Repentance is part of the good news/gospel.

What does the “apparently faithful” Saul need to repent of?

1. Wrong view about Jesus—the *most serious*

2. Wrong view about himself

Listen to his self-awareness:

(Phil 3:4-9)

“as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”

This is only true because Paul was *arrested by grace*. Grace overcame him; it was irresistible!

It's the story of some here. You were not seeking God. You may have been antagonistic toward God and Christians. But sovereign grace arrested you. The sound is amazing and sweet! How do you know if grace arrested you?

You no longer have a wrong view of Jesus and yourself. Your self-awareness is shaped by the gospel truth of Phil 3:8-9.

The surprise of grace (10-14; 17-19)

- The next scene shifts away from Saul, to a disciple Ananias.
- The Lord appears in a vision and tells him to connect with Saul (v11).
- Ananias questions (13-14), “that guy?”
- v15—the directive is clear: *Go*

***It's not how one feels, but the Lord's word-command that ultimately prevails. We can learn a lot from this.*

Even if we have highly instinctive personalities, we must always be sure that the clear command of the Lord in Scripture trumps everything.

- The surprising thing is not just that Saul will be a friend, but that the persecutor will turn preacher (15).

Illustration of surprise: On Jan 8., 1956, a young Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, and four other missionaries were speared to death as they tried to make friendly contact with a savage tribe (Auca) in Ecuador. But grace often surprises. Jim Elliot's widow, Elizabeth, made contact and many of the tribespeople turned to Jesus Christ. A sociologist from University of Connecticut studied the tribe and concluded that had not many become Christians, they would have all killed each other. The tribe went from 600 to 2000 in population.

Literally, the gospel saved this people.

<https://www.post-gazette.com/ae/movies/2006/01/08/Ecuadoran-tribe-transformed-after-killing-of-5-missionaries/stories/200601080177>

The surprise of grace is here, Steve Saint's father, Nate Saint was murdered by the man standing in the photo. That man became a Christian and adopted Steve as his own son.

Anyone not convinced that grace is surprising? That it brings a radical newness?

There are two things that mark newness to Paul:

—How he will see himself (Brother, v17)

—How he now sees Jesus: (Lord, also v17)

- Phil 2 shows how radically Paul's worldview has been turned.

“⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Sum: The surprise of grace for many is to actually call Jesus as Lord, whether it's a misguided religious man like Paul, or part of savage tribe, or someone who has been in the church for many years.

Finally, why was Saul blinded?

—One view is that the radiant light of Christ was so brilliant that it caused blindness.

—But it can also be that God caused the blindness as a graphic metaphor to show Saul where he really stood with God - to show him his true spiritual condition

(Acts 22:6)

⁶ “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.”

There may be a key in the timing “about noon”.

- Dt 28:28-29 lays out the covenant curses for disobedience. Israel would know their true spiritual condition. “²⁸ The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, ²⁹ and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways.”

(Is 59:10)

¹⁰ We grope for the wall like the blind;
we grope like those who have no eyes;
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among those in full vigor we are *like dead men*.

Remember, Saul knew his Bible really, really well.

Was this a wake-up call to him, saying, “You are not well...you are under a curse, you are like a dead man.”

The true condition for everyone without Christ is under the curse and death. There is no hope outside of Jesus Christ. Any road other than Christ is a dead end for dead men.

The work of grace (15-16)

- Finally, let’s look at the calling (15-16). Remember, this was before time—God has set Paul apart from birth (Gal 1:15).
- Paul’s calling here is very prophetic, similar to Moses and Samuel, Ezekiel in the OT.

Now in one sense, Paul’s calling is very atypical. But there are some elements that are true of all conversions and callings.

Features of Biblical Conversions

1. Comes from divine initiative
2. A personal encounter with Christ as Lord (v10, 17)
3. Is individual, but never individualistic
4. Called to some work, marked by difficulty

Grace takes us from what we have been to what we can be.

- This work sets the tone for the rest of Acts, which will focus in bulk on Paul's ministry to Gentiles.

Listen to Paul's job description in 26:18

¹⁸to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

- But it's not just for Paul, it's also here for us to see. When Christ saves us, *he not only saves us to himself in relationship, but also has work cut out for us.*

(Eph 2:10)

¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

So, the Sound of Amazing Grace is *not just salvation, it's also service*

Conclusion:

So, we heard the sound of Amazing Grace in conversion and also commission of how God takes an enemy and turns him into an ambassador.

I'll leave us with this—if you have Christ, you are no longer an enemy, but an ambassador. We've got work to do. A work motivated by love.

(2 Cor 5:14; 17-20)

¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us...¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave

us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”