

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #22

### Acts 9:19-31

Kent Hughes tells an amazing story of what happened one time in a church in which he was the youth pastor. He had heard that the last living member of the Bonnie and Clyde gang, whose name was Big Jim Harrington, was going from church to church telling his testimony to huge crowds, so Pastor Hughes said he invited him to come to his church one night. He printed up thousands of advertising brochures and distributed them at local high schools. He arranged to have special music and he also arranged to have many counselors on hand to point people to Jesus Christ. He said when the night arrived, it exceeded his expectations. As he put it, there was “a sea of teenagers.” Jim Harrington was a big man. He was bald and there was a dent in the top of his head from an old bullet wound. For two hours he shared his riveting stories and he challenged the young people not to waste their lives but commit them to Jesus Christ. Kent Hughes said the night was a huge success. The elders of the church who had been skeptical were pleased. It was a great night. Two days after the event, he received a phone call from someone close to Big Jim who informed him he was an imposter. He made everything up. He was an alcoholic who lived in the desert. His life had been uneventful so he made up this delusional story and took it to the churches. Nothing of what he said was real (*Acts*, p. 135).

When someone claims they have a relationship with God, it doesn't mean they really have it. But when one actually has a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, God's people will eventually see it and sense it. When people come to real faith in Jesus Christ, it doesn't take long to see and sense there has been a dramatic change. God can save the worst of sinners and when He does save them there is a notable difference that is often dramatic. That is certainly what we see when we see what happened to Saul of Tarsus.

### **WHEN A PERSON BELIEVES ON JESUS CHRIST THERE WILL BE MANY REAL CHANGES ; IN FRIENDSHIPS, IN OPPOSITION, AND IN GOD'S PROTECTION AND PROVISIONS.**

Saul had been literally brought to his knees and saved by the elective sovereign work of God. Jesus Christ stopped Saul and saved Saul and the changes that take place in his life are dramatic. However, some of the people were skeptical, but the results are real, immediate and amazing:

### **RESULT #1 - Saul spent several days with the other believers in Damascus . 9:19**

The very people he once pursued for killing are now the very people with whom he is living. He is now part of the family of God and he spent “several days” with the disciples. We may recall that the noun “disciple” is a synonym in Acts for any and every believer. This term is never used by Paul in his epistles, but it shows up in Acts to refer to any believer. Saul is spending new time with his new family.

During this time he was enjoying fellowship, but he also was learning doctrine and truth. As soon as he had a handle on the basics he started preaching, which is exactly what God had called him to do.

**RESULT #2** - Saul was preaching Jesus Christ in the synagogues . **9:20-22**

There are four observations we want to make from these verses:

**Observation #1** - He preached Jesus “immediately”. **9:20a**

This adverb “immediately” means that he started preaching Jesus Christ in a straight and direct way and he started preaching this at once (Ibid, p. 186). **By Luke using the name “Jesus”, he is emphasizing the fact that Saul immediately started preaching that Jesus is the Savior.** He immediately preached that only by believing in Jesus Christ could one be saved from sin. Saul wasted no time proclaiming truth about Jesus Christ after he was saved.

**Observation #2** – He preached Jesus Christ verbally and audibly. **9:20b**

The verb “proclaim” (εκηρυσσεν) means he verbally and audibly preached and heralded God’s truth pertaining to Jesus Christ. He did not go to people and ask them what they thought or what Jesus meant to them; he went and preached and proclaimed and heralded God’s truth to them.

**Observation #3** - He preached Jesus Christ in the synagogues . **9:20c**

Saul was very familiar with synagogues and had been esteemed as a great teacher of the law. He went right to the very places that were known for their stress on O.T. Law. He marched into the synagogues and preached the grace of God found in Jesus Christ. He went into these synagogues and he preached just the opposite of what they believed.

I have been asked numerous times if someone could be in a false religion and truly be saved. My answer is “yes”. I think there could be someone in a false religion who could be truly saved. However, two things will happen. First, if the person is truly saved, that person will start proclaiming truth and standing for truth in that place; and second, eventually the person will get out of the religious system and want to know Jesus Christ and the Word of God. That is exactly what happened to Saul.

**Observation #4** - He preached Jesus Christ theologically . **9:20d, 22d**

There were three specific theological themes that he proclaimed about Jesus Christ:

**Theme #1** - Jesus Christ is Savior . **9:20**

As we have already discussed, Saul immediately started preaching Jesus, whose very name means He is Savior.

**Theme #2** - Jesus Christ is God . **9:20d**

The Greek construction in verse 20, “He is the Son of God” is one that means Saul preached “Jesus is the Son of the God.” We could understand the Greek grammar here in meaning that Jesus is the specific only Son of the specific only God. In other words, Jesus Christ is God; He is Deity. Saul is in synagogues preaching this. Jesus Christ was not a man, but the God/man.

**Theme #3 - Jesus Christ is “the Christ ”. 9:22d**

What this means is that Saul was in synagogues teaching these Jews that Jesus is the Messiah (John 1:41). Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, Savior, Lord and King.

**Now in verse 22, the text says that Saul was “proving” these things.** That participle “proving” (συμβιβάζω) is present tense meaning Saul was continually proving things. But the word is rare and we learn from this word just exactly what Saul was doing.

The Greek word means that Saul was joining and knitting together truth as it related to Jesus Christ and he was comparing something in a side by side way to demonstrate and prove his point (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 426).

Saul was in these synagogues and he was taking the Old Testament and placing it side by side with the Person of Jesus Christ, and proving that Jesus Christ was the only God/Savior and that He was the Messiah. Saul was carefully weaving together truth from the Old Testament and proving that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of everything. **He was telling these people that if they called on His name, they could be saved.**

There was no man on earth who would be more skilled than Saul to be able to do this. He was very skilled in his understanding of the O.T. He said in Philippians that he was a “Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law a Pharisee” (Phil. 3:5). This was a man who knew the O.T. He was able to pull it all together and point it all to Jesus Christ.

As people were hearing him do this they “continued to be amazed” (9:21). That word amazed means that the crowds of people were dumbfounded because what Saul was proving was so out of place from where he had previously theologically stood (Ibid, p. 160-161). This was the complete opposite of the position he had initially taken.

In fact, according to **verse 21** the people said, isn’t this the same guy who destroyed all those who called on Jesus name in Jerusalem? Isn’t this the same guy who came to Damascus to arrest these believers to take them to the chief priests?

But Saul kept on increasing in spiritual strength and he kept “confounding” the Jews, which means Saul really stirred them up. They were very confused and very troubled (**verse 22**).

**That is what the grace of God always does; it troubles people. It stirs them up. You take a stand for God’s grace in a religious world that promotes good works and you’ll stir up a few people too. You communicate that only faith in Jesus Christ can save you and you’ll stir up a hornets nest with proud men who love their religion, and love themselves and love their human merit.**

**RESULT #3** - Saul was hated by the Jews and they sought to kill him. **9:23-24**

Now Luke is intent on showing the hate that was aimed at Saul almost from day one. The actual chronology of the Damascus events is probably this:

- 1) Saul was saved on the road to Damascus. **Acts 9:1-9**
- 2) Saul spent time with his new church family in Damascus and he preached in various Synagogues, affecting many people and making many people mad. **Acts 9:19-20**
- 3) Saul left Damascus, went to Arabia where Jesus Christ taught him marvelous things (Gal.1:17). In Galatians 1:17-18 Paul mentions a trip he made to Arabia where he was taught doctrine for about three years by Jesus Christ. **More than likely, his trip to Arabia took place between Acts 9:22 and Acts 9:23**; because Galatians 1:17 tells us that after he came out of Arabia, he went back once more to Damascus.
- 4) After “many days” (**9:23**) Saul comes back to Damascus, and eventually is smuggled out of the city in a large basket; because by this time the Jews want to kill him.

Saul’s stand for truth and his presentation of the Grace Gospel cost him his old friends. Those old Jewish friends of his not only stopped fellowshiping with him, they wanted to kill him. They had been looking for him and the moment he got back to Damascus, they wanted to destroy him. In fact, we learn from II Corinthians 11:32 that some “provincial governor” (εθναρχης) was in on the plot to try to ambush Saul.

They watched him like a hawk day and night to try to figure out just the right moment to make their move. **These same Jews would fully support Saul if he took a stand against Jesus Christ, but they want to kill him because he stands for Jesus Christ.**

When you stand for God’s truth, you will ruffle feathers. When you defend God’s grace, you will make some people mad. When you tell a religious world that none of their religious stuff can earn them heaven or give them everlasting life, there will be some that will want you to go away. There will be some that will want to silence you.

**RESULT #4** - Saul’s new family protects him. **9:25**

God surfaced the plan to Saul (**9.24**) and apparently one of his new Christian family members owned a house that had some “wall window” access to the outside of the city. They lowered Saul in a large basket and eventually he will end up in Jerusalem. Actually they lowered Saul in a large pannier that was strong enough to haul wood, hay or straw. Saul was stopped by God alone on the road to Damascus and now he leaves with God alone on a road out of Damascus. Winston Churchill once said “Nothing is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result.”

**RESULT #5** - Saul comes to Jerusalem, but the Christians are afraid of him. **9:26**

Just think about this for a moment. Saul comes to Jerusalem, having been smuggled out of a city because people want to kill him and when he gets to Jerusalem no one wants him.

I don’t know what your pre-conversion days were like, but you may discover it will take a while for people to realize that God has truly saved you and transformed you. It sure did for Saul.

When he came to Jerusalem as a believer, the other believers were afraid he was faking it so he could track them down.

**RESULT #6** - God raises up a new Christian friend Barnabas to help Saul. **9:27-28**

Saul's first good friend was Ananias and his second is Barnabas and he will turn out to be a very special friend to Saul. He will show up four more times in the book of Acts: 1) Acts 11:22-24; 2) Acts 11:30; 12:25; 3) Acts 12:1-2, 50; 14:12; 4) Acts 15:2, 12, 22, 25, 37.

Barnabas is an amazing man, who, as one writer said, has a "beautiful" ministry here to Saul. He is a very strong believer. He is a man of truth and of strong theology. He is a classy first century Christian.

**(Action #1)** - Barnabas took Saul to see the apostles. **9:27a**

The verb "took hold of him" (επιλαμβανω) does seem to imply that Barnabas did actually physically take Saul by the arm and led him to the apostles. Barnabas believed in Saul. He knew the conversion was real. He never once brings up his past failures and sins. He never mentions it here. He doesn't make him crawl, he marches him in to the apostles.

Years ago I had the privilege of working as a teacher for Mr. John Miles. As you know, he was my dear friend and theological mentor. He was the most gracious man I have ever known. I don't remember him saying anything bad or critical about anybody. One day I overheard someone say something negative about him and I got in their face. Then I went straight to Mr. Miles and told him who said it and what they said. Mr. Miles said, "Well we just don't know the problems this person has had and we don't know what is going on in their world." What a classy, God honoring man. That was Barnabas here.

**(Action #2)** - Barnabas told the apostles the truth about Saul. **9:27b**

Barnabas told the story of how the Lord had appeared to Saul and saved Saul on the road to Damascus. He told them that the Lord had actually talked to Saul and then how Saul had boldly declared the truth about Jesus Christ. Barnabas is testifying of what God's grace had done in Saul's life.

The result of all of this is seen in the first part of **verse 28**; Saul was accepted by the believers. He was with them and he was moving through Jerusalem speaking about believing in the name of Jesus Christ. Apparently, Saul got to know James, the Lord's brother, and he spent 15 days with Peter (Gal. 1:18-19).

The text says that Saul was preaching "boldly". That word means there was a real bold confidence to the way Saul was preaching (Ibid, p. 347). There was something riveting and gripping about the way he preached grace. But again his preaching of truth got him into trouble.

**RESULT #7** - Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem want to kill Saul. **9:29**

The Jews from the Greek background couldn't stop the logic or power of Saul's preaching so they plotted to assassinate him.

**RESULT #8** - Saul's Christian brothers brought him down to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus.  
**9:30**

There are some mission organizations that take the position you always stay in the place of ministry even if your life is threatened. If you use Acts as a basis for mission philosophy, that is not true. There are times when one needs to leave the area. If Saul would have stayed and got killed, the entire world would have missed his impacting grace ministry.

Caesarea was a safe place to smuggle out Saul. It was a seaport located about sixty-five miles from Jerusalem. They took Saul there and put him on a ship headed for Tarsus.

What an amazing turn of events. **When chapter 9 begins, Saul is leaving Jerusalem to persecute Christians; but when chapter 9 ends, he is leaving Jerusalem as the persecuted Christian.** Saul disappears here for about ten years, but when we meet him again he will change the world.

This does teach us an important point – **powerful development for great use for God takes time.** You will see God do great things from day one, but the spiritual and doctrinal and Biblical development for big time use will take time. From the time Saul is saved on the road to Damascus until the time he is used in a big time apostolic way, is approximately thirteen years. He will be greatly used by God as a front line apostle for about twenty years (AD 45-64), but there were several years of preparation that preceded those twenty years.

But notice **verse 31** says that the churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria had the blessings of God on them. Why the mention of these areas? Fulfillment of Acts 1:8. The Gospel is now about to launch out to the world and the big name man who will be used to do it is on a ship headed for Tarsus. By the way, **carefully notice that the noun “church” is singular , not plural. So this is a reference to the universal church; the body of Jesus Christ, not just one local church.** Notice carefully what God was doing in all of His churches:

- 1) They all enjoyed peace.
- 2) They all were being built up.
- 3) They all were moving forward with a fear of the Lord.
- 4) They all continually had the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
- 5) They all continued to increase.

You get serious about your relationship with Jesus Christ and watch what God will do. You come to the services and you learn these books of the Bible and these doctrines and see if God doesn't expand your outreach. You will also see some opposition. You will see things happen in your friendships. You will also see God take great care of you and greatly use you.