

From Persecutor to Persecuted

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[0 : 00] If you would take your Bibles and turn to the book of Acts. Acts chapter 9. We'll read the first 31 verses.!

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless. They heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing.

So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias.

[1 : 24] The Lord called to him in a vision. Ananias! Yes, Lord, he answered. The Lord told him, Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. Lord, Ananias answered, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

And he has come here with authority from the chief priest to arrest all who call on your name. But the Lord said to Ananias, Go, this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, Brother Saul, the Lord, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized. And after taking some food, he regained his strength.

[2 : 46] Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name?

And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests? Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him. But Saul learned of their plan. Day and night, they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.

But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

[4 : 00] So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.

When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria, enjoyed a time of peace.

It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. Well, Damascus, Syria is in the news these days as King Assad announced from there last week that he's going to take back all of Syria in that horrible civil war being fought there.

But 2,000 years ago, that very same city marked an amazing victory in the war of all wars for the eternal souls and bodies of men and women, boys and girls.

Because it was outside of this same Damascus of Syria that our conquering Lord Jesus met this powerful enemy, Saul, as he was breathing out slaughter against the church.

[5 : 19] And Christ revealed his glory to him in a way that knocked him to the ground, that converted him, that turned him and changed him from an enemy of Christ and from an instrument of Satan to a friend, an instrument for Christ.

So we marveled at that wonderful conversion. Saul headed out for Damascus, a bloodthirsty persecutor, and he now enters Damascus as helpless as a young child led by the hand.

And he will leave Damascus one night as a persecuted preacher of Christ, lowered down in a basket through an opening in the wall. What a change in this man's life from persecutor to persecuted, from destroyer to builder of the church of Christ.

Now we learned at least one of the reasons this is repeated three times for us in the book is that we might not miss some important lessons about conversion.

Yes, there are some things that are unique about Saul's conversion, but there are many things that are true of any conversion, and that's what we highlighted. Conversion is, first of all, a work of God changing his enemies into friends, and we were all enemies before we were friends.

[6 : 46] Secondly, conversion is a work of sovereign grace. The Lord Jesus did not wait for Saul to seek him before Christ sought him out.

He sought Saul who was not seeking him, but was fighting against him. And that's what sovereign grace does. It saves those who don't want Christ and makes them to want him and tears down all the obstacles between them and Christ.

And so they come most freely and willingly to trust and receive Christ. As he's offered in the gospel, we saw that grace, grace comes to the undeserving, and it has found out us, many of us, in the same way.

And then conversion establishes a new relationship to Jesus Christ. Saul hated Christ before he was converted. Now he became a lover of Christ and could never get over the fact that Jesus loved him and gave himself for him.

And he loved him in return. And he's dominated by the Lord Jesus, whereas before he rebelled against him. Now the one thing needful for Saul is to find out, Lord, what do you want me to do?

[8 : 02] And that becomes the question for anyone converted to Christ. And lastly, we saw that conversion sets a man to praying, teaching rebel hearts to pray.

Prayer, the Christian's vital breath. And the Lord Jesus seeks to encourage Ananias with the fact that Saul's a new man by saying, Behold, he is praying now.

And that's what he was doing. Those first three days then led into Damascus. He's blind, but he's praying. He's laying hold of the unseen God. And today we're going to pick up the account in verse 10 then.

And we'll see how the Lord Jesus used three men to build his church. The first is Ananias. And we meet Ananias as an available servant of Christ.

Now in this account, almost as much ink is spilled on Ananias as is spilled on Saul. On the road outside Damascus, the Lord Jesus spoke directly to Saul.

[9 : 09] And he could have given him the whole message, but he didn't. He says, No, you go on into Damascus and you will receive instructions there. He chose to use his servant Ananias.

And that's a principle we see in the book of Acts. Though the Lord does not need us, he loves to use human instruments. People who themselves have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

And so when he has an Ethiopian eunuch to save, he doesn't send an angel to tell him the gospel, but sends an angel to Philip to go tell him the gospel.

And when he has a Saul of Tarsus to save, he sends an Ananias to him. When he has a Cornelius, he sends a Peter. You're getting the idea. The followers of Christ become servants of Christ that he then uses to minister the gospel to others.

So are you a follower of Christ? Then be ready to be used by him to reach others. Ananias is an available servant of the Lord.

[10 : 17] Verse 10 introduces us to him. It's the first mention of him in the book. In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias. That is a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

He's trusted in Christ as the Messiah, Jesus as the Messiah. And that means he's one of the very men that Saul has traveled 135 miles to arrest in the synagogue there.

If he found any according to the way of Christ, followers of Christ, he wants to arrest them, bring them back in shackles to Jerusalem and punish them there. He was out to get Ananias and any like him.

Now, how Ananias came to faith in Christ, we don't know. We're simply not told. He's probably not one of those who in Acts chapter 8 fled the persecution in Jerusalem and went throughout Judea and Samaria.

No, this fellow, Ananias, was probably a Jew who had lived in Damascus and worshipped in the synagogue there for some time.

[11 : 25] In the account that Saul gives of his conversion in Acts 22, he says there of Ananias, he was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.

So he lived there long enough to have a reputation, a high reputation among all the Jews living there. Perhaps he had been saved on a visit down to Jerusalem. Maybe he heard that sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost while he was there for the feast and then went back up to Syria and Damascus.

We don't know. There are many unknowns about this guy, but is that not a point to be made in itself? That the Lord has his people in many places.

And though they're unknown to us, they are known to him. He had his 7,000 in Elijah's day that had never bowed the knee to Baal, though they were not known to him.

And he's got his man Ananias in Damascus, Syria. However it was that he came to believe, he's got him there. And he has him there to be used and to be sent to Saul of Tarsus.

[12 : 37] Now, he knows Ananias by name. And that's just a sign that he knows everything about him. And he calls him by name, Ananias.

And he knows all his thoughts and all of his fears. And he's got an important mission for him to do. So here's his assignment, verse 11. Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul.

Now, we've seen the Lord giving directions to his servants several times now. Don't you love the way he gives directions to his servants? We saw it with Philip as well.

Go to Straight Street. Now, there's a lot of streets in Damascus. Go to the straight one. Go to Straight Street, okay? And then not just to all the houses on Straight Street, but a particular house. I want you to go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. And not just to anyone that's in his house. I want you to go to a man from Tarsus who is in his house.

[13 : 40] And not just any man from Tarsus, but his name's Saul. And so the Lord gives just the instructions to prepare his servant for his mission. This is the Lord Jesus who's building his church.

And he's working out another divine appointment, bringing two people together, just as he did Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, just as he's going to do with Peter and Cornelius.

So here is this Lord of the church bringing together these two, preparing both of them for the meeting of the other. And he gives a vision to each one of them to prepare them for this meeting.

So here he speaks to Ananias in a vision, telling him where to go, what to do, and what to say. And then he prepares Saul as well for this meeting by speaking to him in a vision.

He's telling Ananias about this vision that he gave to Saul. He says to Ananias, verse 12, In a vision he, that is Saul, has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.

[14 : 46] So you see how the Lord is preparing each for the other. Well, we'll come back to Ananias, but just think briefly about how the Lord is preparing Saul for this meeting.

The last word he heard was from the Lord on the road outside Damascus. Get up, go into the city, and you'll be told what to do.

Well, he's in the city now. He's blind. He's waiting. He's praying. He's thinking. He's fasting. And the Lord prepares him with a vision of a man coming, laying his hands on him to restore his sight.

Now, that's good news to a blind man who doesn't know if he'll ever see again. He didn't know it was a temporary blindness. But here's a revelation.

A man is coming with good news to restore your sight. And in this vision, he not only sees a man coming and laying his hands on him and restoring his sight, in the vision, he's even told the name of the man that's coming.

[15 : 50] And that's significant. Because the name Ananias means the Lord is gracious. A man is coming.

The Lord is gracious is coming to see you, Saul. And isn't he just the man for Saul whose hands are stained with the blood of Christians from the Lord and who just days earlier had been breathing with one purpose to destroy the people of the Lord.

What does a man with a history like his need if not to know that the Lord is gracious and that's who's coming. And if we repent, our sin will be met with his grace.

The Lord is gracious, is coming to see you, Saul. And he is just the messenger of grace that Saul needed. So the Lord graciously preparing Saul for the meeting.

Now consider how he's preparing Ananias, his servant, for his difficult assignment. He knows all about his fears of Saul and so he stoops to encourage him.

[17 : 01] Even in his first words of instruction, he's praying. Behold, he's praying. In other words, it's a new man. It's a different Saul.

Saul. I'm sending you to him. Well, praying or not, Ananias says, Lord, I've heard many reports about this man and all the harm he's done to your saints in Jerusalem. In other words, this isn't the first time Ananias has heard of Saul of Tarsus.

His reputation had preceded him to Damascus. And even the purpose of his journey there was known by Ananias and the saints there in Damascus, that he's come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.

Now how he got that intelligence, we don't know. But he was spot on, wasn't he? That's exactly right. We've been told. That's why Saul is 135 miles north of Jerusalem.

And then before we're too harsh on Ananias, let's realize that this was indeed a staggering assignment that he was being given. If you would like, it would be like you being told to go see the ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

[18 : 18] And you would say, but Lord, I've seen him on the news. I'm sure that's him. He's responsible for the beheading and slaughter of many Christians in the Middle East.

So you understand why Ananias would respond the way he did to the Lord. His fears were not imagined. He had indeed been a dangerous man, this Saul.

And there's nothing unspiritual about not wanting to die. Christians are not people with a morbid love for being beheaded. And we find the Lord is ever so patient and gracious with his servant.

He listens to him. Isn't that the word to us? Pour out your hearts to him at all times, ye people.

He listens. You're afraid? Go tell him. Tell him what you're afraid of. You've got that kind of a master who's sending you on this assignment. So Ananias is pouring out his heart to the Lord.

[19 : 25] But Ananias is missing some important information, isn't he? He still thinks of Saul as the old Saul and not as the newly converted Saul that he is. And that should surely be a check upon our reasoning when we've been given an assignment from the Lord and it just doesn't seem to fit us.

And we're evaluating the commands of God with our own pea brain ignorance. Could it be that God knows more than us about the situation and that the most wise thing to do, the most correct thing to do, if we knew all the facts, yep, that's what I need to do.

Well, God does know. As Josh said in his prayer, his ignorance is wiser than our greatest wisdom.

And so that's what we find. Ananias bowing his ignorance to the Lord's wisdom.

He mentions it, but he doesn't cling to it. The Lord is gracious. We dare not lean upon our own understanding, but go trusting our commanding Lord.

And so the Lord repeats the command. Go. It's not the first time we've seen that command, is it? To the church.

[20 : 42] Go. And be my witnesses. To Philip, go. And now to Ananias, go. And he kindly gives him more information that is as much for his own comfort as it is for a word that Saul needs to hear.

For the Lord says to Ananias, this man is my chosen instrument. You see, it's not to be, he's not on a mission to be your assassin. No, he's on a mission.

He's my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles, before their kings, and before the people of Israel. And I'm going to show him how much he must suffer for my name. So, in essence, the Lord is saying to Ananias, Ananias, you have correctly described Saul's past.

Now let me tell you about his future. I've chosen this man long before he chose me.

And I've chosen him as my instrument, my vessel, to carry my name. The same name he's been seeking to wipe from the earth, I have chosen him to carry that name.

[21 : 54] I've put my name on him. And he now bears my name and he will carry that name. Beyond the border and the boundary of Jews, he's going to take it to the Gentiles.

He's going to be what he calls himself primarily the apostle to the Gentiles. to bear God's Christ-saving name to people outside of Israel as well as to the people of Israel themselves. And being a Greek-speaking Jew, Saul is uniquely fitted for this task. And he'll not only bear my name, he'll suffer for it. He'll suffer.

So he's called to evangelize far beyond Israel and he's called to suffer. It's as much a part of his calling as evangelizing.

And so that's why I've called him, Ananias. That's why I'm sending you. Do you see now? So the amazing thing is not that Ananias responded by telling the Lord of his fears.

[23 : 02] The amazing thing is that he went to Saul notwithstanding his fears. He did indeed not lean on his own understanding but upon the Lord. And he does just what he is told.

Jesus said, go, and we read, then Ananias went. Oh, I wish that could be written of me every time. Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your commands.

And every time you say, go, then John went. Just two follows one every time. That's the response. You see, this is the available servant of the Lord.

Ananias. Beautiful thing that we see in him. Believing the message of Christ, he goes to him and he calls him Brother Saul. Now, you may not have seen a lot in those two words but think about that. The Lord's word about Saul is enough and Ananias owns this Christian killing Jew as a brother in Christ.

[24 : 08] Amazing. Sometimes it's hard to live up to our name but Ananias, the Lord is gracious, is here treating Saul with the same grace that he had received.

Brother Saul. Brother Saul. Wow. There's a lot of grace to get those two words out of his mouth. Now, the Lord had told Saul to go into the city where he would be told what to do and Ananias now comes to him just as was seen in the vision.

And Ananias is now identifying himself as the Lord's servant. I'm the one that was sent to bring you the further instructions from the Lord. and he has signs to prove that he's the right one.

That he's not just somebody coming in and saying things and spouting off to Saul. He has miraculous signs that show he's the Lord's messenger of the Lord's words.

So we ought to hear them. The first sign is his supernatural knowledge. He tells Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here he has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 18] How would Ananias ever know that? That he had met the living Lord out on the road coming into town unless the Lord had revealed it to him. It was a sign that this is the one that Christ told me would come.

And the other is his supernatural healing was the other sign for indeed he laid his hands on Saul just as it had happened in the vision that was given previously to Saul.

And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes so that he could see again. So all this is confirming signs that Ananias is the bearer of the Lord's further instructions.

Listen to him. It's what we see in the book of Acts. Signs confirming the messengers of the Lord.

And so all that information that the Lord gave to Ananias about Saul being his chosen instrument to take the gospel his name Jesus name to the Gentiles and kings that's given to Saul as well as the call to suffer.

You're going to have to see how much you must suffer for Jesus name. So the instructions are given to Saul. He's immediately baptized. He publicly declares his faith in Jesus as Messiah and it was both a baptism and a commissioning service rolled up in one.

[26 : 42] And Ananias walks off the pages of Scripture just as quickly as he walked on to them. We never hear of him again. You just read everything we know about Ananias.

Only eternity will show what else this man did. But what did we see from him? What did we learn of him? We learned he's an available servant for the Lord to move here and there to go on his errand whatever it be.

He's ready to run on his errand. Ready to take the hard assignment trusting in him who sent him Ananias an available servant.

Are you available? Does the Lord Jesus have some of you on a difficult assignment? A providence you would never choose for yourself?

A situation a job a family a neighborhood assignment as difficult as visiting Mr. Baghdadi? If your gracious Lord has given the assignment in perfect wisdom and love don't balk don't chafe don't doubt don't delay rise up and serve him you can trust him even as his servant Ananias did. [27 : 54] If it's the will of your Savior and Lord do it suffer it does anything else matter to the servant of the Lord than that his master's will is done Ananias the available servant Saul a powerful preacher he's the second one we meet a powerful preacher of Christ so he's baptized he's commissioned to bear Christ's name and he wastes no time after just a few days with the disciples there in Damascus at once he began to preach in the synagogue that Jesus is the son of God and he did it with immediate effect all who heard him were astonished they're astonished at his conversion at the change that's come upon him isn't this the same guy that raised havoc in Jerusalem and isn't he the one that was coming down here to arrest any who called on his on Jesus name so they're amazed at the change in him yet here he is preaching Jesus and telling us that the Christians are right and he really is

Jesus really is the Messiah so that amazed that astonished them but they were also baffled and astonished by his the content of his preaching he was so adept at the Old Testament scriptures from his previous studies with Gamaliel and now he has the key to it all the knowledge of Jesus Christ he immediately begins preaching that Jesus is the Messiah and proving it from Old Testament scriptures such that they could not stand up against his word and it kept going like that and Saul kept growing in power more and more in his preaching of the word until finally the unbelieving Jews had had enough of it and they conspired to kill him and they posted hit men at the city gate by day and by night you guys stay there during the day and watch for him if you see him kill him okay it's night shift you're there if you see him kill him in other words it didn't take long for the Lord's words to be fulfilled

I will show him how much he must suffer for my name suffering will dog Saul of Tarsus all the rest of his life he's called to it he knew it and he embraced it and what made it worth it all was that it was suffering for the name of him who suffered and died for me so they conspired to kill him but Saul learned of their plan to kill him and escape of course he did because the Lord's plan was not yet fulfilled was it he's Christ chosen instrument to what to be slaughtered in Damascus no he's to get to the Gentiles and kings their kings and he hasn't got there yet and so he is immortal until his mission is accomplished and we'll see that with this man he's down but he's not out he's not out until the Lord says now now you're done come home so he who is rising to the top of leadership in Israel is now being lowered at night in a basket through a hole in the city wall powerful persecuting Saul is now taking a night ride to freedom in a wicker basket can you see how meeting Christ is just totally turned upside down the life of Saul turning him into a powerful preacher of Christ well his problems did not end in Damascus when he comes back down to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples of Jesus there and we're told they were all afraid of him not believing that he really was a disciple in other words they think he's a wolf in sheep's clothing he's just playing the part so he can get into our meetings and get close and then wreak greater havoc upon the church and you can understand why they might think that he's a pretender and so he's treated as persona non grata he's not accepted in the church he's held at length at arm's length by his own brethren in Christ so he's a man without a country isn't he this Saul he doesn't belong anywhere the Jews hate him and want to kill him and he's held under suspicion by the church of Christ for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake again and it's here that we read those refreshing words but Barnabas but Barnabas here's our third man in the building of Christ church

Barnabas a friendly encourager in Christ now unlike Ananias we've met Barnabas before we've seen him in Jerusalem and we'll meet him afterwards again but back in chapter four we were told that his name is Joseph a Levite from Cyprus but the apostles called him Barnabas which means son of encouragement so what happened is that they watched this guy Joseph for a while and they concluded that man needs a new name because everywhere he went he was leaving behind encouraged people he found them discouraged and he left them encouraged refreshed revitalized he found them down and he left them lifted up and so they said Joseph from now on you're Barnabas son of encouragement and the name stuck because it fit him so well he really was a friendly encourager in Christ this guy

[33 : 53] Barnabas so chapter four gives us just one sampling from his life and what we see him doing is encouraging the saints with his wealth with his money last week on the evening news they tried to end the night with a piece of good news to balance out 29 minutes of bad news and they

told the story of a man who had saved his money and was sitting well and had plans to buy a yacht maybe you saw that I think he wanted to retire early and set sail but listening to a sermon at church by his pastor his mind was changed instead of buying a yacht he decided to give a full four year education to all the class a whole class of underprivileged students in a school nearby where he lived the children were really too young to even know the value of what he was giving them totaling more than a million dollars but their mothers understood it and they were weeping with joy and they were encouraged by his action to provide for their children a way out of that cycle of poverty into which they had been born and so they're weeping and the man himself was weeping tears of joy with them just thankful to be able to do something so helpful to these who were in need

I say that's a picture of Barnabas that's the way he was he found joy in encouraging other people and he did it with his money he did it with his time he did it with his words he did it with his presence not presence under a tree but his bodily presence being places to see and to be with people and so we're told in Acts 4 he owned a field and when he realized the needs of others there in the church in Jerusalem he sold the field brought the money and put it at the apostle's feet to be distributed to those in need that's a Barnabas that's a son of encouragement and that's the picture we're given now five chapters later we bump into this same Barnabas again and he's still living up to his name it's one thing to have a name it's another thing to live up to it here's what happened as Saul gets back to Jerusalem and now tries to join the church he's met with fear unbelief suspicion skepticism and a door slammed in his face he's not really a disciple we can't trust him so Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi comes to Grace Fellowship one day and he says he wants to join the church and everybody packing has their hand in their pocket that day and they're keeping a nervous eye on this guy over there who's sitting in the back and afterwards nobody's talking to him even the greeters are not doing their usual friendly greeting with him they're all keeping their distance so Bill Miller says well you can come and stay at my house and Rhonda nods and he spends time with this Mr. Baghdadi and he hears his testimony he hears how he met the Lord Jesus and they talk about the Lord Jesus and they talk about the Bible and what he's seen of Christ in the scriptures and they pray together and after a while Bill comes to the elders and says he's legitimate he's legitimate whatever he was before he's a new man in Christ he's a follower of Jesus he's the real thing if I'm the real thing he's the real thing well that was Barnabas that's what he did for Saul of Tarsus when he came and tried to join the church Mr.

Encourager took him in when no one else would he drew alongside of him he heard him out and he wasn't ashamed to call him brother and so he went and interceded for him before the apostles he brought him to the apostles the leaders of the church and he vouched for his story he told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him and you know what he did in Damascus after the Lord saved him he preached fearlessly in the name of Christ even at the threat of death now would a man pretend if his life was being threatened no men brother Saul came or brother Saul came back a different man than when he left for Damascus and it's because he met the risen Christ and has been changed by his grace it's all true and I put my name on the line for him now if you had the endorsement of Barnabas in the church of Jerusalem you had something because what

[38 : 56] Barnabas said meant a lot to the church in Jerusalem and that's exactly what Saul had he had Barnabas's endorsement and that's all the apostles and the rest of the church needed for they then embraced him as a brother in Christ and so Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem after that speaking boldly in the name of the Lord he especially tried to reach those Grecian Jews his own group who had had such a run-in with Stephen and had murdered him months earlier and they liked the old Saul and they hated the new Saul he's a traitor and so when he debated with them about Jesus being the Messiah and they could not beat him at arguing from scripture they too tried to kill him and so these who had been his friends in the murder of Stephen whose coats he had kept at his feet now turned on him with enough hatred to kill him but remember he's invincible until his mission is accomplished chosen instrument to the Gentiles and so we read in verse 30 when the brothers learned of this plan to kill him they took him down to Caesarea sent him off to Tarsus his hometown and what would become his home base for several years notice those words again the brothers the brothers took him he now has a whole church of brothers who love him and care about his safety and all because

Mr. Encourager Barnabas stuck out his neck for him and went to bat for him and stood by him and owned him as a brother and all this when no one else would is it any wonder that we we're going to

find later on in this book that there is a special bond between these two men Saul and Barnabas and we're going to find them laboring arm in arm for the sake of the name Barnabas the friendly encourager in Christ to Saul in a time of need so who is it this week will be encouraged by you what is her name what is his name will you pray will you think will you plan to be an encouragement to someone this week you will find as Barnabas did that he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed and so we find Barnabas the encourager so what have we seen we've seen three men this morning building the church of Christ

Ananias Saul and Barnabas each chosen instruments of the Lord in their own way serving Christ as he called them but if all we see is these three men then we've missed the hero of the story the great architect and mover of his instruments what we're seeing in the book of Acts is Jesus Christ building his church and so we need to see lastly number four Christ himself the all wise all powerful builder of his church let's not miss him or we'll miss the main point it's he who said I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it and that's what's happening here the acts of Jesus Christ are being unfolded his acts through the Holy Spirit through his apostles and his church to build his church even as all hell is opposing his building project project so Jesus is the one who made

Ananias a gracious brother in the Lord who saved him and made him a gracious brother to go to the murdering Saul of Tarsus and call him brother Jesus is the one who saved and refreshed Barnabas and made him a friendly encourager to others Saul included and Jesus is the one who had stopped Saul of Tarsus from destroying his church and saved him and made him a powerful preacher of the gospel to the ends of the earth and the salvation of thousands changing him from hunter to hunted from persecutor to persecuted for Christ's sake from making others suffer for Christ to himself suffering for Christ it's Jesus it's the it's the Lord Jesus doing what he promised the wonder and mystery and the power and wisdom of his ways so as we conclude let's be amazed all over again at the conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Satan's hatred of Christ and his church filled this man's heart like perhaps none other on the earth and on the day of Stephen stoning a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem and we find that it was spearheaded by the zeal of this one man because when he got saved the church was again enjoying peace and that's something oh but he's breathing out slaughter you see against the church and in so doing he's touched the apple of Jesus eye the church built with his own precious blood he's fighting against Jesus plan of the ages to build his church and so the risen glorified Lord Jesus meets him as he's headed into Damascus to wreak havoc on his people there and he converts him and he performs the greatest feat in battle when a man can snatch the spear out of his enemy's hands and kill him with it

[44 : 49] Satan had a choice instrument and weapon in Saul of Tarsus and Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and snatched out of Satan's hand that weapon and changed him into a weapon for the church that's what we're seeing here in Acts chapter 9 Christ triumphing over the powers of hell to see his church not destroyed but going on built up in the faith changing Saul into a gospel weapon to use against Satan to turn people from darkness to light from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light to turn them from the power of Satan to the power of God so with this glorious conversion of Saul the great persecution that broke out against the church in Jerusalem fizzled out like a dud firework it just came to nothing and suddenly the church is enjoying peace you see that in verse 31 it's the next summary statement we get them every so many chapters as we go through Acts here's the next summary statement then when after Saul was converted and sent back home removed from the scene then the church throughout Judea

Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace it was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit and grew in numbers living in the fear of the Lord what's a church look like that's that's encouraged by the Holy Spirit well this one was growing in numbers but also growing in the fear of the Lord I wonder how many churches would regard that as a marker of the Holy Spirit's presence here that we are growing in our sense of awe at this God that we worship Jesus Christ the Lord of glory that's a mark of a church that's growing that's encouraged by the Holy Spirit that is being strengthened and notice the growth of the church from Jerusalem throughout Judea Galilee and Samaria that's just what Jesus said you'll be my witnesses right through these regions how did the church of Christ spread that far and so quickly they were just huddled there in Jerusalem well Satan said I'm going to destroy them and in the persecution they scattered and went everywhere and wherever they went they preached the gospel again you see

Christ using the very weapon of Satan to defeat him with and so now it's not just the church in Jerusalem did you notice verse 31 then the church throughout Judea Galilee and Samaria the church has grown and it's spread out into the whole of Palestine no power of hell no scheme of man no persecution or instrument of Satan no Saul of Tarsus can keep the Lord Jesus from building his church there's a lesson for us grace fellowship that we're going to sing in a moment and this is the word these are the words we sing Lord teach thy church the lesson still in her darkest hour of weakness and of danger to trust thy hidden power thy grace by ways mysterious the wrath of man can bind and in thy boldest foe man thy chosen saint can find your greatest enemy you can find the greatest preacher that ever walked the earth this is the one who is building his church able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine so saints take heart in the work it's amazing that Christ has called us to have a part in the greatest thing that's going on in history today the building of his church he's called you and me doesn't need us but he's he delights to use human instruments of people who have tasted that the

Lord is gracious to spread his gospel so let's give ourselves to this plan of Christ that he is going to once it's done we'll come back and it'll be eternity forever and ever in his presence right now it's unfinished business so let's in the words of Carrie expect great things from God and attempt great things for him the Lord Jesus has a church to build and we see how determined he is to build it well it's number 404 let's let's glory in the Lord's victory and in what he is doing to build his church still today let's stand as we sing 404 let's pray our Lord thank you for this testimony of your conquest over Saul of Tarsus and we who have been converted thank you that you sought us and conquered sin's power in our lives and set us free and drew us into your family we thank you that the church is in your hands

Lord Jesus and that you are building it and even when she seems most weak and helpless and defeated you're never more in the field than when you are most unseen and that at any moment you can break out on behalf of your church and grant them peace and strength and the Holy Spirit to encourage them to increase them in number and in the fear of the Lord Lord you've done that in China and we thank you for the wonder of your ways we pray for those laboring there even this day that you would show the power of your saving grace and gather more in even when men do not want you there have mercy upon our persecuted brethren keep them from caving into their fears protect them but Lord we would ask you save a Mr.

[51 : 11] Baghdadi save these persecutors save these who have beheaded Christians and do as you did with Saul of Tarsus in a way that the world would see that there is a grace that is staggering there is forgiveness for the worst of sinners and please don't let any here leave with their sins unforgiven but to bring them to this wonderful savior who's ever living to intercede and to build his church add some even here today we ask in Jesus name amen