

## **Saul's Response to Redemption Acts 9:19b-31**

### **Introduction**

Last week we looked at Saul's conversion that began with his being confronted by Jesus on the Damascus road

We saw how Jesus instructed Ananias to go to Saul and to minister to him and how Ananias was initially reluctant to do so because of Saul's reputation

It was hard for Ananias to accept that a man like Saul could actually have become a follower of Christ

And, really, that's quite understandable

There are those who we would have a hard time believing would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ

It's not exactly because we doubt the power of the gospel – but rather that we doubt that some would respond based on what we know about them or at least what we think we know about them

**Chuck Colson** was someone like that for many when he announced that he had accepted Christ in 1973

Colson was one of the architects of the Watergate break in and was widely known as President Richard Nixon's "hatchet man"

By all accounts he was a ruthless political operative who would do whatever it took to get results and his endeavors ultimately saw him imprisoned for 7 months for his role in Watergate

Prior to his arrest, one of his friends gave him a copy of C.S. Lewis' book *Mere Christianity* and as a result of reading that book; Chuck Colson gave his life to Christ

Of course, people were skeptical and some newspapers published stories stating that he was just claiming to have found religion as a ploy to obtain a lighter sentence

People had a hard time believing someone as ruthless as Colson could have really become a Christ-follower

But Colson clearly demonstrated the validity of his conversion in his post-prison life through his activity in prison ministry as the founder of the Prison Fellowship ministries and Christian advocacy as an author and founder of his Breakpoint radio ministry that continues today

Being saved made a dramatic difference in Chuck Colson's life and he openly demonstrated his commitment to Christ during the latter half of his life

There is an old saying that "**The proof of the pudding is in the eating**" which means the quality of a thing must be experienced to be realized

And what is true of pudding is also true of salvation – accepting Christ should make a noticeable difference in a person

**2 Corinthians 5:17** tells us –

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Chuck Colson proved to be a different man after his conversion and, as we will see this morning, so did Saul

Saul responded to the reality of his redemption in some very tangible ways

He was changed and everyone who knew him or knew of him could see it in his conversation, his focus, and his commitment

And though not everyone respected or appreciated the change – they couldn't deny that it had taken place

In our passage this morning we will see how, after he accepted Christ, Saul:

### **I. Proclaimed and Proved Jesus**

### **II. Prepared**

### **III. Faced Persecution and Persisted**

And then we will finish this section with a report from Luke on the **Status of the Church**

Let's begin our study by reading the entire passage

If you haven't already done so, will you join me in **Acts 9** and follow along as I read **19b-31**

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. **20**And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." **21**And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" **22**But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

**23**When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, **24**but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, **25**but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

**26**And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. **27**But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. **28**So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. **29**And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. **30**And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

**31**So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

As we saw last week when word of Saul's conversion came to Ananias he had to overcome some initial skepticism and reluctance in going to minister to Saul

In the end, though, Ananias accepted the testimony of the Lord and went to do as he had been commanded

He laid hands on Saul, called him "brother," and baptized him

Ananias proved to be Saul's bridge to the gathered believers in Damascus

And we see in the last half of **verse 19** that Saul was accepted into their company and he stayed with them "for some days"

This is the first outward evidence that Saul's conversion was genuine – he entered into fellowship with the gathered believers

He wanted to be with them and they welcomed him in spite of all they knew of his past and his original reason for being in Damascus in the first place

The desire to be around God's people is evidence of being one of God's people while feeling no pangs for not being around God's people should give the professing believer pause

But Saul did more than just hang out with the other believers in Damascus

## I. Proclaimed and Proved Jesus

In **verse 20** we read that Saul immediately **proclaimed** Jesus in the synagogues

Saul had just seen Jesus as the Son of God in all of his resurrected glory on the road to Damascus and it had changed him

So he took advantage of his position and went to the synagogues where any educated Jewish man could ask for the floor and he proclaimed what he now knew to be true – Jesus is the Son of God!

Notice that this happened “immediately”

Saul was a brand new believer who felt compelled to tell everyone what had been revealed to him

He didn’t plead ignorance or wait to be properly trained – he told what he knew because he was excited about it

It’s been said that every Christian goes through three stages in their witnessing

This is easy!    This is hard!    This is impossible!

Saul was in the first stage and he wasted no time in getting the word out

Of course the Jews in the synagogues were confused by this sudden about-face as we see in **verse 21**

As we saw last week, Saul’s mission wasn’t a secret

Everyone knew his reputation as a persecutor of the church and his reason for making the long trip to Damascus

He was headed to the synagogues of Damascus with letters of extradition from the high priest

His intention was to arrest any followers of the Way who had fled Jerusalem and drag them back for punishment

The leaders of the synagogues may well have prepared lists of people to turn over to Saul

Only to have him show up and actually start proclaiming the very thing that he had previously rejected

It’s no wonder they were astounded

The change in Saul would be on the order of the head of Isis beginning to preach Christ

It would be very difficult to wrap one’s head around

We aren’t told this explicitly in the text but the others in the synagogues must have disputed with Saul over his proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God

I have to believe that Saul, who was a religious scholar and very familiar with Scripture, began to piece things together and to see connections in his mind

Because we’re told in **verse 22** that he not only made the pronouncement that Jesus was the Son of God he actually **proved** that Jesus was the Christ – the Messiah

And in doing so we are told that he “confounded” them – in other words, they couldn’t argue against him

Saul was smart, well educated, and a master debater and he was winning arguments in the synagogue

He proclaimed and proved Christ and in so doing he caused a great deal of confusion amongst the Jews

We need to be more like Saul in telling people about Jesus

People tend to talk about the things that interest or excite them

We don't have any problem telling who is a Green Bay Packers fan

We don't have any problem telling who becomes involved in a direct-marketing program or any of those things

Because we tend to talk about the things that we are most interested in

Saul had met the risen Christ and he was excited to tell people all about him

Most new believers are just like Saul as they enthusiastically tell everyone they meet about Jesus

It's often joked about in Christian circles how we just have to wait for that enthusiasm to wear off

But it's actually sad that we so soon lose our enthusiasm and our motivation for the Lord

And that leads us to our next point –

Saul was brilliant, enthused, and committed – he had gone from persecutor to proclaimer, but he wasn't yet ready for the commission Jesus had prepared for him – Saul also needed to be **prepared** for the commission

And as we will see, preparation that leads to ongoing motivation and enthusiasm for God requires time alone with God

## II. Prepared

It isn't readily apparent but the account Luke records here in Acts is a compressed version of what took place

There is a gap of some duration between verses 22 and 23

Our Scripture reading this morning was from Galatians 1 because it's in that passage that we find what fits into the gap between verses 22 and 23

Look with me again at **Galatians 1:15-18**

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me [an obvious reference to his Damascus Road experience] in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, **but I went straight away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.** Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

There are differing opinions as to why Saul travelled to Arabia

The prevailing opinion is that he went to be alone with God and to reorder his thinking

That his sojourn in Arabia was a period of time alone with the Lord in preparation for his new life's work

We also can't be sure how long Saul was in Arabia because he only tells us that he went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus and after three years went to Jerusalem

Some scholars think that he spent the three years in Arabia with the Lord as compensation for the three years that the other apostles had gotten as they travelled with Jesus during his earthly ministry

And that seems like a reasonable deduction to me and the point is that Saul spent quality time alone with the Lord being taught and trained

His being isolated for three years would help to explain the reaction of the church at Jerusalem to his arrival there later on as they would not have heard what he was up to during that time but we just can't know for sure how long he was away from Damascus

Times of preparation are found often in God's Word

Remember that Moses underwent 80 years of preparation

God had Moses raised and educated in Pharaoh's household for 40 years and then took him into the wilderness to serve as a shepherd for another 40 years before sending him to lead his people out of Egypt

Moses spent 80 years being prepared by God for 40 years of service!

And preparation isn't just for those who are going into vocational ministry

In **1 Peter 3:15** we see the command for every believer to be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect"

It's vital that we know who God is and how to defend our faith

And we do that through an ongoing relationship with God as we meet with him in his Word and in prayer

Every believer needs to make it his or her business to spend time alone with God on a regular basis so as to establish a proper foundation that will enable proper service

Saul enjoyed a private time of preparation with the Lord in Arabia and he came back to Damascus ready to roll

### III. Faced Persecution and Persisted

While we don't know for sure how long he was gone, what we can see is when he returned to Damascus things had changed and Saul now **faced persecution**

While his preaching had served to confuse his Jewish audience before he went to Arabia, it now angers them to the point they plot to eliminate him

Some way or another Saul becomes aware of the plot and his followers sneak him out of the city by lowering him down the city wall in a basket

#### **How humiliating that must have been for Saul!**

When he headed to Damascus he was a powerful persecutor who was feared and respected by all

On the way he was confronted by Jesus, led into Damascus by the hand because of blindness, and became a believer who proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues only to confuse his countrymen

He went away for three years in order to be taught by Christ in order to be better prepared for his ministry

Only run into a brick wall of persecution that caused him to have to be sneaked out of town in a basket

Our normal response is to ask, "Why? Why would God allow this to happen?"

Clearly God wanted Saul to be his witness so why would he allow Saul to be rejected right out of the gate?

The answer is that God knew that Saul needed further refinement

God needed to teach Saul who it was that was in charge and who it was that gave success in ministry

Think of what might have happened had Saul been successful

He had been witnessing based on what he already knew and what he had personally experienced

Had he been instantly successful he might have been tempted to go on with his ministry in his own strength

Saul needed to learn his limitations in order to learn to rely on God

Paul later writes in **2 Corinthians 4:7** that human ministers are but "jars of clay" and that "the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us"

And while his becoming a basket-case might have been humiliating he learned to wear the experience as a badge of honor

In **2 Corinthians 11:30-33** Paul writes about the experienced in hindsight

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

Clearly, Paul learned the lesson that God was trying to teach him

## ***Jerusalem***

But that wasn't the last persecution that Saul would face in his ministry – it's not even the last persecution in our passage

After escaping Damascus Saul headed for Jerusalem where he attempted to join with the church there

When he arrives he finds that he is something of a man without a country

His old friends in the synagogue and on the Sanhedrin are now his adversaries and the believers are afraid of him because they don't believe they can trust the reports of his conversion

Saul had left Jerusalem as the most fierce, ruthless enemy of Christianity

In the three intervening years since his conversion the church at Jerusalem had likely heard tell that Saul had become a Christ-follower

However, he had then disappeared and there was no further report

And now he arrives on the scene and wants to join the church

It's no surprise that the believers there would have been skeptical and afraid of his motivations

How demoralizing it must have been to have been through so much only to be rejected

And then in **verse 27** we read these words, "But Barnabas"

We first met Joseph who was nicknamed Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, in **Acts 4:36** when he sold a piece of property and gave the money to the apostles for distribution to the needy

And now here he is once again living up to his nickname as he takes Saul literally by the hand and presented him to the apostles and vouched for his conversion

We aren't told how Barnabas knew that Saul was genuine but based on Barnabas' reputation within the church Saul was accepted and allowed to move about freely within the company of believers

The church needs people like Barnabas as we should thank God for those in the church who play the part of a Barnabas – those who build bridges and act as an encouragement to others

Chuck Colson had a man who acted as a Barnabas to him

Colson's conversion was met with a great deal of cynicism and disbelief and he knew that many people, especially his political enemies, would not believe his decision for Christ was true

However, he found he had a strong supporter in a most unlikely man; a man named Harold Hughes

Colson had put this man high on Nixon's "enemies list" due to the liberal causes he supported and his position on the Vietnam War – they were on opposite ends of the political spectrum and neither man liked the other

But when Colson shared his testimony with him, Hughes encouraged him and said, "That's all I need to know. Chuck, you have accepted Jesus and he has forgiven you. I do the same. I love you now as my brother in Christ; I will stand with you, defend you anywhere, and trust you with anything I have."

Colson reflected, "I was overwhelmed, so astonished, in fact, that I could only utter a feeble 'Thank you.' In all my life no one had ever been so warm and loving to me outside of my family. And now it was coming from a man who had loathed me for years."

**It's a real privilege to have a brother or sister who will defend you - The church can always use more Barnabases**

Saul could have been tempted to give up but Barnabas gave Saul the will to go on and he **persisted** with his new way of life and his ministry

And we see that once he was accepted by the church, Saul went right back to the synagogue and began to dispute with the Hellenistic Jews there much as Stephen had before his death

And like Stephen, the Hellenists were unable to win an argument with Saul so they sought to kill him also and he once again had to be spirited out of town

So in **verse 30** we see that Saul was put on a ship to his hometown of Tarsus

He likely didn't know it then but he was getting a taste of what the rest of his life would be like

We know that he suffered persecution and hardship wherever he went

Look with me quickly at the list that Paul put together later in his ministry in **2 Corinthians 11:23-27**

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

I think it's safe to say that Saul didn't have an easy time of ministry and that he certainly was shown how much he must suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus

In the course of my study this week I ran across these lines from a poem written by an anonymous author –  
“God ruthlessly perfects those he royally selects. How he hammers and hurts him, and with mighty blows converts him.”

James tells us in his letter that we should count it all joy when we meet trials of various kinds (**James 1:2**)

**Humiliating failures can become fruitful preparation for greater service if we let God have his way with them**

It's easy to accept victories as a part of serving God

But we also need to accept and apparent setbacks as being from the hand of God for our own good

What we view as devastating defeats are often just what we need to allow us to refocus and redirect our efforts as we seek to grow closer to the Lord and minister more effectively for him

We won't hear any more out of Saul until **Acts 11:25** when Barnabas heads to Tarsus to bring Saul to Antioch

This is some 5 years after the account we have looked at today during which time Saul preached in Syria and Cilicia



## IV. Status of the Church

Luke finishes this section of his account with another of his reports on the general state of the church **verse 31**

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

I want to quickly point out five attributes that Luke shares here

**First**, the church had **peace**

Peace doesn't mean the absence of conflict but having a sense of calm assurance in the midst of conflict

Persecution hadn't ended simply because Saul had become a believer

But the church could have confidence and be at peace because their chief persecutor was now a believer!

The power of the gospel could hardly have been better illustrated and the church was emboldened

**Second**, the church was being **edified** – The believers were continuing to gain strength and mature spiritually

**Third**, they **lived their lives in a circumspect manner** conscious of their obligation to God to live righteous lives

**Fourth**, they **enjoyed the comfort of the Holy Spirit** – The indwelling Spirit bore witness to the fact that they were beloved by God

**Fifth**, they continued to **grow in numbers** – In fact they continued to grow at a great pace

## **Conclusion**

Being saved changes a person and that change should show

### ***It should show in the believer's conversation***

Every believer must be about telling what they know

We cannot be found to be delaying giving witness because we are responsible for telling others about Jesus

But we can't allow ourselves to remain there

### ***It should show in the believer's preparation***

Believers must be about the business of constant preparation through spending time alone with God

We need to be regularly in the Word and communing with God in prayer

### ***And it should show in the believer's willingness to suffer***

Every believer must be ready to suffer persecution for their efforts

By and large we have been spared much in the way of serious persecution given the time and place in which we live

But that may not always be the case and as we get busy for God we are sure to attract the attention of the enemy

Some of us have suffered a form of persecution from our families and friends who either doubt or resent our having become a follower of Christ

And while we may not fear for our lives as many in the world, that type of persecution is just as real and it hurts

Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ changed Saul and it changed Chuck Colson

While people doubted both of their conversions at first, they both proved themselves to be dedicated followers of Jesus Christ

They both knew why Christ had saved them and they got busy witnessing to others and spent the remainder of their lives in the Lord's service

If you are a believer, you have also been changed and your life should show it

As believers our commission is the same as it was for Saul and the same as it was for Chuck Colson

As the body of Christ we are to be about carrying out the mission that Jesus began while he walked the earth

Every one of us can tell people who Jesus is to us and what he's done for us

We don't need any special training to do that much

And then we can begin taking steps to take care of the rest

As we stand on the threshold of a new year will you commit to making this a year of demonstrated change in your life so that all might see what a difference being a Christian makes?

Let's pray