

## God is mighty to save - rejoice!

The pastor called in a snow day. In fact, most of the congregation called in a snow day. But, thankfully, one faithful man was there early Sunday morning to open the building, stoke the furnace, and to preach the Word. That morning a young man decided to brave the weather and attend worship services, but couldn't reach his destination because of the weather. Instead of the church he planned to attend that morning, he instead ended up at the small Methodist chapel. With the preacher absent, the responsibility fell to this faithful man, who was a shoemaker or tailor. He took **Isaiah 45:22** as his text - "*Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.*" He preached a simple, clear, gospel message. It's recorded that he didn't even pronounce all of the words correctly. Having finished his short sermon, he looked out and saw this young man, and said, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ!" The young man would later write, "There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the Precious Blood of Christ." *You see, that's the state of humanity apart from the intervening grace of God - clouds, darkness, mired in sin and guilt, and deserving of the wrath of God.* The young man, only 15 years of age, heard the gospel and was converted. In later years he became known as the "Prince of Preachers", and thousands upon thousands heard the gospel preached through his ministry. All because of a simple message by a shoemaker. You see, it's not in the eloquence of words or the wisdom of men, but the power to save is in the gospel. God intervened on that day, through a snowstorm and a simple, faithful preacher, and CH Spurgeon was saved from sin and brought from death to life. **God is mighty to save - rejoice!**

### Scripture Passage: **Acts 9:1-9**

This morning we're looking at an individual that has an even more radical story of conversion. Whereas CH Spurgeon had a faithful man preaching the gospel to him, this man had nobody, at least initially. In it we see God's mighty power to save, and in this study we should be encouraged and challenged.

### Hunting (vv.1-2)

1. **v.1** "*But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest...*" -
  1. Here at the beginning of chapter 9 our attention is brought back to this man, Saul. We were first introduced to him in **Acts 7:58**, as he was holding the garments and giving approval of those stoning Stephen. In **Acts 8:3** he was said to be ravaging the church, dragging off men and women to prison.
    1. Breathing threats and murders means persecuting the church was his life, his all-consuming passion. It was the air he breathed.
  2. **v.2** "*...and asked for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*" - Christianity is called "the Way" - **John 14:6**
    1. **Galatians 1:13** "*For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.*"
    2. **Acts 22:4** "*I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,*"
    3. **Acts 26:10-11** "*And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.*"
4. There was no one more enthusiastic about persecuting the church than Saul.
5. But as terrible as this is, there is reason for rejoicing -
  1. First, that Saul was going all the way to Damascus to persecute Christians, which meant the gospel had spread considerably. We learned in chapter 8 that the gospel had gone to Samaria, but Damascus was even further, roughly 160 miles away from Jerusalem.
  2. Second, and this takes biblical-mindedness, there is reason for rejoicing in persecution. This is hard for us who live in air-conditioned Christianity, but the Bible actually teaches us that persecution should be cause for rejoicing.
    1. **John 15:20** "*Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.*"
    2. **Matthew 5:10-11** "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.'*"
    3. **James 1:2-4** "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*"

4. **1 Peter 4:13–14** “*But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*”
5. **Are you able to rejoice in suffering?** So far in Acts the expansion of the church and fulfillment of the Great Commission has been a direct result of persecution. Are your prayers more for the expansion of the kingdom than they are for having a comfortable Christian experience? What fills your prayer journal and makes up your prayer requests?

**Transition:** The harder Saul worked to oppose the church, the more the church grew and expanded. God was working and in control, which becomes, painfully to Saul, quite obvious.

### Hunted (vv.3-6)

1. **v.3** “*Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him*” - From Jerusalem to Damascus was a 6 day journey.
  1. **Acts 26:13** “*At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.*”
2. **v.4** “*And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’*” -
  1. The light was so intense and the experience so overwhelming that Saul falls to the ground. Then he hears a voice from heaven, questioning why Saul is doing what he is so committed to doing - persecuting Christ.
3. **v.5a** “*And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’*” - Saul recognizes that this one speaking to him is powerful, is Lord.
4. **v.5b** “*And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’*” - That’s worth reading a couple of times. Put yourself in Saul’s sandals as he heard these words. What did he believe about Jesus? That Jesus was dead, a false Messiah. But now he hears the voice of Jesus speaking directly to him. Do you think his belief about Jesus changed in this moment? No question. Saul’s entire world and system of belief is turned on its head. Jesus isn’t dead, but is alive and well and speaking. The resurrection is true!
  1. Of the NT authors, Paul gives us the most instruction regarding the resurrection, and more than any other he stresses the centrality of the resurrection to the Christian faith. **1 Cor. 15** details the necessity of the resurrection to our faith, and shows us that our eternal hope is based on the resurrection of Christ.
  2. Is there anything else surprising about Jesus’ words? Who was Saul persecuting? The church, the Christians. But Jesus says Saul was persecuting him. Along with giving the most instruction regarding the resurrection, Paul would also be the one to give the most instruction about the Christian’s union with Christ. It’s not that Jesus is watching what is happening to his church, but he is so joined to the church, and the church to him, that there is no separation.
    1. **1 Corinthians 12:24–27** “*But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*”
    2. **Do you love Jesus but still consider the jury to be out on whether or not you love the church?** That thinking is absurd and unbiblical. Maybe you haven’t articulated it that way in your mind, but your actions show that’s where your heart is. I want to challenge you to examine that, and see how God would have you act and think. You can’t love Jesus if you don’t love his blood-bought church. You can’t be joined to Jesus if you’re not joined to the members of his body, the church. Is gathering with the church more obligation than joy? Saul went from hating and persecuting the church to being hated and persecuted because of his love and service for the church.
      1. **Matthew 25:31-46** This is serious and sobering.

5. **v.6** “*But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.*” -

1. This is direct intervention by God. In fact, this is a sovereign work of salvation performed by God. Saul wasn’t a spiritual seeker, he didn’t have a gospel tract handed to him or a preacher proclaiming the saving work of Jesus to him. The conversion and salvation of Saul, which takes place in this chapter, is initiated and accomplished by God. God is mighty to save, and in that we should rejoice!
  1. **Romans 3:10–12** “*None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.*”
  2. We’re born opposed to God, and only the miraculous and gracious intervention of God can change that. Praise be to God for his grace!

**Transition:** Saul the hunter becomes the hunted, and being confronted with the power of God, he is humbled.

### Humbled (vv.7-9)

1. **v.7** “*The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.*” - The men weren’t just stunned speechless, but the language communicates they were made mute.

2. v.8 *“Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.”* - Saul, the once powerful persecutor of the church, journeying to Damascus with his entourage to bind men and women, now blind and helpless being led by the hand into the city.

1. **Philippians 3:5–11** *“circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 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— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*

**Conclusion:** As you consider the Damascus Road experience of Saul, have you also considered your own conversion story? It may not be as dramatic as Saul's, but it is miraculous and full of grace nonetheless. Do you recall how God intervened in your life, and drew you to him? He is a mighty God, and mighty to save. Is there anyone you've written off, or considered too far from grace to change? This passage should challenge that thinking, and encourage us to pray for that individual.

# Family

## Table Talk



July 22, 2018

## GOD'S TRUTH

God is mighty to save- rejoice!

### Family Discussion

1. The conversion of Saul, later called Paul, was a striking display of God's power to save. Who was Saul? What was he about in purpose before being confronted by Jesus?
2. What was the only thing Saul said in response to Jesus? Who did Saul acknowledge Jesus to be?
3. God is mighty to save! Even as Saul was persecuting the church, God had a plan to save him, unite him in faith with the church, with Christ himself, and use him mightily to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Read the later words of Paul, who was previously Saul, in 1 Corinthians and Romans. What perspective do these passages give you on your salvation? God's power and wisdom? God's love? The church? A worthy aim of your Christian life?

### Key Verse

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."  
Romans 1:16 (ESV)

### TABLE READING

Lead your kids into  
God's Word...

1. Acts 9:1-2
2. Acts 9:3-5
3. 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5; Romans 1:16; Romans 5:6-11



### Scripture Memory: Acts 10:34-35

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)