

The Gospel Brings Peace – Acts 9:1-31

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



In chapter 7, Luke introduced us to a man named Saul; many of us know him by his other name, Paul. Don't be confused; both names refer to the same person. What we shouldn't miss at this moment is that God would be able to call and use someone like Saul for man's good and His glory. But that really isn't a new story in the scope of Acts or even the Bible, right? We have seen God's Spirit do some truly extraordinary things and use some people we would never have imagined him using to this point. And, so it is with Saul.

What is most dramatic with Saul's story is that he was literally warring against Jesus. He was actively hunting down Christians, arresting them, and in the case of Stephen, present at their death. Yet, one day on the road to Damascus, everything changed. The man who brought fear, wrath, and pain to the church now meets Jesus and is going to be restored in peace. He will experience peace with God, peace with a community he was an enemy of, and as Luke notes, peace will be a defining attribute of the church as a whole. Why? Because **wherever the Gospel is declared, it brings peace.**

1. Peace with God. (vv.1-9)

- a. To start this passage, we need to actually begin at the end with v. 31.
 - i. **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.** (Acts 9:31)
 - ii. Paul will go on to tell us in Galatians (one of his earliest letters about the fruit of the Spirit that is to be evident in the life of a Christian).
 1. ²²**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** (Gal. 5:22-24)
 - iii. When you are in Christ, that is when you are adopted in to God's family, the fruit of the Spirit is what is to be evident in your life.
 1. **One of the first fruits we experience is peace.**
 2. We heard about this peace in the baptisms last week.
 - a. Peace that came through restoration with God.
 - b. Peace that came through healing from hurt and pain.
 - c. Peace that was extended into community.
 - i. **This peace was and is only possible through Jesus.**
- b. Luke gives us a summary statement that becomes a helpful lens to understand the power of the whole passage.
 - i. **Again, what that lens will help us see, is that the gospel brings peace because the gospel makes Jesus clear and known.**

- ii. So Luke pauses to give a general summary of the situation. Despite the opposition raised against Paul, **active persecution of the church ceased with his departure from the scene, and for the time being, the church enjoyed a period of peace.**
 - 1. By this time it had spread throughout the whole of what we call Palestine.¹
- c. **Saul / Paul experiences peace with God → Because Jesus is made clear to him.**
 - i. First let's talk about this character we first met in Acts 7 → Saul / Paul.
 - 1. Saul / Paul – Same guy, and we can use his name interchangeably.
 - a. 9:1-13:12 → Luke refers to him as Saul
 - b. 13:13 and on → Luke refers to him primarily as Paul
 - 2. Paul's family was of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5), and he was named for the most prominent member of the tribe—King Saul.²
 - 3. Paul is the Greek version, and Saul is the Hebrew version of his name.³
 - ii. **This conversion is surely one of the major events in Acts**, as it is told three different times, each time with fresh **detail (Acts 9 in the third person; 22:3–16 and 26:4–18, both in the first person).**⁴
 - 1. The substance of the story is told twice more, in Paul's speech before the crowd in Jerusalem in 22:3–16, and in his testimony before Agrippa and Festus in 26:4–18.⁵
 - iii. More on Paul's family background:
 - 1. **Roman Citizenship** – This was inherited from his family.
 - a. Someone did something of great value to the Empire to gain citizenship, or you were very wealthy.
 - i. Only 20-30% of the population were full citizens.
 - ii. Being Jewish, this was far rarer.
 - b. Tarsus – **NE Mediterranean (Known for universities & scholarship)**
 - i. Tarsus was a seat for the Roman governor. Many who lived there were granted Roman citizenship, an important detail later when Paul is in prison.⁶
 - ii. Well educated – Fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, & Latin.
 - iii. Paul would have grown up reading and studying the Greek Translated OT (LXX).
 - 2. **Tent Makers** –
 - a. Tents were commonly made from the hides of pigs.
 - i. As a Jewish family, Paul's family trade wouldn't have made those.
 - b. Specialty tents were from sheep's hide.
 - i. Expensive & reserved exclusively for the Roman army.
 - 1. Think... DOD contractors.
 - 3. **Jewish** –
 - a. Circumcised on the 8th day, of the Tribe of Benjamin (King Saul)

¹ I. Howard Marshall, [*Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 186–187.

² Charles L. Quarles, [*"Paul,"*](#) ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1254.

³ R.P. Nettlhorst, *The Bible's Most Fascinating People* (Chartwell Books), 179.

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, [*Acts*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 350.

⁵ I. Howard Marshall, [*Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 176.

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, [*Acts*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 360.

b. A Pharisee – educated under Gamaliel. (Ivy League)

i. **Phil 3:3-8**

For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ 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; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

d. To this point, we have watched Saul (Paul) persecuting the church.

i. Saul is operating under the authority of the High Priest. → “asked him for letters...”

1. As we have said before, the Pharisees were a populist pressure group, not an official body with any official power. Saul, zealous for God and the **law**, was prepared to do more than the high priest had yet envisaged.⁷

2. This would be Caiaphas, AD 18–37 ⁸

3. There is a question as to how much authority the High Priest and local Jewish authorities actually had. → Remember back to the crucifixion, they need Pilate’s ruling to put Jesus to death.

a. Saul → Probably Hanson, p. 112, is nearer the truth when he suggests that Paul had ‘authorization from the Sanhedrin to injure and even kidnap leading Christians, *if he could with impunity*.’⁹

ii. **Location, Location, Location:** Damascus was a commercial center on the way between Egypt and Mesopotamia. It had a substantial Jewish population. **The mention of Damascus is significant, for Luke has not told us anything about this church yet.** In Acts, the church has now moved north to Samaria (Acts 8), west and south to the coast, and east to Syria (Acts 9).¹⁰

iii. **The Way:** Behind this term again lies the concept of ‘the way of the Lord/God’ (18:25f.) as the ‘way of salvation’ (16:17).

1. God has appointed the way or manner of life which men should follow if they wish to be saved (cf. Mark 12:14); the Christian claim that theirs was *the* way of God led to the absolute use of the term, as here.¹¹

e. **Saul / Paul experiences peace with God → Because Jesus is made clear to him.**

i. We call this event a ‘**conversion**’, but it was more like a volcanic eruption, thunderstorm and tidal wave all coming together. If the death and **resurrection** of Jesus is the hinge on which the great door of history swung open at last, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was the moment when all the ancient promises of God gathered themselves up, rolled themselves into a ball, and came hurtling through that open door and out into the wide world beyond.¹²

⁷ Tom Wright, [Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 144.

⁸ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 177.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 178.

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 356.

¹¹ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 178.

¹² Tom Wright, [Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 142.

- ii. **Divine Revelation: The bright light is to be understood as an expression of divine glory, and, since it is generally held that no man can see God, it is not surprising that the effect of the light was to cause blindness.**
 - 1. **Paul, then, can be said to have had an encounter with the risen Jesus in which he heard his voice.** Elsewhere Paul speaks of God revealing his Son to him (Gal. 1:16), but he also goes further and speaks of seeing Jesus (1 Cor. 9:1; cf. 15:8).¹³
- iii. **Attacking God Himself via His Children: All the emphasis in the present narrative falls on what was said to Paul. ‘Why do you persecute me?’**
 - 1. The verb διώκω (*diōkō*, persecute) appears twice in verses 4–5. What Paul does against the church represents an attack against Jesus, who here appears as the exalted Lord. This verb appears nine times in Acts (7:52; 9:4–5 [2x]; 22:4, 7, 8; 26:11, 14–15 [2x]). Six of the occurrences are in the three descriptions of this event. Two of the others appear in Paul’s description of his early work against the church.¹⁴
 - 2. **Now, through divine revelation of the person of Jesus, Paul goes from being one who is literally warring against Jesus to one who is at peace with Him.**

2. Peace in community. (vv. 10-30)

- a. Secondly, we see that Saul will now be able to experience peace within the community that he persecuted.
 - i. Yes, this will take time, and as we will see, a trusted voice in Barnabas.
 - ii. **But, the dramatic reality is this, through the gospel peace is possible where conflict and division once reigned supreme.**
- b. Here in this next section we are going to meet Ananias and Barnabas, and God is going to use them to help restore Saul back into peace with the community of believers.
 - i. **The question before you and me: Am I willing to be a peacemaker?**
 - 1. Ananias risked his own life for peace.
 - 2. Barnabas risked his reputation for peace.
- c. Ananias – The first peacemaker on the scene.
 - i. Ananias’s comment might have been taken as an expression of disobedience to God; he should have realized that the Lord would know better than he did! **But his remarks were entirely natural, and in the present context they serve to introduce a further statement by the Lord regarding his choice of Paul to be his servant.**¹⁵
 - 1. **To carry my name is an unusual expression which signifies the bearing of witness to Jesus (cf. 9:27).** The Gentiles, kings and people of Israel represent the three main groups before whom Paul will in fact bear witness later in the story, and the unusual order of the words is meant to stress the calling of Paul to go to the Gentiles.¹⁶
 - 2. **The Lord replies that he knows the situation and has changed Saul’s vocation, a marvelous fact unknown to Ananias.** Now Saul is the Lord’s chosen instrument

¹³ I. Howard Marshall, [*Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 178–179.

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, [*Acts*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 358.

¹⁵ I. Howard Marshall, [*Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 181.

¹⁶ I. Howard Marshall, [*Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 181.

(σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς, *skeuos eklogēs*). **The genitive here is one of quality: a vessel that is selected .**

- a. Saul now possesses a new calling that has him finally working for God's cause.¹⁷
- ii. Barnabas – The son of encouragement from chapter 4 is back.
 1. He is willing to forgive and bring back into community someone the rest of the church was resistant to forgive.
 - a. They had stories and names of people that Saul had hurt, imprisoned, or even murdered... don't forget Stephen.
 - b. **They had the receipts to prove their pain.**
 2. It was Barnabas who *brought Paul to the apostles* and related a story which he himself was prepared to believe and which, if true, would fully rehabilitate Paul in the minds of the Christian leaders. In particular, **he told how Paul had spoken out boldly on behalf of Jesus and thereby placed his own safety at risk.**¹⁸
 - a. This helps to address the fears of those concerned with Saul's presence... was he playing the long game and attempting to swindle this group and then persecute them? That idea makes little sense if he was willing to preach Jesus at great personal risk.
 - b. **This action of Barnabas communicates the reality that peace with God also leads to peace with each other in the community of Christ.**
 - i. Even when your past includes the murder of Christians.
 3. Again, when we look at the deep division and pain in the world around us, Christians are in a position to offer love, grace, and forgiveness because we like Paul have experienced it first from Jesus.
 - a. We were at war with God before we were adopted through Jesus.
 - b. **Caution: Saul demonstrated that he was truly changed. Forgiveness in Jesus is not a license for the perpetuation of abuse.**
- d. **The question before you and me: Am I willing to be a peacemaker?**
 - i. **Ananias risked his own life for peace.**
 1. Am I willing to let go of my comfort to be a peacemaker?
 - a. This looks like being willing to walk in another person's shoes, listen to their experiences, and even defer to them when I know that I'm not required to?
 - ii. **Barnabas risked his reputation for peace.**
 1. Am I willing to been questioned about my views or stances in order to be a peacemaker?
 - a. This looks like resisting tribalism and being willing to work for the common good of our neighbors and community.

3. Peace in turbulent times. (vv.31)

- a. The church at this time was living in a deeply hostile culture and context. However, God is doing something that only he can do... give peace in turbulence.

¹⁷ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 361.

¹⁸ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 185.

- i. **When our neighbors look at us as a community of faith, do they see a community marked by peace?**
- b. This third large unit closes as the last one did in 6:7, with a simple summary of the church's growth. These summaries function like triumphant choral refrains in the book, as they ring out with joy over what God is doing.¹⁹
 - i. **The term ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*, church) carries its technical, theological meaning of the community of believers, but with a new twist (earlier 5:11; 8:1, 3). The term here is singular; it is one community in three regions that is in view.** This sense of the church in many locales appears only here and in 20:28.²⁰
 - ii. **Let's not miss the geographical notes of who is at peace in the church.**
 - 1. All of Judea... This has not been the case for over 700 years!
 - a. Galilee, Samaria, and Jerusalem is unified and experiencing peace.
- c. **Peace was being experienced in the individual lives and hearts of believers and within the communities of Christians at large.**
 - i. **This peace is rooted and realized in and through Jesus.**
 - 1. **We must avoid the temptation to simply attribute this to a growing sense of morality.**
 - a. If we can just be better, more respectful, dignified, or loving, we can experience this same peace. → This is categorically false.
 - b. Jesus and the gospel (that makes Jesus clear) is the single thing that transformed their lives.
 - 2. **Again, if we want to be peacemakers in our community and world, we must declare the gospel.**
- d. For Christians peace in a turbulent time looks like:
 - i. **Contentment** – We know the end of the story and have confidence that there is more than this life.
 - ii. **Security** – We know that God is sovereign, and nothing can separate us from his love.
 - iii. **Hope** – While we are right to grieve and lament the brokenness of this life, we do not do so without hope.
 - iv. **Perseverance** – They were willing to press on in faith because it made a real difference in their lives.
 - v. **Joy** – There is nothing in this life that robs us of our joy because our joy originates not in us but in Jesus.

¹⁹ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 372.

²⁰ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 372.