

Sunday October 9, 2022

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

Welcome to Church. Today we have another chance to come to our great and mighty God and worship the king of Kings and the Lord of Lords. As we prepare to do so let us turn to Psalm 91 and remind us ourselves why this is such a good thing to do.

Psalm 91. *"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' ³ Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. ⁴ He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. ⁵ You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. ⁹ If you say, 'The LORD is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, ¹⁰ no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; ¹² they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. ¹⁴ 'Because he loves me,' says the LORD, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. ¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.'"*

Let us pray. *Father, we thank you for church this morning. Whether we are seated at home or in the building together, we thank you for the salvation we enjoy. Forgive us for the times this week when we have forgotten your goodness and greatness. We are sinful. We are selfish. We deserve to face the storm of your justice and wrath. Lord, we ask for your mercy and grace. We thank you that Christ bore the judgement we deserve, in his body, on the tree, but then three days later, rose from death, victorious, the risen, conquering king. We thank you for our forgiveness. We thank you for our assurance of salvation. We thank you that heaven is our home. Who else could rescue me from my failing? Who else would offer His only Son? Who else invites me to call Him Father Only a Holy God. Amen*

Song – Behold our God [Behold Our God - \[Official Lyric Video\] - YouTube](#)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Who has held the oceans in his hands?
Who has numbered every grain of sand?
Kings and nations tremble at his voice
All creation rises to rejoice | 3. Who has felt the nails upon his hands?
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man
God eternal, humbled to the grave
Jesus, Saviour, risen now to reign |
| Chorus: Behold our God, seated on his throne
Come, let us adore him
Behold our king, nothing can compare
Come, let us adore him | Chorus

Bridge You will reign forever
(let Your glory fill the Earth) x8 |
| 2. Who has given counsel to the Lord?
Who can question any of his words?
Who can teach, the one who knows all things?
Who can fathom all his wondrous deeds? | Chorus |

Chorus

Behold our God, seated on his throne
Come, let us adore him
Behold our king, nothing can compare
Come, let us adore him

Bible Reading – Acts 9:1-19 (NIV)

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” ⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. ⁶ “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” ⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ 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. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. ¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. ¹¹ 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. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” ¹³ “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” ¹⁷ 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 that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.”

Announcements

Focus for October – Training. *“It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.”* (Eph 4:11-12) We are fortunate within our Church to have people who are gifted in many ways. But those gifts are given to us so that we can all grow in our works of service. We will focus on this in October asking everyone to consider being trained in at least one way that they can serve others.

Ministry Training. During the next four weeks we are closing down our small groups. In their place there will be seminars every Tuesday night & Wednesday lunchtime. There will be a different emphasis each week

- Tues 11th/Wed 12th October Training I
- Tues 18th/Wed 19th October Complementarianism – the Biblical roles of men & women
- Tues 25th/Wed 26th October Training II
- Tues 1st/Wed 2nd November Obedience: How Mission is everyone’s responsibility (Parsons)

On **this Tuesday** we will have a BYO dinner from 6:45pm at the Charlestown Church & then followed by various workshops 7:30-8:30pm – Church sound system (Aaron C), Praying aloud and in public (Dave W), How to share your faith (Suzie C), Preparing a Bible Talk (Stephen T), New City Catechism for families (Jon B) and Involvement in Creation care (Stuart B)

On this Wednesday we will have a BYO lunch from 12:15am at the Charlestown Church followed by various workshops 1-2pm – Visiting on behalf of the Church (Joanna B), New City Catechism for families (Jon B) Supporting a missionary (Kathryn O) & Meeting one on one (Stephen T)

There is no compulsion to book but if you went to <https://forms.gle/kQZY4ywup19yMiai7>

You could book a place in one of these workshops which would give us an idea of what seminars are the more popular and would help with printing off of materials and allocating the right sized rooms for each group.

Upcoming Events

- Sun 30/10 Parson Visit us for this week.
- Sat 5/11 Gala Concert
- Sat 19/11 Men's Breakfast (7-9am)
- Sat 19/11 NSW State Moderator Visits Swansea Church for morning tea
- Sat 26/11 Gingerbread House Night
- Sat 10/12 Gather Round Christmas Celebration

Christmas boxes (Operation Christmas Child. Samaritans Purse). Don't forget to pick up your Christmas box and to bring it back to the Church by the end of October.

Term 4 NSW School Term. Starts this week which means the regular activities of the Church will be back in full swing from this week.

Holiday Kids' church. All children will start in the church building as usual. When it is time for the children to leave - Sprouts/crèche go to the crèche room in the cottage as usual, preschool to year 2 go to the church hall, kids in years 3-4 have the option of going to the hall or staying in church, kids in years 5-6 are to stay in church. Kids' activity sheets will be left in the back row of seats in the church for the kids staying in church.

Vanuatu. Our church is planning on running a short-term mission to Vanuatu early next year. The dates are expected to be 4th – 18th January. Our aim will be to help the local with a physical project that allows them to minister more effectively to their community as well as doing some teaching, training and kids/youth work. If you are interested in knowing more details, please see Stephen. Numbers will need to be finalised by the end of November.

Mission Team. There will be a mission team meeting via zoom, on Sunday 16th October from 3:30-4:15pm. All welcome

Finances for August

Budget offerings for August	\$27,000
Actual offerings for August	\$39,497
Surplus for August	\$12,497
Surplus for Jan-Aug	\$10,167

Prayer Points for 9th October 2022

Psalm 34:1 "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Pray for Mexico: Pray for the love and forgiveness of Jesus to overpower the strongholds of crime, violence, and corruption. Pray for government leaders to repent of corruption and seek God's righteousness. Pray for empty religious traditions to be replaced by radical discipleship.

Pray for a greater humility: Pray that we would humble ourselves before the Lord. Pray that we would boast in Christ alone. Pray for the Lord to be magnified and exalted in our church and across our nation. Pray that many Aussies would seek the Lord and would be delivered from the wrath to come.

Pray for A Rocha: Pray for funding to allow more staff to be appointed and for guidance on which organisations to partner with. Now in our seventh year, we are hoping to buy or lease land for a field studies centre, and we appreciate your prayers for patience and courage as we seek God's leading on this.

Bible Reading – Acts 9:20-31

“Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ 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?” ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. ²³ After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. ³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”

Song – I will sing the wondrous story [I will sing the wondrous story \(music from Keswick, with lyrics\) - Bing video](#)

1. I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me
How He left His home in glory
For the cross of Calvary

Chorus:

Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me
Sing it with the saints in glory
Gathered by the crystal sea

2. I was lost but Jesus found me
Found the sheep that went astray
Wrapped his loving arms around me
Drew me back into His way

Chorus

3. He will keep me till the river
Rolls its waters at my feet
Then He'll bear me safely over
Where the loved ones I shall meet

Sermon – Meeting... (Stephen T)

A little while ago I was part of a panel who was interviewing a person for a ministry position and in their application, they were asked who were the three people they saw as models of the Christian faith. Now that's good question, isn't it? Who has greatly influenced your Christian walk? Who has helped to show you what faith is all about?

Well one applicant answered Martin Luther whose rediscovery of the Christian concept of faith helped bring about the reformation. The apostle Paul who as the apostle for the Gentiles helped take the message of forgiveness through Christ throughout the known world. And my minister who has taught me so much about what it really means to have faith & trust in Jesus.

Do you notice that two out of those three people are dead? The applicant never met those two people personally but that doesn't mean he wasn't deeply affected by who they are & what they did. Well this morning we are going to meet one of those people, Saul, who was to become the great apostle, Paul.

Slide 2

For the book of Acts is about to go into its second phase. Up until now it has been all about what Jesus has done through his 12 apostles amongst the Jewish people. But if you remember the great commission, the

gospel of God would start in Jerusalem, then go to Judea but after that it would go to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. So the first 8 chapters have been focused on Peter the leader of the apostles but now the focus is going to switch from Peter to Paul and from the work of the Jews to the work of the Gentiles, so God's gospel could now go to the ends of the earth. So, let's meet the person who will spearhead that work.

Slide 3

1. Let's meet Saul (verses 1-2)

Now Saul has already been introduced in the book of Acts. Three chapters ago we saw that he held the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen. That shows he had some authority in the persecution that happened early in the Church's history. And in the very next chapter we read that *"Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison."* Paul had now found his mission in life. To stamp out these heretical Christians from the face of the earth.

But the problem was that many Christians left town to stay alive and they took the gospel with them wherever they went. And so now Saul hears that like a wack a mole, the Christians have turned up in Damascus. And so we pick up the story in Acts 9. *"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."*

Saul must have been determined to travel 300km one way, over a week's journey just to lay his hands on these good for nothing Christians. But he was more than just determined he was breathing out murderous threats. The language Luke uses is of a wild animal, a wolf, a bear, pursuing their prey. And motivated Saul to do all this? His devotion to God. Saul is thinking that God would not be impressed by these guys calling a crucified man, Jesus, a Messiah. In the name of purity of worship this must be stopped. Immediately. And that's when

Slide 4

2. Saul met Jesus. (Verses 3-9)

"As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Slide 5

Saul actually met the risen Christ. This was not just a subjective experience; he didn't just see Jesus in a dream or a vision. This was something objective. The light he saw was the glory of Christ. The voice he heard was the voice of Christ. The object that he saw before him was the person of Christ. Christ tumbled him off his high horse and completely humbled him.

Now I think Saul was genuinely stumped when he heard this voice. He had no idea who could have been saying this. He wasn't persecuting anyone - he was simply going about doing the Lord's work, wasn't he? The voice speaks again: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!" So.... Jesus is alive! So... Jesus did rise from the dead! So there was such a close connection between Jesus and his disciples that when you persecute Christians, you are actually persecuting Jesus, when you hurt a Christian, you are actually hurting God Himself!

Isn't that a fascinating thought? That God is so much within the Christian, that he feels their pain, their hurt, their persecution. But didn't Jesus say something similar to his disciples just before he died? He was talking about when he would come again and how he would divide the sheep from the goats, and he said to those around him that some had fed him when he was hungry, had given him a drink when he was

thirsty, had clothed him when he was naked, had visited him when he was in prison. For whenever you do this to the least of one of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.

Remember 9/11? You attack New York City and you attack all of America. When Novak Djokovic was deported out of Australia? The whole of Serbia took it as a person affront! Remember the Bali bombings? You hurt young Aussies in Bali you are hurting us all at the same time. That's what Jesus is saying to Saul. You attack my people, who are my body, you are attacking me.

And in what would have been a sickening moment for Saul, the penny drops. He realised that he was wrong. Saul was actually treading on the toes of the king of the universe. I mean, that's quite a mistake, isn't it? It's like a bully trying to beat up a little kid; and he doesn't realise the little kid's dad is the heavy weight champion of the world! But now God had confronted Saul with his past and yet had graciously given him a task for the future.

Slide 6

And it's all down to God's grace. Saul didn't make a decision for Jesus. He was persecuting Jesus! Why Saul will later call himself the worst of all sinners. So how can God save someone like that? Certainly not by their works, they have done far too many things wrong. It can only be by grace through faith. Isn't God's grace amazing? Isn't His forgiveness incredible? No matter what we have done, God's grace is able to forgive us. For if God can save someone like Saul, his grace can save anyone.

Who would you say is the person least likely to be saved that you know? Donald Trump? Vladimir Putin? Your husband, mum, child? Well Saul was the most unlikely convert of his day and yet God turned his life upside down. Maybe, just maybe, God might do that for those we think are beyond anyone's reach, including God's!

Slide 7

⁷“The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.”

Slide 8

Jesus has turned everything around. Instead of Saul laying hands on Christians, Jesus Christ had laid hold of him. Instead of arresting Christians, Saul was arrested by Christ Himself. Instead of persecuting the faith, Saul was to become a preacher of the faith. In the words of John Calvin God's grace didn't just turn a cruel wolf into a sheep, but would make him into a shepherd.

Now in one way what happened to Saul is unique. The blinding light. The presence of Jesus. The call to service. But in another way what happened to Saul will happen to all Christians. We must have a personal encounter with Jesus. We must be the objects of God's grace. We need to respond to that grace in faith and we need to go where Jesus is calling us to go as well.

Slide 9

3. Saul meets Jesus and then Saul meets Ananias. (Verses 10-19)

¹⁰“In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, Ananias “Yes, Lord” he answered. ¹¹The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street & ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. Slide 10 ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” ¹³“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

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For while Saul is being led by the hand to a house in Straight St, God appears before a devout member of the Damascus church. And he asks him to do the most extraordinary thing. He asks him to go to the man

who had come to Damascus to have the Church destroyed, go to him and place his hands on him so that he could see again.

Now that's a big ask isn't? In fact, it would be suicidal! And Ananias is very quick to point this out to God. Now do you see a bit of yourself in Ananias? Quite often we hear God speak to us through his word to forgive someone their sin or to give up your time to help the work of the Church or to pray that God would change the hearts of the people around us and we say back to God. I think you have made a mistake. That is a complete and utter waste of time. Yet although he might have complained, Ananias was a man of faith, and he did what he was told.

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¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." ¹⁷ 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 that you may see again & be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

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So timidly Ananias goes down to Straight St. And he places his hands on the blind man. He prays for him. And he calls him "Brother Saul!" What great words! Now they were probably the first words Saul heard from Christian lips after his conversion, and they were words of welcome, words of acceptance, words of fellowship. Here was a man who was here to destroy the Church, being accepted as a brother, a brother in the Church community.

Don't you love the balance of what is going on in Acts 9? God balances a great public miracle with the quiet meeting in a suburban house. The bright light and the voice from heaven are dramatic events but the visit of Ananias is quite ordinary. The hand of God pushed Saul off his high horse but God used the hand of a man to bring Saul what he needed the most. God spoke from heaven but He also spoke through an obedient disciple who gave the message to Saul. The ordinary events were just as much a part of this miracle as the extraordinary.

What has happened with Ananias has happened thousands of times throughout the history of the world. Just to give you one such example. On April 21, 1855 Edward Kimball was teaching his Sunday School class. When something he said, was used by God's Spirit to bring a young boy to faith. That boy was Dwight L. Moody, who was to become one of the leading evangelists the world has seen. For Kimball he was just teaching a Sunday School class, but in heaven there was rejoicing and for the Church one of its great leaders had now been brought into the fold.

What about our children in our Kids Church? What about your faithful witness to your kids at home or your grandkids? What about that person that is often on their own that you go out of your way to speak to? Is there another Apostle Paul there? Another Dwight L Moody? Who knows? Well God does. And he may want you to have a role in their life. To befriend them. To pray for them. To teach them about the Christian life. God may be calling you to be involved in their lives. He may be encouraging you to make yourself available to help others. Will you do it? Are you prepared to do something that scares you? Will you do something that will have a spiritual impact on another's life? Ananias was willing.

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4. Saul meets Jesus, he meets Ananias and then he meets Opposition (Verses 20-26)

"Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ 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?" ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah."

At first there was the honeymoon period. Who is this guy? He looks a bit like the Pharisee Saul? But wow, he certainly knows his Scriptures and he is giving us convincing proof that Jesus is the Messiah. That the one who died on the cross for our sins and was risen for our resurrection. He says he is still alive today, because he is the Son of God! But they soon turned against him.

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The persecutor who turned into a preacher has now become the persecuted. ²³ *"After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day & night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall."* In just a snap of the fingers Paul has become a basket case! In fact, he makes fun of himself in the book of 2 Corinthians. He points out that the first Roman soldier over the wall in assault won a prize but he was the first over the wall to escape, which probably means that he gets the booby prize!

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You would think that this great man, this intellectual giant, this Jew with a background in the Roman world would be able to conquer all before him for the sake of the gospel. With a man like Paul with his tremendous gifts, there would be a revival in Damascus, surely? And if not there, certainly Jerusalem would open their arms to this star performer. So, after a while in Damascus Saul comes back to Jerusalem and debates with the Greek speaking Jews, people that were his electorate in the past. And they want to kill him as well.

And so Saul was sent away to his home town of Tarsus where he ends up staying for about 7 or 8 years. There he is for a long, long time out of the spotlight. Working through the implications of Jesus being the Messiah. God might have an enormous task for this man to perform but he has to humble him first. He needs to get his dependence on God not himself. Saul needs to learn that his strength will come only through his weakness. And that if he is going to serve his Saviour then they will also treat him in the same way they treated his Saviour Jesus.

For it takes time to brew good coffee. It takes many years to grow an oak tree. Preparation for the Lord's service doesn't happen overnight. Even though the gospel has to go to the ends of the world, God is not any hurry with Saul. Before the gospel of God would go to the Gentiles, the Jerusalem Church must understand that the Gentiles have a place in the Church of God. And that wouldn't happen until the conversion of Cornelius, which we look at next week.

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AW Tozer once wrote, *"It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt Him deeply."* And it was John Calvin who wrote, *"This verse shows us that nobody is fit to preach the gospel in a hostile world unless his mind has been prepared for suffering... (so) we must ask Him for the spirit of knowledge and of wisdom, but also for the spirit of steadfastness & of courage, so that we may never be broken by desperate suffering, for it is the lot of the godly."*

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5. Saul meets opposition and then Saul meets Barnabas. (Verses 27-30)

²⁷ *"But Barnabas took him & 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. ²⁸ So Saul stayed ... speaking boldly in the name of the Lord."*

How every Church needs a Barnabas. Someone who will give a word of encouragement. Who will intercede for the outsider. Who will notice someone else gifts, who will take a risk for Christ, who will promote the ministry of others, who reconcile believers with others.

My experience is that evangelists like Paul don't easily fit into the Church. They say it as it is. They have a zeal for the gospel that many others don't have. And so we need enablers like Barnabas who will support these people, who will back them and who will remind the Church that we are not a community club but instead we are here to win the world for Christ.

Slide 20

6. And lastly Saul met unbelievers. (Acts 22 & 26)

Do you know that the story of Saul's conversion is recounted three times in the book of Acts? Here in Acts 9 and then again in Acts 22 and Acts 26. Saul knows the power of testimony. For the same power, the same grace that change a wretch like Saul, can change kings & governors and ordinary people. So Saul spoke his testimony to people whenever and where ever he could. Not because he wanted to draw attention to himself. But because his testimony drew attention to Jesus. Jesus saved him when he couldn't save himself. Jesus forgave a sinner & a blasphemer & a murder. He tells others that once you meet Jesus, really meet Jesus, everything will change.

And that is where our passage ends, with the Church having been changed. You see the result of meeting Jesus, meeting opposition, meeting our fellow Christians and meeting unbelievers in the name of Jesus will show itself in the community of believers. Which is why verse 31 says ³¹ *"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace."*

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Peace with God, with outsiders & peace within itself *"& was strengthened."* It consolidated itself as a community of faith in this hostile world. *"Living in the fear of the Lord"* produced a godliness among the believers. *"And encouraged by the Holy Spirit"* God Himself strengthened them despite their difficulties. *"And it increased in numbers."* God blessed them by adding to their numbers. What was happening amongst them was attractive to those around them.

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I started our sermon today by asking the question who might be a model for our faith? Is it someone like Saul where you have seen a big change because of the work of God in their lives. But maybe it could be someone like Ananias who quietly has served God and allowed others to shine. Or maybe it might be someone like Barnabas who is an encourager, an enabler, a reconciler, someone that builds others up in the faith and enables the whole church to grow.

But maybe the more important question is does anyone think that you are a model for their faith? Has anyone seen the changes in your life & wanted to know the same Jesus who brought about those changes in you? Or will others be thankful for your work behind the scenes or your encouragement or enabling? Most of us will not change the world like Saul. But all of us can influence that family member, that kid down the road, that person who seems weak in their faith. And we can do that by meeting Jesus ourselves and introducing others to Jesus as well.

Song – The power of the Cross

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| <p>1. Oh, to see the dawn
Of the darkest day
Christ on the road to Calvary
Tried by sinful men
Torn and beaten, then
Nailed to a cross of wood</p> | <p>2. Oh, to see the pain
written on your face
bearing the awesome weight of sin
Every bitter thought
Every evil deed
Crowning your bloodstained brow.</p> |
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Chorus. This, the pow'r of the cross
Christ became sin for us
Took the blame, bore the wrath
We stand forgiven at the cross

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|---|---|
| <p>2. Now the daylight flees
Now the ground beneath
Quakes as its Maker bows His head
Curtain torn in two
Dead are raised to life
"Finished!" the vict'ry cry</p> | <p>4. Oh, to see my name
Written in the wounds
For through your suffering I am free
Death is crushed to death
Life is mine to live
Won through your selfless love</p> |
|---|---|

Benediction. ³¹ *Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee & Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord & encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers."*