

# CHAPTER 9

In this chapter we have,

**I.** The famous story of St. Paul's conversion from being an outrageous persecutor of the gospel of Christ to be an illustrious professor and preacher of it.

- 1.** How he was first awakened and wrought upon by an appearance of Christ himself to him as he was going upon an errand of persecution to Damascus: and what a condition he was in while he lay under the power of those convictions and terrors (v. 19).
- 2.** How he was baptized by Ananias, by immediate directions from heaven (v. 10-19).
- 3.** How he immediately commenced doctor, and preached the faith of Christ, and proved what he preached (v. 20-22).
- 4.** How he was persecuted, and narrowly escaped with his life (v. 23-25).
- 5.** How he was admitted among the brethren at Jerusalem: how he preached, and was persecuted there (v. 26-30).
- 6.** The rest and quietness which the churches enjoyed for some time after this (v. 31).

**II.** The cure wrought by Peter on Eneas, who had long been laid up with a palsy (v. 32-35).

**III.** The raising of Tabitha from death to life, at the prayer of Peter (v. 36-43).

## ~~498~~ ACTS 9:1-9

### SAUL'S CONVERSION

We found mention made of Saul twice or thrice in the story of Stephen, for the sacred penman longed to come to his story; and now we are come to it, not quite taking leave of Peter but from henceforward being mostly taken up with Paul the apostle of the Gentiles, as Peter was of the circumcision. His name in Hebrew was *Saul* desired, though as remarkably little in stature as his namesake king Saul was tall and stately; one of the

ancients calls him, *Homo tricubitalis* but four feet and a half in height; his Roman name which he went by among the citizens of Rome was *Paul little*. He was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a free city of the Romans, and himself a freeman of that city. His father and mother were both native Jews; therefore he calls himself a *Hebrew of the Hebrews*; he was of the tribe of Benjamin, which adhered to Judah. His education was in the schools of Tarsus first, which was a little Athens for learning; there he acquainted himself with the philosophy and poetry of the Greeks. Thence he was sent to the university at Jerusalem, to study divinity and the Jewish law. His tutor was Gamaliel, an eminent Pharisee. He had extraordinary natural parts, and improved mightily in learning. He had likewise a handicraft trade (being bred to tent-making), which was common with those among the Jews who were bred scholars (as Dr. Lightfoot saith), for the earning of their maintenance, and the avoiding of idleness. This is the young man on whom the grace of God wrought this mighty change here recorded, about a year after the ascension of Christ, or little more. We are here told,

**I.** How bad he was, how very bad, before his conversion; just before he was an inveterate enemy to Christianity, did his utmost to root it out, by persecuting all that embraced it. In other respects he was well enough, as *touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless*, a man of no ill morals, but a blasphemer of Christ, a persecutor of Christians, and injurious to both, <sup><3013></sup>1 Timothy 1:13. And so ill informed was his conscience that he thought he ought to do what he did against the name of Christ (<sup><4009></sup>Acts 26:9) and that he did God service in it, as was foretold, <sup><4012></sup>John 16:2. Here we have,

**1.** His general enmity and rage against the Christian religion (v. 1): *He yet breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*. The persons persecuted were the disciples of the Lord; because they were so, under that character he hated and persecuted them. The matter of the persecution was threatenings and slaughter. There is persecution in threatenings (<sup><4017></sup>Acts 4:17, 21); they terrify and break the spirit: and though we say, Threatened folks live long, yet those whom Saul threatened, if he prevailed not thereby to frighten them from Christ, he slew them, he persecuted them to death, <sup><4024></sup>Acts 22:4. His breathing out threatenings and slaughter intimates that it was natural to him, and his constant business. He even breathed in this as in his element. He breathed it out with heat and vehemence; his very breath, like that of some

venomous creatures, was pestilential. He breathed death to the Christians, wherever he came; he puffed at them in his pride (~~411~~ Psalm 12:4, 5), spit his venom at them in his rage. Saul yet breathing thus intimates,

**(1.)** That he still persisted in it; not satisfied with the blood of those he had slain, he still cries, *Give, give*.

**(2.)** That he should shortly be of another mine; as yet he breathes out threatenings and slaughter, but he has not long to live such a life as this, that breath will be stopped shortly.

**2.** His particular design upon the Christians at Damascus; thither was the gospel now lately carried by those that fled from the persecution at Stephen's death, and thought to be safe and quiet there, and were connived at by those in power there: but Saul cannot be easy if he knows a Christian is quiet; and therefore, hearing that the Christians in Damascus were so, he resolves to give them disturbance. In order to this, he applies to the high priest for a commission (v. 1) to go to Damascus, v. 2. The high priest needed not to be stirred up to persecute the Christians, he was forward enough to do it; but it seems the young persecutor drove more furiously than the old one. Leaders in sin are the worst of sinners; and the proselytes which the scribes and Pharisees make often prove seven times more the children of hell than themselves. He saith (~~421~~ Acts 22:5) that this commission was had from the whole estate of the elders: and proud enough this furious bigot was to have a commission directed to him, with the seal of the great sanhedrim affixed to it. Now the commission was to empower him to enquire among the synagogues, or congregations, of the Jews that were at Damascus, whether there were any that belonged to them that inclined to favour this new sect or heresy, that believed in Christ; and if he found any such, whether men or women, to bring them up prisoners to Jerusalem, to be proceeded against according to law by the great council there. Observe,

**(1.)** The Christians are here said to be *those of this way; those of the way*, so it is in the original. Perhaps the Christians sometimes called themselves so, from Christ *the Way*; or, because they looked on themselves as but in the way, and not yet at home; or, the enemies thus represented it as a way by itself, a by-way, a party, a faction.

**(2.)** The high priest and sanhedrim claimed a power over the Jews in all countries, and had a deference paid to their authority in matters of religion,

by all their synagogues, even those that were not of the jurisdiction of the civil government of the Jewish nation. And such a sovereignty the Roman pontiff now claims as the Jewish pontiff then did, though he has not so much to show for it.

**(3.)** By this commission, all that worshipped God in the way that they called heresy, though agreeing exactly with the original institutes even of the Jewish church, whether they were men or women, were to be prosecuted. Even the weaker sex, who in a case of this nature might deserve excuse, or at least compassion, shall find neither with Saul any more than they do with the popish persecutors.

**(4.)** He was ordered to bring them all bound to Jerusalem as criminals of the first magnitude, which, as it would be the more likely to terrify them, so it would be to magnify Saul, as having the command of the forces that were to carry them up, and opportunity of breathing out threatenings and slaughter. Thus was Saul employed when the grace of God wrought that great change in him. Let not us then despair of renewing grace for the conversion of the greatest sinners, nor let such despair of the pardoning mercy of God for the greatest sin; for Paul himself obtained mercy, that he might be a monument, <sup><sup>1</sup> Timothy 1:13.</sup>

**II.** How suddenly and strangely a blessed change was wrought in him, not in the use of any ordinary means, but by miracles. The conversion of Paul is one of the wonders of the church. Here is,

**1.** The place and time of it: *As he journeyed, he came near to Damascus;* and there, Christ met with him.

**(1.)** He was in the way, travelling upon his journey; not in the temple, nor in the synagogue, nor in the meeting of the Christians, but by the way. The work of conversion is not tied to the church, though ordinarily public administrations are made use of. Some are reclaimed in slumberings on the bed (<sup><sup>1</sup> Job 33:15-17), and some in travelling upon the road alone: Thoughts are as free, and there is as good an opportunity of communing with our own hearts there, as upon the bed; and there the Spirit may set in with us, for that wind blows where it listeth. Some observe that Saul was spoken to abroad in the open air that there might be no suspicion of imposture, nor of a trick put upon him in it.</sup>

**(2.)** He was near Damascus, almost at his journey's end, ready to enter the city, the chief city of Syria. Some observe that he who was to be the apostle of the Gentiles was converted to the faith of Christ in a Gentile country. Damascus had been infamous for persecuting God's people formerly they threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron (Amos 1:3), and now it was likely to be so again.

**(3.)** He was in a wicked way, pursuing his design against the Christians at Damascus, and pleasing himself with the thought that he should devour this new-born child of Christianity there. Note, Sometimes the grace of God works upon sinners when they are at the worst, and hotly engaged in the most desperate sinful pursuits, which is much for the glory both of God's pity and of his power.

**(4.)** The cruel edict and decree he had with him drew near to be put in execution; and now it was happily prevented, which may be considered,

**[1.]** As a great kindness to the poor saints at Damascus, who had notice of his coming, as appears by what Ananias said (v. 13, 14), and were apprehensive of their danger from him, and trembled as poor lambs at the approach of a ravening wolf; Saul's conversion was their security for the present. Christ has many ways of delivering the godly out of temptation, and sometimes does it by a change wrought in their persecutors, either restraining their wrathful spirits (<sup>4970</sup>Psalm 76:10) and mollifying them for a time, as the Old-Testament Saul, who relented towards David more than once (<sup>4924</sup>1 Samuel 24:16; 26:21), or renewing their spirits, and fixing upon them durable impressions, as upon the New-Testament Saul here.

**[2.]** It was also a very great mercy to Saul himself to be hindered from executing his wicked design, in which if he had now proceeded, perhaps it had been the filling up of the measure of his iniquity. Note, It is to be valued as a signal token of the divine favour if God, either by the inward operations of his grace or the outward occurrences of his providence, prevent us from prosecuting and executing a sinful purpose, (<sup>4973</sup>1 Samuel 25:32.

**2.** The appearance of Christ to him in his glory. Here it is only said that there *shone round about him a light from heaven*; but it appears from what follows (v. 17) that the Lord Jesus was in this light, and appeared to him by the way. He saw that just One (<sup>4924</sup>Acts 22:14), and see <sup>4923</sup>Acts 26:13. Whether he saw him at a distance, as Stephen saw him, in the heavens, or

nearer in the air, is not certain. It is not inconsistent with what is said of the heavens receiving Christ till the end of time (<sup><482></sup>Acts 3:21) to suppose that he did, upon such an extraordinary occasion as this, make a personal visit, but a very short one, to this lower world; it was necessary to Paul's being an apostle that he should see the Lord, and so he did, <sup><491></sup>1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8.

(1.) This light shone upon him *suddenly exaiphnes*, when Paul never thought of any such thing, and without any previous warning. Christ's manifestations of himself to poor souls are many times sudden and very surprising, and he anticipates them with the blessings of his goodness. This the disciples that Christ called to himself found. *Or ever I was aware,* <sup><262></sup>Song of Solomon 6:12.

(2.) It was a light from Heaven, the fountain of light, from the God of heaven, the Father of lights. It was a light above the brightness of the sun (<sup><483></sup>Acts 26:13), for it was visible at mid-day, and outshone the sun in his meridian strength and lustre, <sup><292></sup>Isaiah 24:23.

(3.) It shone *round about him*, not in his face only, but on every side of him; let him turn which way he will, he finds himself surrounded with the discoveries of it. And this was designed not only to startle him, and awaken his attention (for well may he expect to hear when he is thus made to see something very extraordinary), but to signify the enlightening of his understanding with the knowledge of Christ. The devil comes to the soul in darkness; by this he gets and keeps possession of it. But Christ comes to the soul in light, for he is himself the light of the world, bright and glorious to us, as light. The first thing in this new creation, as in that of the world, is light, <sup><406></sup>2 Corinthians 4:6. Hence all Christians are said to be *children of the light and of the day*, <sup><488></sup>Ephesians 5:8.

3. The arresting of Saul, and his detachment: *He fell to the earth*, v. 4. Some think that he was on foot, and that this light, which perhaps was accompanied with a thunderclap, so terrified him that he could not keep his feet, but fell upon his face, usually a posture of adoration, but here of astonishment. It is probable that he was mounted, as Balaam, when he went to curse Israel, and perhaps better mounted than he; for Saul was now in a public post, was in haste, and the journey was long, so that it is not likely he should travel on foot. The sudden light would frighten the beast he rode on, and make it throw him; and it was God's good providence that his body got no hurt by the fall: but angels had a particular

charge concerning him, to keep all his bones, so that not one of them was broken. It appears (~~4034~~ Acts 26:14) that all that were with him fell to the earth as well as he, but the design was upon him. This may be considered,

(1.) As the effect of Christ's appearing to him, and of the light which shone round about him. Note, Christ's manifestations of himself to poor souls are humbling; they lay them very low, in mean thoughts of themselves, and a humble submission to the will of God. Now *mine eyes see thee*, saith Job, *I abhor myself. I saw the Lord*, saith Isaiah, *sitting upon a throne, and I said, Woe is me, for I am undone.*

(2.) As a step towards this intended advancement. He is designed not only to be a Christian, but to be a minister, an apostle, a great apostle, and therefore he must thus be cast down. Note, Those whom Christ designs for the greatest honours are commonly first laid low. Those who are designed to excel in knowledge and grace are commonly laid low first, in a sense of their own ignorance and sinfulness. Those whom God will employ are first struck with a sense of their unworthiness to be employed.

4. The arraignment of Saul. Being by the fall taken into custody, and as it were set to the bar, he heard a voice saying to him (and it was distinguishing, to him only, for though those that were with him heard a sound, v. 7, yet they knew not the words, ~~4020~~ Acts 22:9), *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Observe here,

(1.) Saul not only saw a light from heaven, but heard a voice from heaven; wherever the glory of God was seen, the word of God was heard (~~4023~~ Exodus 20:18); and to Moses (~~4039~~ Numbers 7:89); and to the prophets. God's manifestations of himself were never dumb shows, for he magnifies his word above all his name, and what was seen was always designed to make way for what was said. Saul heard a voice. Note, Faith comes by hearing; hence the Spirit is said to be received by the hearing of faith, ~~4032~~ Galatians 3:2. The voice he heard was the voice of Christ. When he *saw that just One, he heard the voice of his mouth*, ~~4024~~ Acts 22:14. Note, The word we hear is likely to profit us when we hear it as the voice of Christ, ~~5013~~ 1 Thessalonians 2:13. *It is the voice of my beloved*; no voice but his can reach the heart. Seeing and hearing are the two learning senses; Christ here, by both these doors, entered into Saul's heart.

(2.) What he heard was very awakening.

[1.] He was called by his name, and that doubled: *Saul, Saul*. Some think, in calling him Saul, he hints at that great persecutor of David whose name he bore. He was indeed a second Saul, and such an enemy to the Son of David as the other was to David. Calling him by his name intimates the particular regard that Christ had to him: *I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me*, <sup><384></sup>Isaiah 45:4 See <sup><382></sup>Exodus 33:12. His calling him by name brought the conviction home to his conscience, and put it past dispute to whom the voice spoke this. Note, What God speaks in general is then likely to do us good when we apply it to ourselves, and insert our own names into the precepts and promises which are expressed generally, as if God spoke to us by name, and when he saith, *Ho, every one*, he had said, *Ho, such a one: Samuel, Samuel; Saul, Saul*. The doubling of it, *Saul, Saul*, intimates, *First*, The deep sleep that Saul was in; he needed to be called again and again, as <sup><379></sup>Jeremiah 22:29, *O earth, earth, earth. Secondly*, The tender concern that the blessed Jesus had for him, and for his recovery. He speaks as one in earnest; it is like *Martha, Martha* (<sup><401></sup>Luke 10:41), or *Simon, Simon* (<sup><423></sup>Luke 22:31), or *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, <sup><437></sup>Matthew 23:37. He speaks to him as to one in imminent danger, at the pit's brink, and just ready to drop in: "*Saul, Saul, dost thou know whither thou art going, or what thou art doing?*"

[2.] The charge exhibited against him is, *Why persecutest thou me?* Observe here, *First*, Before Saul was made a saint, he was made to see himself a sinner, a great sinner, a sinner against Christ. Now he was made to see that evil in himself which he never saw before; sin revived and he died. Note, A humbling conviction of sin is the first step towards a saving conversion from sin. *Secondly*, He is convinced of one particular sin, which he was most notoriously guilty of, and had justified himself in, and thereby way is made for his conviction of all the rest. *Thirdly*, The sin he is convinced of is persecution: *Why persecutest thou me?* It is a very affectionate expostulation, enough to melt a heart of stone. Observe,

**1.** The person sinning: "It is thou; thou, that art not one of the ignorant, rude, unthinking crowd, that will run down any thing they hear put into an ill name, but thou that hast had a liberal learned education, has good parts and accomplishments, hast the knowledge of the scriptures, which, if duly considered, would show thee the folly of it. It is worse in thee than in another."



2. The person sinned against: “It is I, who never did thee any harm, who came from heaven to earth to do thee good, who was not long since crucified for thee; and was not that enough, but must I afresh be crucified by thee?”

3. The kind and continuance of the sin. It was persecution, and he was at this time engaged in it: “Not only thou hast persecuted, but thou persecutest, thou persistest in it.” He was not at this time hauling any to prison, nor killing them; but this was the errand he came upon to Damascus; he was now projecting it, and pleasing himself with the thought of it. Note, Those that are designing mischief are, in God's account, doing mischief.

4. The question put to him upon it: “Why dost thou do it?”

(1.) It is complaining language. “Why dealest thou thus unjustly, thus unkindly, with my disciples?” Christ never complained so much of those who persecuted him in his own person as he did here of those who persecuted him in his followers. He complains of it as it was Saul's sin: “Why art thou such an enemy to thyself, to thy God?” Note, The sins of sinners are a very grievous burden to the Lord Jesus. He is grieved for them (<sup>488B</sup>Mark 3:5), he is pressed under them, <sup>402B</sup>Amos 2:13.

(2.) It is convincing language: “Why dost thou thus: Canst thou give any good reason for it?” Note, It is good for us often to ask ourselves why we do so and so, that we may discern what an unreasonable thing sin is: and of all sins none so unreasonable, so unaccountable, as the sin of persecuting the disciples of Christ, especially when it is discovered to be, as certainly it is, persecuting Christ. Those have no knowledge who eat up God's people, <sup>344B</sup>Psalm 14:4. *Why persecutest thou me?* He thought he was persecuting only a company of poor, weak, silly people, that were an offence and eye-sore to the Pharisees, little imagining that it was one in heaven that he was all this while insulting; for surely, if he had known, he would not have persecuted the Lord of glory. Note, Those who persecute the saints persecute Christ himself, and he takes what is done against them as done against himself, and accordingly will be the judgment in the great day, <sup>425B</sup>Matthew 25:45.

5. Saul's question upon his indictment, and the reply to it, v. 5.

(1.) He makes enquiry concerning Christ: *Who art thou, Lord?* He gives no direct answer to the charge preferred against him, being convicted by his own conscience, and self-condemned. If God contend with us for our sins, we are not able to answer for one of a thousand, especially such a one as the sin of persecution. Convictions of sin, when they are set home with power upon the conscience, will silence all excuses and self-justifications. *Though I were righteous, yet would I not answer.* But he desires to know who is his judge; the compellation is respectful: *Lord.* He who had been a blasphemer of Christ's name now speaks to him as his Lord. The question is proper: *Who art thou?* This implies his present unacquaintedness with Christ; he knew not his voice as his own sheep do, but he desired to be acquainted with him; he is convinced by this light which encloses him that it is one from heaven that speaks to him, and he has a veneration for every thing that appears to him to come from heaven; and therefore, *Lord, who art thou? What is thy name?* <sup><0137></sup>Judges 13:17; <sup><1329></sup>Genesis 32:29. Note, there is some hope of people when they begin to enquire after Jesus Christ.

(2.) He has an answer immediately, in which we have,

[1.] Christ's gracious revelation of himself to him. He is always ready to answer the serious enquiries of those who covet an acquaintance with him: *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.* The name of Jesus was not unknown to him; his heart had risen against it many a time, and gladly would he bury it in oblivion. He knew it was the name that he persecuted, but little did he think to hear it from heaven, or from the midst of such a glory as now shone round about him. Note, Christ brings souls into fellowship with himself by manifesting himself to them. He said, *First, I am Jesus, a Saviour; I am Jesus of Nazareth,* so it is, <sup><4218></sup>Acts 22:8. Saul used to call him so when he blasphemed him: "I am that very Jesus whom thou usedst to call in scorn *Jesus of Nazareth.*" And he would show that now that he is in his glory he is not ashamed of his humiliation. *Secondly, "I am that Jesus whom thou persecutest,* and therefore it will be at thy peril if thou persist in this wicked course." There is nothing more effectual to awaken and humble the soul than to see sin to be against Christ, an affront to him, and a contradiction to his designs.

[2.] His gentle reproof of him: *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,* or *goads* to spurn at the spur. It is hard, it is in itself an absurd and evil thing, and will be of fatal consequence to him that does it. Those kick at the goad that stifle and smother the convictions of conscience, that rebel

against God's truths and laws, that quarrel with his providences, and that persecute and oppose his ministers, because they reprove them, and their words are as goads and as nails. Those that revolt more and more when they are stricken by the word or rod of God, that are enraged at reproofs and fly in the face of their reprovers, kick against the pricks and will have a great deal to answer for.

**6.** His surrender of himself to the Lord Jesus at length, v. 6. See here,

**(1.)** The frame and temper he was in, when Christ had been dealing with him.

**[1.]** He trembled, as one in a great fright. Note, Strong convictions, set home by the blessed Spirit, will make an awakened soul to tremble. How can those choose but tremble that are made to see the eternal God provoked against them, the whole creation at war with them, and their own souls upon the brink of ruin!

**[2.]** He was astonished, was filled with amazement, as one brought into a new world, that knew not where he was. Note, The convincing, converting, work of Christ is astonishing to the awakened soul, and fills it with admiration. "What is this that God has done with me, and what will he do?"

**(2.)** His address to Jesus Christ, when he was in this frame: *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* This may be taken,

**[1.]** As a serious request for Christ's teachings: "Lord, I see I have hitherto been out of the way; thou hast shown me my error, set me to rights; thou hast discovered sin to me, discover to me the way to pardon and peace." It is like that, *Men and brethren, what must we do?* Note, A serious desire to be instructed by Christ in the way of salvation is an evidence of a good work begun in the soul. Or,

**[2.]** As a sincere resignation of himself to the direction and government of the Lord Jesus. This was the first word that grace spoke in Paul, and with this began a spiritual life: Lord Jesus, *What wilt thou have me to do?* Did not he know what he had to do? Had he not his commission in his pocket? And what had he to do but to execute it? No, he had done enough of this work already, and resolves now to change his master, and employ himself better. Now it is not, What will the high priest and the elders have me to do? What will my own wicked appetites and passions have me to do? But,

*What wilt thou have me to do?* The great change in conversion is wrought upon the will, and consists in the resignation of that to the will of Christ.

**(3.)** The general direction Christ gave him, in answer to this: *Arise, go into the city of Damascus, which thou art now near to, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* It is encouragement enough to have further instruction promised him, but,

**[1.]** He must not have it yet; it shall be told him shortly what he must do, but, for the present, he must pause upon what has been said to him, and improve that. Let him consider awhile what he has done in persecuting Christ, and be deeply humbled for that, and then he shall be told what he has further to do.

**[2.]** He must not have it in this way, by a voice from heaven, for it is plain that he cannot bear it; he trembles, and is astonished. He shall be told therefore what he must do by a man like himself, whose terror shall not make him afraid, nor his hand be heavy upon him, which Israel desired at mount Sinai. Or, it is an intimation that Christ would take some other time to manifest himself further to him, when he was more composed, and this fright pretty well over. Christ manifests himself to his people by degrees; and both what he does and would he have them to do, though they know not now, they shall know hereafter.

**7.** How far his fellow travellers were affected with this, and what impression it made upon them. They fell to the earth, as he did, but rose without being bidden, which he did not, but lay still till it was said to him, *Arise*; for he lay under a heavier load than any of them did; but when they were up,

**(1.)** *They stood speechless*, as men in confusion, and that was all, v. 7. They were going on the same wicked errand that Paul was, and perhaps, to the best of their power, were as spiteful as he; yet we do not find that any of them were converted, though they saw the light, and were struck down and struck dumb by it. No external means will of themselves work a change in the soul, without the Spirit and grace of God, which distinguish between some and others; among these that journeyed together, one is taken, and the others left. *They stood speechless*; none of them said, *Who art thou, Lord?* or, *What wilt thou have me to do?* as Paul did, but none of God's children are born dumb.

(2.) *They heard a voice, but saw no man*; they heard Paul speak, but saw not him to whom he spoke, nor heard distinctly what was said to him: which reconciles it with what is said of this matter, <sup><420></sup>Acts 22:9, where it is said, *They saw the light and were afraid* (which they might do and yet see no man in the light, as Paul did), and *that they heard not the voice of him that spoke to Paul*, so as to understand what he said, though they did hear a confused noise. Thus those who came hither to be the instruments of Paul's rage against the church serve for witnesses of the power of God over him.

8. What condition Saul was in after this, v. 8, 9.

(1.) *He arose from the earth*, when Christ commanded him, but probably not without help, the vision had made him so faint and weak, I will not say like Belshazzar, when the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another, but like Daniel, when upon the sight of a vision no strength remained in him, <sup><2706></sup>Daniel 10:16-17.

(2.) *When his eyes were opened*, he found that his sight was gone, and *he saw no man*, none of the men that were with him, and began now to be busy about him. It was not so much this glaring light that, *by dazzling his eyes, had dimmed them Nimium sensibile laedit sensum*; for then those with him would have lost their sight too; but it was a sight of Christ, whom the rest saw not, that had this effect upon him. Thus a believing sight of the glory of God in the face of Christ dazzles the eyes to all things here below. Christ, in order to the further discovery of himself and his gospel to Paul, took him off from the sight of other things, which he must look off, that he may look unto Jesus, and to him only.

(3.) *They led him by the hand into Damascus*; whether to a public house, or to some friend's house, is not certain; but thus he who thought to have led the disciples of Christ prisoners and captives to Jerusalem was himself led a prisoner and a captive to Christ into Damascus. He was thus taught what need he had of the grace of Christ to lead his soul (being naturally blind and apt to mistake) into all truth.

(4.) He lay *without sight*, and without food, *neither did eat nor drink for three days*, v. 9. I do not think, as some do, that now he had his rapture into the third heavens, which he speaks of, 2 Corinthians 12. So far from this that we have reason to think he was all this time rather in the belly of hell, suffering God's terrors for his sins, which were now set in order

before him: he was in the dark concerning his own spiritual state, and was so wounded in spirit for sin that he could relish neither meat nor drink.

## ~~490~~ ACTS 9:10-22

### ANANIAS SENT TO SAUL

*As for God, his work is perfect; if he begin, he will make an end:* a good work was begun in Saul, when he was brought to Christ's feet, in that word, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* And never did Christ leave any that were brought to that. Though Saul was sadly mortified when he lay three days blind, yet he was not abandoned. Christ here takes care of the work of his own hands. He that hath torn will heal that hath smitten will bind up that hath convinced will comfort.

**I.** Ananias is here ordered to go and look after him, to heal and help him; for he that causeth grief will have compassion.

**1.** The person employed is *Ananias, a certain disciple at Damascus*, not lately driven thither from Jerusalem, but a native of Damascus; for it is said (~~492~~Acts 22:12) *that he had a good report of all the Jews who dwelt there, as a devout man according to the law; he had lately embraced the gospel, and given up his name to Christ, and, as it should seem, officiated as a minister, at least pro hac vice on this occasion*, though it does not appear that he was apostolically ordained. But why were not some of the apostles from Jerusalem sent for upon this great occasion, or Philip the evangelist, who had lately baptized the eunuch, and might have been fetched hither by the Spirit in a little time? Surely, because Christ would employ variety of hands in eminent services, that the honours might not be monopolized nor engrossed by a few, because he would put work into the hands, and thereby put honour upon the heads, of those that were mean and obscure, to encourage them, and because he would direct us to make much of the ministers that are where our lot is cast, if they have ordained mercy to be faithful, though they are not of the most eminent.

**2.** The direction given him is to go and enquire at such a house, probably an inn, for one *Saul of Tarsus*. Christ, in a vision, called to Ananias by name, v. 10. It is probable it was not the first time that he had heard the words of God, and seen the visions of the Almighty; for, without terror or

confusion, he readily answers, “*Behold I am here, Lord, ready to go wherever thou sendest me, and to do whatever thou biddest me.*” *Go then, saith Christ, into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas* (where strangers used to lodge) *for one called Saul of Tarsus.* Note, Christ very well knows where to find out those that are his, in their distresses: when their relations, it may be, know not what is become of them, they have a friend in heaven, that knows in what street, in what house, nay, and which is more, in what frame they are: he knows their souls in adversity.

**3.** Two reasons are given him why he must go and enquire for this stranger, and offer him his service:

**(1.)** Because he prays, and his coming to him must answer his prayer. This is a reason,

**[1.]** Why Ananias needed not to be afraid of him, as we find he was, v. 13, 14. There is no question, saith Christ, but he is a true convert, *for behold he prayeth.* *Behold* denotes the certainty of it: “Assure thyself it is so; go and see.” Christ was so pleased to find Paul praying that he must have others to take notice of it: *Rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep which I had lost.* It denotes also the strangeness of it: “Behold, and wonder, that he who but the other day breathed nothing but threatenings and slaughter, now breathes nothing but prayer.” But was it such a strange thing for Saul to pray? Was he not a Pharisee? and have we not reason to think he did, as the rest of them did, make long prayers in the synagogues and the corners of the streets? Yes; but now he began to pray after another manner than he had done; then he said his prayers, now he prayed them. Note, Regenerating grace evermore sets people on praying; you may as soon find a living man without breath as a living Christian without prayer; if breathless, lifeless; and so, if prayerless, graceless.

**[2.]** As a reason why Ananias must go to him with all speed. It is no time to linger, *for behold he prayeth:* if the child cry, the tender nurse will hasten to it with the breast. Saul here, like Ephraim, is bemoaning himself, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and kicking against the goad. “Oh! go to him quickly, and tell him he is a dear son, a pleasant child, and *since I spoke against him, for persecuting me, I do earnestly remember him still.*” <sup>2818</sup>Jeremiah 31:18-20. Observe what condition Saul was now in. He was under conviction of sin, trembling and astonished; the setting of sin in order before us should drive us to prayer. He was under a bodily affliction,

blind and sick; and, *Is any afflicted? Let him pray.* Christ had promised him that it should be further told him what he should do (v. 6), and he prays that one may be sent to him to instruct him. Note, What God has promised we must pray for; he will for this be enquired of, and particularly for divine instruction.

**(2.)** Because he hath seen in a vision such a man coming to him, to restore him to his sight; and Ananias's coming to him must answer his dream, for it was of God (v. 12): *He hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias, and just such a man as thou art, coming in seasonably for his relief, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight.* Now this vision which Paul had may be considered,

**[1.]** As an immediate answer to his prayer, and the keeping up of that communion with God which he had entered into by prayer. He had, in prayer, spread the misery of his own case before God, and God presently manifests himself and the kind intentions of his grace to him; and it is very encouraging to know God's thoughts to us-ward.

**[2.]** As designed to raise his expectations, and to make Ananias's coming more welcome to him. He would readily receive him as a messenger from God when he was told beforehand, in vision, that one of that name would come to him. See what a great thing it is to bring a spiritual physician and his patient together: here were two visions in order to it. When God, in his providence, does it without visions, brings a messenger to the afflicted soul, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, it must be acknowledged with thankfulness to his praise.

**II.** Ananias objects against going to him, and the Lord answers the objection. See how condescendingly the Lord admits his servant to reason with him.

**1.** Ananias pleads that this Saul was a notorious persecutor of the disciples of Christ, v. 13, 14.

**(1.)** He had been so at Jerusalem: "*Lord, I have heard by many of this man, what a malicious enemy he is to the gospel of Christ: all those that were scattered upon the late persecution, many of whom are come to Damascus, tell how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem, that he was the most virulent, violent persecutor of all, and a ringleader in the*



mischief what havoc he has made in the church: there was no man they were more afraid of, no, not the high priest himself, than of Saul; nay,”

(2.) “His errand to Damascus at this time is to persecute us Christians: *Here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name*, to treat the worshippers of Christ as the worst of criminals.” Now, why does Ananias object this. Not, “There-fore I do not owe him so much service. Why should I do him a kindness who has done and designed us so much unkindness?” No, Christ has taught us another lesson, to render good for evil, and pray for our persecutors; but if he be such a persecutor of Christians,

[1.] Will it be safe for Ananias to go to him? Will he not throw himself like a lamb into the mouth of a lion? And, if he thus bring himself into trouble, he will be blamed for his indiscretion.

[2.] Will it be to any purpose to go to him? Can such a hard heart ever be softened, or such an Ethiopian ever change his skin?

2. Christ overrules the objection (v. 15, 16): “Do not tell me how bad he has been, I know it very well; but go thy way with all speed, and give him all the help thou canst, *for he is a chosen vessel*, or instrument, unto me; I design to put confidence in him, and then thou needest not fear him.” He was a vessel in which the gospel-treasure should be lodged, in order to the conveyance of it to many; an earthen vessel (~~400~~ 2 Corinthians 4:7), but a chosen vessel. The vessel God uses he himself chooses; and it is fit he should himself have the choosing of the instruments he employs (~~416~~ John 15:16): *You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you*. He is a vessel of honour, and must not be neglected in his present forlorn condition, nor thrown away as a despised broken vessel, or a vessel in which there is no pleasure. He is designed,

(1.) For eminent services: *He is to bear my name before the Gentiles*, is to be the apostle of the Gentiles, and to carry the gospel to heathen nations. Christ's name is the standard to which souls must be gathered, and under which they must be enlisted, and Saul must be a standard-bearer. He must bear Christ's name, must bear witness to it before kings, king Agrippa and Caesar himself; nay, he must bear it before the children of Israel, though there were so many hands already at work about them.

(2.) For eminent sufferings (v. 16): *I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.* He that has been a persecutor shall be himself persecuted. Christ's showing him this intimates either his bringing him to these trials (as <sup>390B</sup>Psalm 60:3), *Thou hast shown thy people hard things*, or his giving notice of them beforehand, that they might be no surprise to him. Note, Those that bear Christ's name must expect to bear the cross for his name; and those that do most for Christ are often called out to suffer most for him. Saul must suffer great things. This, one would think, was a cold comfort for a young convert; but it is only like telling a soldier of a bold and brave spirit, when he is enlisted, that he shall take the field, and enter upon action, shortly. Saul's sufferings for Christ shall redound so much to the honour of Christ and the service of the church, shall be so balanced with spiritual comforts and recompensed with eternal glories, that it is no discouragement to him to be told how great things he must suffer for Christ's name's sake.

**III.** Ananias presently goes on Christ's errand to Saul, and with good effect. He had started an objection against going to him, but, when an answer was given to it, he dropped it, and did not insist upon it. When difficulties are removed, what have we to do but to go on with our work, and not hang upon an objection?

**1.** Ananias delivered his message to Saul, v. 17. Probably he found him in bed, and applied to him as a patient.

(1.) *He put his hands on him.* It was promised, as one of the signs that should follow those that believe, that they should lay hands on the sick, and they should recover (<sup>418B</sup>Mark 16:18), and it was for that intent that he put his hands on him. Saul came to lay violent hands upon the disciples at Damascus, but here a disciple lays a helping healing hand upon him. *The blood-thirsty hate the upright, but the just seek his soul.*

(2.) He called him *brother*, because he was made a partaker of the grace of God, though not yet baptized; and his readiness to own him as a brother intimated to him God's readiness to own him as a son, though he had been a blasphemer of God and a persecutor of his children.

(3.) He produces his commission from the same hand that had laid hold on him by the way, and now had him in custody. "That *same Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest*, and convinced thee of thy sin in persecuting him, has now sent me to thee to comfort thee." *Una*

*eademque manus vulnus opemque tulit* The hand that wounded heals. “His light struck thee blind, but he *hath sent me to thee that thou mightest receive thy sight*; for the design was not to blind thine eyes, but to dazzle them, that thou mightest see things by another light: he that then put clay upon thine eyes hath sent me to wash them, that they may be cured.”

Ananias might deliver his message to Saul very appositely in the prophet's words (<sup><306></sup>Hosea 6:1, 2): *Come and turn to the Lord, for he hath torn and he will heal thee; he hath smitten, and he will bind thee up; now after two days he will revive thee, and the third day he will raise thee up, and thou shalt live in his sight.* Corrosives shall be no more applied, but lenitives.

(4.) He assures him that he shall not only have his sight restored, but be filled with the Holy Ghost: he must himself be an apostle, and must in nothing come behind the chief of the apostles, and therefore must receive the Holy Ghost immediately, and not, as others did, by the interposition of the apostles; and Ananias's putting his hands upon him before he was baptized was for the conferring of the Holy Ghost.

2. Ananias saw the good issue of his mission.

(1.) In Christ's favour to Saul. At the word of Ananias, Saul was discharged from his confinement by the restoring of his sight; for Christ's commission to open the prison to those that were bound (<sup><260></sup>Isaiah 61:1) is explained by the giving of sight to the blind, <sup><408></sup>Luke 4:18; <sup><247></sup>Isaiah 42:7. Christ's commission is to open the blind eyes, and to bring out the prisoners from the prison. Saul is delivered from the spirit of bondage by receiving sight (v. 18), which was signified by the falling of scales from his eyes; and this immediately, and forthwith: the cure was sudden, to show that it was miraculous. This signified the recovering of him,

[1.] From the darkness of his unconverted state. When he persecuted the church of God, and walked in the spirit and way of the Pharisees, he was blind; he saw not the meaning either of the law or of the gospel, <sup><410></sup>Romans 7:9. Christ often told the Pharisees that they were blind, and could not make them sensible of it; they said, *We see*, <sup><404></sup>John 9:41. Saul is saved from his Pharisaical blindness, by being made sensible of it. Note, Converting grace opens the eyes of the soul, and makes the scales to fall from them (<sup><408></sup>Acts 26:18), to open men's eyes, and turn them from darkness to light: this was what Saul was sent among the Gentiles to do, by the preaching of the gospel, and therefore must first experience it in himself.

[2.] From the darkness of his present terrors, under the apprehension of guilt upon his conscience, and the wrath of God against him. This filled him with confusion, during those three days he sat in darkness, like Jonah for three days in the belly of hell; but now the scales fell from his eyes, the cloud was scattered, and the Sun of righteousness rose upon his soul, with healing under his wings.

(2.) In Saul's subjection to Christ: He was baptized, and thereby submitted to the government of Christ, and cast himself upon the grace of Christ. Thus he was entered into Christ's school, hired into his family, enlisted under his banner, and joined himself to him for better for worse. The point was gained: it is settled; Saul is now a disciple of Christ, not only ceases to oppose him, but devotes himself entirely to his service and honour.

IV. The good work that was begun in Saul is carried on wonderfully; this new-born Christian, though he seemed *as one born out of due time*, yet presently comes to maturity.

1. He received his bodily strength, v. 19. He had continued three days fasting, which, with the mighty weight that was all that time upon his spirits, had made him very weak; but, *when he had received meat, he was strengthened*, v. 19. The Lord is for the body, and therefore care must be taken of it, to keep it in good plight, that it may be fit to serve the soul in God's service, and that Christ may be magnified in it, <sup><310></sup>Philippians 1:20.

2. He associated with the disciples that were at Damascus, fell in with them, conversed with them, went to their meetings, and joined in communion with them. He had lately *breathed out threatenings and slaughter against them*, but now breathes love and affection to them. Now *the wolf dwells with the lamb*, and *the leopard lies down with the kid*, <sup><310></sup>Isaiah 11:6. Note, Those that take God for their God take his people for their people. Saul associated with the disciples, because now he saw an amiableness and excellency in them, because he loved them, and found that he improved in knowledge and grace by conversing with them; and thus he made profession of his Christian faith, and openly declared himself a disciple of Christ, by associating with those that were his disciples.

3. *He preached Christ in the synagogues*, v. 20. To this he had an extraordinary call, and for it an extraordinary qualification, God having immediately revealed his Son to him and in him, that he might preach him, <sup><310></sup>Galatians 1:15, 16. He was so full of Christ himself, that *the Spirit*

*within him constrained him to preach him to others, and, like Elihu, to speak that he might be refreshed,* <sup><K2D></sup>Job 32:20. Observe,

**(1.)** Where he preached in the synagogues of the Jews, for they were to have the first offer made them. The synagogues were their places of concourse; there he met with them together, and there they used to preach against Christ and to punish his disciples, by the same token that Paul himself *had punished them oft in every synagogue* (<sup><481></sup>Acts 26:11), and therefore there he would face the enemies of Christ where they were most daring, and openly profess Christianity where he had most opposed it.

**(2.)** What he preached: *He preached Christ*. When he began to be a preacher, he fixed this for his principle, which he stuck to ever after: *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord*; nothing but Christ, and him crucified. He preached concerning Christ, *that he is the Son of God*, his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased, and with us in him, and not otherwise.

**(3.)** How people were affected with it (v. 21): *All that heard him were amazed, and said, "Is not this he that destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and now does he call on this name himself, and persuade others to call upon it, and strengthen the hands of those that do?"* *Quantum mutatus ab illo! Oh how changed! Is Saul also among the prophets?* Nay, did he not come hither for that intent, to seize all the Christians he could find, and *bring them bound to the chief priests*? Yes, he did. Who would have thought then that he would ever preach Christ as he does? Doubtless this was looked upon by many as a great confirmation of the truth of Christianity, that one who had been such a notorious persecutor of it came, on a sudden, to be such an intelligent, strenuous, and capacious preacher of it. This miracle upon the mind of such a man outshone the miracles upon men's bodies; and giving a man such another heart was more than giving men to speak with other tongues.

**4.** He confuted and confounded those that opposed the doctrine of Christ, v. 22. He signalized himself, not only in the pulpit, but in the schools, and showed himself supernaturally enabled, not only to preach the truth, but to maintain and defend it when he had preached it.

**(1.)** He increased in strength. He became more intimately acquainted with the gospel of Christ, and his pious affections grew more strong. He grew more bold and daring and resolute in defence of the gospel: *He increased*

*the more* for the reflections that were cast upon him (v. 21), in which his new friends upbraided him as having been a persecutor, and his old friends upbraided him as being now a turncoat; but Saul, instead of being discouraged by the various remarks made upon his conversion, was thereby so much the more emboldened, finding he had enough at hand wherewith to answer the worst they could say to him.

(2.) He ran down his antagonists, and *confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus*; he silenced them, and shamed them answered their objections to the satisfaction of all indifferent persons, and pressed them with arguments which they could make no reply to. In all his discourses with the Jews he was still *proving that this Jesus is very Christ, is the Christ, the anointed of God, the true Messiah promised to the fathers*. He was proving it, *ymbibazon* affirming it and confirming it, teaching with persuasion. And we have reason to think he was instrumental in converting many to the faith of Christ, and building up the church at Damascus, which he went thither to make havoc of. Thus *out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness*.

## ~~402~~ ACTS 9:23-31

### SAUL IS RECEIVED BY THE APOSTLES

Luke here makes no mention of Paul's journey into Arabia, which he tells us himself was immediately after his conversion, ~~416~~ Galatians 1:16, 17. As soon as God *had revealed his Son in him, that he might preach him, he went not up to Jerusalem*, to receive instructions from the apostles (as any other convert would have done, that was designed for the ministry), but he went to Arabia, where there was new ground to break up, and where he would have opportunity of teaching, but not learning; thence he returned to Damascus, and there, three years after his conversion, this happened, which is here recorded.

**I.** He met with difficulties at Damascus, and had a narrow escape of being killed there. Observe,

**1.** What his danger was (v. 23): *The Jews took counsel to kill him*, being more enraged at him than at any other of the preachers of the gospel, not only because he was more lively and zealous in his preaching than any of

them, and more successful, but because he had been such a remarkable deserter, and his being a Christian was a testimony against them. It is said (v. 24), *The Jews watched the gates day and night to kill him*; they incensed the governor against him, as a dangerous man, who therefore kept the city with a guard to apprehend him, at his going out or coming in, <sup><4113></sup>2 Corinthians 11:32. Now Christ showed Paul *what great things he must suffer for his name* (v. 16), when here was presently the government in arms against him, which was a great thing, and, as all his other sufferings afterwards, helped to make him considerable. Saul was no sooner a Christian than a preacher, no sooner a preacher than a sufferer; so quickly did he rise to the summit of his preferment. Note, Where God gives great grace he commonly exercises it with great trials.

## 2. How he was delivered.

(1.) The design against him was discovered: *Their lying in wait was known of Saul*, by some intelligence, whether from heaven or from men we are not told.

(2.) The disciples contrived to help him awayhid him, it is likely, by day; and in the night, the gates being watched, that he could not get away through them, *they let him down by the wall, in a basket*, as he himself relates it (<sup><4113></sup>2 Corinthians 11:33), *so he escaped out of their hands*. This story, as it shows us that when we enter into the way of God we must look for temptation, and prepare accordingly, so it shows us *that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may not be by it deterred nor driven from the way of God*.

II. He met with difficulties at Jerusalem the first time he went thither, v. 26. He came to Jerusalem. This is thought to be that journey to Jerusalem of which he himself speaks (<sup><4118></sup>Galatians 1:18): *After three years I went up to Jerusalem, saith he, to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days*. But I rather incline to think that this was a journey before that, because *his coming in and going out, his preaching and disputing* (v. 28, 29), seem to be more than would consist with his fifteen days' stay (for that was no more) and to require a longer time; and, besides, now he came a stranger, but then he came, *historesai to confer with Peter*, as one he was intimate with; however, it might possibly be the same. Now observe,

**1.** How shy his friends were of him (v. 26): *When he came to Jerusalem, he did not go to the chief priests and the Pharisees (he had taken his leave of them long since), but he assayed to join himself to the disciples.* Wherever he came, he owned himself one of that despised persecuted people, and associated with them. They were now in his eyes *the excellent ones of the earth, in whom was all his delight.* He desired to be acquainted with them, and to be admitted into communion with them; but they looked strange upon him, shut the door against him, and would not go about any of their religious exercises if he were by, for *they were afraid of him.* Now might Paul be tempted to think himself in an ill case, when the Jews had abandoned and persecuted him, and the Christians would not receive and entertain him. Thus does he fall into divers temptations, and needs the armour of righteousness, as we all do, both on the right hand and on the left, that we may not be discouraged either by the unjust treatment of our enemies or the unkind treatment of our friends.

**(1.)** See what was the cause of their jealousy of him: *They believed not that he was a disciple, but only pretended to be so, and came among them as a spy or an informer.* They knew what a bitter persecutor he had been, with what fury he went to Damascus some time ago; they had heard nothing of him since, and therefore thought he was but a wolf in sheep's clothing. The disciples of Christ had need to be cautious whom they admit into communion with them. *Believe not every spirit.* There is need of the wisdom of the serpent, to keep the mean between the extremes of suspicion on the one hand and credulity on the other; yet methinks it is safer to err on the charitable side, because it is an adjudged case that it is better the tares should be found among the wheat than that the wheat should any of it be rooted up and thrown out of the field.

**(2.)** See how it was removed (v. 27): *Barnabas took him to the apostles themselves, who were not so scrupulous as the inferior disciples, to whom he first assayed to join himself, and he declared to them,*

**[1.]** What Christ had done for him: *He had shown himself to him in the way and spoken to him; and what he said.*

**[2.]** What he had since done for Christ: *He had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.* How Barnabas came to know this, more than the rest of them, we are not told; whether he had himself been at Damascus, or had had letters thence, or discoursed with some of that city, by which he came to the knowledge of this; or whether he had formerly



been acquainted with Paul in the Grecian synagogues, or at the feet of Gamaliel, and had such an account of his conversion from himself as he saw cause enough to give credit to: but so it was that, being satisfied himself, he gave satisfaction to the apostles concerning him, he having brought no testimonials from the disciples at Damascus, thinking *he needed not, as some others, epistles of commendation*, <sup>400</sup>2 Corinthians 3:1. Note, The introducing of a young convert into the communion of the faithful is a very good work, and one which, as we have opportunity, we should be ready to do.

## 2. How sharp his enemies were upon him.

(1.) He was admitted into the communion of the disciples, which was no little provocation to his enemies. It vexed the unbelieving Jews to see Saul a trophy of Christ's victory, and a captive to his grace, who had been such a champion for their cause to see him *coming in, and going out, with the apostles* (v. 28), and to hear them glorying in him, or rather glorifying God in him.

(2.) He appeared vigorous in the cause of Christ, and this was yet more provoking to them (v. 29): *He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus*. Note, Those that speak for Christ have reason to speak boldly; for they have a good cause, and speak for one who will at last speak for himself and them too. The Grecians, or Hellenist Jews, were most offended at him, because he had been one of them; and they drew him into a dispute, in which, no doubt, he was too hard for them, as he had been for the Jews at Damascus. One of the martyrs said, Though she could not dispute for Christ, she could die for Christ; but Paul could do both. Now the Lord Jesus divided the spoils of the strong man armed in Saul. For that same natural quickness and fervour of spirit which, while he was in ignorance and unbelief, made him a furious bigoted persecutor of the faith, made him a most zealous courageous defender of the faith.

(3.) This brought him into peril of his life, with which he narrowly escaped: *The Grecians*, when they found they could not deal with him in disputation, contrived to silence him another way; *they went about to slay him*, as they did Stephen when *they could not resist the Spirit by which he spoke*, <sup>400</sup>Acts 6:10. That is a bad cause that has recourse to persecution for its last argument. But notice was given of this conspiracy too, and effectual care taken to secure this young champion (v. 30): *When the brethren knew what was designed against him they brought him down to*

*Cesarea*. They remembered how the putting of Stephen to death, upon his disputing with the Grecians, had been the beginning of a sore persecution; and therefore were afraid of having such a vein opened again, and hastened Paul out of the way. He that flies may fight again. He that fled from Jerusalem might do service at Tarsus, the place of his nativity; and thither they desired him by all means to go, hoping he might there go on in his work with more safety than at Jerusalem. Yet it was also by direction from heaven that he left Jerusalem at this time, as he tells us himself (~~427~~ Acts 22:17, 18), that Christ now appeared to him, and ordered him to *go quickly out of Jerusalem*, for he must be sent *to the Gentiles*, v. 15. Those by whom God has work to do shall be protected from all the designs of their enemies against them till it be done. Christ's witnesses cannot be slain till they have *finished their testimony*.

**III.** The churches had now a comfortable gleam of liberty and peace (v. 31): *Then had the churches rest*. Then, when Saul was converted, so some; when that persecutor was taken off, those were quiet whom he used to irritate, and then those were quiet whom he used to molest. Or, *then*, when he had gone from Jerusalem, the fury of the Grecian Jews was a little abated, and they were the more willing to bear with the other preachers now that Saul had gone out of the way. Observe,

**1.** *The churches had rest*. After a storm comes a calm. Though we are always to expect troublesome times, yet we may expect that they shall not last always. This was a breathing-time allowed them, to prepare them for the next encounter. The churches that were already planted were mostly in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, within the limits of the holy land. There were the first Christian churches, where Christ had himself laid the foundation.

**2.** They made a good use of this lucid interval. Instead of growing more secure and wanton in the day of their prosperity, they abounded more in their duty, and made a good use of their tranquillity.

**(1.)** They *were edified*, were built up in their most holy faith; the more free and constant enjoyment they had of the means of knowledge and grace, the more they increased in knowledge and grace.

**(2.)** They *walked in the fear of the Lord* were more exemplary themselves for a holy heavenly conversation. They so lived that all who conversed with them might say, Surely the fear of God reigns in those people.

**(3.)** They *walked in the comfort of the Holy Ghost* were not only faithful, but cheerful, in religion; they stuck to the ways of the Lord, and sang in those ways. *The comfort of the Holy Ghost* was their consolation, and that which they made their chief joy. They had recourse to the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and lived upon that, not only in days of trouble and affliction, but in days of rest and prosperity. The comforts of the earth, when they had the most free and full enjoyment of them, could not content them without the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Observe the connection of these two: when they walked *in the fear of the Lord*, then they walked *in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*. Those are most likely to walk cheerfully that walk circumspectly.

**3.** God blessed it to them for their increase in number: They *were multiplied*. Sometimes the church multiplies the more for its being afflicted, as Israel in Egypt; yet if it were always so, the saints of the Most High would be worn out. At other times its rest contributes to its growth, as it enlarges the opportunity of ministers, and invites those in who at first are afraid of suffering. Or, *then, when they walked in the fear of God and his comforts, they were multiplied*. Thus those that will not be won by the word may be won by the conversation of professors.

## ~~4102~~ ACTS 9:32-35

### THE CURE OF ENEAS

Here we have,

**I.** The visit Peter made to the churches that were newly planted by the dispersed preachers, v. 32.

**1.** He *passed through all quarters*. As an apostle, he was not to be the resident pastor of any one church, but the itinerant visitor of many churches, to confirm the doctrine of inferior preachers, to confer *the Holy Ghost on those that believed*, and to ordain ministers. He passed *dia panton among them all*, who pertained to the churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, mentioned in the foregoing chapter. He was, like his Master, always upon the remove, and *went about doing good*; but still his headquarters were at Jerusalem, for there we shall find him imprisoned, ~~4110~~ Acts 12:2. *He came to the saints at Lydda*. This seems to be the same

with *Lod*, a city in the tribe of Benjamin, mentioned <sup><B></sup>1 Chronicles 8:12; <sup><B></sup>Ezra 2:33. The Christians are called *saints*, not only some particular eminent ones, as saint Peter and saint Paul, but every sincere professor of the faith of Christ. These are the saints on the earth, <sup><B></sup>Psalms 16:3.

**II.** The cure Peter wrought on *Eneas*, a man that had been bedridden eight years, v. 33.

**1.** His case was very deplorable: *He was sick of the palsy*, a dumb palsy, perhaps a dead palsy. The disease was extreme, for *he kept his bed*; it was inveterate, for he kept his bed *eight years*; and we may suppose that both he himself and all about him despaired of relief for him, and concluded upon no other than that he must still keep his bed till he removed to his grave. Christ chose such patients as this, whose disease was incurable in a course of nature, to show how desperate the case of fallen mankind was when he undertook their cure. When we were without strength, as this poor man, *he sent his word to heal us*.

**2.** His cure was very admirable, v. 34.

**(1.)** Peter interested Christ in his case, and engaged him for his relief: *Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole*. Peter does not pretend to do it himself by any power of his own, but declares it to be Christ's act and deed, directs him to look up to Christ for help, and assures him of an *immediate* cure, "He *will* make thee," but, "He *does* make thee, whole;" and a *perfect* cure, "He makes thee *easy*," but "He makes thee *whole*." He does not express himself by way of prayer to Christ that he would make him whole, but as one having authority from Christ, and that knew his mind, he declares him made whole.

**(2.)** He ordered him to bestir himself, to exert himself: "*Arise and make thy bed*, that all may see thou art thoroughly cured." Let none say that because it is Christ that by the power of his grace works all our works in us therefore we have no work, no duty, to do; for, though Jesus Christ makes thee whole, yet thou must arise and make use of the power he gives thee: "*Arise, and make thy bed*, to be to thee no longer a bed of sickness, but a bed of rest."

**(3.)** Power went along with this word: he arose immediately, and no doubt very willingly made his own bed.

**III.** The good influence this had upon many (v. 35): *All that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.* We can scarcely think that every individual person in those countries took cognizance of the miracle, and was wrought upon by it; but many, the generality of the people in the town of Lydda and in the country of Saron, or Sharon, a fruitful plain or valley, of which it was foretold, *Sharon shall be a fold of flocks,* <sup><260></sup>Isaiah 65:10.

**1.** They all made enquiry into the truth of the miracle, did not overlook it, but saw him that was healed, and saw that it was a miraculous cure that was wrought upon him by the power of Christ, in his name, and with a design to confirm and ratify that doctrine of Christ which was now preached to the world.

**2.** They all submitted to the convincing proof and evidence there was in this of the divine origin of the Christian doctrine, and *turned to the Lord,* to the Lord Jesus. They turned from Judaism to Christianity; they embraced the doctrine of Christ, and submitted to his ordinances, and turned themselves over to him to be ruled and taught and saved by him.

## ~~<408>~~ ACTS 9:36-43

### TABITHA RAISED TO LIFE

Here we have another miracle wrought by Peter, for the confirming of the gospel, and which exceeded the former the raising of Tabitha to life when she had been for some time dead. Here is,

**I.** The life, and death, and character of Tabitha, on whom this miracle was wrought, v. 36, 37.

**1.** She lived at Joppa, a sea-port town in the tribe of Dan, where Jonah took shipping to go to Tarshish, now called *Japho*.

**2.** Her name was *Tabitha*, a Hebrew name, the Greek for which is *Dorcas*, both signifying a *doe*, or *hind*, or *deer*, a pleasant creature. *Naphtali* is compared to a *hind let loose, giving goodly words*; and the wife to the kind and tender husband is as the loving *hind*, and as the pleasant *roe*, <sup><269></sup>Proverbs 5:19.

**3.** She was a disciple, one that had embraced the faith of Christ and was baptized; and not only so, but was eminent above many for works of charity. She showed her faith by her works, her good works, which she was full of, that is, in which she abounded. Her head was full of cares and contrivances which way she should do good. She *devised liberal things*, <sup><BIB></sup>Isaiah 32:8. Her hands were full of good employment; she made a business of doing good, was never idle, having learned to *maintain good works* (<sup><BIB></sup>Titus 3:8), to keep up a constant course and method of them. She was *full of good works*, as a tree that is full of fruit. Many are full of good words, who are empty and barren in good works; but Tabitha was a great doer, no great talker: *Non magna loquimur, sed vivimus* *We do not talk great things, but we live them.* Among other good works, she was remarkable for her *alms-deeds, which she did*, not only her works of piety, which are good works and the fruits of faith, but works of charity and beneficence, flowing from love to her neighbour and a holy contempt of this world. Observe, She is commended not only for the alms which she gave, but for the alms-deeds which she did. Those that have not estates wherewith to give in charity may yet be able to do in charity, working with their hands, or walking with their feet, for the benefit of the poor. And those who will not do a charitable deed, whatever they may pretend, if they were rich would not bestow a charitable gift. She was full of alms-deeds, *hon epoiei* *which she made*; there is an emphasis upon her *doing* them, because what her hand found to do of this kind she did with all her might, and persevered in. They were alms-deeds, not which she purposed and designed and said she would do, but which she did; not which she began to do, but which she did, which she went through with, which she performed the doing of, <sup><BIB></sup>2 Corinthians 8:11; 9:7. This is the life and character of a certain disciple; and should be of all the disciples of Christ; for, if we thus bear much fruit, then are we his disciples indeed, <sup><BIB></sup>John 15:8.

**4.** She was removed in the midst of her usefulness (v. 37): *In those days she fell sick, and died.* It is promised to those who consider the poor, not that they shall never be sick, but that the Lord will *strengthen them upon the bed of languishing*, at least with strength in their souls, and so will *make all their bed in their sickness*, will make it easy, <sup><BIB></sup>Psalms 41:1, 3. They cannot hope that they shall never die (*merciful men are taken away*, and merciful women too, witness Tabitha), but they may hope that they shall *find mercy of the Lord in that day*, <sup><BIB></sup>2 Timothy 1:18.

**5.** Her friends and those about her did not presently bury her, as usual, because they were in hopes Peter would come and raise her to life again; but they *washed the dead body*, according to the custom, which, it is said, was with warm water, which, if there were any life remaining in the body, would recover it; so that this was done to show that she was really and truly dead. They tried all the usual methods to bring her to life, and could not. *Conclamatum est the last cry was uttered.* They *laid her out* in her grave-clothes *in an upper chamber*, which Dr. Lightfoot thinks was probably the public meeting-room for the believers of that town; and they laid the body there, that Peter, if he would come, might raise her to life the more solemnly in that place.

**II.** The request which her Christian friends sent to Peter to come to them with all speed, not to attend the funeral, but, if it might be, to prevent it, v. 38. Lydda, where Peter now was, was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples at Joppa had heard that Peter was there, and that he had raised Eneas from a bed of languishing; and therefore they *sent him two men*, to make the message the more solemn and respectful, *desiring him that he would not delay to come to them*; not telling him the occasion, lest he should modestly decline coming upon so great an errand as to raise the dead: if they can but get him to them, they will leave it to him. Their friend was dead, and it was too late to send for a physician, but not too late to send for Peter. *Post mortem medicusa physician after death*, is an absurdity, but not *Post mortem apostolusan apostle after death*.

**III.** The posture in which he found the survivors, when he came to them (v. 30): *Peter arose and went with them.* Though they did not tell him what they wanted him for, yet he was willing to go along with them, believing it was upon some good account or other that he was sent for. Let not faithful ministers grudge to be at every body's beck, as far as they have ability, when the great apostle *made himself the servant of all*, ~~409~~ 1 Corinthians 9:19. He found the corpse laid in the upper chamber, and attended by widows, probably such as were in the communion of the church, poor widows; there they were,

**1.** Commending the deceased a good work, when there was that in them which was truly commendable, and worthy of imitation, and when it is done modestly and soberly, and without flattery of the survivors or any sinister intention, but purely for the glory of God and the exciting of others to that which is virtuous and praiseworthy. The commendation of Tabitha

was like her own virtues, not in word, but in deed. Here were no encomiums of her in orations, nor poems inscribed to her memory; but *the widows showed the coats and garments which she made* for them, and bestowed upon them *while she was with them*. It was the comfort of Job, while he lived, that the loins of the poor blessed him, because they were warmed with the fleece of his sheep, <sup><381D></sup>Job 31:20. And here it was the credit of Tabitha, when she was dead, that the backs of the widows praised her for the garments which she made them. And those are certainly best praised *whose own works praise them in the gates*, whether the words of others do or no. It is much more honourable to clothe a company of decrepit widows with needful clothing for night and day, who will pray for their benefactors when they do not see them, than to clothe a company of lazy footmen with rich liveries, who perhaps behind their backs will curse those that clothe them (<sup><207E></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:21); and it is what all that are wise and good will take a greater pleasure in, for goodness is true greatness, and will pass better in the account shortly. Observe,

(1.) Into what channel Tabitha turned much of her charity. Doubtless there were other instances of her alms-deeds which she did, but this was now produced; she did, as it should seem with her own hands, *make coats and garments* for poor widows, who perhaps with their own labour could make a shift to get their bread, but could not earn enough to buy clothes. And this is an excellent piece of charity, *If thou seest the naked, that thou cover him* (<sup><283E></sup>Isaiah 58:7), and not think it enough to say, *Be ye warmed*, <sup><305D></sup>James 2:15, 16.

(2.) What a grateful sense the poor had of her kindness: *They showed the coats*, not ashamed to own that they were indebted to her for the clothes on their backs. Those are horribly ungrateful indeed who have kindness shown them and will not make at least an acknowledgment of it, by showing the kindness that is done them, as these widows here did. Those who receive alms are not obliged so industriously to conceal it, as those are who give alms. When the poor reflect upon the rich as uncharitable and unmerciful, they ought to reflect upon themselves, and consider whether they are not unthankful and ungrateful. Their showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made tended to the praise not only of her charity, but of her industry, according to the character of the virtuous woman, that she *lays her hands to the spindle*, or at least to the needle, and then *stretches out her hand to the poor*, and *reaches forth her hands to the needy*, of what she has worked; and, when God and the poor have thus had



their due, *she makes herself coverings of tapestry and her own clothing is silk and purple,* <sup>418B</sup>Proverbs 31:19-22.

2. They were here lamenting the loss of her: The widows stood by Peter, weeping. When the merciful are taken away, it should be laid to heart, especially by those to whom they have been in a particular manner merciful. They need not weep for her; she is taken from the evil to come, *she rests from her labours and her works follow her*, besides those she leaves behind her: but they weep for themselves and for their children, who will soon find the want of such a good woman, that has not left her fellow. Observe, They take notice of what good Dorcas did *while she was with them*, but now she is gone from them, and this is their grief. Those that are charitable will find that the *poor they have always with them*; but it is well if those that are poor find that they have always the charitable with them. We must make a good use of the lights that yet a little while are with us, because they will not be always with us, will not be long with us: and when they are gone we shall think what they did when they were with us. It should seem, the widows wept before Peter, as an inducement to him, if he could do any thing, to have compassion on them and help them, and restore one to them that used to have compassion on them. When charitable people are dead, there is no praying them to life again; but, when they are sick, this piece of gratitude is owing to them, to pray for their recovery, that, if it be the will of God, those may be spared to live who can ill be spared to die.

#### IV. The manner in which she was raised to life.

1. Privately: She was laid in the upper room where they used to have their public meetings, and, it should seem, there was great crowding about the dead body, in expectation of what would be done; *but Peter put them all forth*, all the weeping widows, all but some few relations of the family, or perhaps the heads of the church, to join with him in prayer; as Christ did, <sup>418C</sup>Matthew 9:25. Thus Peter declined every thing that looked like vainglory and ostentation; they came to see, but he did not come to be seen. He put them all forth, that he might with the more freedom pour out his soul before God in prayer upon this occasion, and not be disturbed with their noisy and clamorous lamentations.

2. By prayer. In his healing Eneas there was an implied prayer, but in this greater work he addressed himself to God by solemn prayer, as Christ

when he raised Lazarus; but Christ's prayer was with the authority of a Son, who *quickens whom he will*; Peter's with the submission of a servant, who is under direction, and therefore he *knelt down and prayed*.

**3.** By the word, a quickening word, a word which is spirit and life: *He turned to the body*, which intimates that when he prayed he turned from it; lest the sight of it should discourage his faith, he looked another way, to teach us, like Abraham, *against hope, to believe in hope*, and overlook the difficulties that lie in the way, *not considering the body as now dead*, lest we should *stagger at the promise*, <sup><419></sup>Romans 4:19, 20. But, when he had prayed, he *turned to the body*, and spoke in his Master's name, according to his example: "*Tabitha, arise; return to life again.*" Power went along with this word, and she came to life, *opened her eyes* which death had closed. Thus, in the raising of dead souls to spiritual life, the first sign of life is the opening of the eyes of the mind, <sup><418></sup>Acts 26:18. When she saw Peter, she sat up, to show that she was really and truly alive; and (v. 41) *he gave her his hand and lifted her up*, not as if she laboured under any remaining weakness, but thus he would as it were welcome her to life again, and give her the right hand of fellowship among the living, from whom she had been cut off. And, *lastly*, he *called the saints and widows*, who were all in sorrow for her death, and *presented her alive* to them, to their great comfort, particularly of the widows, who laid her death much to heart (v. 41); to them he presented her, as Elijah (<sup><417></sup>1 Kings 17:23), and Elisha (<sup><416></sup>2 Kings 4:36), and Christ (<sup><415></sup>Luke 7:15), presented the dead sons alive to their mothers. The greatest joy and satisfaction are expressed by life from the dead.

## **V.** The good effect of this miracle.

**1.** Many were by it convinced of the truth of the gospel, that is was from heaven, and not of men, and believed in the Lord, v. 42. The thing was *known throughout all Joppa*; it would be in every body's mouth quickly, and, it being a town of seafaring men, the notice of it would be the sooner carried thence to other countries, and though some never minded it many were wrought upon by it. This was the design of miracles, to confirm a divine revelation.

**2.** Peter was hereby induced to continue some time in this city, v. 43. Finding that a door of opportunity was opened for him there, he tarried there many days, till he was sent thence, and sent for thence upon business

to another place. He tarried not in the house of Tabitha, though she was rich, lest he should seem to seek his own glory; but he took up his lodgings with one Simon a tanner, an ordinary tradesman, which is an instance of his condescension and humility: and hereby he has taught us not to *mind high things, but to condescend to those of low estate,*  
◀516▶ Romans 12:16. And, though Peter might seem to be buried in obscurity here in the house of a poor tanner by the sea-side, yet hence God fetched him to a noble piece of service, which is recorded in the next chapter; for *those that humble themselves shall be exalted.*