

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

APRIL 26TH, 2026 // THE BOOK OF ACTS

TRANSFORMATION (ACTS 9:19B-25) "SAUL WAS WITH THE DISCIPLES"

Saul, who viciously attacked the Church, was now counted among the disciples of Jesus.

- In Saul, we see the pattern of transformation that is available to all. First, God reveals and confronts us with our sin and rebellion against Him, even those things done in ignorance. Then, as we place our faith in Him, we allow Him to do a work within us that only He can do.
- *"I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I received mercy because I acted out of ignorance in unbelief... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them... But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life"* (1 Timothy 1:13-16).

"IMMEDIATELY HE BEGAN PROCLAIMING JESUS"

Saul, an expert in the OT, took advantage of this immediately to speak in the Jewish synagogues.

- Instead of teaching the OT scriptures as he had many times in the past, Saul now used his knowledge of the scriptures to show how they pointed to Jesus. In the synagogue, Saul would make the same claim that got Stephen stoned to death: Jesus is the Son of God.

"HE IS THE SON OF GOD"

When Saul called Jesus the Son of God, and when Jesus referred to Himself in this way (John 5:17-18; Matthew 26:63-65), it was not a claim of being "from God" in the sense that He is less than God; it was a claim of equality with God (Philippians 2:6).

- It was understood as a clear claim of His deity, which is why they accused Stephen, Saul, and Jesus of blasphemy.

"JESUS IS THE MESSIAH"

Those in the synagogue and in Damascus would have been shocked at what they were witnessing. This persecutor of Jesus' followers had come to town to clean house, yet here he was proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

- The hunter would now become the hunted as the Jews in Damascus sought to kill Saul.

"SAUL LEARNED OF THEIR PLOT"

Paul would speak about the plot to kill him in his letter to Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:32-33). King Aretas IV assisted the Jews in their plot to kill Saul, placing guards at the city gates.

- The plot to kill Saul would be the beginning of many things he would suffer for the name of Jesus (9:16). To escape, he was lowered out of the city walls in a basket in the night.

STRENGTHENED (ACTS 9:26-31)

"HE TRIED TO JOIN THE DISCIPLES"

In Galatians 1:18, Paul tells us that about three years passed from the point of his conversion to his fleeing Damascus and arriving in Jerusalem.

- Though several years had passed, the disciples were still suspicious of Saul. They may have heard about his radical conversion, but until they saw it with their own eyes, they simply did not believe he was a disciple.

"THEY WERE ALL AFRAID OF HIM"

Though Saul wasn't accepted by the others, he continued forward as God's chosen instrument.

- How many of us would have given up at this point? Saul had been faithfully preaching Jesus for three years—even avoiding assassination attempts—and now he wasn't even accepted by the others. We are to display the perfect love of God to imperfect people.

HE WAS COUNTED AS ONE OF THEM

Saul was shown the love of God through Ananias (9:17), and now he would see Barnabas ("Son of Encouragement") come to his defense, claiming his conversion was genuine.

- Verse 28 says, "Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem," to show that he was welcomed into the group as a follower of Jesus.

"THEY... SENT HIM OFF TO TARSUS"

Saul again faced persecution as the Hellenists attempted to kill him, so the Believers in Jerusalem sent him to Tarsus, where he would remain for eight to 12 years, until Barnabas reached out to him to go to Antioch to assist the growing church there.

- Saul previously left Jerusalem to persecute Christians; now, he would leave because he was being persecuted.

SAUL'S CONVERSION DID NOT STOP PERSECUTION

Verse 31 tells us that the church "had peace and was strengthened." This does not mean that persecution had ended but that they found peace and strength during heavy persecution.

- Persecution continued as Caiaphas, the high priest, was replaced by Jonathan and then his brother Theophilus—and during the reigns of the Roman emperors Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.

"IT INCREASED IN NUMBERS"

The church increasing in numbers at the end of verse 31 communicates the idea of being edified ("built up"). The church was growing numerically, but they were also growing in reverence and encouragement ("comfort") through the Holy Spirit.

- Often, God wants the comfortable to gain "fear of the Lord" through afflictions and the afflicted to receive comfort through the Holy Spirit.

INSTRUMENTS OF HEALING (ACTS 9:32-43) FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION

Luke uses passages like this to show how the gospel is moving outside of Jerusalem into Ethiopia, Damascus, and now areas northwest of Jerusalem called Lydda and Joppa.

- It is commonly believed that the disciple Philip made his way to Gaza and traveled back up the coastal cities preaching the gospel (8:40).

THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC

Verse 32 tells us that when Peter arrived, there were already "saints who lived in Lydda." As Peter was in Lydda, he came across a man who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years.

- Acting on the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Peter identified who was healing the man—"Jesus Christ heals you." Then, mimicking Christ (Mark 2:10-12), he said, "Get up and make your bed."

"A DISCIPLE NAMED TABITHA"

Luke tells us of a woman in Joppa named Tabitha (Aramaic), also translated as Dorcas (Greek), who was deeply involved in the area. She was a Believer, dedicated to doing good works and acts of charity.

- Tabitha had been sick and died, so two disciples in Joppa went to bring Peter, who was nearby in Lydda, back to Joppa.

THE EXPECTATION OF A RESURRECTION

The way the disciples washed Tabitha and placed her upstairs would have been very uncommon for someone being prepped for burial. It is as if they expected Tabitha to be resurrected.

- The expectation of a resurrection should rest in the hearts of those who demonstrate godliness and faithful servanthood.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

Only three times had anyone been raised from the dead by Jesus, and Peter was present for all three times.

- A very similar scene is recorded in Mark 5:38-43. Here, Peter acted through the promptings of the Holy Spirit and recalled what he had witnessed with Jesus, so he put everyone out of the room and said, "Tabitha, get up."

BROUGHT FROM DEATH TO LIFE (JOHN 5:24)

The miraculous resurrections we see in Scripture are meant to point to an eventual resurrection of Believers into eternal life.

- These Believers were only resuscitated, meaning that they would eventually die again. At this point, their resurrections were not into eternal life but into lives lived in expectation of a future resurrection.

SEEING THE EFFECTS OF THESE MIRACLES

Verse 35 tells us that because of the healing of Aeneas, "all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord," and verse 42 says that the resurrection of Tabitha caused many to believe in the Lord.

- The miracles being performed through the apostles and disciples were for the benefit of all and not just the individuals.
- In verse 43, Luke tells us that Peter remained for some time in Joppa, staying with Simon, a leather tanner. A tanner worked with dead animals and would have been viewed as ceremonially unclean by observant Jews of that time.
- This is important to note because it shows the groundwork being laid in Peter's heart as he became less concerned with Jewish traditions.

SAUL'S TRANSFORMATION

- We should be broken by sin, but God does not want us to remain broken (Psalm 51:16-18). Brokenness and sorrow for sin should move us to the place of repentance where He can restore us.
- Once restored by God, we must allow Him to refine us into useful tools for His glory and honor.

BROKEN TO BE BUILT UP

- Have we experienced broken and contrite spirits?
- Has growing up in the Church diminished our need for Christ?
- Have we come to the place of desperation where we absolutely rely on Jesus?
- Do we feel as though we cannot live without Him?

EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

- Paul often wrote in his letters about the "building up" of the Church, and while that includes numerical growth, it is not limited to numbers.
- Have we placed an emphasis on our spiritual growth and development of character?
- Do we participate in the edification of the Church by being plugged in?
- Do we read the Word and pray regularly?