

Perspective is a Gift

Acts 9: 1-31

Psalms 16

Sean Kelly

First Presbyterian Church

Lake Forest, Illinois

Please Pray with Me:

*“Gracious God we thank you for this opportunity to pause, and gather this morning in worship. I ask that your Spirit would be among us, and that the words of my mouth and the meditations of ALL of our hearts would be for Your Glory... Our Rock & Our Redeemer... Amen!”*

It's truly humbling to have the opportunity to share from the Word of God, and I am honored for the chance to share with you this morning.

Our Scripture Reading comes from the Book of Acts, and tells us of the incredible Conversion of Saul and his very personal and intimate interaction with Christ.

If you would like to follow along you can find our Passage in your Bulletin, or in the Pew Bibles on Page 127. Our Reading comes from Acts 9... Starting in Verse 1:

*“Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.<sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”<sup>5</sup> He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.<sup>6</sup> But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”<sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.<sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led*

*him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”*

Now, I want to pause here for a moment... Here we see this incredible encounter, and ultimately a powerful transformation, that still reverberates throughout the Global Church TODAY!

The Passage begins by pointing out the extreme animosity Saul has towards believers in Christ, who are referred to as ‘*belonging to THE WAY*’ in our passage. Saul is described as ‘*breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*’. If nothing else, we see from this passage the intense hostility that was present throughout the Region at this time.

And then Saul sees ‘*a light from heaven*’, and his life would never be the same again. This encounter is significant because we have seen these incredible effects before as others encountered the Lord throughout Scripture... These ‘incredible effects’ were present as the Lord met with other Prophets in The Book of Exodus, Ezekiel and Daniel. **Saul is being set apart, and this passage is the story of Saul being ‘called to a greater purpose’.**

Which brings us to Saul’s response. As Saul experiences this ‘*great light*’, he immediately falls to the ground, he fell to the ground in anticipation, some have even used the word reverence, but in anticipation of hearing God speak to him...

Saul responds by saying, “*Who are you, Lord?*” - - Saul’s use of the Word “Lord” here is not yet, according to most scholars, a confession of faith, but an honest inquiry from a devout Jew, which Saul was, understanding the significance of this experience due to his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. In other words, Saul knew he was experiencing something incredible... Saul knew he was in the midst of a truly religious experience!

So to recap where we are so far:

- The Day begins with Saul approaching Damascus as a take charge zealot who is “*breathing threats and murder against the Disciples of the Lord*”. However by day’s end, he is ‘*led by hand into Damascus, blind and utterly dependent upon others for food and drink*’.
- Saul experiences a ‘*flashing light*’ and ‘*powerful voice*’ as he encounters Jesus, which ultimately leads to Saul’s conversion... It is important to point out that the Lord’s intent wasn’t to frighten Saul into obedience, but to reveal a plan of action.
- The Living, Resurrected Jesus is recruiting Saul personally into the faith and then commissioning him to ministry.

As we return to our Scripture, I am picking up in verse 10, or if you are following along in the bulletin I am starting at the beginning of the second paragraph...

“<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” <sup>11</sup> The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; <sup>14</sup> and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; <sup>16</sup> I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” <sup>17</sup> So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell

*from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.”*

Have you ever done something reckless? I mean something that as you were doing it, you knew you had made a mistake? A moment where you said to yourself, or possibly even out loud, ‘I immediately regret this decision’??

I had a moment like this last October... My family was driving to Myrtle Beach, SC for a vacation, and to give you an adequate understanding the exact situation we found ourselves in, we were driving, my daughter Sadie was 2 years old and my wife was 8 months pregnant with our second child... Well as you may remember there was a severe Hurricane, Hurricane Matthew, travelling up the coast through Florida, into Georgia and ultimately impacting North & South Carolina. Due to a mindset of invincibility, stubbornness or naivety, I’m not sure which, we decided to continue as scheduled despite the troubling weather forecast.

As we travelled our optimism grew... The most severe portion of the storm seemed to be south of our destination and the severe winds & destruction (according to reports) seemed to be waning. But then we entered Florence, SC. A town roughly 100 miles off the coast which was impacted tremendously by the storm - - We were low on gas and frantically searching for a pump to fill up our tank so we could finish the last leg of our journey, when we saw a station loaded with 75 cars methodically moving their way through the crowd. We entered the station, waited our turn, only to comprehend once we got to the physical pump that there was no gas/no electricity and the realization that we were all duped by the mirage.

So we spent the few ‘drops’ of gas we had remaining driving and looking for... something! As the car pattered to a stop, we parked in a Starbucks parking lot with the intention of getting our bearings in order to figure out what to do next. As I stopped I put my head on the steering wheel and sat in

silence for a few moments... My pregnant wife, frightened and holding back tears in the seat beside, my joyful daughter, ignorant to the severity of our situation playing and singing in the back seat, and me sitting experiencing a new level of shame and anger as I led my family, the family I am called to love/care for/protect, as I led them into this circumstance because of my desire to forge ahead with our vacation plans.

And then something happened - - We looked around! Right behind us, in the same Parking Lot, was the only restaurant in Florence that had power and was open. Across the street was a crowd of people meeting and sharing needs with others as they each tried to determine how best to help one another. And a short walk down the block was even a grocery store, getting power from a generator, with ice cream for my beautiful daughter.

In the midst of the dumbest, reckless, and in a way most selfish decision I had ever made... God showed me something beautiful - - A Community, coming together in ways I had never experienced before.

**While sitting in the restaurant desperately processing what to do**, my friendly, outgoing, wife engaged two other girls and started talking with them. We learned about their situation and asked about the safety of their loved ones when they shared their concern for my pregnant wife and young family's lack of shelter. They offered to find us gas and help us on our way.

These strangers drove around from friends house to friends house in order to find us, also strangers, a gas can - - They then drove around to find the only gas station still providing gas, filled up the can and returned it to us to put into our car. The whole episode taking well over 2 hours!!

Here were these 2 girls, whose homes and lives had been uprooted by Hurricane Matthew, helping a reckless family, passing through their town on their way to a beach vacation.

That day God was undeniably present in my life - - That day God showed me the power, and the gift, of PERSPECTIVE!

- - - -

And we see the power of Perspective throughout the exchange in our passage between the Lord & Ananias - - When God calls Ananias, the first emotion Ananias exhibits is FEAR! He recounts the rumors and the threats that Saul has waged against all believers of ‘The Way’, and Ananias is hesitant to encounter Saul out of fear for his livelihood, let alone actually seeking Saul out!

But in the Lord’s response we don’t find anger, or judgment, in my opinion the Lord responds with grace, encouragement, and patience... The Lord responds, *“Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; <sup>16</sup> I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”* So Ananias goes, obediently and faithfully. Through this interaction between Ananias & the Lord we see Ananias’ PERSPECTIVE shift - - from Fear & Hesitancy to Faithful Obedience - - Ananias shifts from thinking of himself, to faithfully serving the Lord no matter the cost!

Which brings us to the final portion of our passage. Picking up in verse 20, or at the beginning of paragraph 3 in your bulletin:

*“For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, <sup>20</sup> and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” <sup>21</sup> All who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?” <sup>22</sup> Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.”*

In my opinion there are 2 powerful details we can gather from these last few verses - - *“Saul immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues”*... Saul immediately began sharing his faith! Imagine the confusion that had to

occur within Damascus. Here's Saul, this notorious persecutor of 'The Way', suddenly declaring the POWER and RELIABILITY of the exact message he once dedicated his life to opposing!!

A second observation is this - - This passage details one of, if not the most, drastic PERSPECTIVE SHIFTS in history.

Last year one of the videos we showed in Middle School Sunday School said, 'One of the greatest gifts from God is a change in PERSPECTIVE'. This quote really stuck with me and I have thought about this statement often. Perspective matters!! Perspective changes the way we view ourselves, changes the way we interact with others, changes the way we think about and understand God.

So what does this mean for us? Number One this passage demonstrates that Our God is an Incredible, Majestic, All-Knowing, All-Powerful God!!

And Second it details the importance of being open to the work God is doing and to the Moving of the Spirit... Just think of Ananias: What Ananias thought was a horrifying proposition in approaching Saul, turned out to be an amazing opportunity to witness the power & presence of the Lord.

So May we All Seek to Connect to God; May we All Seek to know God Intimately; And May we All Experience the Gift of a Changed Perspective which is only possible through God...

**Amen!**