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It Takes A Church To Win A Soul

ACTS 9:26-31

Introduction

1. What role do you have in our Lord's kingdom?
2. You may have asked yourself this question at one time or another.
3. I want each of you to know that you are very important to our Lord's work in this community.
4. Today, we look again at Saul's conversion and what happened over the next three years, I would like for us to focus on three men and the impact they made upon his life.
5. Those men are Stephen, Ananias and Barnabas.
6. As we look at them, I want to encourage each of you to emulate the traits which they possessed.
7. I believe we as a congregation will be stronger as a result and the Lord's kingdom will grow here in our community.

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I. From Persecutor to Proclaimer

A. PREACHING IN DAMASCUS

"Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" But

Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.” (*Acts 9:19–22, NASB95*)

1. Until Saul’s encounter with our Lord on the road to Damascus, everything we have been reading about him indicates a man who was determined to erase the church from existence.
2. However, with that encounter, and his obedience to the gospel, he became a different man. Why?
 - a. He had repented of his attitude and actions toward Christ and His church.
 - b. Now, he truly believed Jesus to be “the Son of God,” and was willing to proclaim this truth in the synagogues of Damascus.
 - c. As he would later describe baptism in his letter to the Christians in Rome, he had been buried with Christ through his baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so, he too was now walking in a newness of life (*Romans 6:4*) — he was no longer the old Saul, the persecutor of the church.
 - d. And, finally, as he would later describe our salvation to the brethren in Colosse, he had “put off the old man with his deeds” and “put on the new man” a man “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (*Colossians 3:10, ESV*).
3. Following his baptism, Saul spent several days with the disciples who were in Damascus (v. 19b) — He was now enjoying the company of those he had set out to destroy.
4. Now, those Jews who heard this new Saul proclaim Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus were amazed and confused.
5. They were asking one another, “Isn’t this the man who, in Jerusalem, was destroying those who called on this name and then came here for the purpose of taking them as prisoners to the chief priests?” (*Acts 9:21, HCSB*)

B. REFLECTION IN ARABIA

“But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia” (Galatians 1:15–17a, NASB95)

1. At some point during all of this Saul left Damascus and went away to Arabia.
2. This piece of information comes to us from Paul’s own hand in a letter he will later write to the churches in Galatia.
3. It is very likely that, like Elijah of old (1 Kings 19:8), Saul went to Mount Sinai (Galatians 4:25) to be alone with the Lord for personal study, meditation and to receive further instruction.
4. We are told how long he was away, but in his letter to the Galatians he said that he “returned once more to Damascus” (Galatians 1:17).
5. When Saul returned, he didn’t slow down; he was a man on a new mission — the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ.

Slide 4**C. ESCAPE FROM DAMASCUS**

“When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.” (Acts 9:23–25, NASB95)

1. It had been almost three years since Saul began that first journey to Damascus.
2. No longer were the Jews in Damascus amazed or confounded — they were determined to do away with him, but Saul learned of their plot.

3. He also knew that “the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize” him (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).
4. So, under the cover of darkness, some of Saul’s disciples “let him down through an opening in the wall” by means of a large basket (Acts 9:25).

Slide 5**D. ACCEPTANCE IN JERUSALEM**

“Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.” (Galatians 1:18, NASB95)

“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.” (Acts 9:26–28, ESV)

1. For the first time in three years, Saul went back to Jerusalem, not to meet with the Sanhedrin, but “to become acquainted with Peter (Cephas)” (Galatians 1:18).
2. When Saul reached Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples — he wanted to connect with the Christians there.
3. However, “they were all afraid of him” — “they didn’t believe that he was a disciple.”
4. Of course, you can’t blame them — the last time they had seen Saul he was dragging their brothers and sisters in Christ out of their homes and throwing them in jail.
5. At that time, he was doing everything in his power to destroy the church.
6. Now, he wanted to be recognized as one of them — that was a little more than they could believe.
7. Thankfully, Barnabas was still in town, that great encourager.

8. He took Saul straight to the apostles and began to explain to them what had happened since they had last seen him:
 - a. He told them of Saul's encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus.
 - b. He told them of how Saul had been boldly preaching in the name of Jesus there at Damascus.
9. Because of Barnabas' encouraging words, Saul was warmly accepted by the apostles and the church.
10. Now, he was boldly preaching the same Jesus he once denied.

[Why have I shared all of this with you? It is because I want you to carefully consider . . .]

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II. Three Men Who Made A Difference In Saul's Life

A. STEPHEN

"When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul." (Acts 7:58, NASB95)

"Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:60, NASB95)

1. It is very likely that because Saul was himself a Pharisee and a student under the great Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), he was present when Stephen made his defense before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7).
2. We know that he was present at Stephen's execution because the witnesses who stoned Stephen laid their robes at his feet.
3. He heard Stephen's last words, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60, NASB95).
4. It didn't seem reasonable that someone would make such a passionate

defense for a faith which he believed to be false.

5. Besides this, how could someone being stoned to death ask the Lord to forgive his executioners.
6. Stephen made an impact upon Saul and challenged his thinking.
7. Are you a person who is like Stephen?
 - a. Do you know God's Word and are you able to give an answer in a gentle and respectful way as to why you believe as you do (Cf. 1 Peter 3:15).
 - b. Do you constantly pray for those who still need to come to Christ in obedient faith.

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B. ANANIAS

1. As you may remember from last week's lesson, Ananias was a Christian in Damascus to whom the Lord spoke in a vision.

"Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, 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." (Acts 9:11-12, NASB95)

2. Ananias, however, was reluctant to go because of Saul's reputation.

"But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."" (Acts 9:13-14, NASB95)

3. When, however, the Lord reassured Ananias that Saul (later Paul) was "a chosen instrument" of His who would take His name to the Gentiles, Ananias went to find Saul.

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4. After entering the house where Saul was staying, Ananias laid his hands on

him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17b, NASB95)

5. Ananias is another person we need to emulate.
 - a. Are we willing to look beyond the reputation which a person may have and see them as someone in need of salvation.
 - b. Will we take the time to form a relationship with them in order to share the good news of what God has done to bring them that salvation?
 - ❑ Let’s strive to be more like Ananias.

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C. BARNABAS

“When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.” (Acts 9:26–28, NASB95)

1. In Jerusalem, Paul was a man without a friend.
2. Those who were his former Jewish companions would have nothing to do with him because he had forsaken the Jewish faith.
3. Those who were Christians would have nothing to do with him because they were not sure that he *had* left the Jewish faith.
4. Even the apostles seem to have kept their distance from him.
5. The damage which he had done to the Lord’s church there in Jerusalem just three short years ago was still fresh upon the Christians’ minds.
6. Barnabas, however, being the encourager that he was brought Saul to the apostles and shared with them the story of his salvation and of bold preaching of the gospel in Damascus.

7. Because of Barnabas, the apostles and the church in Jerusalem warmly welcomed Saul into their fellowship.
8. How many of us here this morning are like Barnabas?
 - a. Do we encourage our new brothers and sisters in their faith?
 - b. Do we welcome them into the fellowship of this church family and help them establish relationships with their fellow Christians?

Conclusion

1. Saul went on to become Paul, our Lord's apostle to the Gentiles.
2. He made three missionary journeys proclaiming the good news.
3. You and I are here today because of his efforts.
4. Three men made a difference in his life: Stephen, Ananias & Barnabas

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5. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul later wrote about what makes a church grow (Ephesians 4:15-16).

“but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”
(Ephesians 4:15–16, NASB95)

6. Let's all do our part to help this church grow and to build one another up in love.
7. If you are not a Christian today, please know that our Lord calls you to come home.
8. Turn from your sin, confess Him as your Lord and Savior, be buried with Him in baptism.
9. Then go to work in His kingdom!