

A Place Where Lives Change

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Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² 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. ³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸ 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. ⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ 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, ¹² 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." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." ¹⁵ 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; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:1-20).

1. Turning Points in Life

Everyone has turning points in life. What was a key turning point in your life? For me, my turning point was when I came to the US in the 1980s. I arrived in Kansas City, Missouri to study for my MBA program. I had a goal to become a business professional or college professor. When I got here, I learned about the need to build bridges between parents and children from my experience working with young Korean children. I had a sense of call to be a bridge builder, and I went to seminary to be a pastor.

2. Saul's Turning Point

Acts chapter 9 talks about the turning point of Saul. Saul was his Jewish name. Later he was called Paul, that is his Roman name. During the first century, the disciples of Jesus Christ experienced persecution at the hands of Jewish leaders. This was because the disciples proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, yet many of the Jews including Saul thought that Jesus was the false Messiah.

The Jewish leaders arrested Stephen and executed him by stoning because he did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people bringing the Jews to Christianity (6:8-7:53). Saul consented to Stephen's death (Acts 8:1a). Saul continued his persecution of the church, dragging off men and women and putting them in prison (8:3). Saul began a persecution campaign against those who believed in Jesus not only in Jerusalem but also in other cities.

Acts 9:1 tells us that Saul went to the high priests and asked them for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any followers of Jesus, he might take them to Jerusalem as prisoners. "Synagogues in Damascus" indicates that Christians were still closely associated with Judaism. So they worshiped the Lord in the Jewish synagogues. In Damascus, Saul planned to arrest Christians who had fled Jerusalem when persecution began after Stephen's death.

When Saul got close to Damascus, a light from the sky shone around him. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him. "**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**" Saul says, "**Who are you, Lord?**" The Lord says, "**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**"

Jesus does not say, "why are you persecuting my followers?" Rather Jesus identifies with his disciples and says persecuting disciples means persecuting him. Saul thought that he was persecuting Christians for the sake of God. But Saul realizes that he was doing the opposite.

Jesus says, "**rise up, and enter into the city, and you will be told what you must do.**" Jesus orders Saul to go to Damascus to await further

instructions. Saul opens his eyes, but sees nothing. The people bring Saul into Damascus and Saul realizes that he was spiritually blind.

The Lord sends Ananias to pray for Saul. When Ananias prays, Saul receives his sight and is filled with the Holy Spirit. At that moment, Saul receives his spiritual sight as well. The Lord says, through Ananias, that Saul would be God's chosen vessel to bear his name before the nations. Saul is baptized and begins to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. This is a radical U-turn in the life of Saul.

3. The Lord Uses his People

We see the amazing grace of God in the story of Saul. Saul was a persecutor of Christians and was an unlikely candidate to serve the Lord. He was trying to destroy the Christian community. Yet, God reached out in grace and took Saul from where he was to transform the world.

When we read the Bible, we realize that God uses his people in crisis for his purpose. Moses was not interested or ready to be God's servant in Egypt. Yet the Lord used Moses.

Regardless of background, social status, gender, or age, God calls people to His purpose. God uses ordinary people including women, which would have been unusual during that time, instead of using only the prophets or disciples.

4. Ukraine President Zelensky

Does God still care about his people? As we get up each day, many in Ukraine continue to fight Russian military forces for their lives. Since February, there has been a prolonged conflict. Things have improved some in the capital of Kyiv, and we could give a lot of credit to the nations that provided their support.

However, I believe that God uses the Ukraine President Zelensky to care about his people in Ukraine. Russia attempted to make false claims that the Ukraine president had fled during the conflict. President Zelensky then filmed himself standing in central Kyiv. When the U.S. offered to evacuate him from the combat zone, he refused the offer. Zelensky told the US, "The fight is here. I need ammunition, not a ride." He delivered many video addresses to governments around the world to support Ukraine with military and humanitarian aid. His passionate efforts pushed global leaders to send aid when it was not easy to do so. God seems to use him as God used Moses to deliver the Israelites in Egypt.

5. Conclusion

Wherever we are in the world, each of us is known by God and called to be used for his purpose. What do you think God may be calling you to serve in this world? We may not always feel capable or worthy to be used for God's work, but the Lord will use us if we make ourselves available. If we are willing to follow his direction, God will use us.

6. Application

In our church alone, we have many activities where people can volunteer and provide financial support to make an impact on our church and our surrounding area.

We may not always feel qualified or not sure how much of an impact we can make. Yet, our passage today reminds us that God calls each of us and like Saul, our lives may change the world as we serve God's kingdom.

Remember that we are here today as followers of Jesus because of the work of Saul, the Apostle Paul, two thousand years ago. I pray that you and I can hear God's small voice each day, and that we may make a difference in our church and our community. May others experience God's positive change in their lives and may God be glorified through our lives. Amen.