

ACTS

A GOSPEL MOVEMENT



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Introduction

Introduction

Acts is the story of God's grace flooding out to the world. Nothing is more prominent in Acts than the spread of the gospel. Jesus promises a geographic expansion, and Acts follows the news of his death and resurrection as it spreads from a small group of disciples in Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the capital of Rome.

Through the repeated preaching of the gospel to different people groups, the gospel draws people in, constitutes people as the church, and then sends people out on mission to the world. *Acts is a historical account of how the resurrection of Jesus changes everything.*

God is central to the gospel's expansion. He is at the heart of the gospel message and, through the Holy Spirit, he is responsible for its growth. The gospel expands through the power of God despite significant barriers of geography, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, wealth, persecution, weakness, suffering, sickness, and imprisonment.

Many of these barriers appear so impregnable that, when the gospel is preached to a new segment of society, riots ensue. But no one is beyond God's saving power, and neither is anyone exempt from the need for redeeming grace.

Placing It in the Bigger Story

Acts shows that this new Christian movement is not a fringe sect, but the culmination of God's plan of redemption. What was seen only as shadows in the Old Testament, God now reveals more fully through Jesus Christ. The book of Acts does not primarily provide human patterns to emulate or avoid. Instead, it repeatedly calls us to reflect upon the work of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and how it establishes the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel's expansion is the culmination of what God has been doing through the Old Testament, and through the Gospels. Acts reveals God to be the great benefactor who pours out blessings on all people. Even the opportunity to repent is a gift from God.

GOSPEL BOLDNESS

Acts 4:1-22

Acts 4:1-22

Gospel Boldness

Scripture Text

Acts 4:1-22

Big Idea

The early church followed Jesus faithfully in defending and confirming the gospel, remaining obedient even in opposition and persecution.

Overview

Chapter 4 to chapter 9 of the book of Acts connects the ascension of Jesus with the conversion of the apostle Paul. This is a time when Christian ideas and beliefs were being formulated and when the organisation of the church into a worldwide movement was being developed.

John and Peter entered the temple to pray, but ended up involved in a miracle. This caught the attention of the religious elite.

Sadducees

The Sadducees only believed in the first five books of the bible (from Genesis to Deuteronomy). They believed they were God's chosen people, but didn't believe in the resurrection. This is partly why they were upset with Peter and John, who were talking constantly about the resurrection. *The Sadducees trusted in their position and lineage.*

Pharisees and High Priests

The Pharisees and High Priests believed in all the books of the Old Testament, and the resurrection of the dead. They were particularly interested in obeying the Law. They even added an additional laws to the 613 already written by Moses. *The Pharisees and High Priests trusted in their ability to keep the law.*

Observation and Meaning

1. Who are some of the recurring characters in this passage (Luke 3:2, John 8:13-14, Matthew 26:3)? Why do you think Luke mentions their names (Acts 4:6)?
2. Why did Peter and John end up in trouble with the Jerusalem leadership (Acts 4:1-12)? What trouble did Peter and John end up in (Acts 4:13-18)?
3. What is significant about Peter's reference to Jesus as '*the cornerstone*' (Acts 4:11)? What is a cornerstone (see Isaiah 28:16 and Romans 9:32-33)?
4. How did Peter and John respond to the threats of the Jerusalem leadership (Acts 4:19-20)? Why did they respond in this manner? Why were the Jerusalem leadership unable to prove them guilty or carry out any punishment against them (Acts 4:21-22)? What did it reveal about the heart condition of the Jerusalem leadership?

Application

- How might you come into friction with others around you when you follow Jesus?
- How have you dealt with this kind of opposition?
- How does the gospel, and the example of Peter and John, encourage you to deal with opposition?

**Through the Holy Spirit,
God is working to conform
and shape each believer
according to the chief cornerstone**

PRAYERS FOR BOLDNESS

Acts 4:23-31

Acts 4:23-31

Prayers For Boldness

Scripture Text

Acts 4:23-31

Big Idea

God is sovereign over creation, redemption, and the mission. This should ground our prayers, especially in the midst of opposition and challenges.

Overview

As a result of the miracle Peter and John performed on the lame man, they were brought before the Pharisees and interrogated. As soon as Peter and John were released, they returned to their community and *reported* everything (v.23), and *together* the community lifted up their voices before the Lord (v.24).

Whatever problems Peter and John were going through they understood things to be in accordance with God's predestined plan (Acts 4:24-25, 28). God was not permitting suffering in order for them to run away from it. Through the suffering God was growing and maturing them. God was not permitting suffering in order for Peter and John to manage and control it. God was inviting them to trust his plans and purposes. Through the persecution God disturbed Peter and John's comfort and lead them into community. From this we learn two things:

1. **suffering brings the real condition of our heart to the surface**
2. **suffering brings our true theology into the light**

Suffering confronts us with two common responses:

1. **fear tries to run away and avoid the suffering**
2. **pride tries to control the suffering and alleviate the pain**

Neither of these responses are gospel responses, because neither require faith or trust in Jesus Christ.

“The strongholds of the contemporary world can turn even the religious into practical atheists. How? By furnishing the possibility of operating on a kind of secular autopilot, we can move through our lives without thought or need for God, since the modern world will deliver all of our needs. We assume that the item we purchase online will arrive on our doorstep. We take for granted the logistics, human energy, and natural resources that are consumed in order to furnish our contemporary lifestyles—a vast array of hidden servants making our lives easier, all while providing for our comfort and needs, contributing to a sense that history will inevitably move toward a better future.”

— Mark Sayers, A Non-Anxious Presence

Observation and Meaning

1. How do the Apostles describe the sovereignty of God in their prayer? These descriptions were drawn from Psalm 146:6 and Psalm 2:1-2. How did these references shape their attitude toward the situation?
2. How do we know the 'Anointed' in Psalm 2 refers to Jesus (v.26)?
3. According to Psalm 2, how is the sovereignty of God seen in the gospel (vv.27-28)?
4. We might assume that God's sovereignty means that accomplishing his mission would be smooth-sailing. Why are the apostles facing so much opposition even though they are working for God's mission?

Application

- Give an example of how you are tempted to respond to suffering and opposition with either fear (running away in order to avoid) or with pride (trying to control and alleviate the pain)? How can you draw encouragement from the example found in these verses of the praying church?
- What is the condition of your prayer life (i.e. what do you often pray for or not pray for)? What does your prayer life reveal about the condition of your heart towards God and his mission?
- What would it look like to let God's sovereignty shape the way you pray towards God and for his mission?

Jesus stood up when no one else was bold enough and defeated our true Goliath (sin). Jesus did all this without responding with fear or control.

ONE FAITH ONE FAMILY

Acts 4:32-37

Acts 4:32-37

One Faith One Family

Scripture Text

Acts 4:32-37

Big Idea

The spirit-filled church in Jerusalem shared one faith in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Their faith was evidenced by being one family which loved one another through the sharing of their lives. God's glory is made visible through the church.

Overview

After the arrest of Peter and John, and their release, the followers of Jesus went into a time of prayer (Acts 4:23-31). This passage describes a strengthening in the unity of the believers.

We see they were of one mind and served one another through acts of generosity, in order that any needy person amongst them would be provided for. These beautiful acts offer us a taste of what it is like to imitate the love and sacrifice Jesus Christ poured out for each of us.

Acts 4:32-37 is a reflection of Acts 2:42-47. As a result of following Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit, people not only proclaimed the resurrection but also acted in ways which testified to God's goodness. It is no coincidence that this passage follows Peter and John's arrest and release. This passage acts as a call for believers to stay strong and to live out their faith. They can do this knowing they do not need to own their possessions. They are free to serve others, regardless of the season they are in. Those who believed in Jesus Christ shared:

- **One Faith** — they shared from their heart and soul
- **One Family** — they shared everything in common

Observation and Meaning

1. What are some similarities and differences between these verses and Acts 2:41-47?
2. What do you think Luke means when he says the full number of believers were '*of one heart and soul*' (v.32a)?
3. Why did no one consider any of the things that belonged to them to be their own (v.32b)? What is the difference between something '*belonging*' to you and you '*owning*' something?
4. What was significant about the apostle's giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (v.33a)?

Application

- What is your view in terms of caring for one another in the church community?
- What should be the correct reason for helping those in need?
- If God is the true owner of all things and we also are owned by him, how should this affect the way we can care and serve other people in the church?

The believers' voluntary sharing demonstrated the Old Testament ideal of there not being a needy person amongst them

(see Deuteronomy 15:4-11)

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Acts 5:1-11

Acts 5:1-11

Ananias And Sapphira

Scripture Text

Acts 5:1-11

Big Idea

God is powerfully present with his church through the Holy Spirit, and therefore we must reckon seriously with how we treat and live in the body of Christ (the church).

Overview

The account of Ananias and Sapphira is one of the most disturbing texts in the New Testament. It reveals how essential unity is to God, and how seriously God takes any deceit which threatens the unity of the church. Thankfully, most people do not receive immediate judgement for sin like Ananias and Sapphira did.

What we can be certain of is that sin will be dealt with, and that the consequences of sin without Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross will always be death (see Romans 6:23). As we read through these verses we should remember that the God who punished Ananias and Sapphira is the same merciful God who offers grace, even to those who arranged the crucifixion of his Son (see Acts 2:23; 37-39; 3:13-20).

When Luke writes that Ananias and Sapphira '*kept back*' some of the proceeds (v.2), he means this happened in a secret and dishonest way. Luke contrasts the filling of Ananias' heart by '*Satan*' (v.3) with the filling of the community for witness by the '*Spirit*' (see Acts 4:31). Ananias sin was the lie—claiming to be doing more than he did. Ananias did not have to give anything to the church (v.4). Instead, Ananias chose to deceive the community. Ananias' actions resulted in '*great fear*' (v.5). The fear of the Lord is a common theme in the books of Acts. It either refers to '*godly awe and reverence*' (see Acts 2:43; 10:2; 13:26) or to the fear of God's displeasure and discipline (see Acts 5:11; 16:29; 19:17 and Hebrews 12:7-10).

Observation and Meaning

1. What was the exact charge against Ananias and Sapphira?
2. What were Ananias and Sapphira judged for and what did it reveal about their hearts?
3. How is Ananias' attempt to deceive the church sinning against the Holy Spirit (vv.3-4)?
4. Luke says that '*great fear came upon all who heard of it*' (see v.5 and v.11). What does this '*fear*' refer to? What do you think brought about this '*fear*'?

Application

- Consider the different ways you serve and do life in the church—in what ways is your attitude similar to that of Ananias and Sapphira?
- What lies have you believed that contribute to this attitude? How does this reveal in you a wrong view of Jesus and His church?
- The bible says, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Proverbs 9:10). How does the '*fear of God*' in this passage remind you of God's grace and mercy? How does this reverential fear of God shape the way you serve and do life in the church?

Jesus did not choose to die for us because our sin was trivial. Our sin was immense. Jesus chose to die for us because his love for us was greater.

CHOSEN TO SERVE

Acts 6:1-7

Acts 6:1-7

Chosen To Serve

Scripture Text

Acts 6:1-7

Big Idea

As the church grows, the body of Christ needs to step up and bear the burden of her growing needs, in order that the mission can continue healthily and souls can be won.

Overview

Beginning with Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7), the gospel was proclaimed to an ever widening circle of people. It was proclaimed to Samaria (Acts 8:4-25), to an Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40), to a Gentile God-fearer (Acts 10:1-48), and to the Gentiles at Antioch (Acts 11:19-30). All this sets the stage for Paul's ministry, which would go to the *ends of the earth*.

The Hellenists were Jewish Christians whose primary language was Greek. The Hebrews were native Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic as their primary language. The Hebrews seem to have unintentionally overlooked the Hellenist widows during the daily distribution of provisions for the needy.

It is significant that Luke mentions the great many '*priests*' (v.7). It was this group who until now had been vehemently opposed to the gospel. This reminds us of how wide and deep the love of God really is. It is to be preached to everyone, even those who hate Christians. Priests and Pharisees were a major group of antagonists during the life of Jesus. They instigated and influenced Jesus' death, and Jesus reserved his strongest words for these religious leaders. Their faith in Jesus, seen in the book of Acts, is proof of the power of the gospel and the grace of God to those who opposed his Son.

As we continue through the book of Acts Stephen and Philip will become more prominent, but there will be no further mention of the other five individuals (v.5).

Observation and Meaning

1. What was the problem in this passage? Why were the widows among the Hellenists '*neglected in the daily distribution*' (v.1)?
2. Why was it not desirable for the twelve apostles to '*leave the word of God and serve tables*' (v.2)? Which of the roles in Romans 12:4-8 deserves particular esteem (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-26)? Should teachers only teach?
3. Who chose the seven men? What were the criteria for these first seven deacons (vv.3-7)? What does this passage reveal about the connection between our serving and the mission of the gospel?
4. What is meant by '*a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*' (v.7)?

Application

- Jesus often focused on humility and servant leadership, which he would uniquely exemplify during his death. Read Mark 10:42-45 and consider how it shapes your understanding of serving. How has your heart sometimes revealed a "*gospel-less*" attitude towards serving?
- Identify some needs in the church and for the gospel mission. Are there any areas that you can actively contribute to?
- Humility depends upon a person's ability to fully rely on God, his power, his purposes, and his resources. This reduces self-reliance and increases dependence on the character of God. When it comes to serving in the church, how are you tempted towards '*self-reliance*'? What aspect of God's character do you need to meditate on in order to serve with greater confidence?

STEPHEN IS SEIZED

Acts 6:8-15, 7:51-60

Acts 6:8-15, 7:51-60

Stephen Is Seized

Scripture Text

Acts 6:8-15, 7:51-60

Big Idea

As the Christian church enters a season of persecution so individuals, such as Stephen, go beyond their calling and lay down their lives for the kingdom.

Overview

Stephen was one of seven men chosen by the disciples to care for the Greek-speaking widows in the church (Acts 6:5). Like the apostles, Stephen not only ministered to the needy but also proclaimed the gospel. Many of the religious leaders grew angry at Stephen, who was performing signs and wonders and speaking with wisdom.

Eventually they dragged Stephen before the Sanhedrin, where he was falsely accused of blasphemy. During his defence, Stephen compared Israel's repeated disobedience in the Old Testament to the present nations rejection of the Messiah. This made the members of the Sanhedrin so angry that they threw him out of the city and stoned him to death. Stephen's prayer, as he was dying, echoed the prayer prayed by Jesus on the cross (Acts 7:59-60). Stephen's martyrdom led to a time of persecution against the church (Acts 6:8-10).

Amidst this, the worst incident of persecution in the book of Acts, we briefly meet a person who will later be used by God to proclaim the gospel more widely than any other person in the early church—*Saul of Tarsus* (v.58). Here we receive a glimpse of the radical grace that God will show to and through Saul (later known as Paul). God does not leave behind even the worst of sinners (see 1 Timothy 1:15). This offers hope to sinners who feel unforgivable. *This also serves as a warning to us not to dismiss others as beyond redemption.*

Observation and Meaning

1. Why is Stephen doing signs and wonders when he is meant to be serving widows (v.8)? Why did Stephen's message challenge his listeners (v.9)?
2. Where does Stephen's power, authority in preaching, and shining face come from (v.10)?
3. What was Stephen accused of by his opponents (v.11)? How are these accusations similar to the charges Jesus was accused of? What pattern do we see emerging in Acts between evangelism, opposition, and church growth?
4. Compare Stephen's prayer (Acts 7:59-60) with the prayer Jesus prayed on the cross (Luke 23:34). What stands out to you about these prayers?

Application

- What kind of circumstances tempt you to stir up people against one another, or to falsely accuse someone? What prevents you from giving in to this temptation?
- Have you ever been blamed or accused for something you did not do? How did you react (consider Ephesians 4:11-15 and 2 Corinthians 3:3)? Did you speak with the same spirit with which Stephen spoke (v.10)?
- Have you ever been able to tell someone is full of grace, filled with the Holy Spirit, and following God just by looking at them (v.15)?

**Jesus preached the gospel to everyone,
even those who plotted against him and wished him dead.**

SAUL RAVAGES THE CHURCH

Acts 8:1-25

Acts 8:1-25

Saul Ravages the Church

Scripture Text

Acts 8:1-25

Big Idea

Salvation cannot be manipulated according to the will of people. The gift of salvation comes through the redemptive work of Jesus, and depends solely on the gracious will of God (rather than the merits of people).

Overview

In the next four chapters (Acts 8-11), the book of Acts moves from the topic of persecution to the gospel spreading across borders. Firstly the gospel reaches Samaria (fulfilling Acts 1:8), and so the first cross-cultural barrier is breached. Then it spreads to the Gentiles.

All but the apostles are forced to flee Jerusalem following the martyrdom of Stephen. This scattering of believers produces a mobilised mission force, which Saul sees as a heretical sect. Instead of crushing this movement, Saul's persecution of believers ends up disseminating the Christian faith across dozens of cities and fuelling the advancement of the gospel.

The Samaritans were considered non-Jewish, though technically there were *'half'* Jewish. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as not having any part in the promises of God. It appears that God withholds the giving of the Spirit until the apostles arrive, in order to underscore the connection between the Jerusalem church and the Samaritans. Otherwise, the Samaritans may have assumed they were autonomous from Jerusalem (or the disciples in Jerusalem may not have welcomed the Samaritans into God's family as brothers and sisters). The point is that even the Samaritans, who the Jews usually avoided, were now filled with the Spirit (vv.14-17). This filling indicated that the Samaritans were now included in God's church. Once again Luke highlights the fellowship of the believers as a sign of the Spirit's presence and blessing.

Observation and Meaning

1. What is significant about the fact that they were scattered (v.1) and had to go to Judea and Samaria (consider Acts 1:8, James 1:1 and 1 Peter 1:1)?
2. Philip most likely visited Sebaste, the main city of the Samaritans, located at the foot of their holy mountain Gerizim (v.5). The Samaritans were disliked by both Jews and non-Jews, and would often fight with the Jews over their understanding of God (see John 4:20). John the Baptist and Jesus had previously ministered in this area (John 3:23; 4:4-42), but what did Philip do that got the Samaritan's attention (v.6)?
3. Both pagan and Jewish people practiced magic. The goal of such magic included healing diseases, bringing physical blessings, cursing and harming others, and guarding against demons. Some magicians also claimed to know the future. Read Deuteronomy 18:9-13, and explain what else you discover about magic and sorcery from a Jewish perspective?
4. In response to Simon offering money to receive the Holy Spirit (vv.18-19), Peter tells him he has '*neither part nor lot in this matter*' (v.21). This is Old Testament language for having no share in something (see Deuteronomy 14:27). What do these words indicate about the condition of Simon's heart?

Application

- The history of the church can be traced back to Jerusalem and the persecution of Christians. Considering the church continued to grow, despite persecution, how does this influence the way you see yourself and the church?
- How does the history of the church and the persecution of Christians affect your response to those churches experiencing persecution in the world today?
- Simon witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of the apostles, and desired the Spirit in order to earn money. Under what circumstances do you wrongly desire the *work* of the Spirit? How does the gospel speak to your idolatrous desires?

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8:26-40

Acts 8:26-40

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Scripture Text

Acts 8:26-40

Big Idea

Jesus is the suffering servant who redeems and restores creation, removing hostility and discrimination. The gospel invites all nations and nationalities to come and put their identity in Jesus Christ.

Overview

An angel of the Lord directs Philip to go and seek out a eunuch (v.26). In other words, there is a eunuch that God cares about. We do not know if this man is a eunuch by birth, or a eunuch by choice—but he is without a family and without sexual relations.

The eunuch may have experienced shame:

- *on the outside, he is a court official*
- *on the inside, he likely has internal struggles*

Luke specifically tells us that this eunuch is reading Isaiah 53 (vv.32-33). The eunuch must have identified with the person in this passage (Isaiah 53:2-3, 7-8) because he asks, “*Is the prophet talking about himself, or about someone else?*” (v.34). This is when we read one of the most beautiful verses in the bible—Philip tells the eunuch the prophet is talking about Jesus Christ (v.35).

Jesus Christ——

- *who was a eunuch by choice*
- *who was totally devoted to his Father*
- *who lived a single and solitary life*
- *who suffered shame and sorrow*
- *who was led like a lamb to the slaughter*

Philip looks the eunuch in the eyes and says, “*Jesus did this for you!*” As you read these verses you sense the eunuch’s hope rising, as Philip shares the good news.

The eunuch has one more question (v.36), “*is there anything that prevents me from being baptised?*” The chariot stops. Philip takes the eunuch down to the water and baptises him. As the eunuch rises out of the water, the old has gone and the new has come. He is fully known, fully loved, and fully assured of future glory.

The gospel is an invitation to every tongue and tribe:

If you have put your faith in Jesus as your saviour and Lord, you will receive a new body at the resurrection.

If you have been plunged into Jesus Christ, you have been welcomed into his body—the church.

If you have not already done so, put your hope and your faith in Jesus Christ.

Observation and Meaning

1. What does it mean to be a eunuch in bible times (see Deuteronomy 23:1 and Matthew 19:12)?
2. Who is leading Philip to reach out to the eunuch and share good news (v.29)? What passage is the eunuch reading from (v.30)?
3. What part of Isaiah’s message might have led the eunuch to get baptised (see Isaiah 53)? According to Isaiah, what is the inheritance of eunuchs who give themselves to God (Isaiah 56:3-8)?
4. How does Isaiah’s message comfort those who are suffering, grieving or experiencing shame?

Application

- What labels or identities did you take pride in, or define yourself by, before becoming a Christian? Which of these old labels do you continue to wrestle with or hold on to? What practical steps could we take to build a church culture that regularly reminds one another of our identity in the gospel?
- Under what circumstances are you prone to forget that evangelism is led by the Spirit, and not accomplished in your own strength?
- What prevents you from eagerly sharing the good news with others? What might obedience to the great commission look like for you (Matthew 28:16-20)? How can we encourage one another to build a lifestyle that is intentional about the Great Commission?

Through Jesus' redemptive work he bore the judgement of God, restores creation, and reverses the effects of sin. There is no longer any need for hostility between Jews and Gentiles. In God's kingdom there is no discrimination. Our superiority and weaknesses become inconsequential when our identity is primarily in Jesus.

SAUL'S CONVERSION

Acts 9:1-20

Acts 9:1-20

Saul's Conversion

Scripture Text

Acts 9:1-20

Big Idea

Do we really believe no sinner is beyond the grace of God? If we do, we will pray for our enemies. God is mighty to save, and will redeem anyone he chooses to redeem.

Overview

In the book of Acts, the gospel not only overcomes ethnic and geographical barriers but also breaks through the most formidable barrier of all: human sin. Saul learns firsthand how closely Jesus identifies with his church (described in this text as *'the Way'*). In persecuting those of the Way, Saul was persecuting Jesus himself.

In response to the question, *"Who are you?"* Saul receives the answer: *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting"* (v.4). In opposing God's people, Saul has opposed God himself. Saul is blinded by the appearance of Jesus, and his blindness allows him to see himself for who he really is. Saul recognises his own powerlessness and weakness, and humbly accepts his blindness. Before commissioning Saul to take the gospel to the Gentiles, God tears down Saul's reliance on his religious zeal. Only after being brought to a position of humility is Saul ready for the gospel.

**God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble**

— James 4:6

Saul was overseeing the murder of men and women in the church, with no sign of repentance. It was during these actions that Jesus met with Saul on the Damascus road.

We must warn ourselves against condemning anyone as lost beyond hope (including condemning ourselves as lost beyond hope). God reaches out to his enemies, defeats human rebellion, and in so doing he does not crush these rebels. Instead, through the gospel, God loves and converts them into chosen children (Acts 9:15). Although Saul is an enemy of the church, he is reconciled to God through Jesus and called to be God's ambassador. Through Saul, God goes on to make his appeal to the entire world (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Observation and Meaning

1. What is surprising about Jesus' first words to Saul: "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" (v.4).
2. Ananias confirms that the word '*Lord*' (v.10a) refers to Jesus (v.17). When Ananias heard Jesus speaking he responded, "*Here I am, Lord*" (v.10b). His response was similar to Abraham (Genesis 22:1, 11), Jacob (Genesis 46:2), Moses (Exodus 3:11), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:4-8), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8). What is remarkable about the instructions Jesus gives to Ananias (vv.11-12)? What is wrong with Ananias's response (vv.13-14)?

3. Speaking about Saul, the Lord said, "*...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel*" (v.15). How did Saul (later known as Paul) go on to fulfil these words?
4. Luke tells us that something like scales fell from Saul's eyes (v.18a). This physical event symbolised the fact that Saul's spiritual blindness had been overcome and he could now see the truth. What was the first thing Saul did following this experience (v.18b)? What do you think Saul was doing whilst he was '*with the disciples at Damascus*' (v.19b)? How might the disciples have felt meeting and spending time with Saul (v.19), after he persecuted them (Acts 9:1)? What else did Saul do after his baptism (v.20)?

Application

- How does Jesus' close identity with his followers persecution and suffering encourage and comfort you (see Acts 9:4)?

- Can you describe a time when you welcomed into the church, as a brother or sister in Christ, someone you knew before they were a believer? How did you feel and what were your concerns?
- Do you really believe no sinner is beyond the grace of God? If you do, describe how you pray for your enemies (difficult people)? Why do you struggle to pray for them and what do you do instead of praying?

An enemy can be some one that, no matter how lovingly you approach them, dislikes you and falsely judges you. The word ‘enemy’ is simply a temporary category to describe how someone is treating you.

If we fail to recognise and label someone as an enemy, we will overlook Jesus’ command to love and pray for them

(see Matthew 5:43-45)

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