

ACTS 9 – THE GREAT TURNAROUND

- **Intro** – welcome & name
 - Look at - brilliant summary **v20-21**
 - Saul done abrupt U turn, about face, a great turnaround – everyone notices, everyone q’s
 - What might cause such a change? So abrupt, and complete?
 - Like Saul has been struck by lightning, and is travelling the other direction -> storm image.
 - (Probably know story well) **Overview**:
 - Who is Saul / Paul? What’s his story coming to Jesus?
 - Closer look at Saul’s great change – what is “conversion”?
 - Conversion and us? Are you converted? -> fitting with X being baptised
 - All about “**change**” - What does it take to make you change?
 - Muj: from debit to credit card -> **rewards points**; new plastic, PIN, budget -> spend 1000s to get a free toaster (I’m cynical, Catherine bargain hunter)
 - What makes you **change**?
- Passage – Acts 9
 - Context of Saul
 - **8:3** -> Doing terrible things to Christian believers
 - **22:4a** -> Pretty nasty guy, if you’re a Christian believer
 - story – Not a difficult story to understand, many heard it before
 - Paul out to hurt & imprison Christians (v2), goes to Damascus **[road]**
 - Meets a **heavenly Jesus** (v4-5), blinded, enters Damascus, staying on “**straight street**”
 - Meets Ananias, recovers sight, baptized, spirit (v18) & receives mission (v15)
 - Starts **proclaiming Jesus** as the Son of God (v20)
 - This is the great turnaround -> from “threats & murder” to “son of God”
 - Old friends become new enemies, he’s **smuggled out** through the wall (v25)
 - Meet Saul next in ch 13.
 - what do we learn about “**conversion**” from Saul? What is his change like?
 - Saul is converted by God, when he meets risen Jesus – **v5**
 - This is the main event: the one thing that truly changed Saul. And believers as well.
 - No Jesus, no xian conversion, no change toward God.
 - With Jesus, abrupt & radical change to follow Him
 - Need miracle of God’s intervention (holy spirit – v17) to truly change
 - Without inward work of God’s spirit, any change is purely superficial
 - Many met Jesus on earth or in Bible, not all followed him – no spirit
 - If remember nothing else: **encounters with J** cause people to change & follow J
 - No matter what that looks like, it’s a miraculous encounter with God himself
 - “**U-Turn**” isn’t enough – something outside (**God / lightning**) -> change

- Saul's Change is complete, total - **disruptive**
 - Many changes gradual, subtle
 - Disruptive = sudden, abrupt – change that hurts
 - Wide ranging impact – changes lots of things at once
 - Non-disruptive: **Murray & breakfast** -> diff on holidays
 - Disruptive from confronting experience: **server upgrade** that burned out server! No more shortcuts
 - Saul encountering Jesus was **disruptive change** based on a confronting experience
 - **v5b** - Understand why Saul is so shaken: “whom you are persecuting”
 - After whole life “serving” God, finds “serving” is the polar opposite - hurts
 - Has to turn whole life around b/c whole life is wrong
 - Change from “threats & murder” to ‘Jesus is son of God’
 - Even at expense of his old friends -> now his newest enemies (v23)
 - New mission **v15** – difficult mission, new way of life – how God wants Saul to serve!
 - Saul's conversion is so complete & disruptive: new name (**13:9**)!
- Total change – disruptive change – brought on by meeting risen Jesus
- conversion is filled with **grace**
 - Grace as in God's undeserved favour – good stuff we should get – a gift
 - Same grace we see on cross, J stepping in to die in our place, take our sin on him
 - **1 Peter 2:24, Matt 20:28, John 3:16** – grace -> what Saul now believes
 - Saul was doing **nasty things** to Christian believers
 - Jesus could have hurt or punished Saul, but didn't
 - Gave the foundational role in early church's growth! Based on grace
 - Role profoundly influenced believers & non-believers all through history & continues today -> grace – treating people as they don't deserve
 - Feel impact of grace on Paul himself - **Eph 2:4-5**
 - Not just God showing grace, but **Ananias**
 - he was hesitant, yet calls Saul 'brother' v17, welcomes into church v19
 - without question or reservation
 - As Saul reconciled with God, S is reconciled with the Christians he once hurt
 - As God forgives Saul, so Saul's new church family forgive & welcome him
 - **[grace]** Conversion is the acceptance of God's gift of forgiveness, then continuing to forgive others as a Christian
- **[title]** Summary of Saul's conversion & changes
 - Saul changed because of a powerful work of God – miraculous encounter with Jesus
 - Sudden and disruptive change; A work of God's grace & undeserved favour
 - As much as Saul is famous and conversion was public, dramatic and stark, it's in essence the same for every other Christian believer who turned to Jesus down through history
 - All xian believers have had this same great turnaround

- **Application** – what should we do
 - Are you converted? Are you changed by God? Done your own great turnaround?
 - Non-believer: Are you being called by God to change?
 - Through ordinary words and people (me and X), is this your miraculous encounter with J?
 - Then change! Accept God’s grace! Stand up like Saul and say “Jesus is SoG”
 - Believer: already been changed by God
 - Keep being changed by God!
 - As dramatic as Saul’s conversion was, wouldn’t be in Bible if went back to persecuting xians
 - he kept following Jesus for ~30 years
 - Hard to keep serving Jesus for 10, 20, 50 years. Lots of different reasons
 - My Difficulty – fear of what ppl think -> silent, fit in with crowd
 - Urge: Stay faithful, look to show grace, share how J changed you.
 - And when J calls you home, still be saying “Jesus is SoG”
 - Believer, but no “great turnaround”, no “conversion experience”
 - Perhaps grew up in xian family & never knew time when didn’t know Jesus
 - Perhaps coming to church for years, know right things to say, everyone assumes you trust J
 - Have you truly turned to Jesus? Has God’s holy spirit miraculously changed you?
 - Maybe, maybe not – only you can answer that
 - Maybe your change just wasn’t as dramatic as Saul’s, but it still happened.
 - But perhaps you need to commit to Jesus for the first time – get baptised like X

- **Conclusion** - Let me finish up
 - Read amazing event, the proverbial “road to Damascus” experience
 - Saul meeting a risen, heavenly Jesus, right when he was most hostile to xians
 - And seen the dramatic change an encounter with Jesus can have: Saul is a new man, new way of thinking - grace, a new mission – take good news around world, new friends (& new enemies), new heart – changed by God
 - That same powerful work of God happens in new believers even today, happened to many here, I pray is happening right now
 - This is the great turnaround, this is converting to follow Jesus – this is utterly life changing

Acts 9 (ESV)

9 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹²and 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." ¹³But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his

sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" ²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

²³When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, ²⁵but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

Acts 8:3

But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Acts 22:4

"I [Saul] persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women."

1 Peter 2:24

Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Matthew 20:28

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Ephesians 2:4

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved