

One of my priorities as an elder in this congregation is to encourage you to be a student of the Word of God. That doesn't mean simply to come and listen on Sunday or attend a Bible study, but personally to take time to be in the Scriptures daily to hear from God. As I read over our passage for today I was reminded of the old treasures I had seen in the past, but I also prayed to have revealed to me new treasures and to see what would speak to you too. Jesus said, *"Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."* Matthew 13:52 The Bible is filled with treasure for those who recognize that our time is better spent in God's Word than chasing after the temporal pleasures of this world (Psalm 119:72). You will find the food for your spiritual growth in the Word of God (Proverbs 2:3-5). Mark those treasures you find and review them often. Continually search for new ones. They can be the very voice of God to you.

The first half of this chapter was on the supernatural encounter of Saul with the risen Lord Jesus. He writes about it in several of his letters (1 Corinthians 15:8-9), but the following verse seems to me to best describe his heart. *¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.* 1 Timothy 1:15-16 Paul was saying that he is God's trophy of how gracious and patient God can be. If you think you are too bad for Jesus, or not good enough to serve Him, then look at Saul, God's trophy for demonstrating great patience and grace to man. If God can save a Christian killer who tried to stop the early church from obeying Jesus and evangelizing the world, and then call him to be one of the greatest evangelists, and even appoint him to write most of the doctrine in the New Testament, then there is hope for you and me (Ephesians 3:7-8). Amen? Do you believe it? When we say we are too weak, or ignorant, or shy, or whatever for God to save and call us to serve Him, we are saying more about our limited view of God than we are about our weaknesses. God delights in using the weak because then we see the real source of the power is in Him (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

^{19b} For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. Acts 9:19b The disciples must have been as amazed, as we are at times, with the incredible transformation they were witnessing in Saul. Here was this man who came to arrest them now testifying about seeing the risen Lord and being called to suffer for Him. I would imagine he asked the disciples a lot of questions and wanted to hear all about the life and teachings of Jesus. How thrilled the disciples in Damascus must have been to share with him! That must have been some truly rich fellowship. But he couldn't hold in all that he had experienced and was learning. He had been so wrong and now could so clearly see his error that he had to tell his fellow Jews who had not yet accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of

Commented [PW1]: Psalm 119:72 (ESV)

⁷² The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

Commented [PW2]: Proverbs 2:3-5 (ESV)

³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,

⁴ if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,

⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

Commented [PW3]: 1 Corinthians 15:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Commented [PW4]: Ephesians 3:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Commented [PW5]: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (ESV)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

God. Acts 9:10 Eager to correct the errors of his past, Saul started preaching his new-found faith in the synagogues of Damascus. The "Son of God" was a title meaning Messiah. Remember that in [John 1:34](#) John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the Son of God. Shortly after that, the devil tested Jesus by asking Him to do certain things if He was really the Son of God ([Matthew 4:3](#)). When Jesus stilled the storm on the lake the disciples said, "Truly you are the Son of God." [Matthew 14:33](#) When Jesus asked Martha if she believed He is the resurrection and the life she responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." [John 11:27](#) In other words, "You are the Messiah, the Son of God." Saul was proclaiming that the Jews had killed their long-awaited Messiah and that He had died for their salvation as the lamb of God.

²¹ And 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?" Acts 9:21 Saul had a reputation among the Jewish community of spearheading the attack on people of The Way, but suddenly he has reversed himself and is proclaiming Jesus is the Messiah ([Galatians 1:13](#)). He came to arrest Christians, and now he is one of them. This a powerful testimony that Jesus did rise from death and is active in the world.

²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. Acts 9:22 This strengthening is not like that from breaking a fast as in the previous passage ([Acts 9:19a](#)), this is spiritually strengthened to testify with convincing boldness. The Jews tried to counter his arguments that Jesus is the Messiah, but he confounded them at every turn. He spent his life in the Word and knew the Scriptures well. Now that he knows the key to the Scriptures, the mystery that was hidden for ages past ([Ephesians 3:6](#)), that the Messiah would first suffer for the sins of all mankind, and now that the Holy Spirit is teaching him ([John 14:26](#)), no one can refute his scriptural evidence. How we need for God to raise up more men like this in our day! RZIM ministries is striving to do this with their new school of apologetics.¹ When there is a powerful witness there is soon to follow powerful opposition.

²³ When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, Acts 9:23-24 It seems that a number of the Jews of that time had a motto, "If you can't beat 'em, kill 'em!" They had stoned Stephen and now they believed they had to kill Saul. It reminds me of the effort to kill Lazarus. People were believing in Jesus because of Lazarus' resurrection so the leaders figured they would stop that by seeing that he was killed ([John 12:9-11](#)). Now that is desperation! What if he rose again? They even tried to kill the resurrection and the life ([John 11:25](#)). That didn't work so well. Why would they think they can stop His followers? They should have taken Gamaliel's advice, "Let them alone lest we be found to be opposing God!" [Acts 5:39](#) If we don't get some kind of resistance from family, friends, or others, we are probably too silent about our faith. We try not to be offensive, but we should seek the salvation of those we love, and sometimes that will offend them ([Matthew 10:36](#)).

Commented [PW6]: John 1:34 (ESV)

³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Commented [PW7]: Matthew 4:3 (ESV)

³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

Commented [PW8]: Matthew 14:33 (ESV)

³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Commented [PW9]: John 11:27 (ESV)

²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Commented [PW10]: Galatians 1:13 (ESV)

¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

Commented [PW11]: Acts 9:19a (ESV)

^{19a} and taking food, he was strengthened.

Commented [PW12]: Ephesians 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Commented [PW13]: John 14:26 (ESV)

²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Commented [PW14]: Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics and RZIM Academy

Commented [PW15]: John 12:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well,

¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

Commented [PW16]: John 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

Commented [PW17]: Acts 5:39 (ESV)

³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice,

Commented [PW18]: Matthew 10:36 (ESV)

³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

The providence of God made the assassination plot known to Saul. God had a plan for Saul's life as He has a plan for yours and mine. Man or devil cannot stop us until that plan is completed. We don't have to worry about the time of death, it is in God's hands (Psalm 139:16). Man usually thinks it is too soon, but God knows the details of what would happen had that child or adult lived longer. He brings us home in His perfect time for our good.

²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. Acts 9:25 This was the first of many escapes from danger that Saul will have to make in his obedience to the call of God on his life (Acts 23:12). We can see the intensity of this spiritual war. Men were waiting at the gates of the city day and night with daggers under their cloaks hoping to stop the powerful witness of the former Christian persecutor turned apostle.³ The only way out of the city was through an opening in the wall. City defensive walls had rooms in them and sometimes a window looked to the outside of the wall for ventilation. The disciples tied a rope to a big basket, had Paul get in, and lowered him at least several stories, and probably more. Windows couldn't be close to the ground or invaders or thieves could enter them.

What happened next is recorded in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul went into the deserts of Arabia for three years (Galatians 1:17-18; that is Syrian Arabia and possibly Petra). We have no record of exactly where or what he did there, but we can imagine he went through the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit to unlearn some of what he had been taught and to learn what they truly meant while also evangelizing the area. He met Jesus in the Word. Three years with Jesus in the Word and you are bound to be transformed. I believe that is where he developed all the doctrine we see in his letters. They came right out of the first covenant seen in the light of the reality of Jesus as a fulfillment of all the shadows that came before (Hebrews 10:1). "Real ministry is made in the closet of prayer; God's men and women are made in secret. Their lives and their profoundest convictions are born in their secret communion with God."²

²⁶ 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. Acts 9:26 The disciples knew of his role in Stephen's death and his mission to imprison them. They probably thought he was trying to pretend to be one of them to find out their hiding places. "How could someone change so quickly?" they may have thought. Had they forgotten what happened to themselves? Once again, God provided.

²⁷ 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. Acts 9:27 We were introduced to Barnabas at the end of chapter four (Acts 4:36-37). We were told his name means "Son of Encouragement." He must have fled persecution in Jerusalem and gone to Damascus where he met the transformed Saul. Barnabas told the apostles that Saul was truly changed. He told the apostles about Saul's encounter with the Lord and how he preached boldly in the name of Jesus proving He is the Messiah. Risking your life for Jesus is a pretty sure sign you are truly a disciple.

Commented [PW19]: Psalm 139:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Commented [PW20]: Acts 23:12 (ESV)

¹² When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Commented [PW21]: Damascus was ruled by the Nabateans who also ruled Arabia. Paul must have caused a stir in Arabia causing the leadership, Aretas or his viceroy, to allow this assassination attempt (2Corinthians 11:32).

Commented [PW22]: Galatians 1:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

Commented [PW23]: Hebrews 10:1 (ESV)

¹ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Commented [PW24]: E.M. Bounds, Power Through Prayer, p 17

Commented [PW25]: Acts 4:36-37 (ESV)

³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,

³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Once again we have to go to the letter to the Galatians to get the rest of the story. Saul met with Peter for two weeks and conferred with Jesus' brother James (Galatians 1:18-19). James had a lot in common with Saul. He was devout Jew. He didn't believe his half-brother was the Messiah until after the resurrection (John 7:5). He was suddenly confronted with the risen Lord which threw his whole world upside down, just as had happened to Saul (1 Corinthians 15:7).

²⁸ So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. Acts 9:28 Saul was now one of the Jerusalem disciples. In the very place he was commissioned to arrest Christians, in the seat of Judaism, he is boldly proclaiming the name of the Lord. That means he is telling people that Jesus is Lord of all, the Messiah, now seated at the right hand of the throne of God! That is the teaching that caused the council to sentence Jesus to death and Stephen as well (Matthew 26:64; Acts 7:56). In fact, Saul heard it from Stephen's lips and at that time plugged his ears and ran screaming toward him to see him stoned (Acts 7:57). Now Saul is preaching the very language he despised. What reversal! That is the transforming power of the Spirit. He can make the shy become bold. He can turn haters of Jesus into devoted followers. He can take self-worshiping egomaniacs and make them selfless servants of God. **There is nothing He can't do with a surrendered life. What is it He wants to make of you?**

Did you notice that Luke described Saul as a bold preacher in each of the last two verses? Saul was an all or nothing personality, and God didn't change that. He was zealous for Judaism, and now he is just as zealous for the message of salvation in Jesus, if not more so (Galatians 1:14). God made us all uniquely. Some people need a bold witness that gets right in their face. Others need to see the persistent love and patience of a believer demonstrating the life of Christ. Others need a powerful intellectual defense. That is why we all have our unique gifts and talents. Saul's uniqueness was both boldness and intellectual insight. But as I said earlier, that kind of a witness stirs up strong resistance as well.

²⁹ And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. Acts 9:29 Here we go again. These were the very ones that had Stephen stoned. Now Saul is supporting Stephen's message and telling them they made a terrible mistake. They really are hard-hearted, stiff-necked, uncircumcised in heart and ears, and always resisting the Holy Spirit, as Stephen declared (Acts 7:51). Well, they didn't accept the message any better from Saul. The response was the same. "Kill him!"

³⁰ And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Acts 9:30 Caesarea is northwest of Jerusalem on the ocean. If you recall, Philip ended up there (Acts 8:40). I would think these two evangelists met, though we have no record of it. From there, they wanted Saul to go to evangelize his home town of Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, now in south-central Turkey. It was a Greco-Roman city with its own academy. A lot of trade passed through Tarsus which made it a good location for evangelism. Scholars say he was there about three years before being drafted by Barnabas to help with the church in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

Commented [PW26]: Galatians 1:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.
¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Commented [PW27]: John 7:5 (ESV)

⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him.

Commented [PW28]: 1 Corinthians 15:7 (ESV)

⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Commented [PW29]: Matthew 26:64 (ESV)

⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Commented [PW30]: Acts 7:56 (ESV)

⁵⁶ And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Commented [PW31]: Acts 7:57 (ESV)

⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

Commented [PW32]: Galatians 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Commented [PW33]: Acts 7:51 (ESV)

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

Commented [PW34]: Acts 8:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Commented [PW35]: Acts 11:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,
²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

31a So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. Acts 9:31a The church began with a period of relative peace as thousands were converted and taught. Only the leadership was occasionally imprisoned and ordered to stop preaching, but nothing was done when they continued. Then Stephen was martyred and a period of persecution drove them to take the message to other areas. Since that persecution was headed up by Saul, his conversion and then departure from the area quieted things down again. We see these periods of persecution and then peace throughout church history. Peaceful times allow the church to be built up through discipleship and to gain local converts. The times of persecution scatter us to take the Gospel with us to new areas. Persecution also strengthens our resolve to stand for Jesus regardless of the consequences. We've seen that in the Middle East, and also seen the fruit that martyrdom has in touching many lives, just as it touched the life of Saul.

31b And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Acts 9:31b Luke gives us three important factors involved in church growth. The first was in the previous verse, **being built up**. We need to grow in our faith through fellowship, the study of God's Word, and prayer (Colossians 2:6-7). We need to **walk in the fear of the Lord**. That means to have a reverence for what God has told us. We don't flirt with compromise because we know that what God tells us is for our good. We know that as father, He disciplines us for our good when we disobey (Hebrews 12:7). To walk in the fear of the Lord means to live a holy life, refusing to compromise with sin (Proverbs 16:6).

The third factor was walking in **the comfort of the Holy Spirit**. We all fail to be Christ-like at times. Our hearts condemn us at times. But if we know the work of the cross is a completed work and that it covers all sin, the Holy Spirit gives us great comfort. God is greater than our emotions and disappointments in ourselves (1 John 3:19-20). When we hear the comforting words of God's love for us in prayer, we are strengthened in our love for Him. Whatever disappointments we face, the Holy Spirit can comfort our hearts and help us to be thankful and to rejoice in all things (Philippians 4:4). He shifts our eyes and hearts from the temporal to the eternal. With these three, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord, and comfort of the Holy Spirit, the church didn't just add new converts, it multiplied! May God help us to experience the same.

Questions:

- 1 Who is God most likely to call?
- 2 What did Saul preach?
- 3 What was the response? Why?
- 4 Why couldn't Saul be killed?
- 5 Why was the hatred toward Saul so vehement?
- 6 What did Saul likely do in Arabia?
- 7 Where are God's men and women made strong?
- 8 Why do you think Saul was so bold?
- 9 Who did Saul meet with in Jerusalem?
- 10 What three things caused the church to multiply?

Commented [PW36]: Colossians 2:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,

⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Commented [PW37]: Hebrews 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Commented [PW38]: Proverbs 16:6 (ESV)

⁶ By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.

Commented [PW39]: 1 John 3:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him;

²⁰ for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

Commented [PW40]: Philippians 4:4 (ESV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.