

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on December 6 2020:**

**"Transformation of the Early Church Series on
The Book of Acts – Saul's Conversion
(Acts 9:1-31) (Part 9)"**

Second Sunday of Advent – Peace

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman on Zoom shows us from the writing of Luke about the amazing account of the radical transformation of Saul from a persecutor into a believer and preacher of Jesus.]

Introduction:

- Just as light overcomes darkness, because light has a spiritual quality to it, peace overcomes stress, because peace comes from Almighty God.
- And no matter what distress we have in our lives, God's peace will overcome that and we can take comfort in that.
- We can take comfort in knowing that darkness is not in control and that stress is not in control.
- These advent concepts, which we are reflecting upon, are a reminder of the spiritual qualities that don't change.

- And today, we'll see that peace fell upon the entire church at the conversion of Saul.
- His conversion was a miraculous moment not only for himself, but also for the church.

Overview of today's message –Saul's Conversion (Acts 9:1-31):

1. Saul himself: pre-conversion in Jerusalem (verses 1-2)
2. Saul encountering Jesus: conversion on Damascus Road (verses 3-9)
3. Saul and Ananias: welcome into the church (verses 10-25)
 - a. Saul had a new reverence for God
 - b. Saul had a new relationship to the church
 - c. Saul had a new relationship to the world though witness
4. Saul through Barnabas: introduction to the apostles in Jerusalem (verses 26-31)
 - a. Saul's witness was Christ-centered
 - b. Saul's witness to Christ was Holy Spirit inspired
 - c. Saul's witness was courageous
 - d. Saul's witness was costly

Poetic Preview of today's message (Acts 9:1-31) – Pastor Craig's rhyming verses:

*Saul continued with murderous Threats,
Against the Way without Regrets.
As he traveled along the Damascus Road,
Encountered Jesus in flashing light and reduced to a Toad.*

*Jesus asked, Why do you persecute Me?
Saul's reply, Who are you Lord? Unable to Flee.
Three days blind without food or Drink,
Considerable time to pray and Think.*

*The Lord called to Ananias in a bold Vision,
To participate with Saul in a new Decision.
Ananias had concerns to say the Least,
Saul's reputation preceded, quite the Beast.*

*But the Lord reassured he was called to Proclaim,
To Gentiles and Israel and would suffer his Name.
So Ananias laid hands for recovery of Sight,
Scales fell from his eyes receiving the Spirit with Might.*

*Saul began to preach Jesus, the Son of God,
Amazing all who heard him when he spared the Rod.
So Saul grew in power preaching the Son of Man,
Jews now wanting to kill him became their Plan.*

*His followers assisted in sparing his Life,
On his return to Jerusalem Barnabas helped ease the Strife.
There he preached and debated with Hellenistic Jews,
Peace fell upon the church, much needed good News.*

Acts 9:1 (NIV), Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2) and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

- Luke has a desire to convey to the Greeks, Hellenistic Jews and to Israel that there is a new way taking place in the church.
- God uses the elevation of Barnabas, who with others was added to the apostles in the church, to help Paul in his reconnection with the apostles and the church.
- Saul we not welcomed into the church immediately.
- This would be a letter of approval from the High Priest to the leaders in the synagogues in Damascus for Saul's actions.
- Saul was extremely zealous for God, even though he was dramatically misguided.

3) As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5) "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

- "I am" was the title for the Lord God in the Old Testament.
- So, when Saul heard these words, it meant something dramatic to him.
- We have this notion of our free will and free moral agency.
- But, our free will or free moral agency doesn't prevent God from doing what He wants to do in our hearts, even though He doesn't force us to respond.

- Forced love is not love at all.
- When Jesus and the Holy Spirit reach out to someone, they come face-to-face with the love of Jesus, which is a good thing.

6) “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” 7) The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8) Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9) For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything.

- “Get up and go” is a directive from Jesus for Saul’s personal mission, which included seeking out Gentiles, their kings and Israel itself.
- We need to realize that what Jesus calls each of us to do include our participation.

10) In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. 11) The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12) In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

- Luke loves visions and speaks often of them in the book of Acts.
- Visions were a way God communicated with humanity.
- Now, if you knew Saul’s reputation, you, like Ananias, wouldn’t want to reach out to Saul.

13) “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14) And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” 15) But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16) I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

- God tells Ananias that it’s going to be OK when he interacts with Saul.

17) Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

- We need to remember that when Luke uses the phrase “Filled with the Holy Spirit”, meaning to become a prophet.
- When Ananias said “Brother Saul”, this was a term of endearment that helped Saul tremendously.
- Saul was welcomed into the church family.
- And it was quite an about face for Ananias, who initially had his doubts about Saul.
- This reminded Pastor Craig about the time 4 years ago when he and his wife Nan came out to Pasadena for an interview to see about becoming our new pastor.
- They were very warmly welcomed by church members through the spirit of brotherhood – the Holy Spirit, which they have never forgotten.

18) Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19) and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

- Now, other scriptures tell us along with church history that there was a 3 year period that Saul was being discipled in the new way both in Damascus and in the part of Arabia that was just north of Damascus.
- It's interesting that the disciples spent three years with Jesus being taught by Him.

20) At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21) All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22) Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

- Saul did a 180 degree turn when he began preaching about Jesus.
- And notice that Saul, who was the disciple to the Gentiles, first started preaching to his fellow Jews in the synagogues to show that the Jewish community was not being left out of the gospel message about Jesus.
- So, here we see a radical transformation that comes from a conversion, that comes from the Holy Spirit who gives us spiritual insight.

23) After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, 24) but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25) But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

- The tables have turned – Saul, the hunter, has now become the hunted.

26) When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27) But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

- Barnabas, elevated into the inner circle of church leadership, was the bridge to welcome Saul into the fellowship of the apostles.

28) So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29) He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. 30) When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 31) Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

- So, the church went through a radical period of anxiety, but now has come to time of peace.
- That's because Saul is no longer persecuting the church.
- He has left Jerusalem and is being taught personally by Jesus to learn about the Gospel more deeply in Damascus and Arabia.

- Now, despite the obstacles we face today, we can acknowledge that we are at peace, as well, because Jesus has made it so.

Poetic Summary of Acts 9:1-31 (Let's say this together):

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Communion (Laura Urista):

- **Luke 2:14** recorded that the angels, on the night of Jesus' birth, were praising God and saying, "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.**"
- Now, when we think of peace, we usually think of the absence of something such as –
- If only people wouldn't hate each other; if only we didn't have weapons of war, if only we could win against all the diseases, if only racism and poverty could be abolished; if only true justice would prevail.
- But, even if all of our prayers would be answered, the true peace of God wouldn't be the result.
- That's because, the peace of God isn't simply the absence of adversity or war or hostility.

- God brought true peace to the world, not by taking away or removing our problems, hatred or war, but by adding His presence – Emmanuel, God with us.
- The peace of God proceeds from God and not from men or the efforts of men.
- And God gives His peace to those who receive His Son, Jesus Christ.

- We can't generate the peace of God, but we can receive it, as we allow Christ to live in our lives and love through us.
- Jesus provides that peace that transcends all understanding.

- And, so now, we have that opportunity to literally receive a piece of His peace, as we take the bread and the wine, symbolizing His broken body and His blood that was shed for all mankind.
- Let's remember what Jesus said to His disciples when He shared communion with them, for the very last time:

John 14:27 (NIV), Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

- So, at this time, we'll take the bread, which symbolizes the body of Christ, broken for us – the piece of His peace – let's eat the bread together.
- And, we remember His shed blood, His ultimate sacrifice to bring us eternal and everlasting peace – His peace that lives within us.
- Let's symbolically drink His blood together.

Closing prayer: