



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 9:10-31

Acts

"Brother Saul"

TRANSCRIPT

We are in the book of Acts, and if you're visiting with us, we are in Acts chapter 9. We studied last week the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. This morning we continue with that, the results, the way God dealt with him following his conversion beginning with verse 10 and going through verse 31.

"Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, 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.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.' So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sights and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, 'Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?' But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ. When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket. When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our time of study together. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we do thank you for this time together. What a privilege it is to gather together with the saints with men and women young and old alike who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. We are bound together in a family. We have been brought together in your family, and we have great privileges, great blessings within this company. So we thank you for that, and thank you for one of the great privileges,

which is to possess the Holy Spirit. The moment of faith, you have placed Him within our hearts and He is our teacher, He is our guide, He is our protector, and we pray that that ministry would go on unfettered this morning, that our hearts would be open to His teaching ministry and that he would take the things that we have read and as we seek to understand them a little more deeply, a little more thoroughly, that He might instruct us and build us up in the faith and prepare us for a week of service for you.

You've called us, Lord, to be your servants. You have called us to be witnesses throughout the world wherever we go, and so we pray that wherever we are this week that we would be that, and that we would witness well for Jesus Christ, and that our time together this morning would be helpful to that end. It is a blessing to be here, to read together your Word, to study it, and to be nourished on that Scripture, that inerrant Word of God, and so we pray your blessing on us.

We consider it also a great privilege, an equally great privilege to be able to approach the throne of grace as we do. That is part of the blessings that we have as children, sons of God, that we can come directly into your presence. The world cannot do that. It may have access to places of great authority, high places. There is no place like that to which we have access, the throne of God. SO we count it a great privilege to go to that throne at this moment and intercede for ourselves and for those who have sought our prayers. There is a long list, Father, of those who are sick and those who are in need of your help. We pray that it would be extended to them. We know, Father, that you will be glorified in your saints. We may not understand why things happen, but you will be glorified in your people, and that is rich comfort for all of us.

Well, may we gain that comfort this morning as we study and as we sing our hymn together. May it be good preparation for our hearts. Open them to your truth. May we worship well together and study well together and learn well together this morning and be built up in the

faith, and go forth from this place effective servants of yours. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

In Roman times and in Roman families, the most important day in a boy's life occurred when he reached manhood. There was a ceremony in which he took off the robe of his youth, a short toga, and he put on the long, white robe of adulthood, signifying his new status in the family. From that day on, he was accepted as a man. He took his place in the family councils and he enjoyed all the freedoms and privileges of the family. Now, I mention that because something similar occurs with a child of God. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, immediate and permanent changes occur. First, the believer is justified, fully forgiven and declared righteous by God, accepted as righteous in His sight. It is as though we have been clothed with the white robe of righteousness. At that same moment, that person is adopted by God, made a full member of His family.

The shorter catechism defines spiritual adoption as an act of God's free grace whereby we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. That is true of every believer in Jesus Christ, even one like Saul of Tarsus, a former member of the Jewish councils and persecutor of the church, even true of him. There are no step-children in God's family, no second class citizens. When Saul was saved and forgiven on the Damascus Road, he became a full member in God's household and God cared for him just as a father cares for his child. He guarded him. He guided him, and in various ways, He promoted Saul's maturity and Saul's development in order to prepare him for his great mission as the apostle to the Gentiles. Having adopted Saul, the first thing the Lord did was introduce him to his new family. God does not intend for us to live the Christian life alone.

As the catechism says, we have been received into the number, received into the number of the saints. We are members of a wide circle of brothers and sisters, and we need one another. Saul would learn that because Jesus now begins to open doors into that circle so

that Saul could fellowship with those he had once persecuted. He has been sitting in the dark in a house in Damascus for three days, blind from the light of Christ, unable to eat, unable to drink, but he was praying. Toward the end of the three days, Saul had a vision of a man coming to him. Somewhere else in the city was another man, Ananias, and he too had a vision in which the Lord spoke to him and called him by name. "Ananias," He said. Ananias answered, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord told him to get up and go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for Saul of Tarsus, for he is praying 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.

Ananias is one of the little-known figures of the New Testament. He has been described as one of the forgotten heroes of the Christian church. We do know a little bit more about him from chapter 22 where Paul describes him as a devout man with a good reputation among the Jews of Damascus. We know nothing more than that, but we can sense from Paul's description of him that Ananias was special to the apostle. He was his first Christian friend though he was a reluctant friend at first. Ananias knew who Saul was. His reputation had preceded him, and the Lord's instruction to find him and lay his hands on him didn't seem like a very good idea to Ananias. So he told the Lord, "I know who this man is. He has done a lot of harm to the saints in Jerusalem, and he has come here with the authority of the high priest to arrest all of the believers."

We sometimes talk to the Lord like that, don't we? When we pray, we sometimes feel that we have a need to remind the Lord of all of the details of our burden as though the Lord doesn't know something about us or about the particular need that we have. Ananias does that here. He informs the Lord all about Saul, that he was a dangerous man, that he was the grand inquisitor of the Sanhedrin, like the Lord needed some kind of instruction along these lines. The Lord doesn't correct him. He doesn't say, "Ananias, have you forgotten I'm omniscient? I know all things. Do you really think I've overlooked something about

this man? Do you really think it's possible that I might have made a mistake?" He doesn't do that. He simply overrules the objection and tells Ananias, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

Jesus knew Saul's past. Nothing is hidden from Him. Nothing takes Him by surprise. He knows our past. He knows our future as well just as clearly as He knows the past, just as clearly as if it had already happened. He knows it because He's planned it all, and He tells Ananias something about Saul's future. He tells him that it will be a hard future. It will be a hard life. This man who had made the saints suffer would himself suffer a great deal for Christ's name, which reminds us that while the Christian life is a great life and while Christian service is the greatest of privileges, it is not without hardship.

The Lord always provides for His people. The Lord takes absolute care of us. We never need to fear, but He brings things into our lives that are oftentimes very uncomfortable. He brings hardship into our lives. We know that from various texts of Scripture. Perhaps the fundamental text of all Scriptures that informs of us that is Romans 8:28 that, "All things work together for good." He causes them to work together for good, "To those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." That's a great comfort, but the reality is hardship does come into our life. That is part of the Christian life. That is a great part of the Christian service, and it would be a particular part of Paul's life as he sought to serve the Lord.

The Lord tells Ananias of this, of what Saul's life would be like as he went out on his mission to the Gentiles as well as the Jews throughout the world. So having informed him of this, we read in verse 17 that, "Ananias departed and entered the house." He had his concerns, but he also had enough knowledge of the Lord to know that He can be trusted in every situation and wherever he is sent. He went with the reassurance that the man that he would visit would be praying.

That is a clear indication that Saul is a new creature and evidence of true conversion.

Prayer has been called the breath of heavenly life. This was one of Saul's first spiritual breaths. It wasn't the first time that this man had prayed. As Pharisee, he had daily regimen of prayer. Pharisees were notorious for praying in the temple and in the synagogues and even on the street corners. They made a public display of their piety and their prayer. Saul had prayed every day of his life, at least since his bar mitzvah, but they were prayers of a self-righteous man. These were the prayers of a repentant man who spoke to the Father from a changed heart and came to Him as a believer in Jesus Christ, spoke to Him on that basis.

In fact, we see in this the miracle of grace. We see in this the change from one like that, self-righteous Pharisee in the temple who prayed and thanked God that he was not like that publican, like that tax gatherer, and now we see this Pharisee praying just like that tax collector, one who was thankful that God had been merciful to him, a sinner. So this was the first time that Saul had truly prayed, and God said it was a genuine prayer, a real evidence that the miracle of grace had occurred in Saul's life. With that confidence, Ananias entered the house of Judas went directly to Saul, laid his hand on him and said, "Brother Saul." Those were the first words that Paul heard from another Christian, "Brother." They were words of acceptance, and they must have moved him deeply. The great enemy of the church, the man who had caused so much sorrow and bloodshed was welcomed as a brother and received into the family of God.

The grace of God and the blood of Christ not only removes our sins; it removes bitterness and vengeance and it makes brothers out of former enemies. That is the power of the cross. It is not only vertical with God. It is first and foremost that, but it is also horizontal. It touches all kinds of people and it brings them together, and we see that here in this house on the street called Straight. Ananias then spoke to Saul about Jesus, who had appeared to him on the Damascus Road

about restoring his sight and about being filled with the Holy Spirit. We read in verse 18 that, "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized."

He may have left the house. We don't know where they were baptized, but I can imagine that they went out and went to one of the great rivers that flows through Damascus, the Abana or the Pharpar River. There Saul was baptized, but what is significant about his baptism is not where he was baptized, but when it occurred. It happened after he was addressed as Brother Saul. So it would seem from that that baptism is not necessary for salvation. He was already a brother. He was already forgiven before he ever went under the water of baptism. Baptism isn't necessary for salvation. It does not save us. It does not wash away our sins. It does not make us clean before God. It is not that last and final and crucial step to becoming a Christian. We are saved. We are justified. We are adopted. We are sanctified in Jesus Christ at the moment of faith, but having said that, baptism is necessary. It is necessary as a public confession of faith in Christ and Saul made that confession with a sense of urgency. He didn't wait. Scales fall off and they go out and they are baptized. It happens immediately. Only after that do we read that he took food and was strengthened.

There is nothing in the life of Saul, there's nothing in the life of Paul that was casual. He was not casual about his walk with the Lord. He was not casual about the spiritual life in any way at all. He put obedience to the Lord before everything else, before his physical concerns. It's only after he has done that, only after the baptism that he thinks about his material, his physical strength. Now, with his introduction to Ananias and his baptism, the barriers that had separated him from the church were broken down. We read in verse 19 that, "For several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus."

It must have been exciting fellowship as he recounted for them the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus Road and they marveled

over God's trophy to grace. He must have marveled at how completely they accepted him as one of them and how they encouraged him, and now they supported him. Saul now had new friends and the circle of his friendship would only grow wider, which is an example of what God does for His people. One of the obstacles that sometimes stands in the way of people believing the gospel, of people trusting in Jesus Christ is the concern that when they do that, they will lose their friends and be cut off from their family. That does happen, and the Lord made that clear. That's why He said that we must, "Count the cost of discipleship." We must count the cost of following Him.

At one point, Peter began to wonder about that cost. It struck him that perhaps it was a bit too high. In Matthew 19, he wanted to know what they were going to get out of this life of following Christ. "We've left everything," he said. "What will there be for us?" The Lord's answer is typically gracious and typically glorious. What will you get? Well, Peter, you will get far more than you gave up. "Everyone who left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake will receive many times as much and will inherit eternal life."

Saul had eternal life. He knew that. He rejoiced in the grace of God making him a new creature in Christ and the fellowship he had with the Lord, but as he would lose old friends, he would find that he had many more new friends. He had received many times as much because he had entered into a fellowship that literally goes to the ends of the earth and to the ends of time. Now that's true of every one of us who have believed in Jesus Christ. You have received and you will receive many times as much as you have given up. In fact, it's even foolish to speak of what we have given up. Well, what have we given up? Harmful relationships? Filthy rags for a new family, for the robes of righteousness of Jesus Christ. You're a member of God's family if you're a believer in Jesus Christ. You have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. We can never give up more for Christ than we receive from Him. God is no man's debtor.

Now, Saul knew that. He knew who the debtor was. He knew well that he owed everything to God's grace in Jesus Christ, and he responded. He responded to that with gratitude, and He responded to that with effort. Verse 20 states that, "Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues saying, 'He is the Son of God.'" He had been sent to the synagogues of Damascus on the authority of the high priest to root out and deport in chains all who believed in Jesus Christ. Instead, he entered the synagogues proclaiming Christ. Luke writes that the people there were amazed, and no wonder, it was an astonishing change. It was a miraculous change. Saul had clearly cast his lot with the church. His conversion was genuine. That seems to be the main theme that Luke is tracing out in this passage on Saul and his conversion and all that followed. This conversion was genuine, and he has made a public record of it. There was no wavering on his part. There was no going back. He stands up in the synagogues. He identifies with the church of Jesus Christ, and he proclaims Him to be the Son of God.

At some point, perhaps after verse 21 or verse 22, scholars differ on this, but at some point, Saul left Damascus, and he went out into Arabia. He states that in Galatians 1:17, one of the biographical sections that Paul gives us. He writes, "I went away to Arabia and returned once more to Damascus." Arabia in Paul's day was the Nabataean Kingdom, which extended east of Damascus and included both the Arabian and the Sinai Peninsulas to the south, so it was a vast area. Some think that he went out on a preaching mission to proclaim Christ to the Arabs. There's good reason to believe that that's true, while others feel that he went there to find solitude in the desert on a spiritual retreat much like Elijah had done when he went down to Mount Horeb in the Sinai. There has was able to commune with God without distraction and reflect on the great change that had taken place in his life and on what it all meant and what his life would be like, his new life in Christ.

We don't know why he went out. We're not told why he went out. Whatever the reason for his trip into Arabia, he returned to Damascus and he resumed preaching in the synagogues. The content of his message is given in verses 20 and 22. He preached that Jesus is the Son of God and that Jesus is the Christ. Now, Saul had much more to learn and he would learn much more from Christ, but these two facts, he knew for certain. They were facts that are essential in the preaching of the gospel, facts that are essential for the Christian faith. In fact, one cannot enter into the Christian life, one cannot be a Christian without believing these facts that he preaches that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is the Son of God. He is that. Jesus is, first of all, God.

He had revealed Himself to Saul from heaven. Saul knew that He was and is God. He addressed Him as that when He first speaks to Saul. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" He addresses Him as Lord. "Who are you, Lord?" So he confessed Him as Lord, as God from the beginning because the light that shone around him and shone into his eyes physically also shown into his heart enabling Saul to understand the unique person of Christ, that He is both God and man. Salvation is not possible otherwise. We must have a divine Savior. He had to become a man in order to die and be punished for our sins in our place as our substitute, but because He died as God, His death was of infinite value, sufficient for the salvation of the world, able to save all it was intended for, which it did. It accomplished salvation. He saved His people from their sins on Calvary.

If Jesus were just a man, His death would not have accomplished that. It would not have accomplished any kind of salvation. In fact, if He were just a man, then He would have been a sinful man, and His death would have been of no value, not even to Himself. Much more than that, infinitely more than that, He is the God-man and Saul went into the synagogues of Damascus preaching that, preaching a divine Savior, preaching that Jesus is the Son of God, the one we know to be the second person of the Trinity, and he proclaimed Him to be the Messiah. We've said Jesus is the Christ, which means Jesus is the

Messiah. Christ and Messiah both mean anointed one. He is Israel's King and the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. He argued that cogently in the synagogues and no doubt, he met the objection that had been a stumbling block for him, and that is the cross. How could Jesus be the Messiah when He had died on a cross? The Messiah is a king. The Messiah is a deliverer. He is a conqueror. He is not one who is conquered. Certainly, Jesus Christ was conquered. He was nailed to a Roman gibbet. He was put to public shame. "That's not our Messiah," they would say.

So Saul must have answered that objection by showing the necessity of Christ's death before His reign, the need of the cross before the crown, the necessity of it because before He could have a kingdom of righteousness, He must have righteous subjects. He must have righteous people to inherit it, people whose sins have been paid for, people who have been forgiven and are right with God. And to prove that Christ did this and that He is the only one who was qualified to do so, that He fit the standard of the prophetic Scriptures, I suppose he turned to a passage like Isaiah 35:5-6, which prophesied God's coming and doing miracles, opening the eyes of the blind, making the deaf to hear and the lame to leap. He would have shown how Christ fulfilled this and other passages with the miracles that He had done, the miracles of healing.

He probably read Isaiah 52 and 53, and showed how Christ fulfilled them with His crucifixion or Psalm 16, how He fulfilled it in His resurrection. Verse 22 states that he was proving that this Jesus is the Christ and literally that can be translated, that word "proving" can be translated "placing together." He was placing together that Jesus is the Christ. The idea of that word "proving" or "placing" is that of placing Old Testament prophecies alongside their fulfillments in the Lord's life and in His ministry. In that way, proving that Jesus is the one to whom the Scriptures had pointed. He is the fulfillment of all those great prophecies of the Messiah.

Saul was well-equipped to do this, well-equipped from his training as a rabbi. He knew the Scriptures well. He knew the way the Jews thought, and he was very effective. Luke writes in verse 22 that, "He was increasing in strength and confounding the Jews." So, it wasn't long before their amazement turned into anger, and they conspired to kill him. Saul's stand for Christ lost him a lot of friends in Damascus. These people who were looking forward to the arrival of this rabbi from Jerusalem with all this authority who had been so effective in routing out the Christians in Jerusalem were utterly disappointed and angry with the change that had occurred.

So he had lost a number of followers, a number of friends in Damascus, but it was also a time in which he gained new friends and better friends because the plot was discovered, and they helped him to escape. In fact, they are called his disciples, which suggests that these are some of the people who came to faith while Paul was there in Damascus preaching. But one of them evidently had a home on the wall of the city, and from the window Saul was lowered down in a basket outside of the wall and was able to elude the assassins.

When Winston Churchill was a young man, he worked for *Time* as a reporter, correspondent, and he covered the Boer war in South Africa. At one point, he was captured. He was put in a P.O.W. camp far behind the enemy lines, but he managed to escape. With the help of sympathizers, he was hidden in a train under bales of wool and smuggled across miles of hostile territory. For him, it was a great adventure. In fact, it was given international coverage. When he arrived at safety, he received a hero's welcome. Bands played and he was carried on people's shoulders and he gave a speech.

For Paul it was completely different. His escape from Damascus was no great adventure. It was nothing he took pride in at all. In fact, his escape in a fish basket was humiliating. He recounts it in 2 Corinthians 11 as an example of his weakness and his frailty. He came to Damascus as a hunter of saints, an arrogant Pharisee with great authority. He left the city hunted and humbled, but it was all part of

God's work in his life to reduce his pride, to make him know his weakness. It was training, the kind of training that a father gives his son, and the Lord was doing that. He was dealing with His son, His child as a Father and teaching Paul his dependence on the Lord, his dependence on the Lord's people for the work that he was being given to do.

It was the beginning of the sufferings that Jesus said Paul would have, and he would have many; many rejections and many difficulties that he would not escape. He would suffer stonings, beatings, imprisonments in his long service for Christ. Once safely out of Damascus, he suffered further hardship. He made his way to Jerusalem. This was now three years after he had left there. He tells us that in Galatians 1:18, but when he arrived, he found himself in a very lonely place. His old colleagues knew about his defection from Judaism, and they wanted to have nothing to do with him. They despised him.

The believers who had suffered so much from him were suspicious, and they didn't want to associate with him. They didn't believe his conversion was genuine. They were afraid it was just a scheme to gain their confidence in order to more effectively destroy them, which is understandable after they had suffered what they had. But while it's understandable, it was not very insightful. They should have known that God can save the chief of sinners. His arm is not too short to save those who are far off. His grace is great. In fact, it had saved them and saved those sinners in Jerusalem, and it had saved Saul, but the Christians in Jerusalem didn't realize it. They were suspicious. They were afraid of him and so Saul was alone in the city.

It must have been a hard time for him, all alone, feeling the hostility of both sides caught in between, not really having a place, great fear about this man who had been such a hostile persecutor of the people of God. But there was one man there in the city who was not afraid of Saul, and that was Barnabas. We met him back in chapter 4. He was a Levite from Cypress. He was a generous man, a helpful man,

and he had earned the nickname "Barnabas" which means "son of encouragement." He was a great encouragement to Saul. We read in verse 27, "But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus."

So, again, Saul was received into the number, welcome into God's family because, again, God had opened a door for him and He had removed a barrier to fellowship. Now, He didn't do it in the same way that He had done in Damascus. He didn't appear to Barnabas in a vision as He had done with Ananias. He simply moved the heart of Barnabas to act according to the generous nature, the helpful nature that was characteristic of his heart, but still it was God's doing. He works in different ways. What it shows is that He does not call us out of one circle of friends to leave us friendless. At each step, Paul found his circle of friendship growing wider and wider with the very best kind of friends.

In Galatians 1, he gives us more details that Luke does not give us. He states there that he met Peter and he stayed with him 15 days. He didn't meet any of the other apostles, except James the Lord's brother. He must have had great fellowship with those men. We'd like to know what they talked about. We're not told. We do know that Paul told them about his life, about his meeting of the Lord on the Damascus Road. It was a meeting of equals, we know that, but no doubt one thing they talked about, one subject that Paul could not hear enough about was that of our Lord's life and ministry and the kind of person He was, things that He had said, the things that He had taught, the miracles He had performed, all about His crucifixion and His resurrection. Peter surely gave him a first-hand account of all of this and Saul must have been very interested in everything that he and James told him.

It must have been an exhilarating time for him and for them alike, but Saul's time in Jerusalem was not spent in pleasant fellowship only. Saul was a prodigious worker. We see that all through Paul's

life, an industrious, diligent worker. He never wasted time, and we read in verses 28 and 29 that, "He was moving freely in the city and preaching Christ boldly, talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews."

So with Saul's return to Jerusalem, things come full circle. He came doing what had been done by Stephen. He carries on where Stephen had left off, debating the same Hellenistic Jews who he had helped to stone Stephen. In their eyes, he was worse than Stephen. He was a traitor to the cause, and they attempted to kill him, but the plot was again uncovered and again the brethren came to his aid. That's how they're described, the brethren. So here we begin with this address to Saul as Brother Saul. They receive him as a brother, and now they are his brothers. They are in this one great family of God, and they took care of him. We read in verse 30 that, "They brought him down to Caesarea," which was the great port of Israel and they sent him away to Tarsus, back to his hometown.

With that, the story of Saul's conversion in Acts 9 ends, and ends very differently from the way it began. The chapter opens with Saul leaving Jerusalem to persecute Christians. The story closes with Saul fleeing Jerusalem as a persecuted Christian. God had completely turned his life around, made him a new creature. What followed were silent years in Paul's life. Nearly ten years would pass before Paul would begin his great missionary activity. In fact, during this time, he became almost a forgotten man. He wrote in Galatians 1:22 that after going back to Salacia where Tarsus is located, he writes, "I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea." They only heard occasional reports about him that the one who had persecuted the church was now preaching Christ; but largely Paul was a forgotten man. They were silent years, but they were not idle years. He wasn't on the shelf. They were years of preparation, a time when he learned about life in the local church as he ministered in it. They were years of development. Saul was a young believer. Every believer begins as a spiritual babe. Every believer must grow in the faith. So these silent years were a time for him to get his thinking straight, to grow in

maturity as God prepared him for his great mission, that to which He had called him.

Luke then closes out this section with verse 31, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace; being built up and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." That was the gift that God gave to the church. It had suffered much. It has gone through strong spiritual warfare, and now He has given it rest from the conflict in order to regain its strength. It was only a temporary lull in the storm. Church is never fully at peace as long as it's in the world, and as long as it's shining as a light it's going to invite the hostility of the world. That would happen again, but this was God's given time for the people to regroup, so to speak, to rest, to study, to pray and to grow.

God does that for us. He takes good care of us because at the moment of faith we are not only justified, but on the basis of that righteous standing, we are also adopted into His family. As His sons, we have a right to all of the privileges of the sons of God. He deals with us as a loving Father, as a powerful Father. We are secure in Him. We are in a safe place in Him, and we have many blessings. We need to realize that and we need to live like the sons that we are. Are you doing that? What are you doing with the peace that God has given you? Perhaps He's given you a life in which things are not in such turmoil and a great deal of peace and a great deal of rest. Are you taking the opportunity to be built up in the faith? Are you using this as a time to pray, or are you like Saul was in that house in Damascus, praying? Are you studying? Are you developing as a man or a woman of God? That's what we need to be doing. We need to be a people who are praying and studying and strengthening one another and doing the work of the Gospel. It's the task that God's given us to do, and He watches over us and guides us and protects us just as He did Saul.

He does that as much for us as He did for Him. He is not less involved with us than He was involved with Saul. You look at his life. You study what the Lord did. He is just as much involved in your life,

and so we should live with confidence and we should be active as that man was. But then I ask you the question, do you know that you're in God's family, that you have been received into the company of the saints, that you have been adopted by Him? Do you know that? Well, you do if you have believed in Jesus Christ because all who trust in Him, all who look to Him are saved at that very moment and adopted into His family. But if you have not trusted in Jesus Christ, you're still in your sins, but He is the one who died for sinners. He bore the penalty of their sins in their place and all who believe in Him are forgiven. They are adopted, and they are received into the number of the saints.

If you have not believed in Jesus Christ, look to Him, trust in Him, receive the forgiveness of sins. Enter into the great family of God, which you can never be cast out. Rejoice in that and live for Him. May God help you to do that and help all of us to rejoice in the great blessings, the great privileges that are ours as believers in Jesus Christ. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank you for what we have in your Son, and we thank you for the reason that we have it. It is not because of anything in us. There is not one man, woman, or child who has ever entered the family of God because of some great work they did, whether it be baptism or all kinds of works of righteousness or piety, whatever that may be. All of our righteousness is as Isaiah tells us are as filthy rags. The moment of faith, you strip those rags from us, you clothed us with new garments, the white garments of your Son's righteousness. We stand before you fully accepted and as sons with all of the rights of the sons of God. We thank you for that, Father. What a blessing we have. May we –