

**Anyone**  
*Acts 9:1-31; June 3, 2018*

Last week Tanner preached through Acts 8 about the God who is over our streets. He started off by asking us all to fill out these little cards that say, “Who is my neighbor?” If you have that card with you, pull it back out. If you haven’t filled one out yet, go ahead and start filling yours out (this is for you; we won’t be collecting these).

Today we’re going to be in Acts 9 and we’re see how **God can save anyone on our streets**. Before we jump into chapter 9, let’s briefly take a look back.

- **Read Acts 1:8:** this is the theme verse for the entire book of Acts: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth.
- **Read Acts 8:1-4:**
  - Saul approved of Stephen’s execution and he continued “ravaging” the church (8:1, 3)
    - Who are the Saul’s in your neighborhood?
    - Who are the people whom you’ve almost completely written off as too far from God?
    - Who have you stopped praying for?
    - Who have you never even prayed for because of their distance from God?
  - As a result of this persecution, disciples were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samara and preached the gospel (8:1, 4). EXCEPT THE APOSTLES
    - The gospel is proclaimed in Samaria (Simon the Magician; Acts 8:4-25)
    - The gospel is proclaimed to an Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40)
    - The stage is set for the gospel to spread to the “ends of the earth.”

**Read Acts 9:1-2: Context**

- Nothing has changed with Saul. In fact, he’s now pursuing Christians (“any belonging to the Way,” the early name for Christians; cf. 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) all the way to Damascus.
- Damascus was 135 miles north-northeast of Jerusalem, roughly a six-day tourney. This is the first city outside of Israel where it is noted there were Christians.
- Saul was headed there to block the advancement of the gospel.

**Read Acts 9:3-9: Saul’s Encounter with Jesus**

- 9:4: We see clearly here that to persecute the church is to persecute Jesus.
- 9:7 is a parenthetical remark which serves to prove that this event wasn’t a matter of Saul’s imagination but was in fact an objective event, though they didn’t see Jesus or hear the precise message. They were witnesses that something happened.
- 9:8-9: Saul’s encounter with Jesus was so great that not only could he not see, he didn’t eat or drink for three days. Though fasting isn’t mentioned, along with the mention of Saul praying in 9:11, Saul was no doubt pausing and reflecting on what he had just seen, the strength of God’s glory in Jesus.

### **Read Acts 9:10-16: Ananias' Encounter with Jesus**

- 9:10: Ananias' response of "Here am I" is reminiscent of key OT figures: Abraham (Gen. 22:1, 11), Jacob (Gen. 31:11; 26:2), Moses (Ex. 3:11), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:4-8), and Isaiah (Isa. 6:8).
- 9:11: Note the detail of this vision from the Lord which includes the street name, Judas' house and that Saul would be praying.
  - As a side note, the street called "Straight" still exists today and is one of the world's oldest continually occupied streets.
- 9:15: John Polhill observes how this verse is programmatic for the rest of Acts. "Chapters 13-28 depict Paul's mission in which he indeed witnessed before Gentiles, the Jewish king Agrippa, and regularly in the synagogues to the sons of Israel."
- 9:16: Indeed, Paul does suffer much for Jesus, eventually dying a martyr's death.

### **Read Acts 9:17-19a: Ananias' Interaction with Saul**

- 9:17: There are two things that are really significant here:
  - First, Ananias is the first non-apostle to lay hands on someone and be a mediator of the Spirit of God. Darrell Bock notes this significance, "The church's ministry is expanding in ways that mean non-apostles will do important work"
  - Second, this is the first time Luke has indicated the Spirit's coming outside of Israel. This foreshadows the work that Saul will do in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- 9:18: The physical event of "scales" falling from his eyes symbolizes that his spiritual blindness has been overcome.
  - Sidebar: Saul's name was not changed to Paul at his conversion. In fact, he isn't called Paul until Acts 13 when he launches out on his first missionary journey. It seems he had two names: Saul (Jewish) and Paul (Roman).
- 9:18: Saul was baptized after his conversion like the many other examples we've seen in Acts.

### **The Point: God can save anyone on your street!**

I know this because this passage teaches us that...

#### **1. God is Sovereign and Powerful.**

- God is Sovereign (Tanner introduced this concept last week).
  - Look at the text: God was pursuing Saul
    - Saul's encounter with Jesus (3-9)
    - Ananias' vision from the Lord (10-15)
    - Saul's vision of Ananias (13).
  - Your neighbor lives down the street because God put them there.
  - It's no accident the people that you know and the people you run in to.
  - When you get this, it transforms the way you pray for your day and the way you

view perceived “interruptions” in your life. God has been working in people’s lives way before we even step into the picture.

- God is Powerful
  - Look at the text:
    - God blinded Saul and then gave him real sight (9, 18)
    - Just like Saul, unbelievers are blind. In Ephesians, Paul says they are dead (cf. 2:1).
    - Rico Tice, in his book on evangelism, says, “Neither you nor I are spiritual eye surgeons. Nothin you and I do or say can give spiritual sight.” To that I would add, neither are we spiritual heart surgeons. There’s nothing we can do to raise the dead.
  - Parallel text: 2 Cor. 4:3-6
    - “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:3-6 ESV)
    - God is the one who turns the lights on and opens blind eyes.
    - Tice continues, “The power of God’s Spirit recreated your heart so that you could see who Jesus is. It took the power necessary to make the stars to do that. And God has that power.”
- Apply these truths to those neighbors who seem the furthest from Jesus:
  - Is God sovereign over them? Yes.
  - Is God powerful enough to save them? The same God who spoke into the darkness in the beginning and said, “Let there be light and there was light.” Do you think that God can say to the darkened heart and blinded eyes of your neighbor, “Let there be light and the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ goes on full display?” Yes.
  - Tice concludes, “The Spirit’s power should give us the confidence to cross the office or the street or the front room and tell someone about Jesus....The gospel is so powerful because it is the power of God to open blind eyes and bring faith” (Rico Tice).

## **2. Jesus is Alive and Glorious.**

- How do you explain Saul going from the persecutor to the persecuted? From Saul the pursuer to the one being pursued?
- He saw the full glory of the resurrected Jesus.
  - A light from heaven shone around him (3)
    - The appearance of Jesus was so bright that it lit up all that Saul saw.
    - “Saul, although he does not yet realize it, is seeing the full glory of the

- risen Jesus” (Bock).
- He fell to the ground (4)
  - “Who are you, Lord? (5)
    - “His use of ‘Lord’ in his question here is not a christological confession but indicates his high respect for the heavenly one in the vision, whose identity he does not yet know” (Darrell Bock).
  - “I am Jesus” (5)
    - “Imagine how those words must have impacted the zealous persecutor. He had sought to stamp out the Christians for their proclamation of a *dead* Messiah. How it must have cut Paul to the quick” (John Polhill).
  - He was blinded and didn’t eat or drink for three days (8-9)
  - One commentator, Joseph Fitzmeyer notes the irony: “though Saul is now blind, he sees.”
- Parallel texts:
    - “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1 ESV)
    - “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me” (Galatians 1:15-16 ESV)
    - “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (1 Corinthians 15:8 ESV)
      - In this chapter, Paul argues that the resurrection changes everything.
  - Apologetic Sidebar: Tim Keller, in his book, *The Reason for God*, says “It is not enough for the skeptic, then, to simply dismiss the Christian teaching about the resurrection of Jesus by saying, ‘It just couldn’t have happened.’ He or she must face and answer all these historical questions:
    - Why did Christianity emerge so rapidly, with such power?
    - No other band of messianic followers in that era concluded their leader was raised from the dead—why did this group do so?
    - No group of Jews ever worshipped a human being as God. What led them to do it?
    - Jews did not believe in divine men or individual resurrections. What changed their worldview virtually overnight?
    - How do you account for the hundreds of eyewitnesses to the resurrection who lived on for decades and publicly maintained their testimony, eventually giving their lives for their belief?”
  - The more glorious Jesus become to you (the more you see him clearly for who he is through his Word and his work in and through you), the more you will long for his glory to spread to the ends of the earth.
    - Reads Acts 9:19b-30: Saul immediately preaching the gospel
      - Saul Preaching in Damascus (19b-25)
        - 20: He first preaches in the very place that he originally intended to arrest Christians.
        - 22: He became stronger in his ability to preach Jesus.

- 23-25: Even more ironic, as Bock notes, is that he had to escape to avoid persecution himself.
- Saul Preaching in Jerusalem (26-30)
- Read Paul's personal account in Acts 26:19-18
- Apply these truths to those neighbors who seem the furthest from Jesus:
  - The more glorious Jesus becomes to you the more you will long for him to be adored even in those neighbors who are far from Jesus.
  - “We talk about Christ: *God* opens blind eyes. It is my job, and your job, to tell someone about Jesus—who he is, why he came and what it means. It is not our job to make someone respond. It’s God who opens blind eyes. You communicate the message—and then you pray that he would do the miracle” (Tice).

### 3. The Spirit is Actively Empowering the Church’s Growth

- Acts 9:31 is another summary text in Acts (cf. 2:41-47; 32-37; 5:12-16; 6:7).
- While “church” frequently in Acts refers to individual churches, here it is used in the singular to refer to the one church spread across three regions. Now the church has spread out beyond Jerusalem (cf. Acts 6:7) to include all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria (cf. Acts 1:8).
- Even in spite of all of the persecution that is happening, the church is multiplying and growing. This is no doubt the work of the Spirit empowering believers to be bold in proclaiming Jesus and leading others to saving faith in Christ.
- This same Spirit is at work today in you on your street.

#### Conclusion:

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he describes his conversion this way:

- “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.” (1 Timothy 1:15 ESV)
- If God can save Paul, the foremost of sinners, he can save anyone.
- This truth about Jesus is powerful enough to get you out of bed each day. Christ came into the world to save sinners. That mission is not yet complete. Church, we still have a task and a mission to be about.
- God is sovereign over this mission. It’s going to happen. But it’s going to happen through normal people like you and I as we make much of Jesus and share him with those on our streets and then take his name to the streets among the nations.
- Who is God prompting you to share Jesus with?
  - God sent Ananias to Saul
- Where is God sending you to share Jesus?
  - Jesus changed Saul’s mission (v. 6, 15) and he can change yours.
  - - God sent Saul to the Jews first, then the Gentiles.
- Will you respond today in eagerness to obey like Ananias did? “Lord, Here I am.”