

Series: How Jesus Acts through Us Today; Sermon: A Persecuted People and a Powerful God; delivered by Josh Moody, senior pastor, on June 14, 2020

Bible text explored: Acts 9:1–19

¹But 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. [ESV]

Review and application:

1. Who (*verses 1-2*) were the “heretics” that Saul vocally opposed?
Saul obtained arrest warrants for any in Damascus synagogues aligned with the Way. What would they be charged with, and what must have motivated the intensity of Saul’s campaign?
2. That was back then. But which century has been marked by more martyrdoms of believers worldwide than any other?
What signs are there that “exclusivity,” claimed by followers of the Way in our own society, may soon be judged illegal discrimination?
3. What order of power (*verses 3-9*) would it take to produce a bitter opponent’s about-face? (See *Luke 1:37*.)
Pastor Moody called the way Saul was utterly changed to Paul “a template for every real conversion.” How did Paul look back on his regeneration? (See *1 Corinthians 15:8-10a*.)
4. How (*verses 10-14*) can God’s power also be seen working through any believer ready to say, “Here I am, Lord”?

5. What power (*verses 15-17*) must a deliverer of God's message draw on . . .
 - . . . in accepting his call?
 - . . . in enduring the suffering included?
 - . . . in Spirit-inspired boldness?
6. Return to Jesus' self-disclosure to Saul (*verse 4*). What is the only way Jesus' persecutors may be saved? (See *1 Peter 2:24*.)

But how can *our* actions effectively contribute to the "defeat" of Jesus' persecutors?

Consider how, in Victor Hugo's Les Miserables, Jean Valjean, who has stolen the silverware of Bishop Myriel, is caught by the police and brought back to the bishop. Instead of confirming his theft, the bishop says Jean Valjean failed to take the candlesticks which he also meant for him to have. After the baffled police depart, he tells Jean Valjean, "My brother, with this silver I have bought your soul for God."