**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Resurrection Series**

Acts of the Holy Spirit: Acts 9:1-28 – Paul. . .Who Are You Lord?

October 27th, In the Year of Our Lord 2024

Pastor Matthew Diehl

(All Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.)

Sermon Audio and Texts: roundtopchurch.org / Under Member’s tab

Note: Final version of sermon is posted with possible additions.

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**“Who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5)** is the question the Pharisee, Saul, asked the power and authority that came to him as he was walking on the road approaching Damascus, when a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him, and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, **"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul’s response, in a surrendering tone . . . “Who are you, Lord?”**

Before we read Acts 9, and the historical account of the Lord coming to Saul to change his life. . . I want to remind us all that we have all been Saul. We can all look back upon a time and give great spiritual reflection when we all were asked by the Lord to ask and seek the answer to the question, “Who are you, Lord?” We had to reflect upon our temporal physical being and our eternal, spiritual being. Questions like. . . why was I born. . .when will I die. . . what is my purpose in life. . .when I die where do I go. . . why do I keep making bad decisions. . . what is my direction and purpose in life when I get up in the morning. . .how do I manage my relationships. . . what do I do with my feelings of guilt. . . how do I repair relationship? We all think about these questions and more. These questions are contemplated by all people. These questions unite the whole human race. And at the same time, we are united in the seeking the answers to these questions. With these questions. . .most of us realize that we have a body and soul (spirit) and only our spirit will live forever.

My experience is that most people know that their lives without God is in turmoil and they are living a life distant from God due to the enmity and strife controlling their being. Like Saul, a lost person has no power within themselves to change. The only choice we have is to surrender to God and allow Him to impower us by with His Spirit. Saul could not change unless God gained His attention. Yes. God gained Saul’s attention in a dramatic way. Many of us can look back and agree that there were life-changing events in our lives that brought us to a point of change. It may have been the miracle of your children being born or the miracle of surviving a would-be fatal accident, or war, or illness, but all these times gave us a spiritual pause and space to contemplate God and all the great questions of life.

The reality is that a person separated from God is powerless to be victorious over this fallen world and the effects it has over their lives. Therefore, the person alienated from God does not have His love and peace that empowers a person to be victorious over this fallen world. This is why the Jews in Acts 2 called out to Peter as he preached under the power of God’s Holy Spirit and they were convicted of their sin of crucifying the Messiah. . .they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:37-38).

These Jews, like Saul, had not experienced life without being in a state of despair and angst, with no hope, power or authority to thwart off their evil desires like crucifying an innocent man (Jesus). They did not know what life was like with God operating in their hearts. They were spiritually ignorant. We were all in that state at one time. . . being constantly convicted by God’s Holy Spirit (John 16:8) to come to Him, as He called out to us. . . "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED" (Romans 10:13. Joel 2:32).

Saul was not at peace and was breathing threats and persecuting his fellow countrymen because they had surrendered to the Cross of Christ. These Believers, in the risen Christ, were held in His hands for eternity where no one can remove them (John10:28-29). Like Saul, we all had to come to the Lord’s quiet spiritual place to be able to hear His voice. Jesus said His sheep hear His voice and He knows them and they follow Him, and He gives eternal life to His sheep (John 10:26-28).

Once a person is in that quiet place, to hear God, He wants us to ask Him (Ezekiel 36:37) to give us a new heart and spirit and then we will be able to walk in His ways (Ezekiel 36:26-27, Deuteronomy 30:6-8). Saul could not become Paul unless this took place in his heart. Saul needed a new heart and spirit from God.

We Believers must witness to those separated from God that He is omnipresent (ever-present). Therefore, God is always wanting for all those separated from Him to choose to surrender and accept His peace demonstrated at the Cross. God, as Jesus on the Cross, proclaimed peace to those that crucified Him. . . that they too still had an opportunity to be forgiven, in His words "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. (Luke 23:34).

Once a person surrenders to God, He will then extend and impart to them His eternal power and authority over their enmity and strife. This is the Helper Jesus promised (John 14:16,26, 15:26, 16:7).

God broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, upon the Cross by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in the ordinances, that convicts us of sin. . . so that in Jesus, He might make our old, strife-ridden body and spirit, into one new person, therefore, establishing peace. . .reconciling (atoning) us in one body to God through the Cross of Jesus (Romans 3:25). By the Cross, God demonstrated His eternal power and authority over sin and death. God’s great love allows us to choose Him freely. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; (Isaiah 57:19). For through Him, we all (Gentiles and Jews) have our chosen access in one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:14-18).

But Paul, did he know all of this? Yes, but in a misunderstood way. Paul’s heart was not focused on the prophecy of God’s prophet Isaiah about the *Suffering Servant* who would come to take away the sins of the world (Isaiah 53). Paul was focused upon appeasing God through the strict keeping of the Tora and the traditions of Judaism. Paul believed that the adherence to the letter of the Law would protect Israel from being destroyed and held in captivity again, like God allowed the Babylonians to do, due to Israel’s abandoning the Law. Paul missed king David’s words in Psalm 51.

16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

So, in our Resurrection sermon series, we come to Acts 9 and the report of Saul being recruited by the Lord. I use the “Resurrection” title as the main catalyst that projected what happened after the incarnated God, as Jesus the Messiah/Christ, rose from the dead and walked from His tomb. . . leaving funeral body-wrappings behind. Roman and Jewish historical records confirm that Jesus of Nazareth was ordered crucified by Pontius Pilate and died on His Cross and His tomb was found empty. These records confirm Jesus’ life, death, entombment and some record Jesus’ followers believed in His resurrection. Here is a common list derived from a random online search.

1. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-100)

2. Tacitus (A.D. 56-120)

3. Pliny the Younger (A.D. 62-11)

4. Jewish Rabbinical literature

5. Satirist Lucian, born (c. AD 125 – 180)

6. Philosopher Celsus (2nd century)

<https://aleteia.org/2018/04/12/heres-the-historical-evidence-from-non-christian-sources-that-jesus-lived-and-died>

The Roman and Jewish authorities, never produced Jesus’ deceased body to prove He did not resurrect. Considering that Jesus prophesied His own death and resurrection, it is reasonable to assume the Jewish and Roman authorities were pressed to find Jesus’ body. They could only bribe the Roman soldiers guarding Jesus’ tomb to lie and say 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' (Matthew 28:13)

Matthew 16:21–23, 17:22-23, 20:17-19.

Mark 8:31–32, 9:30-32, 10:32-34;

Luke 9:21–22, 9:43–45, 8:31–34.

In addition, Jesus proclaimed many times that His body, being a Temple, would be resurrected after three days and gave the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:40) in one instance.

Many who heard Jesus prophesy His future thought he was talking about the Temple in Jerusalem (John 2:20 -22). However, Jesus did specifically point to the Jerusalem Temple and prophesied its destruction (Luke 21:1-6). The Romans destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D.

See also: Matthew 15:32, 26:61, 27:40, 63;

Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34, 14:58, 15:29;

Luke 2:46;

John 2:19, 20-22

I see that Peter’s letter makes a solid witness of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, the resurrected Christ.

**1 Peter 3:18**

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

This foundational history sheds great light on Saul, the Pharisee of Pharisees, the head of his class under the famed Jewish teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). There was not a man in Israel that knew more than Saul or who was more zealous about the Law and the Jewish historical covenant with God. We read Paul’s own words from his letter to the Believers in Galatia concerning his life. “For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions” (Galatians 1:13-14)

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Therefore, it is assumed that Saul was fully aware of Jesus’ Temple prophecy, because one of the legal charges against Jesus was that the He would destroy the Temple in three days (Matthew 26:60-66).

I see that it is important to understand Saul, the Pharisee. . . to receive the clearest understanding of God calling him. Saul was a man born as a Jew from Tarsus, and a Roman citizen (Acts 25:29), and studied to become a respected Pharisee. Therefore, he had great personal freedom in the Roman world and in Jewish culture. Saul had the most freedom to travel, was safe from religious overlords as compared to the common Jew. Saul was one on those religious authorities going about looking for Tora-Law breakers. Saul was also steeped in religious belief that was centered around God’s Temple in Jerusalem, which had been standing since the Jews returned from Babylon, starting in 537 B.C., by the decree of the king of Persia, Cyrus the Great (Ezra 1). Therefore, the Jews had been sacrificing to God and worshiping the Lord for over one-half of a millennium in the Jerusalem Temple. This is about twice as long, since America was formed as a nation.

Remember, the historical weight of Saul’s belief in his covenant relationship with God which was established with Abraham two-thousand years before Saul lived. God’s covenant was tied directly to the Promise Land and specifically Mount Moriah, where the Temple would be built, and where Abraham was tested by God to sacrifice his son Isaac but as God planned from the beginning, provided His substitutionary atonement (foreshadow of Jesus’ Cross). Saul knew of the Patriarch Jacob’s family move to Egypt, due to famine where the Hebrews lived for 430 years (Exodus 12:40) before God called His prophet Moses to challenge Pharoah (Exodus 5) to let His people (Hebrews) out of the Egyptian bondage to worship Him, and eventually reoccupy the Promise Land with Jerusalem as the central place of worship where David moved the Ark of the Covent. . .(2 Samuel 6:1-19) and Solomon built the first Temple (completed in seven years by 960 B.C.). All of these *covenant events* were constantly spiritual weight of responsibility upon Saul. From Saul’s perspective, he carried for his generation the responsibility to live, enforce and protect the Law-covenant with God as he understood. Let us now read the historical account of Saul’s salvation and how God had a plan for his life. We need to keep Paul’s words in mind from Ephesians 2:8-10, as we read the Lord’s interaction in Acts 9, with Saul, before he was Paul.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

**Acts 9:1**

Now Saul,

still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3 As he was traveling,

it happened that he was approaching Damascus,

and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;

4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him,

**"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"**

5 And he **[ Paul ]** said, "Who are You, Lord?"

And He *said*, **"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,**

**6 but get up and enter the city,**

**and it will be told you what you must do."**

7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

8 Saul got up from the ground,

and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing;

and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias;

and the Lord said to him in a vision,

**"Ananias."**

And he **[ Ananias ]** said, "Here I am, Lord."

11 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, 12 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."**

13 But Ananias answered,

"Lord, I have heard from many about this man,

how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;

14 and here he has authority from the chief priests

to bind all who call on Your name."

15 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;**

**16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."**

17 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 sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales,

and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

19 and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,

20 and immediately he *began* to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying,

"He is the Son of God."

21 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?"

22 But Saul kept increasing in strength

and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus

by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

23 When many days had elapsed,

the Jews plotted together to do away with him,

24 but their plot became known to Saul.

They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;

25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through *an opening in* the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

26 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.

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.

28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem,

speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

**AMEN**