

STUDY NOTES

The Acts of the Apostles

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH (Spring 2016)

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The following content is based on the message “Conversion of Anyone” spoken on 04/17/16 by Brian Kruckenberg at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis of the message but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this Study Guide effectively you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these Study Notes for group study and reflection should read the Biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective communities.

THE SCRIPTURE: ACTS 9:9-19

⁹But 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.

STILL BREATHING THREATS

As we open up this chapter we once again meet Saul. He was part of the Jewish Sanhedrin who wanted nothing more than to find and arrest Christians so that they might be tried and killed for their teaching that Jesus was the Messiah. This was so blasphemous to Saul that he sets off on a 6-day (or more) journey to Damascus.

Notice here that Saul is **still** breathing threats and murder against the church. It makes one wonder if some of those persecuting the church had backed off and whether the resistance was being led by Saul. Certainly he was one of the ring leaders in the movement to stop Jesus from being preached and worshiped.

- *What is it that you might STILL be doing that goes against what God wants for you? Or, what is it that you are still NOT doing that you should be doing? Prayer? Reading?*
- *How can you break out of that cycle?*

WHEN JESUS IS LORD, IT CHANGES EVERYTHING

When the Lord appears to Saul, he has a much different response than Ananias. When Saul is confronted by Jesus, Saul doesn't know who Jesus is. He asks, “Who are you, Lord?” Compare this to Ananias and his response when he is summoned by Jesus: “Here I am Lord.” When someone is Lord, they are in control, and you are subject to their will. Saul would soon learn what it meant to make Jesus Lord. It would change the entire direction and trajectory of his life. It would change his priorities and revolutionize how he saw the world.

- *Define “Lord” or “Lordship” in your own language.*
- *How has making Jesus Lord changed your life?*
- *Do you struggle with making other things or other people “lord?” Why do you think we do that?*

PRAYING FOR OUR ENEMIES

Ananias didn't have a lordship issue, but he was human. When he learns that he is being called to pray for Saul, he balks. It is the last thing he wants to do. Why would he pray for an enemy of God and someone who is coming to his city to arrest and kill people. In our modern day language, we might call Saul a terrorist: one who was misguided in his belief that his god was calling him to kill others opposed to his faith! Saul was a man to be feared and hated, not to be prayed for! Yet, God calls Ananias to not just pray for him, but to lay his hands on him. *Put yourself in Ananias shoes and let what Jesus is asking him to do really sink in.*

It is interesting to ask ourselves whether anyone was praying for Saul to meet Jesus. Was Peter praying for him? We know that Stephen prayed for him in a general sense because before he dies, Stephen asks that God forgive those persecuting him. Saul was one of those men.

While we might be shocked at Jesus' call to Ananias, we shouldn't be surprised. After all, while we were still enemies of Jesus, He died for us. We often forget that. We want justice for others, but mercy for ourselves. We want others to pay for what they've done but we'd like to be pardoned. Perhaps we need to change our hearts and the way we think about our own sin and the sin of others.

- *Are you praying for anyone you know to meet Jesus?*
- *Why is it so hard to pray for an enemy?*
- *When you are challenged to pray for an enemy does someone immediately come to mind?*
- *Ask God to help you pray for those who you don't want to pray for.*

THE LIFE OF PAUL

God had "big" things in store for Saul but Saul, now Paul, would soon learn what that meant: a life of suffering for the sake of Jesus. Saul was a part of the Sanhedrin and that same group would later persecute Paul (see Acts 22). How ironic that Paul would suffer under the same system that he once help built.

- *Consider that for yourself: what are you building now that might become your downfall later?*
- *Are you building your home life (think parenting or your relationship with your spouse) on things other than Jesus? If so, what might be the consequences of that be later?*
- *Are you seeking after the things of the world now in your job or at school? Are you trying to build your own name? How might that later impact you?*

While Paul was certainly going to suffer for the cause of Jesus (he would later be martyred), God does use Paul to do some miraculous things. We know from Paul's later writings that Paul has no regrets over living a life for Jesus. Paul comes to learn firsthand what Jesus taught:

Being the least in the Kingdom is greater than being the greatest in this world.

God would use all the zeal, education and experience of Paul as he traveled throughout the major cities of the known world spreading the Good News of Jesus. When we accept Jesus as Lord, it does change everything, but God still uses all of our

lives as we now walk with Him. He uses our past (even things we might not like), our talents and our weaknesses to bring glory to His name and to show Jesus to others.

- *Why do you think we will "suffer" as Christians?*
- *When you suffer, is your first response to escape it or ask God how He wants to use it?*
- *Is there something in your past that you'd rather just forget? How might God use that to reach others through you?*
- *Has anyone ever made you feel like a talent or gift you have cannot be used in the Kingdom of God? Consider Saul/Paul's story and discuss that.*