

Acts 052  
The Blind See  
Acts 9:8-19a  
September 18, 2024  
Dr. Andy Woods

Let us take our Bibles this evening and open them to the Acts 9:8. As the Book of Acts is about the birth and growth of the church, a very key player in the birth and particularly the growth of the church is Paul the Apostle, who wrote 13 of our New Testament letters.

Dr. Luke, our author, is writing this book on the birth and growth of the church. He includes a lot of information on Paul—how he became Paul, how he was converted. Acts 9:1-31 is Saul—that is what his name was before he was saved—Saul's conversion and how he eventually became Paul on the Damascus Road. Saul of Tarsus was breathing out murderous threats against the church. He is the one that presided over the execution of the first martyr of the Christian era, a man named Stephen (Acts 7).

In Acts 9:1-2, while he was still breathing murderous threats against the church, he secured letters from the high priest, enabling him to leave Jerusalem and go to Damascus to grab the Christians that had escaped Jerusalem and drag them back from Damascus up north to Jerusalem, to throw them in prison.

He is literally traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus to do this (Acts 9:1-2), but then he has a surprise (Acts 9:3-7). He receives a light from God; he is blinded physically; and he hears this voice from God who is identified as Jesus (Acts 9:3-7). "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" When you attack the bride of Christ, you attack the groom. If you attack the body of Christ, the church, you attack the head, Jesus Christ.

You go down to Acts 9:8-9, which is where we pick it up tonight, and you see Saul's reaction. His reaction to this whole thing is that he has become physically blind.

*"Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus" (Acts 9:8).*

Notice this line here: *"Though his eyes were open, he could see nothing."* A moment ago, before this happened to Saul on the Damascus Road, he had perfect eyesight. We might even call it 20/20 vision. He had perfect physical eyesight, but when it came to spiritual things, he knew nothing. He was blind as a bat.

Now everything has changed. His physical eyesight has been taken away, but through this, he now sees spiritually perfectly. Would you rather have perfect physical sight and

no spiritual sight? Or would you rather have some kind of handicap in the physical world, allowing you to see perfectly into the spiritual world? If I had to make my choice, I had picked the latter, because spiritual sight is eternal and physical sight is only temporary.

This is one of the things that God does: He takes us to the end of ourselves, He introduces some sort of limitation into our lives, and we do not like it, but the end product is very good because we are able to see things now that we could not see before. We have a tendency in our natural selves to rely upon our natural abilities, talent or whatever, and health, and God has a way of taking those things away. When those things are taken away, we have an ability to see spiritually in ways we could not see before.

When you are physically demoted in some way, God has a tendency to open our eyes to things. This is what is happening in the life of Saul of Tarsus. As we are going to see, God is so good that He is actually going to restore the physical sight of Saul of Tarsus, in a few days. Saul will have his physical sight back in addition to his newfound spiritual sight.

He is so blind that he cannot even make his way to Damascus anymore to execute his mission. Someone has to grab him by the hand and bring him into the city of Damascus, or else he probably would have come to his end there, somewhere on the Damascus Road—that road leading from Jerusalem to Damascus.

How long is Saul of Tarsus going to be physically blind for?

*"And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank" (Acts 9:9).*

Now that is a very small price to pay to get your spiritual sight. Spiritual sight lasts forever. If it just takes three days of removing your physical sight, that is a pretty good exchange. Notice how gracious God is. Not only does He give Saul of Tarsus spiritual sight, but He says, "Your physical sight is going to be restored in a period of three days."

What does three days mean? It means three days. I like to point that out because everybody goes to Genesis and says six days does not mean six days. Six days of creation cannot mean that. Every time you see a similar expression in the Bible, nobody questions it. Three days means three days. Jesus fasted for 40 days before He was tested by Satan. These are just normal expressions. No one second-guesses them, but when you get to Genesis 1, when it says six days, everybody has a big problem with that, because they are trying to jam their evolution or whatever into Genesis 1. There is really no need to do that. It is acceptable. It is appropriate. It is expected that we just take God's Word at face value.

Notice also that Saul, during this time as he is without sight, is fasting. That fast is going to end in Acts 9:19. He realizes he has had an encounter with the Lord, and he is eating nothing during that time period. It is a time of separation and preparation for what God has for him, as this murderer, this persecutor of Christianity, has now received his spiritual sight.

In Acts 9:10, we start to learn how he is going to be healed. His physical sight is going to be restored. This is where we have the calling of Ananias:

*"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'" (Acts 9:10).*

This name, Ananias, literally means "Jehovah is gracious," which is a wonderful name when you think about these circumstances that are happening here. God is pouring out grace, which is unmerited favor, in a way that is almost unprecedented. He is taking someone who was formerly an opponent of Christianity to the point of murder, and He is converting him, allowing him to come to faith, giving him spiritual sight.

His whole life within the span of just a few verses is going to do what we would call a 180. He is going to go from being the great hater of Christianity to its greatest exponent and its greatest promoter. Other than Jesus Christ Himself, I cannot think of someone in the Bible that is used more strategically than Saul who became Paul.

Probably the choicest top servants of the Lord in the whole Bible, I would pick Moses and right alongside Moses, maybe at a greater level than Moses is Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul. We would not have modern-day Christianity had God not got hold of this guy. When the guy that is going to lay hands on him to restore his sight is named "Jehovah is gracious," that is very appropriate.

As all of this stuff is happening to Saul, God is working on the other end through this guy Ananias. He is explaining to Ananias what is about to happen. It says,

*"..and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord'" (Acts 9:10).*

I like that response. If God talks to you, say, "Lord, I am here listening." This is what happened with Samuel. First Samuel three verse ten says,

*"Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for Your servant is listening'" (1 Samuel 3:10).*

There is the calling of Isaiah:

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8).*

If you have circumstances going on in your life where you know it is the hand of God, a great thing to do is to say, "Lord, I do not understand everything, but I am here and I am listening. What is your will?" That is what Ananias is doing, because Ananias is going to be the tool that God uses to restore the physical sight of Saul, who is now becoming the Apostle Paul.

At this point, God gives Ananias some instructions—God speaking to Ananias in Damascus; Saul of Tarsus, making his way as a blind man, being led to Damascus.

*"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'" (Acts 9:11)*

"Get up and go to a house called Straight." It is a strange way of talking, unless you understand that the streets of Damascus were mostly crooked. The norm was a crooked street. If there was a straight street that was abnormal. In fact, the straight street was so abnormal it got the name Straight.

Then he says, "Go to the house of Judas." Do not confuse that with Christ's betrayer. Judas was a common name in this time period. We are not sure who this guy is. We are not given a lot of information about him, but apparently that is where Saul of Tarsus is going to be housed for a little while.

We have some information on how Saul of Tarsus is going to be healed. You see that in Acts 9:12, God continuing to speak to Ananias:

*"And he [Saul of Tarsus] has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight" (Acts 9:12).*

In other words, "Here is the vision," to Ananias. "Find Saul, and lay hands on him because he has already seen another vision coming from Me, that someone named Ananias is going to show up and pray for him and lay hands on him."

This is really important, because what happens in the Christian world—and a lot of you may have experienced this—is that you will have a lot of well-intentioned people come up to you and say, "The Lord told me to tell you, such and such." My wife was in a group called YWAM, and in her particular group where she was, some of the young men in the group would go up to the young women and would say, "The Lord told me to tell you that I am supposed to marry you." The poor young lady said, "God never told me that."

You will run into this mentality a lot in people: "God told me to tell you." But you will notice that when it is really God, God is working on both ends. It is not a situation where Ananias is going to show up at Saul's doorstep where he was being housed and say, "God told me to tell you that I am going to lay my hands on you and you are going to be healed." It is more than that, because that information was already given to Saul on his end.

In other words, Saul, through a vision, knew that Ananias was coming. You will see this constantly in the Book of Acts where God, when He is directly communicating with people, influencing people, is working on both sides of this.

Let us say it is a giant telephone. The exact same thing is going to happen in the next Acts 10 with the conversion of Cornelius. Peter is going to be the one that is going to lead Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, to Christ. Peter is given a vision that he is supposed to lead Cornelius to Christ. Peter does not show up on Cornelius' doorstep and say, "The Lord told me to tell you that I am supposed to lead you to Christ." Cornelius already knew that Peter was coming because God was working on Cornelius' end with another vision, just as He was working in the Apostle Peter's life with the first vision.

If somebody that you respect or somebody that has been in the Lord longer than you comes to you and says, "The Lord told me to tell you," do not feel bad about saying, "If that is really the Lord, He is going to confirm it on my end, too." God is not going to make you make some kind of life altering decision without confirming it to multiple witnesses.

The Bible says that through the matter of two or three witnesses, let a matter be confirmed (Deuteronomy 19:15). God does not work through a single witness. That is a helpful thing to understand. It is a pattern that God is engaging in here. Ananias knows that Saul is to receive his sight by the laying on of hands. Saul knows that Ananias is coming to minister to him.

This is interesting, because Ananias has some objections. Have you ever had some objections to God? God is saying, "Do something," and you are saying, "I do not want to do that. I do not think that is the way to go." Ananias voices some objections here. His first objection is Acts 9:13: "Look at what Saul did in Jerusalem." His second objection is in Acts 9:14: "Look at what Saul is about to do in Damascus. Are you sure, Lord? I am supposed to lay hands on this guy and exercise grace to him? Do You not understand, Lord, that this guy is a murderer? He is not only a murderer; he is a murderer of Your people.

Here come the objections:

*"But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem'" (Acts 9:13).*

Saul's reputation apparently had preceded him. His reputation as a murderer in Jerusalem made its way all the way to Damascus. Ananias is saying, "Lord, are You sure You have the right fellow here? You are not going to exercise grace on him, are You?"

Notice that Ananias refers to God's people in Jerusalem who were being murdered as saints. A lot of people struggle with this. When you are a Christian, you are a saint. Did you know that? People say, "I am not a saint." You are not a saint in your own right—none of us are—but when you get saved, the righteousness of Jesus, positionally speaking, is transferred to you at the point of faith alone in Christ alone.

*"And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:9).*

That is what the Protestant reformers called alien righteousness. Thanks to that word "alien"—space alien, someone from another planet. That is the kind of righteousness that you have once you trust in Christ. We may not act like it all of the time; we may not feel like it all of the time; we may not understand it all of the time, but it is a positional truth. God declares it to be true that the moment you trust Christ is the moment the righteousness of Jesus is transferred to your account. God now looks at you as if you were just as righteous as Jesus Himself.

Martin Luther called it the Great Exchange—His righteousness is exchanged for my unrighteousness. Therefore, you do not have to go before God with worm theology. "Oh, Lord, it is me. I am a great sinner. I have a prayer request, but I dare not ask You because I am such a terrible person," type thing. God is saying, "Speak up. I see you just as righteous as My Son Jesus Christ." "Lord, I do not deserve that." Lord says, "You got that one right. You do not deserve it, but I have given it to you as a free gift by grace, which means unmerited favor." You will see this a lot.

In other words, your sainthood has nothing to do with your behavior. It has to do with a free gift that is given to you. Once you get that and understand that you are a saint—J. Vernon McGee says, "You are either a saint or an ain't"—it is like, "Maybe I should live differently. Maybe I should not use so much profanity. Maybe I should not be watching stuff on TV that is base and inappropriate for a saint. Maybe I should be treating people differently."

You are not behaving correctly to become a saint; you are behaving correctly now because you are a saint. Very few Christians really understand who they are in Christ Jesus, because if they did, they would be living completely differently. It is just that certain things are inappropriate for God's holy people.

It is like what the Book of Ephesians talks about after describing our sainthood. Paul, in Ephesians 4, lists a bunch of behaviors. He says, "Those are just unacceptable for God's holy people. God's holy people are not supposed to act like that." He is not

saying, "You had better act right to get your sainthood." What he is saying is, "You had better change your behavior because you are a saint." It is a completely different motivation for holy living.

Even the Corinthians were called saints. The Corinthian church with divisions (1 Corinthians 1-4), incest (1 Corinthians 5), litigation amongst themselves (1 Corinthians 6), visiting temple prostitutes (1 Corinthians 6), divorce and remarriage are rampant (1 Corinthians 7), flaunting their freedoms in the presence of the weaker brother (1 Corinthians 8-10), drunk at the Lord's table (1 Corinthians 11), abusing spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14), second-guessing the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15)—you go through that book and you show me one place where God says, "Y'all are not saints." What He is saying is, "You are not acting according to your identity." How would you like to be the pastor of that church?

Right at the beginning of the book, Paul calls them saints:

*"To the church of God which is at Corinth to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2).*

God's people are saints, and here Ananias recognizes that Saul of Tarsus in Jerusalem has been killing the saints, murdering the saints. If that were not enough, he starts describing why Saul came to Damascus. Back to what Saul was doing in Jerusalem:

*"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:3-4).*

That was what Saul was like. Ananias is thinking, "I am not sure You got this one right, Lord. You do not want to exhibit or exercise grace toward that guy, do You?"

In Acts 9:14 he talks about what Saul was coming to Damascus to do:

*"And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name" (Acts 9:14).*

That is going back to the first couple of verses in the chapter where Saul went to the high priest (Acts 9:1) and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus. He was getting legal authority to leave Jerusalem, and go to Damascus, where these persecuted Christians fled. He was going to go into the synagogues where they were; he was going to grab them by force; and he was going to take them back into Jerusalem to be incarcerated. Ananias knew about all this and said, "I do not think You have the right guy here, Lord. You do not want to exercise grace toward someone like that."

Then you get God's response to these objections (Acts 9:15-16). He talks about what Saul is going to become. He is going to become Paul, and he is going to have a threefold calling. In other words, "Ananias, do not second-guess Me," God says to Ananias. "I know exactly what I am doing."

Notice that God does not get into a debate with Ananias:

*"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he [Saul of Tarsus] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel'" (Acts 9:15).*

"The first thing to understand, Ananias, is that this guy that you are going to go minister to is elected." The doctrine of election. We will get into this when we get into our Bible versus Neo-Calvinism study in Sunday School. The big push in Neo-Calvinism is that some are elected unto salvation and some are elected unto damnation. They will grab a verse like this where it says, "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is My chosen instrument.'"

What you will start to see with these election verses are typically—and I am not sure if it is true in every case—not so much an election unto salvation as it is an election unto service. Paul has been chosen to serve. You will notice this as you go through some of these election verses, that the context really is not saying exactly what the Neo-Calvinists have asserted.

Election is probably the only point in Calvinism that I still hold on to, but I hold on to it somewhat loosely, because I see a lot of the texts that they use are more of an election unto service rather than unto salvation.

Jesus said this to the disciples in the Upper Room:

*"You did not choose Me but I chose you" (John 15:16).*

People say, "See, there is the doctrine of election." But you have to read the rest of the verse:

*"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain" (John 15:16).*

The choice that God made is for the service of the disciples. That is the kind of thing that you see happening here. "Ananias, do not second-guess Me. I know exactly what I am doing. This is a man that I have chosen to serve Me."

What is he going to do? *"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine'" (Acts 9:15).* He is going to do three things. Number one, "to bear My name before the Gentiles." Saul is going to become Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. Peter is going to be the apostle to the Jews.

In Galatians 2, Paul will write these words concerning his sphere of ministry versus that of Peter:

*"But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles)" (Galatians 2:7-8).*

Peter is the apostle to the Jews; Saul of Tarsus is going to be the apostle to the Gentiles. "That is why you have to go, Ananias, and heal this man, Saul of Tarsus."

If Paul is going to be the apostle to the Gentiles, why does he not immediately leave in Acts 9 and become the apostle to the Gentiles? Why is it that it is going to be Peter who is going to lead the first Gentile to Christ in Acts 10 and 11? That seems strange, because here it says that Paul is going to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

The answer to that question is this: Who was given the keys to the Kingdom? Peter was. Jesus said to Peter:

*"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).*

What do you do with a key? You open a door. Because Peter was given the keys, he is the one that leads the first people groups to Christ. Once the door is open it stays open. Who led the first Jews to Christ in the Book of Acts? Peter (Acts 2). Who led the Samaritans to Christ? Philip, but Peter had to come and lay hands on the Samaritans so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. Peter has to open the door, but once the door is open, the door stays open.

What we have are Jews who have come to Christ. Peter led them to Christ because he has the keys and he opens the door. What we have are the first Samaritans that come to Christ. He has the keys, so he has to open the door. This is why Paul, even though he is chosen to reach the Gentiles, cannot do anything until Peter leads the first Gentile to Christ—Cornelius and his household (Acts 10 and 11). Peter has to open the door, but once the door is open, the door stays open.

Saul, who would become Paul, could now do his thing of being the apostle to the Gentiles, but Peter has to unlock the door first. That is why, as you read this and God says of Saul, "He is My chosen instrument to bear my name before the Gentiles," he does not even reach the first Gentiles in the next couple of chapters. Peter does that.

Unless you factor in that the Lord gave to Peter the keys of the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19), this chronology that is laid out here in the Book of Acts will not make sense to you. Once you understand that Peter is the one that has the keys, and he has to open

the door first, the order here in the Book of Acts of Saul of Tarsus getting saved and Saul of Tarsus becoming the apostle to the Gentiles, yet it is Peter, the apostle to the Jews who leads the first Gentile to Christ, that chronology starts to make perfect sense.

*"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'" (Acts 9:15).*

He has a threefold ministry. Number one, ministry to the Gentiles, but Peter has to open the door first. Number two, Ministry to kings. That certainly happens in the Book of Acts, does it not? Who does Paul minister to? Aretas IV, Herod Agrippa III, and Nero. Exactly what God said would happen—"he is going to be My apostle to kings"—happens in the Book of Acts.

*"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'" (Acts 9:15).*

As you study the Book of Acts, where is the first place Paul always goes on his missionary journeys? He always goes to the synagogue first, except in places like Philippi, when they do not have a synagogue. Otherwise, every place he goes, once the gospel gets outside the borders of Israel, he always goes to the synagogue first.

In fact, in Romans 1:16, he will write these words:

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first the Jew, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).*

He always goes to the synagogue first. They are the chosen people. He gives them the first bite of the apple, so to speak. Typically what happens, though, is that they do not like what he says. They run him out of the synagogue, and then he bears great fruit amongst the Gentiles in that area, to the point where the unbelieving Jews get jealous of his success and bring persecution against him, which is God's will, because it drives him on to the next location he is supposed to go to. That is essentially what happens almost in every city, in every missionary journey.

When I was teaching the Book of Acts at the Bible College, I always told the students, "If I ask you on the test what happened at such and such a place in the Book of Acts, just say, 'Paul went into the synagogue first and he experienced limited success. He got kicked out of the synagogue and bore great fruit amongst the Gentiles, and it made the Jews jealous. They brought persecution against him and drove him to the next location.'" I said, "If you put that down on the question, you have got about an 80%

chance of getting it right, because that is what happens every single time in Saul's, who then would become Paul's ministry.

This is what God is saying to Ananias. "You have to reach this man, extend My grace to this man, because he is a chosen instrument to do three things: bear My name before the Gentiles, before kings, and also before the sons of Israel."

He is also going to suffer. He is not only going to have this wonderful and great ministry, but he is going to suffer every step of the way. Here is a prediction over Saul's life, of the sufferings that he would encounter:

*"For I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16).*

Just as Saul caused suffering to Christians—that was his career before salvation—now as a Christian ambassador, he is going to suffer constantly. Over in 2 Corinthians 11:22-33, is one of the most graphic places we have in the whole Bible of Paul's sufferings. He says:

*"Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me in my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weaknesses. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands" (2 Corinthians 11:22-33).*

Paul here is stacking up his ministry against the false apostles. "These false apostles can say whatever they want," Paul says, "but let us deal with suffering. I come out way ahead when it comes to this issue of personal suffering." That is what God told Ananias would happen to Saul, that he would suffer.

These are short-term prophecies that happened in Saul's life. I do not know if I want to belabor this, but many times I have used these verses to show you short-term prophecies in the Bible that Jesus made about Himself on Passion Week:

*"Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe" (John 14:29).*

This is why the disciples were willing to leave the Upper Room. They saw truth in Jesus to the point where they were willing to die. This is how we know the prophecies yet to come will happen, because the short-term prophecies manifested themselves. These are all examples of short-term prophecies made over Saul's life. All you need to do is read the rest of the Book of Acts and you see how literally and accurately they were fulfilled.

*"For I will show him how much he must ["dei"] suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16).*

In brackets there is the translation of the Greek word "must." When Luke uses the word "must" he is saying it is 100% going to happen—no wiggle room whatsoever. The same Greek word is used in Acts 4:12:

*"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).*

*"But He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities, for I was sent for this purpose'" (Luke 4:43).*

*"Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all these things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled'" (Luke 24:44).*

That little word translated "must" means there is no wiggle room, no conditionality, 100% it is going to happen. "Saul of Tarsus, in fulfilling your calling, you are going to suffer. You cause suffering, and part of your calling is to experience suffering."

How in the world can you correlate verses like this with today's prosperity gospel, which teaches that Christians are entitled to some kind of life of ease and prosperity? Do you have one of those promise books that gives the promises of God to give you the warm fuzzy of the day? Here is a promise that is never in one of those books:

*"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12).*

That is a promise from God. Jesus, in the Upper Room, said:

*"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you—" (John 15:18)*

In other words, "They hate you not because it is you. They hate Me. They hated Me long before you showed up. The reason they hate you is they see Me and you."

*"—If you are of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A slave is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:19-20).*

We do not teach here that you have to be willing to suffer to come to Christ, because salvation is a free gift. But if you get serious about serving Christ, living a consecrated lifestyle unto Christ, and the world and your family and your business partners do not stand up and applaud, but start giving you pushback because of it, you have to understand that you are not outside of the will of God. You are directly in the will of God.

The year that I came to Christ, at the ripe old age of 16, I was fortunate where the fellow that led me to Christ had a discipling relationship with me, where I could grow in Christ having come to Christ. I remember that particular year—this would be 1983—was probably one of the most difficult years I have ever gone through. I would call him, sometimes in tears, sometimes in the middle of the night. He gave me permission to do that, so I took advantage of it.

He would say over and over again, "You are exactly where you are supposed to be. You are not outside of God's will. This is what God said would happen. You are getting serious about Jesus, which is a wonderful thing, but you are living in a world system that hates God, and that hatred comes out through employers and coworkers and sometimes coaches, teammates, family members, sometimes church members."

You start walking this and you start understanding that you are experiencing a lot of pushback. The natural inclination, particularly when you turn on TV and all the preachers are talking about how God is going to heal your body and fill up your bank account and give you the perfect job, you hear enough of that, and you say to yourself, because you are not discipled yet, "What am I missing?"

How important it was for me as a young Christian to hear someone more mature in the Lord tell me, "You are exactly where you are supposed to be." That is the kind of thing that is being spoken here over Saul's life, who is going to become Paul.

What does Ananias do now that God has answered his objections? He obeys. Smart guy. *"So Ananias departed and entered the house—" (Acts 9:17).* He does not sit there

and keep arguing with God. He does what he is supposed to do because, at the end of the day, God's ways are higher than our ways.

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Now are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord.  
'For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8-9).*

In other words, "I do not have to give you a bunch of explanations, Ananias, as to why I am going to extend grace to the Saul of Tarsus. I know what I am doing. I have given you enough information. Now go act on it."

*"...and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul—'" (Acts 9:17)*

Now Ananias is connected with Saul, who is going to become Paul in the house of Judas.

*"—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 may be filled with the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 9:17).*

The filling of the Holy Spirit is different from being indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

*"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).*

"Filled" is in the present tense there. It literally means to be continuously filled with the Holy Spirit. The early church was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4), but they had to be refilled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). Once you trust Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence in you. You cannot get rid of the Holy Spirit, but through sin we can limit His influence in our lives. We can give him the corner office somewhere, but He wants to be central.

That is where confession of sin (1 John 1:9), agreeing with God that sin is wrong, is so important. That allows you to be refilled with the Holy Spirit. It is not as if you are getting more of the Holy Spirit, it is that the Holy Spirit is getting more of you. The indwelling of the Spirit is a singular event at the point of faith alone in Christ alone. Being continuously filled with the Holy Spirit is a consistent regular event in the life of the Christian.

When I come up here to teach a Bible study, I ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit. I do not ask to be saved again because I am saved forever. What I say is, "Lord, I may have done things today in my natural self to limit Your influence in my life. I am getting ready to teach Your Word. I need Your empowerment and direction." Whatever sins I have

committed that the Lord brings to my mind, I confess those. I agree with God that they are wrong and I ask to be refilled with the Holy Spirit.

You will see this distinction of indwelling by the Spirit versus continual refilling of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. We do not teach here the doctrine of the second blessing, that you have to go before God for an extra dose of the Spirit after you are saved. You have all of the Spirit that you are going to get. The issue is, does the Spirit have all of you? That is the issue. That is the need for asking for continuous refilling, particularly in the area of service.

Through all of this, guess what happens? Saul gets healed. You see the healing:

*"And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight" (Acts 9:18).*

Notice that the miracles of God are instantaneous in the Book of Acts. It is not like one of these things where you have a televangelist saying, "So and so is healed. How do we know that? She scheduled a doctor's appointment on Tuesday and got a good report. Then she went to another doctor, got a better report, and I am reading all the medical data here. Praise the Lord, it is a healing."

That is not how healings happen in the Book of Acts. They are immediate and they are instantaneous. That is one of the ways that we know they are of God. Remember the man born lame, in Acts 3?

*"And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened" (Acts 3:7).*

This is not a process. This is instantaneous. What does it say here? Something like scales fell from his eyes. "Something like" is a simile, which means it was not literal scales, but it was like scales. He is speaking here in figurative language. If anybody is qualified to describe this feeling, it would be Luke. What was Luke's occupation? He was a doctor (Colossians 4:14). Luke is the only author in the Book of Acts whose Jewishness is questioned. Every other author, they are Jewish; but people say Luke was a Gentile.

What does Saul of Tarsus want to do? He wants to get baptized.

*"And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized" (Acts 9:18).*

Do you see the order here in the Book of Acts? First you believe, then you are baptized. It is never the other way around. There is a consistent order. I do not have time to read all these verses to you, but you could jot them down:

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).*

In Acts 8:12, the Samaritans believed first, and were baptized second. In Acts 8:34-39, the Ethiopian eunuch believed first and was baptized second. In the first Gentile conversion that is going to happen in Acts 10:42-45, led by Peter who has the keys of the Kingdom, he believes first and is baptized second. Lydia's conversion (Acts 16:14-15), she responds or believes first and is baptized second. The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-34) believes first and is baptized second. Crispus, leader of the synagogue (Acts 18:8) believes first and is baptized second.

There are no cases in the Book of Acts of infant baptism, because baptism is an outward symbol of an inward reality. How can you tell if an infant has been converted when they cannot even speak? You have to wait till someone has believed in Christ for salvation and can articulate that to you. Then they are baptized. The baptism does not save them; it is just an outward symbol of the inward reality which has already happened.

People get really confused about this. They put baptism first, as if baptism is some kind of path to salvation, which it is not. If it was, the gospel would be a gospel of works. What did Jesus say to the penitent thief on the cross? "Quick, throw water on him before he dies, so he can go to heaven." He did not say anything like that. He said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The man was never baptized. He never had the opportunity to be baptized.

Baptism is not essential for salvation, but it is a step of growth for the new Christian. That is the pattern that you see in the Book of Acts. Paul, now Saul who is becoming Paul, after three days breaks his fast that he started in Acts 9:9 when he was blind. He was setting himself aside for the things of God where he ate nothing.

*"And he took food and was strengthened" (Acts 19:19).*

The Lord has given him his inner man, and accompanying that He has restored his physical man. What a work of grace. He has spiritual sight now. To correlate with his spiritual sight, his physical sight comes back. No wonder Ananias, who was the instrument that God used to bring many of these things about, his name literally means "Yahweh is gracious."

What does Saul of Tarsus start to do? He goes into the synagogue and he starts preaching. That does not go well from a human perspective, because immediately there is a conspiracy against his life to kill him. How would you like that as your first ministry assignment? They like you so much, they want you dead. We are going to pick it up there with the second part of Acts 19:19 next week.