

Acts 9

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Tape #8098
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn in our Bibles to Acts, chapter nine, as we continue our study through the Bible. Slowly but surely we're getting there. ¹Then Saul, (Who we of course were introduced to back in chapter seven, as he was watching the clothes of those who were stoning Stephen. Again in chapter eight we find that he was voting for his death. He then began a personal crusade to wipe out Christianity.) And so Saul *still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest* Now he was wreaking havoc of the church in Jerusalem. He was one of the leaders and instigators of the persecution of the church in Jerusalem that caused the believers to escape from Jerusalem and spread throughout all of Judea wherever they went everywhere preaching the Word. Actually unwittingly, Paul was helping spread the gospel as he caused the Christians to flee. But he is still not satisfied. He wants now letters of authority from the high priest to go to Damascus. And there if he can find any people who are of this Way, following Jesus, that he might put them in prison. ²and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (He might bring them back in chains.) ³As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. (He tells us in another account, later on that it was brighter than the noonday sun.) ⁴Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Interesting how Jesus here so identifies Himself with His church. When Jesus said, why do you persecute me? Paul was persecuting the church, but Jesus so identified with His church that any persecution of the church is persecution of Jesus. Why do you persecute me? Who are You, Lord, that I might serve You? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It's hard for you to kick against the goads. I do believe that when Stephen preached that magnificent sermon before the council of which Paul was a part, though Paul tried to close his ears to the truth, that Stephen was declaring, that it was touching him, though he did not want it to do so. It raised questions in his mind. He was thoroughly schooled in the Hebrew scriptures. He recognized the things that Stephen was saying. Recognized them to be true from his knowledge of the scriptures, but he was fighting against it. It is interesting how that many times those people who seem to be the hardest people to reach, are the people who are actually the closest to receiving. The reason why they are so hard to reach is they are fighting a fierce inner battle. And so they react strongly against the truth because it's penetrating and they don't want it to. I believe that when Paul saw Stephen die and was participating in the stoning process in that he was watching the clothes of those who had stripped to throw the stones. That as he heard Stephen say, Lord, don't lay this sin to their charge. That that had an effect upon him. To hear Stephen, to see Stephen's death, I believe that God had begun a work by the Holy Spirit that Paul was fighting against. So Jesus said it is hard for you to kick against the goads, which he was doing.

⁶So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" In the next chapter as we read of Peter being called to go to the Gentiles with the gospel, the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, as the Lord is preparing Peter, breaking down some of the prejudice that the Jew had against the Gentile. As the Lord had let down the sheet from heaven in the vision that Peter had, and the command of the Lord was, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." He said not so, Lord. That is an inconsistent statement. You can't really say, not so, Lord, can you? You can say not so, friend. Not so, hubby. But you can't say, not so, Lord. Paul has the correct response. What do You want me to do, Lord? And if you call Jesus, Lord, that is correct. It isn't denying or refusing to do, but Lord, what would You have me to do?

Now what the Lord said was very simple. Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Again, how the Lord leads us one step at a time. The Lord didn't lay out everything that He had planned for Paul in the future. He just said rise and go into the city.

⁷*And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.* Now later on we will be told that they didn't hear a voice but the difference in the Greek words is, they heard a noise but they didn't understand the words. The Lord was speaking to Paul in Hebrew and thus they heard the noise, the sound, but they didn't understand what the Lord was saying to Saul. They didn't see anybody. They were amazed. They were standing there speechless.

⁸*Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.* Quite an experience. On his way to Damascus, breathing, in the Greek, heavy breath. You know, just threatening—when I get a hold of those Christians, you know. Breathing out murder against the believer. But by the time he arrived in Damascus, he was blind, being led by the hand and a different man than the one who had started out from Jerusalem, breathing out murder.

⁹*And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.* In the darkness of his blindness he was there for three days. I'm sure in his mind there was a tremendous revolution taking place. He wasn't eating. He wasn't drinking. It was a time of just rethinking his whole philosophy, rethinking his whole religious background and beliefs. Paul writing to the Philippians (Philippians 3:4-9), some thirty years after this experience said that those things which were gain to me, all of his background as a Jew, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, tribe of Benjamin, his circumcision, his keeping of the law, his following the rigid rules of the Pharisees and excelling in their religion above the others, all of those things that were gain to me I counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ! He is referring to this experience on the Damascus road. There he came to the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He was really one of the high priest's fair haired boys. He was out to do the will of the priests. He was out to make a mark for himself in stamping out this sect. These believers in Jesus. But when he came to the knowledge of Jesus Christ all of those things that he once prided himself in, he counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. I'm sure that in this three days of blindness, not eating anything, not drinking anything, just there, just a whole mental revolution taking place as God is readjusting the Scriptures in his mind.

¹⁰*Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus* (Now notice he wasn't an apostle nor was he a deacon. We've been told thus far in Acts of the ministry and the works of the apostles. Then for the last couple of weeks, we've been looking at the work and the ministry of the deacons. We've seen how God used Stephen and how God used Philip, a couple of the deacons. Now we see God using just an ordinary disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ. God does things this way so we don't try to pattern God. God is showing that He can use anybody. He is keeping us from trying to create little neat compartments where we might fit the work of God. He's always doing things in different ways so that we don't try to confine Him to one particular pattern. Notice how Jesus in healing, did things in different ways. With the blind men, sometimes He just said, "Receive your sight". And they were able to see. With another, He made mud out of his spittle. He put it in the guy's eye and said go wash in the pool. And when he washed, he could see. So He did things in different ways so that we wouldn't try to pattern Him. Paul tells us there are diversities of gifts and diversities of operation. And the Lord is showing us that He can use apostles, He can use deacons and then He can just use us, ordinary people to do His work. And so Ananias was just a disciple.) *named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."* I love the natural way by which he was relating to the Lord and the Lord to him. I mean it's just like a conversation. Ananias! Yeah, Lord here I am!

¹¹*So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. Three days and three nights, he is praying. He is seeking the Lord. The street called Straight is still in Damascus. It runs the length of the city from east to west. It is one of the major streets in Damascus to the present day. Paul was there in the house of*

one called Judas and Ananias is being directed from the Lord, go to the house of Judas on a street called Straight, Saul of Tarsus, behold, the Lord says, he is praying.

¹²*And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."* So while Paul was in this blinded condition in fasting and prayer, the Lord gave to Paul a vision of a man by the name of Ananias, coming and praying for him that he might receive his sight.

¹³*Then Ananias answered, "Lord, (Are you sure?) I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.* Now this is the first time that the church is called saints. In the Book of Matthew (Matthew 27:52), it speaks about the saints of the Old Testament rising. Their graves opened and they were seen walking the streets of Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus, but now this term is applied to the church in Jerusalem. As far as God is concerned, you who are followers and disciples of Jesus Christ are saints. Now the Catholic church may not recognize you as such, but the Lord does. You don't have to be canonized. If you are just a follower and believer in Jesus Christ, Pastor Chuck says St. Charles has a great ring to it! Called to be saints, Paul said to the Corinthians.

So the saints that are in Jerusalem. I've heard, man this guy has wrecked havoc on the saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴*And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."* Probably

Ananias' name was on Paul's hit list. ¹⁵*But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.* Paul was to have a threefold ministry- Gentiles, king and to the children of Israel. Paul ministered unto King Agrippa. Paul ministered unto Nero when he appealed to Caesar, he was brought before Nero. But Paul also had a great ministry among the Gentiles as well as a ministry to the Jews. He is a chosen vessel unto Me, God said. Paul was uniquely prepared by God for a ministry that would bridge between the Jewish and the Gentile communities. Between the Hellenists and the Hebrew. Paul grew up in the city of Tarsus. It was a free, Roman city in that Paul was a Roman citizen. And growing up in Tarsus, which was a city of strong Grecian culture. So the first fourteen years of his life, though he was schooled in the scriptures by his father and he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, the tribe of Benjamin, yet his playmates, the kids he grew up with, were all of the Grecian culture. So he was introduced and he had the background of the Grecian culture. When he was fourteen his father sent him to Jerusalem to further his education in the Hebrew university there under Gamaliel, where he became thoroughly schooled in the scriptures. Thus knowing the Hebrew mind and knowing the law and the scriptures as a Pharisee, schooled under Gamaliel, he was able to talk to the Jews. But also having been brought up in the Grecian culture in his early years, he was able to relate to those of the Grecian culture. So God really sort of prepared Paul and was preparing Paul as he later said I was separated from my mother's womb. God began the preparation very, very early in the life of Paul, preparing him for this specialized ministry that is going to cross cultural groups. So he was able to say, when I was in Rome, I was like the Romans. When I'm with the Jews, I'm like the Jews. I'm all things to all men that I might gain the more. He could fit in to the Gentile culture. He could fit into the Hebrew culture. He was familiar with both. God had chosen him that he might cross the cultural barrier and minister in a broad field of ministry, a chosen vessel unto Me.

And then an interesting thing in verse sixteen, ¹⁶*For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."* Now Paul does give a listing of the things that he has suffered for the cause of Jesus Christ, the beatings, the imprisonments, the shipwrecks. In the letter to the Corinthians, he speaks there of the great things that he had suffered. (2 Corinthians 11:16-28) I say again, let no man think me a fool, if otherwise as a fool, receive me that I might boast myself a little. That which I speak I speak it not after the Lord but as it were foolishly in the confidence of boasting. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I'll glory too. For you suffer fools gladly seeing that you gladly are so wise. For you suffer if a man brings you into bondage. If a man devours you. If a man takes from you. If a man exhorts himself. If a man smites you on

the face. I speak as concerning the reproach as though we have been weak. How be it where in soever any is bold I speak foolish, I'm bold also. Are they Hebrews? You see they had come in. They were abusing the flock. These people were holding them up, you know, great evangelist, marvelous man. But this man was ripping them off and fleecing them! And so Paul is sort of rebuking them. Because of them receiving these wolves. Here he is you know, and they were putting Paul down. He wasn't really approved by the apostles in Jerusalem, all this kind of stuff. And so he sort of is forced to share a little bit of what he has endured for the gospel's sake. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I? Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended? And I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. But the Lord said I'm going to show him. Do you suppose the Lord showed him all of these things? Five times, Paul, you're going to get beaten. Thirty-nine stripes, you know. You are going to be stoned. The Lord said I am going to show him the things that he is going to suffer for my sake. The amazing thing to me is that Paul went on. I mean if the Lord had shown me that kind of a future I think that I would have said, "Lord are there any alternative plans?" But the Lord said, I'm going to show him the things that he is going to suffer for My sake.

¹⁷And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, (Can you put yourself in Ananias' shoes for a minute? Here he is standing before the man who has authority from the priest to arrest him and all of those that call upon the name of Jesus and to take them as prisoners back to Jerusalem. And he looks at this fellow, Brother Saul) *the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.*" Now up until this point, as far as the record is concerned, the Holy Spirit was imparted to the believers by the ministry of the apostles. Even Philip, one of the deacons, did not administer the gift of the Holy Spirit. But when he had this great revival in Samaria and when the church in Jerusalem heard of it, they sent Peter and John for as yet the Holy Spirit had not come upon them. And when Peter and John came they laid their hands on them that they might receive this empowering of the Holy Spirit. Now here is just a disciple, Ananias, who is sent to Paul to pray for the healing of the blindness and for Paul's receiving of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. ¹⁹So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. So dramatic changes. Paul, I'm sure, still not fully comprehending or understanding what's going on. But he is there with the disciples in Damascus and ²⁰Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. ²¹Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" (Isn't this the fellow that has come that has come up here to destroy the Christian faith?) ²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus (Because of his vast knowledge of the scriptures, his great working knowledge of the scriptures, they were confused. They were confounded because Paul was able to prove from the scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.), *proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*

²³Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. So he had a rather inglorious entry, being led in blind, but a more inglorious departure, escaping over the wall in a basket in order to escape being ambushed by the Jews that were at the gate.

²⁶And when Saul had come to Jerusalem (Now, between verse twenty five and twenty six, there is a gap of about three years. Paul did not go immediately to Jerusalem upon leaving Damascus, but he went down to the area of Mt. Sinai in Arabia. And there he was for almost three years as the Lord was readjusting the whole understanding of the scriptures. It was a time of solitude. It was time of seeking God. It was a time of tremendous spiritual revelation. For God is going to be revealing unto him the marvelous grace of God, apart from the law. And so this is revolutionary. Three years he is going to be there being instructed, personally, by the Lord. Being taught. So as Paul is writing his letter to the Galatians, as he speaks of his conversion, he said I did not go directly to Jerusalem, but I went to Arabia for three years and there was taught by the Lord, the things that Paul teaches in the epistles. And he said he really didn't receive anything. He wasn't taught by the founding fathers of the church, by the apostles in Jerusalem. He said they really didn't add anything to me. Even as they had been three years with Jesus, being taught as a group, Paul was with Jesus for three years alone, being personally tutored by the Lord in the scriptures. So after that he returned to Damascus and then he came down to Jerusalem. So between verses twenty five and twenty six there is about a three year time gap.), *And when Saul had come to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.* Not that fellow. We know him. They probably thought he was some kind of a mole. ²⁷But Barnabas (the son of consolation) took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. ²⁹And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. Poor Paul, it starts out in Damascus, they are trying to kill him. Now he gets to Jerusalem and it's the same thing as he begins to dispute with them. It's a very good sign of your weak position when you cannot really argue it but the only thing you can do is kill the person that is arguing against you because you can't really dispute what he is saying. So you just get angry and want to kill him. And that shows the irrationality of your position.

So ³⁰When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. Go home, Paul. So Paul returned home to Tarsus.

³¹Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied. Now Paul spent the next seven years in Tarsus, making ten. It is interesting how that so often when a person comes to the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, they feel that they need to immediately enter the ministry and begin to share with others that knowledge that they have gained through Jesus Christ, but it is interesting to me that though Paul had spent all of the years in his schooling in the scriptures, in which God was preparing him, that even after his conversion, it was probably ten years before he actually began his ministry. Ten further years of preparation. Ten further years of being taught of the Lord, this tremendous revolutionary change that is going on inside. Now Pastor Chuck doesn't say that you have to be ten years in preparation. Surely God can take you and begin to use you immediately. Paul's problem was that of having to relearn. It's always a slower process relearning than the process of learning because in relearning you have first of all to unlearn a lot of the things that you once held and had and all, so the relearning process is always slower.

Now we jump from Paul. He is safely tucked back again in Tarsus for the next seven years. And we turn again to Peter. ³²*Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.* You who have flown into Israel, coming in to the Ben Gurion airport, you are actually are coming into Lydda. This area where Peter now is coming down from Jerusalem. ³³*There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.* ³⁴*And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately.* Oh! What glorious anointing of God! As he speaks to this man a word of faith, Jesus Christ maketh you whole. A man who had been bedridden for eight years! ³⁵*So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.* A remarkable healing!

Now ³⁶*At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.* ³⁷*But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.* ³⁸*And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.* Hurry Peter, come on down to Joppa! ³⁹*Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.* She was one of those special women, talented, a seamstress, who could do anything. And she was always looking out for others. Ministering to others. One of those precious saints. And so they were showing, you know, she made this little coat for little Jacob, you know. And all of the things she had made and done they were sharing with Peter.

⁴⁰*But Peter put them all out,* (Remember when Jesus was brought to the house of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum, whose little daughter Tabitha had died. And when He arrived at the house, all of the mourners were there, and they were wailing and everything else. He said cool it, she isn't dead she is just asleep. And they began to laugh at Him. They were just scornful. They were nasty. And Jesus said, get them out of here. So they put them all out and He took just Peter and John and the mother and father of the little damsel. And He commanded her to rise. So Peter, the same, put the other people out lest there be probably a spirit of unbelief and all that would hinder the work that God was wanting to do. They were weeping and all into this so they weren't ready for the miracle.

So Peter put them all out *and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise."* Jesus said to the little damsel, "Talitha, cumi," (damsel arise). Peter said, Tabitha, arise, very similar. I can understand why he put the people out. I mean if you are going to talk to a dead body you don't want a lot of people around. They will think that something is wrong with you. So he put them all out and then he addresses this dead body. Much like Jesus said, Lazarus, come forth. He addressed the dead, so Peter addressed the dead. *And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.* ⁴¹*Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.* Don't you know that that was an exciting experience? I mean, Peter comes out of the room holding hand with Tabitha, saying here she is! ⁴²*And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.* ⁴³*So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.* So this is now setting us up for chapter ten as the Lord is going to be opening the door to the Gentiles, through Peter in the tenth chapter, a very exciting chapter as we see the beginning of the Gentile church, of course of which, we have become a vital part.

Father, we thank You for this record. And Lord, as we see the work of Your Holy Spirit, not just with the apostles but also with just the disciples. As we see, Lord, You choosing instruments. Preparing instruments to do Your work, so Lord it is our desire in these days to see Your work. To see the power of

Your Holy Spirit manifested. To be instruments, Lord, through which You can accomplish Your purposes. Lord, how we long for and desire to just have that kind of a relationship with You as did Ananias where You could speak to him and direct him, very specifically. And Lord, we desire to have that same kind of a relationship where You can speak to us and give us specific directions. Lord, we desire to have that kind of work of Your Spirit in our lives that we can bear witness that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. The kind of background and knowledge of the Scriptures, where we can open the Scriptures and show how They speak of Jesus. Lord, we pray that as Your people, You will draw us away from the allurements and the distractions of this world in which we live, drawing us unto Yourself and into a relationship with You, Lord, where our hearts will be opened to hear Your voice and willing and ready to quickly respond. God, give us we pray, a heart after Thee. Deliver us and free us Lord, from the entanglements of the fallen society amongst which we live. And Lord, may we be in tune with the Spirit, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

May the Lord be with you and watch over you and keep you. May it be a good week. And I pray that the Lord will draw you until Himself. That you'll find some quiet time and a quiet place where God can minister to your heart of the things that are eternal. That we won't be so bound by the daily obligation, the necessities, or what we refer to as the necessities of life. But like David, he said, I esteem Your Word more than my daily bread. And that we will be drawn to this kind of a communion with the Lord and that we might become far more aware of the Spiritual values than the worldly values in which we spend so much time. May the Lord draw you unto Himself and minister to you in a special way this week. May you have a testimony next week of what God has wrought in your life this week as you've opened your heart to Him and to the things of the Spirit.