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Sermon Notes

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A Life Transformed by the Resurrected Christ

Acts 9

This is a sacred day for Christians all over the world... a day we celebrate the mighty resurrection victory of Jesus over the grave!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single most powerful event in the history of the human race...

What is POWER? It is the ability to change things, to have an effect... a powerful machine is one that can move heavy objects; a powerful explosion is one that can produce massive change in an instant; a powerful engine is one that can move a massive freight train of one hundred cars; a powerful rocket is one that can lift a heavy payload into orbit 22,000 miles above the surface of the earth; a powerful speaker is one who can produce a massive effect in the hearts of his hearers; a powerful ruler is one whose decrees affect the daily lives of millions of people; a powerful invention is one that changes the way something is done from then on all over planet earth. That's POWER!!

No single event in human history has had such power as the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... it changed the eternal destinations of a multitude greater than anyone can count from every nation on earth. That's the big picture!

It is very hard for us limited human beings to understand the scope, the magnitude, the dimensions of an infinitely powerful action

like the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our minds go numb with the numbers... they are too big to comprehend.

The cold-hearted Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, one of the greatest murderers in the dark annals of human history, was purported to have said in 1947, **“A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.”**

Why does that seem to be true? It is because our minds are unable to expand to grasp the massive significance of a million lives snuffed out.

The exact same dynamic may be at work in reverse when it comes to the POWER of the resurrection of Christ. In Revelation 7, we are told that, in heaven, there will be a multitude of human beings greater than anyone could count, from every tribe, language, people, and nation, standing in radiant white robes singing the glories of their Savior. They will spend all eternity in perfect delight, swimming in a sea of glory, enjoying the infinite pleasures of God for measureless days... endless days... And they will be there because Jesus Christ died in their place and rose from the dead... giving them his righteousness and his eternal life as a free gift.

How can our finite minds expand to comprehend that?

Perhaps we need to take the wicked logic of Stalin and use it to our advantage in a glorious meditation... what did the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead do for ONE MAN – Saul of Tarsus? What change did it affect in his mind, his heart, his soul, his standing with God, his lifestyle, the course of his life’s history after that moment?

That meditation is in front of us this glorious morning, and I think it will be all we can handle. The salvation of one man is a glorious triumph... the salvation of countless millions of souls is... incalculably glorious!

So, how radical was the change in Saul of Tarsus? Today, we will plumb the depths of his conversion... and celebrate the sovereign grace of God in saving him!

I. The Context: The Gospel Accomplished, Applied, and Assaulted

Our text today is found in the Book of Acts

The Book of Acts is the second in a two-volume set written by a medical doctor named Luke... the first volume was the Gospel of Luke... the second volume is this Book of Acts

I will call Luke “The Gospel Accomplished” and Acts “The Gospel Applied”

The “gospel” is “good news”... it starts with the “bad news” of our sinfulness, our rebellion against God, our standing under condemnation by his righteous justice for our sins, and the impossibility of our doing anything to save ourselves... this terrifying condition is the deep black background against which the radiant diamond of Christ shines with the glory of God... for Christ came to ACCOMPLISH our salvation by his life, death, and resurrection... and that story is told in Luke’s first book – the Gospel according to Luke

However, Christ’s once for all accomplishment of the gospel does not achieve the salvation of any sinner by itself... it has to be APPLIED to individual sinners by the Holy Spirit... and he does this by the powerful witness of Christ’s people... by the preaching of this message and their repentance and faith as worked by the Holy Spirit... that’s the story of the Book of Acts

The Gospel Applied: The Book of Acts

1. Christ’s people were mobilized by the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses
2. The Day of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit was poured out on the people from heaven

3. The beginning of the harvest of souls in Jerusalem... 3000 new believers added in one day when the Apostle Peter preached the gospel message
4. More and more people believed the gospel message and the church in Jerusalem grew larger and larger

B. The Gospel Assaulted

1. BUT this amazing spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ was opposed from the very beginning
2. The very same Jewish leaders who had hated Jesus and arrested him and condemned him to death now began doing the same thing to his followers
3. One of the most zealous persecutors of the church was a young man named Saul of Tarsus

Acts 8:3 Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Saul was trained in Judaism by one of the greatest Jewish teachers of his day, Gamaliel... and he was on fire for Judaism... he showed his zeal especially by destroying Christians

Acts 26:9-11 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

Following his rage-filled path, he decided to go to Damascus to destroy the Christian church there... he obtained letters from the Jewish high council to deliver to the Jewish authorities in Damascus to arrest and drag back to Jerusalem any Christians he found there

Acts 9:1-2 *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.*

But... he was about to have an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ that would change his eternal destination and powerfully affect twenty centuries of history to come

Four steps... 1) The Resurrected Jesus Confronts Saul; 2) The Resurrected Jesus Convicts Saul; 3) The Resurrected Jesus Converts Saul; 4) The Resurrected Jesus Commissions Saul

II. The Resurrected Jesus Confronts Saul

Acts 9:3-4 *As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

A. This Man was SEETHING with rage at Christ and at Christians

1. "breathing out threats and murder"

B. Suddenly... Jesus CONFRONTED Saul... Met Him, Stopped Him in his tracks, knocked him to the ground

1. Jesus is always the initiator in salvation

2. He seeks and saves the lost!

3. Jesus stood in Saul's way and would not let him go any further on the road that leads to destruction

C. The Blinding Light from Heaven

Acts 9:3 *As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.*

This light was brighter than the sun:

Acts 26:13-14 About noon... as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground

D. Christ Had Already Been Working on Saul of Tarsus

1. Later in Acts, we get more information about the PROCESS which Christ had been working in Saul's mind and soul

Acts 26:14 I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

2. "Goads" are sharpened sticks put on a plow to train the oxen not to kick back at their master... they cause PAIN whenever the yoked oxen KICK at what the master wants them to do
3. GOADS... painful memories... the way the Christians died... the arguments from scripture that they made

John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

4. God the Father was DRAWING Saul to faith in Christ before the Road to Damascus... but Saul was KICKING BACK at him... resisting!
5. Now the final work was now being done in Saul's soul

III. The Resurrected Jesus Convicts Saul

A. Conviction of Sin is Essential to Salvation

Luke 5:31-32 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

B. Saul Needed to Be Crushed in Conviction

1. He is counting on his own righteousness
2. He thinks he is perfectly obeying the law
3. He thinks he doesn't need a Savior

4. But then, these few words shredded all his righteousness

Acts 9:4-5 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

C. I Can Hardly Imagine What This Did to Saul's Pounding Heart

1. To see the Lord revealed in blinding light FROM HEAVEN
2. To hear these terrifying words FROM HEAVEN: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME??"
3. Persecuting? Opposing? Fighting against?
4. Then the tortured question "Who are you LORD??"
5. The word "Lord" means everything... Jews used that word for the one true God... but to ask "Who are you, Lord?"
6. The words that destroyed Saul's world... and rebuilt it for all eternity:

"I am Jesus... the one you are persecuting!"

7. This was the name that Saul hated more than any other in the world
8. But now, this same Jesus is appearing to him in resurrected glory, clearly alive after his crucifixion... and he is accusing him of persecuting him
9. To attack Christians is to attack Jesus... it is to make God your enemy

IV. The Resurrected Jesus Converts Saul

A. It Had Already Begun...

"Who are you, Lord?"

B. Fundamentals to Our Salvation

Romans 10:9 if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

1. He has now seen the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ in radiant glory
2. He has now called him Lord
3. And he will be led by the hand into Damascus where he will pray

Acts 9:8-9 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

What was he doing? He was PRAYING and LEARNING who Christ really was! What the gospel really was!

C. Ananias and Saul's Baptism

Acts 9:10-18 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." ¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." ¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-- Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here-- has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,

V. The Resurrected Jesus Commissions Saul

A. Saul's Life was Forfeit from that Moment On

1. Saul knew he deserved to die, but the Lord Jesus had spared him
2. Now, the Lord would command him to serve him for the rest of his days

Acts 9:6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

B. The Lord Told Ananias Saul's Mission... and Its Cost

Acts 9:15-16 "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

C. Saul Would Be Known as Paul... the Apostle to the Gentiles

1. He would live the holiest life of any man that ever lived other than Jesus
2. He would suffer more than any other Christian in church history
3. He would travel relentlessly preaching the gospel in city after city, village after village
4. His writings would be used to effect the conversion of countless millions for twenty centuries to come... he would write the Book of Romans which alone accounted for the conversion of Augustine and Martin Luther... perhaps no other single written work in the history of the human race has had such an eternal impact on souls
5. All of this came from one moment... the moment a man seething with wicked rage was instantly converted to love by seeing the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ!

VI. Lessons

A. Understanding God's Sovereign Grace in Conversion

1. Radical transformation of Saul's heart... from darkness to light
 - a. Saul's heart condition before conversion
 - i) Concerning Jesus

Saul of Tarsus HATED Jesus of Nazareth... he considered him a false teacher, a deceiver of the people

What he knew of his teachings he rejected as foolishness and offensive

He considered Jesus' miracles to be fakes or worked by Satan

He hated Jesus' claim to be God in the flesh... considered it blasphemy!!

Worst of all was the concept that Jesus, the Son of God (supposedly) had actually died under the curse of God on a Roman cross... how could that even be possible? How could the King of the Jews, the Son of David, the Messiah, be completely defeated by the Gentiles and die hanging on a tree? For it is written "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree". For Saul, this was blood-curdling blasphemy!

BUT... after his conversion:

He loved Jesus Christ more than he loved anything else in the universe

He had seen Christ's infinite power, love, and beauty, and it had melted him

The glory of the Son of God filled his soul even though his eyes were blinded... the beauty of the Son of God... his ineffable power... his perfect wisdom... his kindness to him as a rebel and an enemy... the gentleness with which he called him, and yet his infinite kingly power... the Lion and the Lamb all at once

When he said "Who are you LORD?" he already knew who Jesus was... God in the form of a man... Son of God, Son of Man... perfectly one... the deity of Christ was obvious from his heavenly position and his heavenly glory

And the death of Christ must have been something other than he supposed... it was not blasphemy that Jesus, the Son of God

died under the curse of God... it was SALVATION... the perfect completion of the animal sacrificial system, where substitutes died for sinners... Jesus had become a curse for us

ii) Concerning himself

Before his conversion, Saul of Tarsus was self-righteous... he was PROUD of his Jewish credentials... a son of Abraham... a Hebrew of Hebrews... a member of the tribe of Benjamin... and a Pharisee by choice and conviction... PROUD, PROUD, PROUD... excelling in Judaism far beyond all other Jews... trained by Gamaliel in the Law...

His obedience to the Law was enough for his own salvation, and he added to it extra works of zeal... hunting down false teaching and crushing it

After his conversion, all his righteousness lay shredded on the ground... Saul of Tarsus lay blinded on the ground, stripped bare spiritually, facing his own condemnation and eternal banishment to hell... he was actually God's enemy, not God's friend.

And his pride was revealed as the spiritual millstone around his neck dragging him down to hell... his heart was opened up by the light of Christ's purity... inside was revealed corruption – earthly lusts, earthly ambitions, earthly murders, earthly greed... he thought he'd obeyed the law from his childhood; now he realized that the Law actually stood against him, because it probed the inner recesses of his heart and revealed secret corruptions... covetousness of all types... and he realized that he really was dead while he lived

This darkness was revealed on the Road to Damascus by the light of Christ's pure glory, and Saul turned in disgust away from his so-called righteousness as a vile, filthy garment that was sticking to his soul... the Spirit of God stripped it from him and clothed him with Christ's perfect righteousness as a gift

Now at last, by sheer grace, Saul stood blameless before the eyes of God, holy and pure, not having a righteousness of his own from the Law, but a perfect righteousness earned by Christ's perfect obedience to his Father every moment of his life... in that radiant garment of purity at last Saul of Tarsus stood

Passionately zealous for Judaism... a ladder-climber, excelling professionally as well, in with the right people, the Sanhedrin had their eye on him; he was going to be powerful, wealthy,

iii) Concerning Christians

Before his conversion, Saul hated Christians... he was "breathing out threats and murder" against them... he hated them so much, he felt nothing but contempt for Stephen when he was stoned to death—Saul thought it was absolutely the right thing to do; when he went from house to house dragging off men and women and throwing them in jail, he did so with unflinching violence... imagine DRAGGING a woman to jail!

This was his true conviction... no doubts, no hesitations! Violence... murder... threats... this is what filled his heart toward both Jesus and all his followers... they all deserved death, and he was very willing to give it to them

After his conversion, Saul understood the connection between Jesus and his people: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME?" He is the head, his people are his body... to love the Head is to love the Body of Christ as well... the first one he met was Ananias... God actually gave him a vision of Ananias coming to him and placing his hands on him and restoring his sight, so Saul as he was praying was waiting for this man... what a conversation they must have had...

Ananias hadn't wanted to go, but the Lord made him. And Ananias went in love and obedience to Jesus

***Acts 9:17-18 Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--
- Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--***

has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ *Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,*

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit came in direct connection with the hands of a Christian... Saul was not on his own, but part of a loving family... soon he would meet Barnabas, who would put an arm around him and welcome him into the church at Jerusalem, though they were afraid of him

For the rest of his life, the brothers and sisters in Christ would be unspeakably precious to him... they would love him and weep when parted from him, and he would weep too

The immeasurable love of the family of God, the fellowship of the Spirit, the brotherhood of believers

iv) Concerning his future life

Before his conversion, Saul was ambitious in the usual worldly sense... he was zealous, energetic, passionate, nationalistic for Judaism... he was advancing in Judaism and becoming rich and powerful with all the right connections... they would reward him with power and possessions and pleasures... all the things the world had to offer... the world lay at his feet

In one instant, all that changed! His loyalties shifted entirely. Now the Sanhedrin in their opposition to Christ were truly the enemies of God... and Saul was about to burn all those bridges by openly preaching Christ in the synagogues in Damascus... soon those very same powerful men would be hunting him down to kill HIM!

The rest of his life was forfeit to the plans and purposes of King Jesus... he now considered his life worth nothing to him, if only he could serve God's purpose in building the Kingdom of Christ... the plans Christ had for him were amazing: *"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings, and before the people of Israel."*

The price tag would also be unspeakably high... *"I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."* The education in pain would be the highest in the history of the Christian church... no one in twenty centuries of the bloody and courageous advance of the gospel has paid so high a price in suffering as the Apostle Paul

THAT is what conversion is like!

2. "Divine and Supernatural Light"

- a. The beginning of Saul's conversion was a blinding physical light that he and his companions saw with their physical eyes, a light brighter than the sun
- b. However, the real work was done with an invisible light, shining within Saul's heart... Paul would write about it later

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

- c. God caused his own spiritual glory to shine in Saul's heart... a sense of the perfection and excellence and infinite worth of his character as seen in his Son, Jesus Christ... that light began shining in Saul's heart... and he "saw" it BY FAITH!!

B. Understanding the Hope this Gives Us in Evangelism/Missions

1. If Christ can convert this seething rage-filled enemy in one moment, he can save anyone anytime
2. We can pray for the most ardent enemy of Christianity and ask God to save him or her
3. We can pray for wandering sons or daughters and know that God can rescue them from the evil of their hearts in a moment
4. The same power that converted Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus is at work in the world today

C. What About You??

1. Has the Resurrected Christ Confronted You?
2. Has the Resurrected Christ Convicted You?
3. Has the Resurrected Christ Converted You?
4. Has the Resurrected Christ Commissioned You?