

My Chosen Instrument

Acts 9:1-31 (15, 16)

“But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

In the past weeks we have learned about how one of the servants of Jesus called Steven was killed because of preaching Jesus Christ. From then on there was great persecution of the believers. Last week we also learned of how persecution broke out in the church in Jerusalem, apostles scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Steven and mourned deeply for him. Things had gotten serious very quickly, believing in Jesus was now a matter of life and death. Men and women in the faith were being dragged into prison left and right. At the heart of these persecutions was the man called Saul. Saul was the image of church persecution. He was the main weapon used by the religious leaders to stop the believers from preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. He was the one who led the killing of Steven and was determined to put an end to the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet in today's passage, this very man who caused havoc in the early church, Jesus chooses him to be his instrument. An instrument for the sole purpose of proclaiming Jesus' name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. In this passage we shall look at what was Saul's problem? what caused his problem? What qualified Saul to be chosen by God? What does it mean that he will be Jesus' instrument? May the Lord have mercy on me and choose me this today to be his instrument so his word may be planted in our hearts. Amen!

Look at verse 1-2, “Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 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.” It was Saul's soul purpose and life mission to imprison those who believed in Jesus and preached Jesus. He was not wasting any breath for any other purpose each breath had murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. However, while he was in his zeal to persecute the church of Jesus something happened, look at verse 3-4, “As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**” They say it was still day time however this light was brighter than the sun, such that Saul even fell from his horse. Saul was confronted by our Lord Jesus and Jesus revealed Saul's problem, **Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?** His problem was that he was persecuting God. All along Saul thought the believers were the problem before God. Saul was well trained in the Jewish doctrines, traditions and customs, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews from a prominent tribe of the Jews. He knew the Torah very well, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, well versed in the teachings of Moses. He was absolutely certain that he was serving the same God of Moses. However, Jesus reveals Saul's problem in a form of a question, why do you persecute me? This is so that Saul may introspect his heart and intentions? Instead of being sure and determined for the wrong thing. We sometimes need to ask ourselves questions, for example, am I in the faith? How you answer that question reveals a lot. This was shattering for Saul because his mission to persecute the church was his identity, it was his crown of fame and human recognition among the Jewish religious leaders. However, before God, he was committing sin of going against God. Let us look at how Saul responded to Jesus' question? Which also reveals Saul's problem and why he himself was a problem.

Look at verse 5, “**Who are you, Lord?**” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. Saul responded with a question, he could not find an answer in his heart why he was persecuting God. Saul asked, “**Who are you, Lord?**” and Jesus once again said, **I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.** Saul knew full well that he was persecuting the people of the way, the ones who followed the way of Jesus, and now Jesus the very person he was persecuting is alive. Saul's problem was that he did not know Jesus, he did not know God. He is struck and shook by this reality. This was a humbling moment for Saul, upon meeting Jesus he did not bring up excuses or justification to why he was persecuting the church. Rather Saul sincerely asked a heart-felt question, “Who are you, Lord?” Saul persecuted the church of Jesus because he did not know who Jesus was. He had been filled with his own human ambitions and used God's name to achieve them while in his hearts of hearts he was ruled by sin and under the power and dominion of sin. He knew about Jesus, heard about him but did not know him personally. And so his question has an element of repentance of a realization that I am so so lost, so wrong and a chief of sinners. There is a deep sense of brokenness within Saul for him to really be able to ask this down-to-earth question, “who are you, Lord?” **through this question Saul was saying, I do not know you Lord, help me know you, how can I know you, who are you, Lord.** Jesus did not appear to Saul to condemn him or punish Saul. Jesus appeared to Saul to become his

Lord. Jesus appeared to Saul to show him his mercy and grace. Jesus had come to open Saul's eyes. He came to redeem Saul from the power of the devil to the power of God. Jesus' grace was greater than Saul's sin.

From verses 6-9, Jesus then commanded Saul to go into the city where he would then be told what to do. And Saul did exactly as he was told, right here we see Saul repented heart, he turned from following his human driven zeal into obeying the Lord Jesus. It was also easy for him to fall into self-pity and self-condemnation which is a form of pride. However, amazingly because he had nothing of himself to count on, he could repent and obey Jesus. And for three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything, it seemed as though he was praying and fasting [11].

Now in Damascus the Lord had a disciple named Ananias and the Lord called to him in a vision, to go to where Saul was [10-12]. Saul in a vision also saw a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. However, upon hearing this, Ananias had a bit of a challenge, look at verse 13-14, "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." Ananias probably could not believe what he was hearing from the Lord Jesus. He felt he had to remind Jesus who was Saul and what his mission was. However, the Lord Jesus had a new life direction for Saul. This was God's grace over Saul which Ananias himself could not understand. The amazing grace of God.

Let us all read verse 15, "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel." Let us look at what Jesus is saying here. Firstly, **Jesus command, Go!**, Ananias had to accept Jesus grace over Saul. Even though Saul at the moment was a man known to be zealous to persecute the church by all and every means necessary. It was not long ago that he had killed Steven one of the faithful servants of Jesus, it was just yesterday that brothers and sisters in the faith were imprisoned because of Saul's command. Ananias is aware that Saul was headed to Damascus for the sole purpose of capturing believers into prison. Now because Jesus commanded him to Go! Ananias as a disciple of Jesus accepted Jesus leading and God's grace over Saul. Probably Ananias is wondering, how could Saul change. The grace! Second, **Jesus reveals that he had chosen Saul as his instrument.** Jesus said, **this man is my chosen instrument.** This shows that Saul was already an instrument of something or someone. He was actually a chosen instrument of Satan because he had been persecuting Jesus Christ. Serving his sinful desires and selfish human ambitions in the name of God. He deserved the full wrath of God. However, Jesus met Saul personally and chose him as his instrument. This is the power of the gift of God's grace over a sinner. Instead of being an instrument used by the devil, from now on, he will be an instrument used by God. Lets look at verse 15b again, "...to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel." Saul will be used as an instrument to proclaim the name of Jesus to everyone. What is the importance of the name of Jesus? Why does his name need to be proclaimed to everyone. In Act 4:12 Peter reveals what is in the name of Jesus, Acts 4:12 says, "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." The name of Jesus is the power of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. It is the name by which we have been given a hope in the kingdom of God and a new life as a new creation! Saul was chosen to be the instrument to carry this name before all people. He was chosen to be used for this great and glorious task. That is why even after we pray we say in the name of Jesus, Amen.

It is quite shocking that Jesus could chose Saul of all people to be his instrument. Why did he choose him? Was it because he could speak many languages? Was it because he was so smart? Or that he had a good family background or training as a Pharisee? Was it because Saul had a lot of zeal and ambition? The answer to all these questions is a big fat NO. There is only one explanation: it was Jesus' grace all the way. Saul later attest to this in the book of Ephesians 3:7-8 which reads, "I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power 8Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." It was grace not just to be saved from the power of sin and death. But grace to participate as an apostle in the wonderful and awesome work of God, to save others from the power of sin and death. Saul speaking later after his name was changed to Paul In the book of Romans 1:5 says, "Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." God's grace upon Saul became so effective in his life, he would preach Jesus name because of the grace he had received. It was this received grace from Jesus that would form the foundation and basis of his faith in the Lord.

We are all here because of the grace of Jesus. We came into the faith not because we prayed or studied the bible, God showered us with his grace. We were like Saul doing our own thing, living based on our passions and selfish ambitions. Some of us though claiming to have received Jesus, yet living out our lives while God is secondary in our lives. Living a tick box Christianity, have I prayed, have I gone to church, have I helped someone etc, while being an instrument of Satan serving our sin master. Self serving instead of serving God. May Jesus reveal our fundamental problem through his word, for Jesus has come to grant us the gift of God's grace. To choose us to be his instrument. This is the amazing grace of God. Let us further see what does it mean to be God's instrument.

Look at verse 16, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Saul had been the cause of suffering for those who proclaimed Jesus name, however, now because of Jesus grace he will now suffer because of Jesus name sake. In previous passages we know that the apostles actually rejoiced for suffering because of proclaiming Jesus name. They rejoiced because they could now be counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the sake of Jesus name. Being counted worthy of suffering for Jesus' name was actually Jesus' grace too. Now Saul was being called to suffer for the name so he too may be counted worthy of suffering of Jesus name. What an absolute 180 degree change in Saul's life, a complete new life. Saul deserved to suffer much for his sins, at least the same that he inflicted to Stephen and the other disciples. But instead he was shown grace to suffer much for Jesus' namesake. As one who had done much harm to the believers, he was now called to suffer with them and experience the power of the name of Jesus. Jesus' statement reveals his full forgiveness and acceptance of Saul and the grace of a new life in him.

Suffering is the way to practically learn of Jesus. This is the meat of the solution to Saul and to all believers in knowing Jesus Christ our Lord. Suffering because of Jesus name, is the practical way to know the Lord and to experience his grace and the power of his resurrection in a real way. We are not going to know Jesus only through studying the bible or coming to church. We can read about all the passages in the bible about God's love and how to love others. However, you will only get to start scratching on the surface what God's love is, when you have to practically obey God's command in loving a person and serving them. Especially a person who is actually mean to you. When we are called to suffering for Jesus' name, we should not be discouraged, confused or depressed. No one wants to suffer, however through this suffering we will learn of Jesus who suffered much and showed his grace to us. And further experience the power of his grace and the power of his resurrection.

In verse 17-18, we read that Ananias went to Saul, placed his hands upon him and prayed, shared to him how Jesus had sent him. Immediately something, like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again and was filled with the Holy spirit. He then got baptized and got something to eat. Look at verse 20, "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." After spending several days in Damascus with the brothers at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. The grace of God upon Saul was with effect, it did not leave Saul idle. He obeyed the Lord Jesus and became an effective instrument of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Saul completely turned from his old life to obedience to Jesus. Let's also look at 1 Corinthians 15:9-10. "9For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." He felt that he didn't even deserve to be called an apostle. He realized it was all purely God's grace—in fact, this grace even came as a gift. Then he held to the grace and obeyed the Lord. it also says that he worked harder than all of them. He didn't work hard because he had been a zealous man in his old life, but it was purely because of Jesus' grace. It was the reason he was who he was. He was eager to show that Jesus' grace was not without effect in his life. We read in verse 22, 28 and 29 that, Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. And speaking boldly in the name of the Lord, he talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.

He was an effective instrument because of Jesus' grace. *The instrument is like a car and grace is like the fuel. No matter how beautiful the car may be, without fuel it cannot do anything.* Saul became a wanted man by the Jews who wanted to kill him. Ultimately because of the help of Ananias and Barnabas Saul was accepted by the believers and the church grew in number, living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, Jesus revealed Saul's fundamental problem, he was persecuting God. The cause of Saul's problem was that he did not know Jesus. However, Jesus had come to love and give Saul's God's gift of grace. This grace is practically God's choosing of Saul to be his instrument. In other words, to be chosen as God's instrument, is God's expression of his grace. We learn that God's grace is not a feeling or something to privately enjoy. God's grace turned Saul into Jesus instrument, he had to go out and suffer for Jesus. This is all possible because of the work of God's grace. This is really amazing, a man was turned from being an instrument of Satan into an instrument of God. To be given a life direction of participating in the suffering of Christ Jesus, to have the practical evidence of being counted into the kingdom of God. I pray that God's grace may be effective in our lives, may we not sit down with what we know and have received. What Jesus did for us on the cross is the gift of God's grace upon us. Lord have mercy on us to be your effective instrument in proclaiming Jesus name to many Saul like people in our campus and in this world.