

## “Saul!”

04-10-16

You know, God sometimes works in the most mysterious ways. You and I are here in worship together this morning with a whole variety of differences, failures and joys. And God chooses the most unexpected times; the most unlikely people; and the most unpredictable ways to show His Will and purposes.

I know that many of us are familiar with the words of the old hymn: *“Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine.”* But maybe to be more correct, according to our first lesson from Acts, it should be, *“Blessed Disturbance, I am Jesus’s.”!*

Open to Acts 9. In Acts today, God comes to disturb and interrupt the lives of Saul, and a Christian in Damascus named Ananias. This is truly an amazing story! Verses 1-2, *“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”*

**Saul was the Enemy!** We have Saul of Tarsus, who was so enthusiastic about his own Jewish faith that he was: *“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of Jesus.”* So, **Saul Takes Action!** Saul was so zealous against the followers of Jesus, after he has rounded up Christians in Jerusalem, he got permission from the leaders of the church, and was willing to go out of his way to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus—in those days a good week’s journey—to persecute Christians there!

But God does move in mysterious ways! Verses 3-8, *“Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.”*

Saul was a powerful, self-confident, influential person, who was very much in control of his life with a clear purpose—persecute Christians. Yet, the resurrected Jesus appears and speaks to Saul. Now *“the tables are turned.”* Powerful and self-confident Saul falls to the ground! His life has been so disturbed and interrupted by the risen Christ that he falls to the ground and is now blind!

**Saul Encounters Christ!** Because of this encounter, Saul, a hater of Christians becomes someone new and different! **Saul Becomes the Chosen!** God had a special purpose for him and he would be doing things very differently than how he had previously lived! He would be doing the same things the Christian people did that he was trying to get rid of! **Saul becomes the Converted!**

What irony and paradox! Saul, the great Jewish leader who, up until this point was accustomed to giving orders is now receiving orders from the very One he was persecuting! Jesus said to Saul: *“rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”* The powerful, self-confident, Saul is now broken. To emphasize this even more, we’re told that the people traveling with Saul: *“led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.”*

The life of Ananias is also going to be disturbed and interrupted when the risen Christ comes to him and gives him orders, too. When Ananias is told about Saul, he certainly doesn't jump up and down with excitement over the mission Jesus had given him! Ananias had heard of Saul's reputation as a persecutor of Christians at Jerusalem. Now Jesus is telling him, he's supposed to go to this man? He probably thought, *"You've got to be kidding, Jesus!"*

But, Ananias ends up going in faith and obedience doing what Christ had ordered him to do. Even with Ananias's reservations and misgivings, Jesus continues to work, and Ananias knows that Jesus isn't just telling him to go, but He's going to be walking with him every step of the way! Verses 17-19, *"So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened."*

The first words Ananias speaks to this complete stranger are: *"Brother Saul!"* The two men, who on their own were enemies, were now united as brothers in Jesus Christ! And from that point on, Saul, now named Paul, **Becomes the Witness of Jesus Christ!** But he becomes more than just a witness, he becomes one of the greatest witnesses the Church has ever seen!

God still continues to choose the most unlikely people—like you and me! People who are far from perfect. People of all shapes, sizes, colors, cultures and personalities. God's able to mold and shape us like God did with Saul and Ananias to reach those people to whom God sends us. God still continues to work in the most unpredictable ways!

**We Were and Are the Enemy Because of our Sin.** Many times we just follow along with whatever the world does and don't think we're doing anything wrong. But the world isn't going the same way God is, so when we follow the world, we fall away from God's path. We don't deserve His forgiveness! But because God stills works in mysterious ways, He sends His Son, forgives us, renews us, and gives us life now and for eternity!

Because of Jesus' suffering and death and rising again, **We Are the Chosen.** In the waters of Baptism, God calls us His own. We are His! In the blood of Jesus Christ, we're washed clean forever!

As we're filled with the Holy Spirit and grow in our faith, **We Become Witnesses!** God has put us in this world to be His ambassadors! We're His representatives to a world that desperately is looking for what we have in Jesus Christ!

At the Pastors' Conference I was at this past week, the statistics were once again shared, that even though millennials aren't a big part of the church, they're looking for a solid base and a constant, because the rest of the world doesn't have it. We have it in Jesus Christ, the greatest constant you could ever have! We also have a constant faith and belief! That's something for us to share!

As we walk with Jesus Christ each day, we are Witnesses for all He's done for us! God's grace is at work in powerful, mysterious ways in our lives to help us mend broken relationships between us and the people around us! It's our role as His witnesses to work to

build mutual respect, trust, friendship, and love for one another, so God's purposes can be accomplished!

So what interruptions and disturbances have come into your life lately? It may very well be the mysterious ways of God at work in your life! From the current movie, *"God's Not Dead 2"* may you live the same way as the character in the movie who said, *"I'd rather stand with God and be judged by the world, than stand with the world and be judged by God!"*

May that be your daily call to faith in Jesus Christ! May it also be your daily call to sharing Jesus Christ with everyone!