

Acts 9 | Kevin Stiles

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Preacher: Kevin Stiles

[0:00] All right. Thanks for the music this morning. Appreciate the singing.! It's good to be with you. And I think Mark had a pretty short passage last week. What was it? Three chapters?

Two. Two chapters? Two long ones. All right. And this morning I have 31 verses in Acts chapter 9. So please don't fall asleep on me.

It's an exciting passage. Acts chapter 9. I've entitled this morning, The Power of the Gospel. It will change your life. No, no, no. The power of the gospel. It will change your destination.

It should change your life. And next week, Mr. David's going to hone in even more on the gospel. But what we want to look at this morning is the power of the gospel. And this one man, this one man that God changed the way he was going.

[1:33] And we have a person that has had a huge influence on the Christian life. Got a question to start. Is there anyone that you can think of that the gospel cannot save?

Is there anybody? You know, I remember at Valley Park, we had our maintenance, head of our maintenance. And he was, he liked our family. I worked for him for a couple of years, but I was afraid of him.

You talk real tough. You get back over. Whoa, people, people were scared. Everyone was scared. And, you know, the name kind of fit him, Mr. Bratcher.

You know, they just seemed. And he was probably one that at that time, I thought, you know what? I don't think I could share the gospel because I think he'd just chew me up and spit me out and say, I don't need that.

But later on, my senior year in baseball, I saw a different side of him. And he always wanted to drive our baseball team to the games.

[2:37] We had a really good team. And I actually almost saw him cry at our last game. So, but I want to start out.

I want to read just a few excerpts from this Miss Miller's missionary story. The title of it, He Wasn't Crazy. It says, look at that, Mr. Walker, whispered a young man in flashy clothing to the woman beside him.

I think he's gone crazy. Usually, Ludlow Walker had a jolly grin and a joke for every customer. But today, his face seemed to be distraught with fear.

Great drops of sweat rolled down his forehead as he stared at the book in his hand. His lips moved feverishly, reading the words from the yellowed pages. Hey, man, what you got there?

There came the raucous voice of a customer on one end of the bar stools. What are you reading, man? Don't bother me. Ludlow murmured, where was I?

[3:36] Yes, the Lord cometh to judge the earth. With righteousness shall he judge the world and the people, he read aloud. A ripple of uneasiness swept over the crowd of drinkers.

That's a Bible, muttered someone. He's crazy for sure. For sure. A man in an expensive suit slipped his own full glass along the countertop toward Ludlow.

Here, man, he said. Drink this quickly. You need it worse than I do. Ludlow Walker raised his head, looked full in the face of his friend. No, he spoke deliberately.

I won't drink that. I'll never drink liquor again. A snort of laughter rose from several of the customers, but most sat in horrified silence. Crazy!

What's going on? Let's get out of here! Alone at the bar, Ludlow bred on. He could not explain the mysterious sense of conviction which had gripped him that afternoon.

[4:32] Caused him to search for this old Bible among his dead father's treasure. He didn't know much about God's plan of salvation, but he knew that he wanted God in his life. Lord, help me, he prayed.

I want your power to change me. I've had enough of sin and darkness. At last, he went to bed, secured in his knowledge that God heard him.

In the morning, he woke with a prayer in his heart. Lord, what shall I do? You must find other Christians, came the answer. And two days later, he went to a mission house with some missionary women, and he said, Everyone said I was crazy.

You don't think I've lost my mind, do you? No, indeed. You haven't lost your mind. Your mind has been renewed. That's what God does for us.

Not everyone was happy, though. You see, his tavern was a, his motel and bar were famous throughout the country of Belize.

[5:40] Government leaders, tourists, and rich businessmen loved to sit and drink in his popular, colorful cocktail lounge. Was Ludwig going to close the place down? No.

Instead, he tore it down. He tore it down. And Ludwig Walker, I believe, is still alive today. He's been a pastor down in Miami area.

He started a mission called Ship Watch for sailors, or not sailors, but merchants that come in to the port to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ludwig Walker, his life was changed. And this morning, we're going to see that this lesson is important. It's sharing about a person who's probably impacted Christianity second to Jesus, and that's Saul of Tarsus.

He was a Pharisee, well-educated, studied under the famous Jewish teacher Gamaliel, and he wrote 13 of our 27 New Testament books.

[6:48] Paul, I mean Saul. You might hear me say Paul, because we know later he became, is renamed the Apostle Paul. So let's look at that.

If you'll turn to Acts chapter 9, we've got 31 verses. I'm just going to kind of read and kind of look at it as we're reading. And I've got it divided in several parts.

The first one is the conversion of Saul, the first 19 verses of Acts chapter 9. And so let's get right into it here. Verse 1. That was the Apostle Paul.

Formerly Saul. We see in verses 1-2, we see the threatening man. The threatening man. Go back one page. Chapter 7.

Verse 58. When Stephen's being put to death. To death. Stoned. It says, They had driven Stephen out of the city. They began stoning him, and witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

[8:13] So he first comes on the scene in Acts as a witness. A witness to the stoning of Stephen.

And what's he think about it? Chapter 8, verse 1. Saul was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death.

He was all for it. He was right there with him. He may not have cast a stone, but he was all for it. This man has got to go. We can't have him anymore.

Sound like some of our culture today? I think so. And then look what else now. Go down two verses in chapter 8, verse 3.

But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, dragging off men and women. He would put them in prison. He was ravaging the church.

[9:11] The church was scared of this man, Saul. Because he had power. Remember, he was a Pharisee. He was well educated. And now he's got people behind him.

It says in chapter 9 there that he goes to the high priest and he gets letters. He's got backing. He's got backing to do what he wants.

And what's he want to do? He wants to get rid of Christians. He does not like Christians. It says he treated the church shamefully with injury.

He was devastating it, trying to ruin the church. Today he'd be put on the TBL list. Travel ban list. Don't go see that man. He might kill you. That's Saul. Where's he going? Okay.

[10:09] It says in verse 2 he's going to the synagogues at Damascus. Now Damascus is about 135 to 150 miles north of Jerusalem.

It's not even in Israel. And yet he's going up to Damascus. That is how, what would we say? That's the fanatic that he is. He wants to get rid of Christians. Not only, it says he wants to get rid of the way. He's going to go up to Syria.

Syria had, Christians had been scattered there. There were a lot that had gone there. Maybe through persecution down in Israel. And Christianity was starting to explode.

But Saul said, we can't have this. And you're going to see later that Saul thinks he's doing it right.

[11:09] He thinks he's zealous for God. This group, the way, has to go. Now Christianity at that time was referred to as the way.

And you might be thinking of John 14, 6. Jesus said, I am the way. And so the name means that Christianity is more than just a belief or set of opinions or doctrines.

No, it's more than that. Following Jesus, being in the way, is a way of living as well as believing. It was your life.

I belong to Jesus. He died for me. I've put my trust in the gospel. And Paul said, no. He knew the law.

We can't have this. I've got to get rid of him. As I said, the way was spreading everywhere. And Saul was concerned. And so what's he doing?

[12:12] It says he's breathing threats. Verse 1, breathing threats and murder. Murder. Murder. He's gone from being the witness to breathing threats and murder.

He's an angry, violent man who's convinced of his own righteousness. No, he thinks he's going the right way. And I think that's the way many people are today.

They think they're going the right way. We went out to eat at Cracker Barrel last week after speaking. And so I just liked, you know, we don't go out to eat too much.

But I like to share with, you know, the waiter or waitress. And I said to Megan, I said, man, you've done a really good job for us today. I've got a question, though, for you.

Do you know where you're going to be when you die? Oh, yeah. No, I hope so. And it just opened.

[13:15] I said, hey, do you mind if I just take one minute? I know you've got other work. To share why I know where I'm going to be. And she, you know, she just, she listened.

Or it seemed like she really listened. She seemed like she was taking it in. And I like to today, I'll say, hey, can I take, can you give me a piece of your paper? I want to write three verses for you.

So you can maybe look at these later on. And so you think of Megan, maybe you could be praying for her at Cracker Barrel. But a lot of people saw, like saw.

They think they know they're going the right way. And they're not. And so now look what happens.

Verse 3. It came about as he journeyed. He was approaching Damascus.

That's where he got his letters to go to. And suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. Wow. And so this, this, what happened here, Paul tells it in two other places.

[14:17] Acts 22 and Acts 26. And so you can go there and get some of the things that you're not, that we don't see in this text. And one of the things is, it was, this encounter happened at midday.

So about noon. About noon. The sun's out. But there's this light. And it says in, in one of the other accounts, it said it was brighter than the sun.

So bright that Paul, or Saul, falls to the ground. And we see that he goes blind. Ah. And he's probably covering his eyes probably to keep from being hurt so much.

The Lord stops him in his tracks. He stops him in his tracks. Midday, noon, light brighter than the sun. And so you won't find this, what I, what I kind of came up with.

And I'm not going to really try to run with it or push it too hard. But I thought, you know what, that's kind of interesting. Noon, midday. Blind, darkness.

[15:27] Who's talking to him? Jesus. What happened when he's on the cross at noon? From the sixth hour to the ninth hour? Total darkness. I don't know.

It just came to my mind. I didn't see it in anybody's commentaries. So I might not have any credence. But I thought that was interesting. And then I also thought it was interesting.

How long was he blind? Three days. Jesus in the grave. Three days. Three nights. Saul. Saul. You're going the wrong way.

And what's it say? Verse 4. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Notice twice.

Saul, Saul. Saul. And it's a style in which the Lord is showing emotion. Like, Saul, you don't get it, Saul.

[16:29] In fact, I feel sorry for you. You're on the wrong road. It's the same as if you remember Martha and Mary. Mary's worshipping at Jesus' feet.

And Martha's like, Lord, don't you care? My sister's, she's lazy. I'm doing all the work. Martha. Martha. Mary's picked the right, the better thing.

Don't, that's okay, Martha. Or how about when he's in Jerusalem and he looks over the city. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem. And I don't know about you, I get that sense of the Lord just, his emotions. They don't get it. They are refusing me. And here it is. Saul. Saul. What's he say? Why have you, why are you persecuting me?

Now let's stop there for a second. I want to look at that first word, why, that question, why? I don't know about you, but I remember being young, often doing either wrong things or stupid things.

[17:35] And what would dad say? Kevin, why did you do that? Why are you going that way? That question, why? In the New American Standard, it's 423 times the word why is used.

But if you, there's three times having to do with God. And what do I mean by that? Think back in Genesis with Cain and Abel.

And Cain's not too happy because God has accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his. And he is mad. And then Cain hears from heaven, Cain, why are you angry?

Why? That's coming from God. And then you've got to go all the way to the New Testament before it happens again. And there's the Lord on the cross.

And it's deep in the deepest agony. My God, my God, why? Why have you forsaken me? And then this third time.

[18:47] Saul, Saul, why? Why are you persecuting me? That question of why. And notice here.

Why are you persecuting? He didn't say, man. Why are you threatening them? Why are you putting them in prison? Why are you persecuting me?

You think you're doing the right thing, but you're persecuting me. You're going the wrong way. And it just cuts.

Cuts right through it all with Saul. And Saul, then he says the next verse. Verse 5. Who are you, Lord?

Who are you? Who are you? What's he say? I'm Jesus. The one I'm trying to get rid of, those people that followed you?

[19:48] The way? Wow. What a question. Who? Who are you? You know, Gallup survey did a poll about questions that people would like to ask God.

They said, choose three questions that you would most like to ask God. And here's the top five responses. Will there ever be lasting world peace?

How can I be a better person? What does the future hold for my family and me? Will there ever be a cure for all the diseases?

And then why is there suffering in the world? Those were the top five. But you know what? Isn't it strange that if you look at those questions, those questions are answered in the Bible.

People want to ask God questions that he's already answered. But Paul asked the rice question. Who are you?

[20:56] Who are you? I must be going the wrong way. I'm trying to get rid of the way. Who are you? He asked the right questions.

He wanted to know Jesus. And you know what? I think of Philippians 3.10. And later on, the Apostle Paul says, That I may know him.

And the power of his resurrection. And the fellowship of his sufferings. That's what Paul wanted. The rest of his life. That I may know him. But right now, who are you?

And he says, I'm Jesus who you persecute. Let me ask you a question this morning. Do you want to know all about Jesus?

Many people say that they do. But they don't want to spend any time with him. Many believers are like, yeah, you know, the Bible.

[22:00] It's kind of boring. I fall asleep when I read it. How about you and I? Do we want to know him? Paul says, I want to know him.

I want to know him. And then look at the next thing. And this isn't actually in this. You won't see it in here. You have to go to Acts 22. It says his next question.

What should I do? What do you want me to do now? I've spent my whole life studying the law. I'm a Pharisee. I'm a Pharisee of Pharisees.

I thought I had it all together. I studied under the famous Gamaliel. What do you want me to do then? Wow. What shall I do, he says.

And notice how he didn't say, what do you want others to do? He said, what do you want me to do? It was so personal.

[23:02] What do you want me to do? I thought I was doing it right. And in 1 Timothy 1, it says, I acted in ignorance of unbelief.

He just calls it what it is. I was ignorant. I was stupid. I was following what I thought was right. And look what Jesus says. Rise, verse 6, enter the city, and it should be told what you must do.

Go, wait, and see. And I was like, why didn't you just tell him? It's all like, you want to know what I want you to do?

This is what I want you to do. Instead, he goes, get up, go, wait, and see. Go, wait, and see.

Again, I'm like wondering, okay, it was three days. Did the Lord want him to really think about what had just happened? What he'd been doing?

[24:06] And then he's going to show them? I don't know. I don't have the answer for you for this morning. But we do know this. He's now blind. His eyes are blind.

He cannot see. We have some blind people here. And Saul was able to say, I can relate to him. I can't see. I was going along, but now I can't see. Wow. Verses 10 to 16, we have a man named Ananias that comes on the scene, and he's given an assignment.

Notice the Lord calls him, and he says, here I am. Here I am. Verse 10. Behold, here am I, Lord. What do you want? What do you want? I'll do it. Verse 11. He says, six things he tells them. And it's neat how the Lord is really specific.

[25:07] But he said, arise and go to the street called Straight. And Ananias, I'm going to tell you, you won't need a GPS. I'm telling you where to go. There's a street called Straight.

That's the first thing. Inquire at the house of Judas. I'm going to tell you who owns this house that I want you to go to. Judas owns the house. And inquire for a man from Tarsus.

There's a guy from Tarsus. I'm telling you where he's from. Tarsus is not in Damascus. And his name's Saul. Fifth thing, he's praying.

He's praying. And he's seeing in verse 12 a vision. Six things he just lays right out before Ananias of what's happening. Ananias, I got a job for you.

I want you to go and tell him. And I want you to lay hands on him. I want you to. He's going to get sight. And you're going to tell him how much he's going to suffer for me. Oh, what a job.

[26:11] What a job. And look in verse 13. Ananias says, Lord, I've heard about how much harm he's done to the saints. He has authority from the high priest, probably Caiaphas, to bind all who call upon thy name.

Lord, do you know what you're calling me to? He's a bad man. He's a threatening man. He might put me to death.

And what's the Lord say? I've chosen Saul. Verse 15. He's a chosen instrument of mine to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel.

And as we read scripture, we see Paul started out preaching to the Jews. Didn't want anything. So he went to the Gentiles. He gets arrested.

He preaches before King Agrippa. Just exactly like the Lord said he would do. But look at verse 16. For I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.

[27:20] Ananias, he's going to suffer. He's going to suffer. Six things he told him. And he says, Saul is chosen.

And so he goes there. And look what he does. Brother Saul. Brother Saul. What an endearing name.

Brothers and sisters. That's what we call each other who are believers. So Ananias, even though he might have been trembling. Brother Saul. He didn't say, stay over there.

Saul. Look what else. He goes and lays his hands on him. And he says, receive the spirit. And he's healed.

What a show of Christian love. That's the only way Saul could know about it. Saul was blind. So he couldn't see him. But he could feel him. And he could hear him.

[28:16] Brother Saul. You regain your sight. You're filled with the Holy Spirit. Wow. What a time that must have been.

And so that's the conversion. In verse 19, it said he took food and was strengthened. He was so concerned. He went three days without eating. And now he's going to get strengthened both physically and spiritually.

And so that moves us to 20 to 25. In just a short, I want to just kind of quickly go through this. Because it says, for several days, or wait.

Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogue saying, he is the son of God. He was going to kill people for believing that he's the son of God.

Now he's, hey, he is the son of God. The way I was walking was wrong. He is the son of God. Wow. And all those hearing him continued to be amazed and were saying, is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?

[29:32] Paul, Saul kept increasing in strength, confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior, the son of God.

And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with them. But their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates by day and night so that they might put him to death.

But his disciples took him by night, led him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket. Paul is, or Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1, 13 says, after they heard the message of the gospel of their salvation, they believed.

And after believing, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. When a person puts their faith in Jesus Christ, he fills us. He seals us with his Holy Spirit.

And it said, Paul has the Holy Spirit. And that's why he's able to go with this kind of strength, because he has now this Holy Spirit. Paul is a changed man.

[30:39] 2 Corinthians 5, 17 says, therefore, if any man, anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. Behold, all old things are passed away.

Behold, all things are become new. This is a new man. I'm changed. I think, I don't know if anybody goes back a few years, Carmen, the singer, anybody?

There's a song, I'm just radically saved, he says. That's the name of the song. Radically saved.

That's what the apostle Paul or Saul here, he's a changed man.

He's radically saved. I think of a, I met a guy, I won't say his name, in Kirkwood. He owned a, he owned a popular restaurant. And he was known as a wild man.

And he told me, he said, Kevin, I got saved. And that first Sunday, what's he do? He gets up. He puts on, he didn't know what, what's it look like to go to church.

[31:41] He puts on his Sunday best. And he goes downstairs, he says, I'm getting ready to go. My wife goes, where are you going? I'm going to church. You ain't going to church.

Not you. I've been radically saved. He said she couldn't believe it. You?

The gospel saved you? Yeah. He had gotten saved. He was a changed man. People were amazed. They recall his past.

They say, is this not the Saul? Is this not the man that persecuted? Does that, does that sentence or question resonate? Is this not the carpenter's son?

It says in all four gospels, Jesus was doing amazing things. And they said, is this not the car? There's no way it could be him. The Messiah. And that's what they're saying about Saul here. [32:41] Is this not? And it says he confounds them. They can't argue with him. He's filled with the Holy Spirit. He's proven Jesus is the Christ.

I think of the song, or not the song, the man, John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace. If you get a chance, we finished this this summer at home, the missionary book, Once Blind.

Once Blind. John Newton, captain of a ship, tried to, he hated Christians.

His goal was to destroy their faith. And one day on the ship, John Newton, there's a storm and it's lightning. And the men are scared.

And the captain comes out and here's John Newton on the ship when all this lightning coming close. Aha, God, you missed me. Oh, I run over here. Try now, God. And in fact, the captain's so mad and he's not even a Christian.

[33:41] He's ready to throw John Newton overboard for blasphemy. And that John Newton's whole goal was to get rid of the Christian faith.

And we see one day though, Amazing Grace. He wrote that. That saved a wretch like John Newton. And he went on to preach for over 40 years.

He wrote over 280 hymns. God, the gospel changed him. And here the people are seeing this man. He is so totally changed.

And you know what? It reminds me of this incident. They let him down in a basket. Kind of reminded me of Old Testament Rahab. When she was harboring the spies and they wanted to catch him and kill him.

And she lowers them down with a rope. Here, they lower Paul down or Saul in a basket. In the last six verses, we're about out of time here.

[34:46] But he goes to Jerusalem. He tries to meet with the disciples. They're scared of him. Christians are scared of him. Yes. They know about him.

They don't believe. Oh, did he get really saved? Who would you believe in? Come on, Saul. We know what you were like. You got a reputation.

But it says he was preaching boldly. Boldly. If you read those 26 to 31. And he was moving about. And the disciples, Barnabas comes in and says, guys, it's real.

Accept him. He has seen the Lord. He's a changed man. And now he's able to move about among the disciples. But they're still trying to kill him.

The Jews are trying to kill him. And for the rest of his life, he will be persecuted. He will be, people will try to kill him. But look at verse 31.

[35:46] This is beautiful. The church throughout all Galilee, Samaria, enjoyed peace. Enjoyed peace. Back up in verse 3 of the previous chapter, he's ravaging the church.

Now they're enjoying peace. It was being built up. It was increasing. Let me share a couple final thoughts here about this of Paul.

And I've had to skip over stuff. His testimony. He shared it twice. At least that's recorded. Before a king.

And before an angry mob. That should encourage us to share a testimony. This week.

Are you willing to share how Jesus saved you with somebody else? It's the gospel power. It's the power to save. What did God say about Paul's life?

[36:48] He said, Saul, you are going to suffer much. And if we had time, I wrote it down. Second Corinthians. You won't believe what he had to go through.

Beatings after beatings by the Jews and by others. And shipwrecks. And living day and night in the ocean water. And five verses.

Just showing what all he went through. The suffering. The rest of his life. For the Lord Jesus. But he says, I know whom I have believed. And am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him.

Till that day. He knew who he believed. Let me quickly. Just what can we see from this text? Guys, we can see the power of the gospel.

Paul says that in Romans 1.16. It's the power of God. And it's salvation to everyone who believes. No one's too bad for the gospel. No one.

[37:51] Mr. Bratcher wasn't too bad for the gospel. He's not with us today. But maybe somebody shared with him. Paul says of himself.

He says, I'm the chief of sinners. In 1 Timothy 1. He says, I'm the least of the apostles. In 1 Corinthians. He says, I'm a wretched man. In Romans 7.24.

In 1 Timothy 1. He says, I acted in ignorance. But I was shown mercy. And in Ephesians 3. He says, I was given grace. He was going.

He was a Pharisee of Pharisees. His motive was to get rid of the way. And God stepped in. Changed his direction. The gospel. Let me just last go back to the question.

Why? Why? He said, why are you persecuting me? Let me ask you three whys this morning. Maybe God's saying this to you.

[38:50] Why are you trying to get to heaven a different way than I say? I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me. Maybe someone here.

You think, I'm not too bad. I'm going to get there my way. And Jesus would be saying, why? Why are you doing it your way? You can't. Second one.

Maybe this pertains to you. He might say, why are you building your mansion on earth when I'm building it in heaven? Why are you spending your whole life, all your efforts to build your mansion here when I'm, He told His disciples, I'm going to prepare a place for you.

And it's going to be good. It's going to be good. Or maybe the third one. Why? Why are you trusting in the things of this world that satisfy only a short time when only I can satisfy?

Why? The gospel is powerful. We're going to end with a song here from Matthew West. I think it should have been song of the year, but it wasn't.

[39:56] They didn't ask me to vote. It's called Unashamed. Unashamed of the gospel. Brothers and sisters, I believe the gospel is the most powerful tool at our disposal.

Because it's the gospel that can change. The gospel will change your destination, and it should change your life. So we'll have this song, and then I'll pray.

I know I went through a lot. Thanks for bearing with me. And I just pray that you'll see the power of the gospel this week. And we'll be unashamed of it.

Father, thanks for this morning. Thanks for remembering you. It always, when we come together to break bread, it does something for the heart. Because we're remembering you.

And we see the Apostle Paul, formerly Saul, who thought he was going the right way. He was zealous. Oh, he was zealous. But he was ignorant.

[41:03] He says that he was. And you've got a hold of him. And we are so thankful for that, because we've got so much in the word that you used through him to write.

Lord, help us to be unashamed of the gospel. It changed his life. It can change anybody's life. And I thank you for this day. Give us safety home and throughout this week.

Amen. Amen. Amen.