

24—Acts 9.19b-31—The Evidence of Grace

I. Introduction

- a. Two weeks ago, we saw the amazing grace of Christ pursue Saul as he approached Damascus with intentions of arresting Christians but finds himself arrested by the grace of Jesus.
- b. We left off with Ananias baptizing brother Saul into the family of God. With the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion, we are left with assuming that it was genuine because Luke doesn't give us anything else.
- c. But with Saul, we get to see if this profession of faith will bear any fruit. True faith will give evidence of grace. The man or woman unchanged by God's grace hasn't experienced God's grace.
- d. Let's take a look at the evidence of grace in the life of Saul the terrorist.

II. Main Point

- a. The word continues to spread and we see the fruit of it by seeing evidence of grace in life of Saul.

III. Outline

- a. Evidence of grace in Damascus
- b. Evidence of grace in Jerusalem
- c. The church had peace and was being built up, multiplied

IV. Exposition

- a. As we begin to look at this passage, there are questions lingering in our minds about Saul's conversion. Ananias has expressed uncertainty about Saul's conversion but Jesus patiently led him to go and baptize him. At two points in our passage today, people find it hard to believe that Saul has become a disciple of Christ. So, let's look for evidence of grace in Damascus. Let's see the power of the Word to change murderers into missionaries.
 - i. If true conversion has come, there should be some identifiable fruit. Can a terrorist change? Wrong question. Can the risen Lord Jesus change a terrorist by his grace? Let's see.
 - ii. There are three things that are common among the two scenes we have in Damascus and Jerusalem:
 1. Saul is with the disciples
 2. He preaches Jesus
 3. And he is willing to suffer for the name of Jesus
 - iii. Let's look at each of them in these different locations. I think it's important to see if there are fruits of grace in two different places. It's easier to be a disciple in some places.
 - iv. So, evidence number one: Saul is with the disciples in Damascus. To be a disciple of Jesus is to gather with other disciples of Jesus.
 1. One cannot be made a disciple if you are not with other disciples.
 - a. To make disciples involves baptizing which has already been done. We saw that in our last text.
 - b. Making disciples also involves teaching. Jesus taught us not only what to teach but how to teach. The repeated theme we see over and over is that Jesus was with his disciples.
 - i. In the age of everything virtual, the church will have to make a stand on this issue. It's not that someone cannot be taught virtually nor that it is NEVER permissible to do so under few circumstances. But, does Jesus command otherwise?
 - ii. We can look at research to see if one is better than the other. But, at the end of the day is that what Jesus would have us do?
 - iii. Can someone hug virtually? No.
 - iv. Is a marriage a viable marriage living separately in other parts of the world?

1. Can you protect your wife from a distance? You can provide for her but is financial provisions all that is required in providing? Can you lead your family through FaceTime?
 - v. Would the cross and resurrection work if Jesus had done that virtually from heaven? The incarnation—God in the flesh—speaks very clearly about how we ought to assemble ourselves.
 - vi. I don't think Peter would have denied Jesus if he had been there by the charcoal fire virtually? Where is the difficulty and risk in that?
 - vii. The first evidence of grace in the life of Saul is that he was WITH the disciples at Damascus. The very ones he had come to arrest.
2. Additionally, the way we identify as a disciple of Jesus is by being with other disciples of Jesus.
 - a. It is irregular to think that we are called to be "lone-ranger" Christians.
 - b. It is illogical to think of the church as the body of Christ and that body be dismembered. It makes no sense for an arm to be doing ministry apart from the body.
 - c. We are family. Ananias gave Saul the new title brother to describe his new identity.
 - d. We need each other. All are important but not so important that you do it alone. None are strong enough to walk the path unaccompanied by other disciples.
 - e. In the beginning, God walked with Adam in the Garden. Christianity at its most basic level is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord in which we gather with each other.
 - v. Evidence of grace number two: Saul preached Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a witness for Christ.
 1. It seems clear that Saul spent some time with the disciples of Damascus before proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues. As well versed in the OT as Saul was, he too needed to be taught. At least some of these disciples in Damascus had heard the gospel proclaimed by the apostles and had given themselves to their teaching.
 - a. The image of the new birth lends to the idea that all have to be taught to grow and understand the Scriptures.
 - b. Saul would have had some advantages as these disciples opened the Bible to explain how the OT Scriptures pointed to Jesus and he fulfilled every promise made.
 2. After having spent some time devoted to the apostles' teaching through these disciples, we see Saul bearing witness about Jesus in two important ways.
 - a. But first, notice after tying things together with these disciples, Saul immediately proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues.
 - i. Some take issue that he did this immediately.
 1. "Some claim that Saul went off to 'seminary' to prepare for three years before preaching. They get that from Gal. 1:17-18. But the point there isn't that Saul went off and studied by himself for three years, but that he simply didn't consult with the Jerusalem church until three years later. During those three years, he was preaching Jesus, verse 20 says." (Bret Rogers)
 - b. Saul proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God.

- i. This is the most controversial claims in all of Scripture. Indeed, this is the reason they crucified Jesus. For man to claim equality with God is blasphemy but Jesus no mere man.
 - 1. We believe that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.
 - 2. To deny the deity of Jesus is to deny the only means of redemption God has provided. Only God can save us from God. Only the Lamb of God can take away the sins of the world.
 - ii. Those who heard Saul stood in awe!
 - 1. The very one who had set out to destroy everyone who called upon the Name of the Lord is now bearing witness of the Name!
 - a. No one could write a story of grace like this one. and the people were amazed! Grace certainly is amazing!
 - c. The second thing Saul proclaimed in the synagogues was that Jesus is the Christ.
 - i. Saul continued to increase in strength. That doesn't mean he was working out at the local Planet Fitness. This means to become strong in the faith (see Rom. 4:20).
 - ii. As he grew stronger, he confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus there in verse 22.
 - 1. This is the same word used to describe what God did to the people at the tower of Babel when he confused their languages.
 - 2. Saul confounded the Jews by proving that Jesus is the Christ.
 - a. The word proving literally means "putting together."
 - b. The OT has a unified message pointing us to Christ. Jesus fulfills every claim.
 - c. Saul had been helped in threading all the pieces together and now he had proved this to the Jews.
 - d. To do so seems to have backed them into a corner and the only escape was to believe what Saul had proven to be true or come out with guns blazing.
 - e. It seems a plot to kill Saul was the choice.
- vi. That gets us to our third evidence of grace: Suffering for the name.
 - 1. Some people believe but when it is no longer advantageous, they abandon the faith to preserve their lives (temporarily).
 - a. (Mk. 4:16-17) ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.
 - i. A plot was made to kill Saul on account of the word he proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ.
 - ii. Will he abandon the faith to avoid suffering?
 - 2. We were not given the details concerning what Jesus told Ananias in (Acts 9:16) where Jesus said "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."
 - a. To be told from the beginning that to follow Jesus means you will suffer might be acceptable until you are actually faced with it.

- b. What we say we would do in any particular situation of suffering for Christ is merely a guess on our part. We can only trust that the Lord will give us strength to stand firm when it comes.
 - 3. The plot to kill Saul becomes known. How ironic!
 - a. They watch the gate day and night for the purpose of killing him BUT his disciples lower him through the wall of the city in a basket.
 - b. Thus, Saul escapes his first round of suffering.
 - i. The question often comes up when you know persecution is coming, "Should I stay or should I go?"
 - 1. There are times when there is no option. Sometimes the possibility for escape is available. Some choose to stay and others choose to flee.
 - 2. All of them are possible options. To flee is not wrong. Saul did not abandon the faith. Rather, persecution often relocates the gospel!
 - 3. When Paul spoke of this moment in 2 Cor. 11:30-32, he boasted in his weakness!
 - c. Before leaving this section, we must take note of something. It said that HIS disciples helped him escape.
 - i. At the end of these three years in Damascus, Saul was with the disciples of Damascus, proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, some attempted to kill him, and had began making disciples himself!
 - ii. This is evidence of a life changed by the sovereign grace of Christ and the word continues to spread through him.
- b. But will this evidence of grace continue in Jerusalem?
 - i. The same three evidences show up in the city from which he was sent out to apprehend those who called upon the Name! Indeed, this is the city where Jesus was crucified.
 - ii. After escaping with his life from Damascus, Saul goes to Jerusalem. This isn't fleeing suffering. The potential is even higher in Jerusalem.
 - 1. The very first thing he does is attempt to join with the disciples in Jerusalem.
 - a. Certainly, had Ananias not vouched for Saul and told them about the vision from Jesus, the disciples in Damascus would have said something like this.
 - i. (Acts 9:26) And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.
 - ii. But, Barnabus who we already know to be a godly man, must have listened to Saul's story. The fear of the disciples was legitimate. But somehow, maybe in a similar way as Ananias, Jesus works in such a way to bring Barnabus and Saul together.
 - iii. MORE EVIDENCE WE NEED EACH OTHER. ANANIAS HELPS SAULS. HIS DISCIPLES HELP HIM ESCAPE AND NOW BARNABUS.
 - b. The first evidence of grace is being with the disciples in a far more difficult setting.
 - c. This time, Saul is taken to the apostles. There, Barnabus describes how the Lord appeared to Saul and spoke to him.
 - i. In fact, Barnabus uses some of the same evidence we have looked at already.
 - 1. In Damascus, Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

2. This evidence allows Saul to go in and out among them at Jerusalem.
 - a. It's one thing for Saul, the former terrorist, to be among you. If he attacked them, they probably could defend themselves.
 - b. But to allow him to go freely in and out among them when he could have plotted against them and gathered help shows how the evidence of grace was genuine and true.
2. If this were not enough, more evidence of grace shows up when he speaks the gospel to the Hellenists.
 - a. The same word, disputed, was used when Stephen spoke with them back in chapter 7. It's as though Saul is doing the exact same thing Stephen did with the same people.
 - i. The first time, he approved the stoning of Stephen. This time, those same people want to stone him.
3. With that said, we see the same pattern as in Damascus. He suffered for the sake of the Name.
 - a. They plot to kill him too. But ironically, the plan is learned by the brothers.
 - b. They help him escape to Caesarea and then to his hometown of Tarsus.
 - i. What will his family think? From terrorist to evangelist, he will turn some heads.
- c. Verse 31 begins with so or therefore, meaning as a result of Saul's conversion and firm evidence of grace, the church had peace and was being built up.
 - i. We've seen the church grow under great persecution. But what will she do the same when the threats have subsided?
 1. I love the use of the singular church here. One church that is scattered throughout all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria—indeed all of Israel—had peace and was being built up.
 - a. The first phase of Acts 1:8 has been completed. The rest of this book unfolds how the gospel goes to the ends of the earth.
 - b. Yes, most certainly we could say there were local churches (plural) throughout these regions. But it is also right and good to talk of the church.
 2. And even in a time of peace, the church is being built up.
 - a. This is a divine passive. This book is about the Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus. He is building his church. He is equipping her for the work of the ministry. The word is continuing to spread. His grace is transforming people like Saul.
 - ii. The church is described as walking in the fear of the Lord and in comfort of the Holy Spirit.
 1. Fearing the Lord is living life in relation to who God really is.
 - a. It is being teachable. I was reading this week in Proverbs where it says in (Prov. 9:9-10) ⁹ Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
 - i. Are you able to be corrected? Or are you wise and willing to be still wiser?
 - ii. Learning and righteousness cannot be separated. The righteous are those who continue to increase in learning God's ways and how to walk in them on the street level.

2. Their comfort wasn't in the right government nor prosperity. Their comfort was in the Holy Spirit.
 - a. How does one find comfort in the Holy Spirit?
 - i. We find that by ministering to each other. It is being with the disciples.
 1. It should be a comfort to come in out of the chaos of the world and gather in the fellowship of the saints.
 2. Let this be a safe place. A place of love and encouragement.
 3. A place where you are prayed for and prayed with. That people listen and take notice of needs that you have.
 4. A place where we grow together in righteousness. Through corrections and training we can grow together.
 - ii. At other times or better in conjunction with what I just mentioned, the Holy Spirit himself comforts us like that in 2 Cor. 1.
 1. This is a gift from the Lord. And this gift of comfort isn't just for you. You are to comfort others with the comfort given to you.
 - iii. And finally, in this too, Luke tells us the church multiplied.
 1. Often, we are tempted to think there is no end to the suffering. And that is certainly possible in this life. But a season of peace might be just ahead.
 - a. Let's be a people content with little or plenty. Whatever the case, may we be content.

V. Response

- a. This passage begs the question, is there evidence of grace in your life?
 - i. Do you love to gather with the disciples?
 - ii. Do you long to make Jesus known to others?
 - iii. Are you willing to suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus?
- b. And as we do, may the Lord multiply us!