

The Conversion of Saul

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Preacher: Stephen Murray

[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the New Testament book of Acts. Acts chapter 9. We're going to read verses 1 through to verse 31 of Acts chapter 9.

! Luke writes the book of Acts and gives this window, this insight, into the life of the very first Christians, the early church.

This is quite a famous section of the New Testament, but listen to what he writes in Acts 9 verse 1. 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.

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, Saul, why do you persecute me?

[1 : 17] Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless. They heard the sound but did not see anyone. 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. For three days he was blind, and he did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias, and the Lord called to him in a vision.

Ananias, yes, Lord, he answered. 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.

In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. Lord, Ananias answered, I've heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem, and he's come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.

[2 : 31] 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.

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, you sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized and after taking some food he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name?

And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests? Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him.

[3 : 42] But Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him and how in Damascus he had preached

fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews. But they tried to kill him.

When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened, living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit and increased in numbers.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study this passage together. Gracious God, your word is truth. And this morning we long to understand this truth and have it embedded upon our hearts, deep down in our hearts.

[4 : 59] So won't you help us by your spirit make the unclear clear to us that we would know your son, love him and serve him.

Help us now for Christ's sake. Amen. So we continue in our series in the book of Acts and we come this morning to the very dramatic conversion of Saul, who will later go on to become the Apostle Paul.

He will actually end up writing roughly half of your New Testament that you have in your Bibles today. So historically speaking, he's easily the second most influential person with regards to the development of early Christianity after Jesus.

He tells us so much about the Christian faith. One of the most listened to podcasts at the moment is a podcast called The Rest is History with Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook, two sort of popular level historians.

I think it's a general rise amongst particularly guys listening to history podcasts and The Rest is History is one of the, I think it's the top ranked one and has really got a lot of people listening into history podcasts.

[6 : 15] But one of the things that Holland and Sandbrook like to sort of play around with a little bit in their podcasts from time to time is counterfactual historiography.

That is trying to predict how things would have turned out if we changed just a few key details in some key event in history past. Like if somebody had assassinated Hitler when he was just 20 years old, what would the world be like today that you and I live in?

If you think about South Africa, if the United Party had beaten the Nationalist Party in the 1948 elections in South Africa, what would South Africa look like today?

If Chris Harney had never been assassinated, what would the ANC look like today? There's all those sorts of games that you can play. There's what if games. If there's one thing had changed, what would the future be like?

What would our experience of the world be like today? Often changing, just one very small event can have this ripple event to the point that it transforms, even creates whole new nations.

[7 : 19] Now strictly historically speaking, so not theologically or spiritually speaking here, but strictly historically speaking, the conversion of Saul is easily a top 10, possibly a top 5 event in that had it not happened, the world that you and I live in today would be a radically, radically different place.

Now this is a fairly well-known part of the Bible. We even have a phrase in the English language. We talk about having a Damascus Road experience. There's a lot going on here. So Luke is continuing this theme that we've been seeing over the last two weeks in the book of Acts of the gospel expanding outwards.

And now what he's sort of doing is he's showing us how God inserts the key puzzle piece that's really going to unlock this expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles and to other nations.

But I think spiritually, theologically, maybe even pastorally speaking, perhaps the most profound lesson that comes out of this passage for you and me as we read it this morning is this.

Jesus saves the unsavable. Jesus saves the unsavable. Listen to how Paul will later on in life describe his own conversion.

[8 : 34] This is what he says in 1 Timothy chapter 1. He says, here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst.

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

And then after saying that little summary, he actually breaks into praise. And he says, now to the king eternally, mortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. That's his reflection on what happened to him.

Jesus saves the unsavable. And so that's what I want us to think about a little bit this morning together. Two simple points. This reality, when you get your head and your heart around this reality, this reality should produce an incredible confidence in you.

Number one, it should produce, you should be confident in Jesus to save the world. And then number two, you should be confident in Jesus to save you. So those are kind of the two things you can hang this talk on this morning.

[9 : 42] Confidence in Jesus to save the world, confidence in Jesus to save you. Here's the first one. Have a look down at verse one. So Luke tells us, picking up the story again, remember we've been away, we've been looking at Philip.

Now the camera pans back to Saul, who we had met when Stephen got stoned and was martyred. Luke writes verse one, 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, that's to the Christian movement, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Now the really obvious fact as you open up this passage is that Saul doesn't seem to be a great candidate for the gospel. He's not the guy you're looking at going, well he'll make a great candidate for the gospel. John Calvin, the great reformer in his commentary on the book of Acts, describes him as sort of like this brute beast full of unbridled religious fanaticism, raging, cruel, fierce, driven by that religious zeal, determined to destroy the followers of Jesus Christ.

That is not the guy that you look at and think, you know, he'd make a great church planter. This is the guy that you look at and then you go back to those Old Testament Psalms that talk about destroying the people who are trying to destroy God's people, what we call the imprecatory Psalms and you pray those, you say, Lord give us justice, wipe this guy off the face of the earth because he's trying to kill your people.

[11 : 16] In our reasoning, the way we look at a passage like this, he is not a good candidate for salvation. He is a candidate for judgment. In fact, he's so bad that when he does convert, the other Christians have a really difficult time accepting it.

Look down at verse 10. This is fast forwarding a little bit to Ananias and God's interaction with Ananias. In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias and the Lord called to him in a vision, Ananias, and yes, Lord, he answered.

And the Lord told him, go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul for he's praying. In a vision, he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.

Lord, Ananias answered, I've heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem and he's come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all those who call on your name.

Now friends, I don't know about you, but when the Lord explicitly calls you by name in a vision, supernaturally, you don't question him, right?

[12 : 28] But such is Saul's reputation, such are the things that Saul has actually done, this is not just an unearned reputation, this is an earned reputation, Ananias is like, are you sure, Lord?

You're like a name mixed up like somebody else you're thinking of here? Get the same thing later on with the apostles. When Saul goes down to Jerusalem, look at verse 26 if you jump all the way down there.

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple, but Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and he told how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and the Lord had spoken to him and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

The apostles are not buying it either. It takes the courage of one man, Barnabas, and he's quite a special character as we'll see later on, to sort of bring him into the fold and say no, he actually has become a Christian.

I mean, you think about those apostles at this point in time because we've read the first eight chapters, they are seeing people come to faith in all sorts of radical, dramatic ways, people that

they did not expect to become Christians.

[13:38] They're seeing that every single day, but Saul, we've got to draw a line. He can't be a Christian. He can't be a real Christian. Too much.

He's not redeemable. Saul is unsavable. But friends, this account that we've just read is trying to tell you and me this morning, no, that's not true.

That is just fundamentally not true. Not even Saul is unsavable. See, I think it's very easy for us to lack confidence in Jesus to save whoever he wants.

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, then you probably know that as Christians we feel based on Scripture that we are supposed to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

That is, we're supposed to be prepared to share our faith with other people who don't know Jesus, engage in what the Bible calls evangelism. But if we're honest, that is easily one of the most awkward and uncomfortable parts of what it means to be a Christian.

[14:42] I think there are a lot of people right now who would much rather serve soup weekly at a homeless shelter than share their faith with their colleague at work.

Evangelism has always kind of been hard for Christians. I mean, there's always that one odd person who seems to always be on fire for Jesus and the gospel seems to ooze out of them. They go into KFC and they come back with five people going to a Bible study after that.

But for your average Christian, evangelism is hard work. It's awkward. It's weird. Now there are certainly, there's definitely more than one reason for why that is the case.

But at least one major reason for why that is the case is that we lack confidence in Jesus to save whoever he wants to save. We're most often like Ananias or the disciples rather than like Barnabas. We lack confidence in Jesus' ability to save. Here's the thing and here's the problem with that. That lack of confidence can be a form of works righteousness.

[15:51] Now what do I mean by that exactly? Think about the Christian gospel. Think about how people become Christians. The Christian gospel is that we cannot save ourselves by our good works.

We cannot make ourselves right in the sight of God through moral and ethical performance, through keeping God's law. We have to instead by faith throw ourselves upon the mercy of Jesus Christ. We actually, we look to his good works on our behalf to save us. He lived the perfect life that we can never live. He died a death as a substitute in our place and we receive his righteous record as a result as we stand before God.

Now this is a, this is a key pillar of the Reformation, the Protestant Reformation that happened in the 16th century. Salvation by faith alone. It's not faith plus works.

It's salvation by faith alone. And so one of the most dangerous things then, and it is often incredibly, incredibly subtle, but one of the most dangerous things to biblical faith is what we might call works righteousness.

[16:57] Thinking that somehow our good works contribute to our righteous standing before God when it comes to salvation. a lack of confidence in Jesus to save whoever he wants to can be a sign of works righteousness creeping into our thinking, creeping into our practices.

I'll give you an example of what I mean by this. So say you've got a colleague at work who is particularly antagonistic towards the gospel and towards Christians.

And you know this because you follow him on Instagram. Instagram. So you see his feed. You see what he talks about all day, every single day. You know that it's not just that he's apathetic towards Christians. He really hates Christians.

He basically thinks everything that's wrong in this world is wrong because Christians have a hand in it somewhere along the line. He thinks Christians live in the intellectual dark ages. He thinks basically the world would be a better place if we got rid of Christians.

And he's not afraid to talk about this openly. He's not afraid. He's not one of those guys who just posts stuff and then will keep quiet in the office place. He posts and he talks. And then you look at his lifestyle and you know his lifestyle and everybody in the office knows his lifestyle.

[18:09] That his lifestyle radically conflicts with what you know to be a lifestyle of faith according to the Bible. Everyone in the office knows he's cheating on his wife. He's got the foulest, foulest mouth around.

It's like he's worse than a Premier League supporter in England. He makes racist jokes in the office all the time and does not care. He's aggressive and he's demeaning when there's office conflict

between colleagues.

He'll just walk over you. And he's an absolute scrooge when it comes to any sort of charitable giving or even just tipping someone for a good service that's been rendered. Now say you come to church and you come to a seminar on evangelism and you sit in a seminar and someone teaches a seminar, probably not me but somebody else and they convince you from the Bible that evangelism is really important.

We've got to go as Christians. We've got to share our faith. And you're like, yes, I've got to share my faith with Jesus. Wonderful news about what he's done for me. I've got to share my faith with Jesus. I bet you that the very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very last person on your list of who you're going to start with is that guy.

Right? He's the last guy. You would rather bite your thumb off than share the faith with him. Now there's two potential reasons for that.

[19 : 25] besides just straight up fear. But two potential reasons for that. Number one, you don't think there is any hope in this world that you would ever be able to persuade him that Christianity is credible.

And so there's a lack of confidence in yourself. That's one reason. the other reason is that you don't think that he fits the profile of the kind of guy who would go to church and so there's a lack of confidence in him.

Either way, both of them are a lack of confidence in people to perform in the right way so that salvation takes place.

Do you see that? That's works righteousness. If you're sitting there and you're looking at the situation and you're going, if he was just a little bit more amicable, if he was a bit more open-minded, if he was just a nicer person, then I could see myself inviting him to church.

Well, what have you done there when you've had that thought process? You just basically said, if he could just add some good works to the mix, then I could see salvation happening in his life.

That's works righteousness.

[20 : 43] And it's the same for lack of confidence in yourself. If I was just better at explaining theological ideas, if I was better at persuasion, if I was calmer in those conversations, if I could keep my cool, well then, then maybe he might be persuaded.

What are you saying about yourself? That salvation depends upon your ability to perform in the moment? Friends, come with me to Acts chapter 9, verse 3.

As Saul 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?

Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. He replied, now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do. Now jump down to verse 17 and Ananias now finally meeting with him.

Listen to this. Ananias went to the house and he entered it and he placed his hands on Saul and he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 52] Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized and after taking some food he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus and once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God all those who heard him were astonished and they asked isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on his name on this name?

Hasn't he come yet to take them as prisoners to the chief priests? Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

This account in Acts 9 where this vengeful violent bloodthirsty almost pathological brute of a man is turned into God's most strategic mouthpiece is as clear as day sign that your works contribute nothing to salvation.

They really don't. It is God's gracious saving power that's saved from first to last transforming the enemy into a child.

And for that reason alone friends you and I should be bursting with confidence. Bursting with confidence in what God can do in the lives of our unbelieving friends and our unbelieving family members our colleagues those people we're praying for maybe we've been praying for a really really long time and our levels of hope that something might ever change is not there well friends this should fill us up with confidence nobody's outside of his reach absolutely nobody don't despair

don't lose heart don't lose enthusiasm for evangelism don't write people off have confidence in Jesus to save so that's the first thing I want you to see second thing you should be confident in Jesus to save you so you've got to personalize this personalize this story now it's it's true that there are a lot of atypical features to Saul's conversion like the bright light

[24 : 10] Jesus appearing to him speaking directly to him the blindness and a bunch of other things that doesn't generally happen some of that is there because God is making clear and I think Luke is recording this fact that Saul is in some sense abnormally born and in fact that's how he's going to describe his conversion in 1 Corinthians 15 and there's an important reason for that it's to undergird his claim to be an apostle as one who witnessed the resurrected Jesus so there are features of his conversion that you're not likely to see repeated in the conversion of other people but the radical nature of the conversion from sort of utter darkness to radiant light that's not one of the features that is exclusive to his conversion that radical transformation is available to all of us every single one of us and you need to be confident in that confident that Jesus saves you even you come with me again to verse 20 here's what happens after he's converted at once

Saul began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the son of God all those who heard him were astonished and asked isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on his name hasn't he come yet to take them as prisoners to the chief priests and yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah after many days had gone by there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him but Saul learned of their plan day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him but his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall when he came to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples but they were all afraid of him not believing that he was really a disciple but Barnabas took him and brought him to a key part of

Saul's conversion story or experience is actually persecution repeated persecution you see now he's full of this newfound hope and joy and as you do with newfound hope and joy you want to share it you want to go out and you want to share it far and wide that religious zeal that he had previously directed towards locking people up he is now directing that religious zeal to setting people free in preaching the gospel and so you can imagine him going out with this great expectation I've got to tell people I've got to tell people this amazing news I've got to tell them that Jesus actually he really is he's the messiah I saw him right there standing in front of me talking to me I've got to tell them this but instead of everybody wholesale embracing this good news some of them try to kill him that's a harsh response right even that office colleague we spoke about earlier he's probably not going to try and kill you after you share the gospel with him at the water cooler both in

Damascus and in Jerusalem wherever he goes they try to kill him several years later he actually speaks about this experience and his expectations of going to Jerusalem so in Acts chapter 22 he reflects back on this and he describes coming to Jerusalem and the Lord speaking to him while he was in something of a supernatural trance and the Lord told him to leave Jerusalem because the people there wouldn't accept his testimony but he actually kind of like Ananias earlier pushes back on God and this is what he says he says Lord these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you what he's basically saying to God there is he's saying I've got such a good testimony like this is this is the best testimony ever this is an incredible testimony this is the testimony to end all testimonies why wouldn't these people accept my message they know who I used to be obviously they can see the change in my life they must know I encountered the risen Messiah why would they not believe me but many of them don't instead they try to kill him what do you think that starts to do to him after a while to his enthusiasm don't you think he starts to at least have some doubts at that point in Damascus they try to kill me in Jerusalem they try to kill me maybe I had an hallucination on the road maybe I'm over remembering that event maybe it's all in my head so there are potential doubts brought on by external circumstances but then there would be internal doubts too the simple reason that Paul knew what he did before coming to Christ he knew he knew that he had ripped families apart he knew that he had presided over the stoning to death of people when he came down to Jerusalem do you know who he would have found there possibly found there friends and family of Stephen he's going to go into a community and have to face that community looking into the faces of the very person he helped to kill that's a lot to carry that's a huge way to carry and that's why he describes himself I think as the worst of sinners in 1 Timothy 1 he must have felt it he must have felt

that him it's not just in 1 Timothy in 1 Corinthians 15 he describes himself as unworthy to be an apostle because he persecuted the church he says he brings up his violent record in Galatians 1 and in Philippians 3 these things must have weighed on him and at times they're going to bring really severe doubts nobody's immune to doubts nobody not Paul not us one of the most radical conversions that comes later on in church history and again a conversion that really changed the course of human history and of whole nations was that of the

[31 : 03] German Catholic monk Martin Luther the beginning of the Protestant Reformation he struggled desperately with doubt how could a holy perfect righteous God love a sinner like him he struggled intensely with it initially when he was actually still a monk in the monastery he would read Romans 1 17 that says the righteous shall live by faith and he took that at that point in his life he took that to mean that those who are righteous people on the basis of the good life that they live will be the ones who have faith who get this gift of faith from God and so he actually hated the word righteous he hated it if I can tear that out of my Bible I would I hate that word righteous because he kept thinking I am never going to be righteous enough to merit that faith and he scrutinized his life every single detail of his life his moral performance and it threw him deeper and deeper into despair and doubt until at last

God in his gracious mercy and kindness made it clear to him that justification right standing before God is by faith alone that he had actually been reading Romans 1 17 backwards it's those who place simple faith in Jesus Christ that will be declared righteous they will be justified before a perfect and a holy God by faith alone not by their moral performance and that was huge huge for him like a weight falling off it sparked the protestant reformation that radically changed the world but in his mind after that growing in the faith now watching the protestant reformation flourish his mind and his heart weren't always a bed of roses going forward despite that wonderful gospel joy he'd experienced despite understanding justification by faith despite having that burden lifted there were still moments of intense doubt all the way along and they ramped up actually the more the success of the reformation grew so he began to feel the weight of the responsibility that he had in teaching and preaching and sending his leaflets all over western europe caring for people he often used to wonder is he maybe destroying the church rather than reforming the church he was often very sick long bouts of depression and anxiety struggling struggling is one of the things he talks about all the time struggling to sense the presence of the lord he had no problem sensing the presence of the devil but he really struggled to sense the presence of the lord in 1527 he writes a letter to his friend philip melanchthon and he says this he said i spent more than a week in death and hell my entire body was in pain and i still tremble completely abandoned by christ i labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against god that last references to the fact that he felt like he was wrestling and arguing with god so much and pleading for the presence so much and accusing god of abandoning him so much that it was like he was uttering blasphemies against god these are not surface doubts that he went through but also they're not unique to him they're not unique to him they're not unique to paul and they are not unique to you when you experience shame and guilt and deep despair creeps into your heart and you start to say to yourself there's no way god can accept me how could he look at what I've done look at what I've done with my life look at what I've failed to do with my life look at the things

I think about the things I desire why on earth would Christ grace me with his presence what worth do I possibly have I think there's a particular kind of a darkness in doubting your own worthiness it's so debilitating because everything in that equation lies squarely on your shoulders there's nobody else who's responsible for the life that you've lived up to this point and so you're left alone to wrestle with those failures by yourself and there's no one else who really knows that depth of the sin but you you process your actions you process your desires your thoughts it's a crushing darkness that kind of doubt my friends this this passage has a remedy has a remedy for your doubt it has something incredibly powerful to make your confidence in Christ's saving work overflow!

it's the most precious part of the whole passage actually but you actually might miss it if you read too quickly look at what Jesus says to Saul on the road to Damascus in verse 4 he says Saul Saul why do you persecute me?

he doesn't say why are you being so destructive why are you being a naughty boy he doesn't even say why are you hurting my people he says why are you persecuting me that is Jesus so so very closely identifies with those that he redeems that to persecute them is to persecute the Lord of life himself see what he's saying to you this morning fellow believer he's saying that that woman that

Paul sent off to prison that is shackled against the wall separated from her children and her family well it's as if Christ is shackled there against the wall with her when the stones hit the brow of the martyr it's as if his brow was bleeding Paul will later on in his writings tell us that Christ is the head of the church and that we are his body and it seems to me that

[37 : 13] Jesus takes that in a sense that far far exceeds our normal understanding of what a metaphor is he is united with us in every blow to the body in a way that is somehow similar to the way that we experience every blow to our own bodies you see you might be able to get your head around the idea that Jesus in his great mercy might forgive you for your sins that he might be benevolent and merciful and say I'll forgive you for your sins you might be able to say I could see that I could see him doing that but it can sometimes be really really really really hard to convince your heart to truly believe that he really wants you after that he accepts you after that it's hard to believe that because he of all people knows everything about you he knows every sin he knows every thought he knows every desire about you he knows you and so why would he want you but he does he does my friend he wants you he doesn't just want to clear your debt he doesn't just want to balance the books he wants you he wants to enfold you in his everlasting love and we know that because of what he says to

Saul Saul Saul why do you persecute me we know that because the head of the body gave over his body to bruising to beating and to death so that you could be brought into that body if you throw yourselves upon his mercy he will save you he will save you from start to finish and you can be! confident of that no matter what you've done no matter what you are doing right now he can save you friends battles with doubt will be intense sometimes really intense we still see dimly the glory of the gospel but by the help of the Holy Spirit we see enough to have that ever growing confidence in Christ to save us things are going be rough sometimes so I've always loved these words from Luther it's probably my favorite words from Luther to really speak to your own heart during those rough times he once wrote this he said when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell tell him this I admit that I deserve death and hell what of it for I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf his name is

Jesus Christ son of God and where he is there I shall be also! Will you tell your heart in doubt Jesus will save you let's pray Father we have doubts that creep in from outside we have doubts that creep in from inside that assail our souls we hear these Sunday school stories about Jesus dying on the cross for us but it's sometimes hard to join those things together we're so thankful for your Holy Spirit who does that work in us and I just pray you would do that in all of us this morning in different ways depending on where we are on that journey for some of us who are still living in rebellion separated from you you I pray you will bring us into the fold into the body that we will see our sin repent of it and trust in

Jesus and for some of us who are your children but we're weak and we're frail and we struggle and we doubt strengthen us in the conviction of your saving work Lord teach us to cling to it and hold on to it and then for those who give us a heart for them and give us a confidence that you can do great things in their lives Lord let us not slow down in our pursuit of them in preaching the gospel in inviting them into fellowship in loving and caring for them and praying for them Lord strengthen us as a church in that endeavor we pray we ask this all for Christ's sake in his glory!

[41 : 49] Amen