

Saul Meets Jesus

Acts 9

PPT Title

Saul Meets Jesus

Main Point: We are saved by God's amazing grace.

Key Verse: *Our Lord poured out more and more of His grace on me. Along with it came faith and love from Christ Jesus...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the worst sinner of all.* - 1 Timothy 1:14-15

Prop: A very powerful spotlight type light (to shine on teacher, not students).

BACKGROUND/REVIEW



Say: Last week we looked at the amazing event of Pentecost - the day that God sent His Holy Spirit to live inside those who had put their trust in Jesus. God would use these men and women to start spreading His kingdom on earth. This would have been an impossible task without the power of God's Holy Spirit living inside of each of them! Filled with the Spirit, the believers did miraculous things and taught in amazing ways. All of this was done so the kingdom of God would grow and grow and grow.

While the number of believers was growing, most of the Pharisees and religious leaders still did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, or Savior. They did not believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead. These men would do anything to stop the message of Jesus from spreading. They arrested, and even killed, some of the believers who spoke out for Jesus. Today we will learn about one of these leaders who did not believe in Jesus. His name was Saul, and he was very intent on stopping the message of Jesus.

YOUNG SAUL



Say: Saul was a Jewish (Israelite) boy, whose father was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). Remember, the Pharisees were the leaders of the Israelites, or Jews. The Pharisees were supposed to help others to know God, but instead, they added many rules to God's laws. They were prideful. Even though the Pharisees looked "religious" on the outside, their hearts were far from God (Matthew 15:1-9). Most of the Jewish people believed that God favored the Pharisees because they looked "religious" on the outside.



Back then, studying the Jewish law was quite an honor. Only the brightest boys were chosen to be trained up by the Pharisees. Saul was one of these boys. Saul was very smart; he was a star student while studying the ways of the Pharisees (Galatians 1:14, 26:5). He really, really wanted to obey the things he had been taught (Galatians 1:14). He was very eager to please God. The problem was, he had a wrong understanding of what God wanted. He believed his teachers who said that Jesus was not the Messiah. Saul thought it was right to try to stop Jesus' disciples from telling their message.

Teacher Note: Saul studied under a wise and well-respected Pharisee named Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Acts 5:33-40 gives evidence that Gamaliel was one of the Pharisees whose heart might not have been far from God. He wisely advised the Sanhedrin not to harm the apostles. "Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." (Acts 5:38b-39 NIV)

SAUL PERSECUTES THE BELIEVERS (Acts 8)



Say: Saul became a strict Pharisee (Galatians 1:13). It was his job to teach others about God. But Saul did terrible things to those who believed in Jesus. He went from house to house to find men and women who followed Jesus, and put them in jail (Acts 8:3). Sometimes, Saul went to the synagogues to find believers and beat them (Acts 22:19). Saul even put some believers to death (Acts 22:4, 20). The Bible tells of a very sad time when some of the religious leaders threw stones at a wonderful believer named Stephen, just because he told others about Jesus. Saul approved of Stephen's death, and even held the coats of people who threw the stones (Acts 22:20).

Teacher Note: Jesus prophesied to His disciples, "A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God." (John 16:2b) This was the case with Saul.

If Saul were around today, the doors of this room might fly open during our time together, and Saul's soldiers might grab me and take me to jail for teaching all of you about Jesus. Saul tortured and killed those who were doing what was right - telling the good news about Jesus.

Application: Some of *you* might even be persecuted (or hurt) for your belief in Jesus. You might be made fun of or worse. Let's finish our story and we'll come back to this point.

SAUL MEETS JESUS (Acts 9:1-9)

Say: We might think there was a terrible punishment waiting right around the corner for Saul. But Saul was about to meet Jesus, and Saul would be showered with God's GRACE! Read with me in Acts 9.

Meanwhile, Saul continued to oppose the Lord's followers. He said they would be put to death. He went to the high priest. He asked the priest for letters to the synagogues in Damascus. He wanted to find men and women who belonged to the Way of Jesus. The letters would allow him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. - Acts 9:1-2

Say: Saul had a plan. He planned to go to Damascus to round up more believers and take them to jail. But God had a very different plan! Proverbs 16:9 says, "In your heart you plan your life. But the Lord decides where your steps will take you." Other men went with Saul. These were most likely servants and soldiers.



On his journey, Saul approached Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. [Shine bright light - on teacher, not students.] He fell to the ground. He heard a voice speak to him. "Saul! Saul!" the voice said. "Why are you opposing me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus," He replied. "I am the one you are opposing. Now get up and go into the city. There you will be told what you must do." [Turn light off.]

The men traveling with Saul stood there. They weren't able to speak. They had heard the sound. But they didn't see anyone. Saul got up from the ground. He opened his eyes, but he couldn't see. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind. He didn't eat or drink anything. - Acts 9:3-9



Ask: What is the brightest light that we know of? *The sun.* **Say:** There is a brighter light than the sun. Did you know that God's glory is so bright that there is no need for any other type of light in heaven? (Isaiah 60:19) Romans 1:20 tells us that everything God created in our world was made to give us a picture that we **can see**, to help us understand God's qualities that we **can't see**. The sun is just a "picture" of the real brightness, which is God's glory.



The light that shone on Saul was straight from heaven. It was MUCH brighter than the sun, and it was directed right at Saul! (Acts 26:13) The Light was Jesus (John 8:12). Just as Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, now He appeared to Saul. This stunning light caused Saul to fall to the ground. Then He heard the voice of Jesus. **Ask:** Why do you think Jesus said Saul was opposing, or hurting, **Him**? *Listen for answers.* **Say:** Those who believe in Jesus are called the "body of Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:27) and Jesus is the "Head" of the body (Ephesians 5:23). The head can always feel what happens in the body. And God's own Spirit lives within each believer. We are in Jesus, and He is in us (John 15:4). Saul's cruelty to the believers was directed at Jesus Himself.

Application: If you are a believer, whatever is done to you is also done to Jesus. And, as a reminder, this also means that whatever YOU do to another believer, you are doing to Jesus. (Matthew 25:40). Do you want your words and actions to bless Jesus, or hurt Jesus?

Say: Saul didn't just see a bright light and hear a voice that day; he met Jesus! (1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:4-11) At that moment, Saul knew that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Finally Saul knew Jesus was no ordinary man! He was no false prophet; He was the Lord!

Saul's blindness was another "picture." Saul had been blind to the truth that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God (Isaiah 42:7).

Saul followed Jesus' instructions and went into Damascus. We can just only imagine how Saul must have felt for those 3 days! He had a lot to think about, for sure. The Bible says that Saul didn't even eat or drink. Have you ever been so upset that you couldn't even eat? That's how Saul felt!

ANANIAS GOES TO SAUL (Acts 9:10-19)

Say: While all of this was happening on the road outside the city of Damascus, something else was happening inside the city. The believers were becoming more and more afraid because they had heard that Saul was on his way (Acts 9:13-14, 26). They knew what terrible things he had done to other believers, and they were getting quite worried.



There was a believer named Ananias who loved the Lord very much. God spoke to him in a vision, telling him to go down the street called Straight to find Saul (Acts 9:11-12).

Application: God is always speaking to us. Because we have the Bible, His Word, He most often speaks to us through it. But God still speaks to people in dreams and visions and through other people.

Say: God knew that Ananias would need a very clear message to be able to go to Saul. We could compare this to God telling one of you to go to see Osama bin Laden. Any one of us would be terrified to go to such a cruel man. But if we were SURE that this was what God said, we would go.

God was working with Ananias and Saul at the same time. God told Ananias that He had given Saul a vision of a man named Ananias coming to him to lay hands on him so that he would be able to see again.

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I've heard many reports about this man. They say he has done great harm to God's people in Jerusalem. Now he has come here to arrest all those who worship you. The chief priests have given him authority to do this." - Acts 9:13-14

Say: I'm sure we all can understand Ananias' hesitation to go out and find Saul! But the Lord had BIG plans for Saul, and God wanted Ananias to be a part of His big plan.

The Lord said to Ananias, "Go! I have chosen this man to work for Me. He will carry My name to those who aren't Jews and to their kings. He will bring My name to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for Me." - Acts 9:15-16

Say: Do you see how God is working here? He is giving Ananias a vision; He is giving Saul a vision. Both men are hearing from God. God is always at work!

Don't forget, Ananias was follower of Jesus. Think about what happened at Pentecost. **Ask:** Did the Holy Spirit live inside of Ananias now? **Yes!** **Say:** The Holy Spirit came to live inside of **every** believer. On his own, Ananias would have wanted to HIDE from Saul! But now he was filled with the powerful Spirit of God! God gave Ananias all the power he needed to put one foot in front of the other and walk right into the house where Saul was staying.

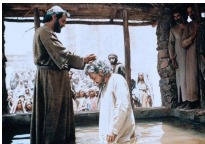
Application: God will never ask you to do something without giving you the power to accomplish it!



Ananias went to Saul and put his hands on him. Because Saul trusted that Jesus was the Messiah, he, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit and was baptized. His sight was also restored. This is a "picture," showing that Saul could finally see the truth of Jesus.

GOD'S LAVISH GRACE

Once Saul met Jesus and put his trust in Him, God made Saul into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). When God changes a person's heart, He does a very complete job. Saul believed and was baptized. Then, he also began to preach that Jesus was Lord! Just imagine how amazing that must have been!



All who heard him were amazed. They asked, "Isn't he the man who caused great trouble in Jerusalem for those who worship Jesus? Hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" But Saul grew more and more powerful. The Jews living in Damascus couldn't believe what was happening. Saul proved to them that Jesus is the Christ. - Acts 9:21-22



As proof of Saul's new identity, God gave him a new name: the name **Paul**. In the coming weeks, we will study the AMAZING life of Paul - complete with mission trips, shipwrecks, jail, and earthquakes. God used Paul to write 13 books of the Bible. Through Saul's preaching, thousands of people came to know Jesus. Through his writing, millions have.

Ask: Did Paul **deserve** to be forgiven and adopted into God's family? **No!** Did he deserve a new name and the blessing of writing part of the Bible? **No!** What did Paul **deserve?** **Death, punishment.** Just imagine Paul thinking back to the terrible things he had done to those innocent, faithful believers, and knowing that God saved him *even though* he had done these things. Paul puts it this way:

PPT Verse

Our Lord poured out more and more of His grace on me. Along with it came faith and love from Christ Jesus. Here is a saying that you can trust. It should be accepted completely. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the worst sinner of all. - 1 Timothy 1:14-15



Paul knew it was only by **God's grace** that he was chosen and saved. Paul never got used to the grace that God freely lavished on him. **Every** letter that Paul wrote begins with the words, "**Grace** and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ," and every letter ends similarly, "The **grace** of the Lord Jesus be with you."

Application: Grace is not something we earn. The very point of grace is that it is given freely to those who do not deserve it. Paul's life is the perfect example of God's grace. God chose Saul **while** he was harming the body of Christ. And the same is true for us. The Bible says, "But here is how God has shown his love for **us** - for you and me. **While we were still sinners**, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) There is nothing you can do to earn God's grace. Simply accept what Jesus did for you on the cross, and receive new life. When you trust in Jesus, your sins are forgiven; forgiveness is yours! God gives you new life in His kingdom. Like Paul, you have a whole new identity. And God can use you to spread the truth of Jesus, bringing people into His kingdom.

Additional Application: As I mentioned earlier, some of you might be persecuted (or harmed) for your belief in Jesus. You might be made fun of; you might do poorly in a class that teaches against your beliefs. In some countries, it is against the law to follow Jesus. The natural response to being persecuted is anger. The super-natural, Spirit-filled, kingdom response is to PRAY for the person who persecutes you. Maybe God has allowed you to be in that person's life just so you can pray for him or her - so that he or she might also meet Jesus! Then that "Saul" would turn into a "Paul"! And God would receive PRAISE out of that person's mouth! Don't think of the people who persecute you as your enemies; think of them as the prize (Buddy Hoffman).

PPT Main Point

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