

Sing w/ me – Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind but now I see.

I wonder, what makes us think we're so special that God would save a wretch like you/me but not a wretch like someone else? That He'd rescue us by grace, yet His grace is insufficient for the really bad/undeserving people around us.

If I've been reminded of anything over the past 10 days in Israel, it's been that God so loved the world (that's you, me, and everyone) that He gave His only Son to die on a cross to pay for our sin to rescue us from the dominion of darkness so that He can bring us into the kingdom of His Son in whom we will find redemption and forgiveness.

Daily in Israel I was reminded of how a holy, loving God is in relentless pursuit of His creation to draw us all to Himself no matter what tribe, nation, or ethnicity we might be from – and no matter how indifferent/hostile we might be to Him.

Several weeks ago we started a series of lesson in Acts about the **unstoppable** movement of the H.S. and His impact upon our lives as God's church.

In this series we've discovered that the ministry/growth of the church has never been, nor will ever be, a work of the human ingenuity, effort, or ability, but solely the work and influence of the H.S. In fact, what's clear in Scripture is that anything built on the ingenuity/ability of man, while it might look glitzy/glamorous – will neither last nor matter.

Just as it is w/ the church as an Unstoppable work of the H.S., we find in the story in **Acts 9** that salvation too is absolutely/completely a Divine work of God thru the ministry of the H.S. to draw people into relationship to God thru the atoning death of Jesus.

This truth is beautifully expressed by Paul in **Ephesians 1** where he explains to us that from the beginning salvation was **PLANNED** by the Father, **PURCHASED** by the Son, and is being **PRESENTED/PRESERVED** by the H.S.

Remember what Peter so boldly/clearly said in **Acts 4:12**:

*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*

Meaning **Jesus is God's one solution to the problem of sin** – He's the answer! But based on what happened on the day of Pentecost, and what happened on the day Peter/John healed the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate, the essential element empowering this message was the H.S. See **vs 31**

*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled w/ the H.S. and spoke the word of God boldly. Acts 4:31*

If you read the entire account of Peter/John healing the crippled man, and the Divine appointments of declaration that resulted in 2,000+ people coming to Christ in spite of numerous spiritual/physical attacks – you see clearly that it was the work of the H.S. and not Peter/John.

**Point:** It's not you and me **but God** in us working through us in the ministry of the H.S. that empowers the message.

The unstoppable force behind the unstoppable message of the Gospel is none other than the H.S. abiding in our lives. God puts Himself there the moment we receive Christ as our Savior. **Ephesians 1:13** tells us that He is a deposit in our lives not only guaranteeing our salvation, but empowering us to live this thing called the abiding life of Christ.

**Meaning?** Salvation has nothing to do w/ us except that we believe. Instead, salvation is a work of God **EXPRESSED** by the Father, **EMBODIED** by the Son, and **EMPOWERED** by the H.S. So while Jesus paid it all, it is the H.S. who is the unstoppable force who confronts, convicts, convinces, and converts. Meaning – **God can save anyone!** He can rescue the best/worst of humanity – including the Herod's, Hilter's, and the Hussein's.

**Don't believe me...** turn in your Bible to **Acts 9** and let's witness together the amazing/powerful grace of God – for if God can rescue a religious zealot, terrorist like Saul, then He can save anyone. **This text answer (3) big questions.**

## I How Lost is LOST?

Have you ever thought about how lost is lost? To be lost means you can't find your way. It means you've gotten yourself into a desperate situation in which there's no way out and you need someone to step in to help. **LOST!**

**Spiritually speaking, to be lost is to be separated from God and incapable of finding your way back to Him.** As we've learned from the parable of the Prodigal Son, it doesn't matter how rebellious/religious you might be or how close or far you are to the Father – you're still lost!

Paul was lost w/ a capital "L". As a friend of mine likes to say, "He was more lost than last year's Easter egg." (Stink'in Lost) Quite simply, he wasn't a very nice guy. Yes, he was religious, but he'd missed the truth. And despite how brash/bold he was in his faith, he considered it his life mission to exterminate this infestation known as the "Way" no matter by what means were necessary.

## A He was a Religious ZEALOT

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church... Ph. 3:4-6*

To the church at Philippi, Paul shares his resume of zeal. He told them that before Christ he was one bad hombre.

Saul was so feared, when God came to Ananias, he questions if God's got the right guy. In **vs. 26**, we find that the other disciples were so terrified of Paul and his reputation, at first they wouldn't let him play in their reindeer games.

## B He was a Remorseless MURDERER

*When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the H.S., looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. Acts 7:54-58*

Paul might not have thrown a pebble, but you can be sure he was an instigator/accomplice in Stephen's death. You can be sure he enjoyed every second of Stephen's death. He was complicit; and Stephen's blood was all over his hands. And I'm willing to bet Stephen wasn't the only follower who died in the presence or at the hand of Saul of Tarsus.

## C He was a Relentless TERRORIST

*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 if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 9:1-2*

Paul wasn't interested in taking prisoners... he wanted to rid the world of these "little Christ". Much like what we see ISIS doing around the world today, there was a conviction in his heart that Christianity must be stopped and eliminated w/ no memory of its existence. That's what ISIS has been doing in the Middle East. They want to re-write history as if it never existed. That's Saul. He was on a mission of terror.

**But then he had a close encounter w/ the unstoppable force of the H.S. of God that turned his life inside out and right-side up. Let's pick up his story in vs 3.**

## II How are the Lost FOUND?

*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, 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." The men traveling w/ 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 did not eat or drink anything.*

The lost are found the same way – by the grace of God in Jesus alone. It is by His wounds we can be healed.

Did you know Paul's conversion is no more spectacular than your conversion? Do you know why I can make such a statement? B/c for anyone to be saved/rescued from their sin requires a miracle of God! It requires Divine intervention.

No matter how lost a person might be by human standards, nothing that's dead can bring itself to life apart except by a miracle of God. And w/out Christ, we're all dead in our trespasses incapable of saving ourselves. This is why God entered time/space in the person of Christ – to offer Himself as a satisfying sacrifice, to make atonement for our sin.

**Catch**: For any person to become aware of such grace requires the revelation (*rhema*) of God. It requires we have our own **Damascus Road** encounter. No, we might not hear an audible voice like here in Paul's case, but we do have to be confronted by the H.S. to hear at least the still small voice of God in our soul that's just as powerful and loud as the voice Saul heard. Similarly, we might not see a blinding light that causes us to lose our sight, but instead, we must see the Light of God's grace in the wake of our sinfulness that allows the H.S. to give us spiritual sight – causing us to do as Paul did... open our hearts to receive Christ as Savior.

**Meaning** – We all come to Christ the same way – thru Christ by invitation of the H.S. – when He confronts us, convict us, convince us, and convert us into relationship w/ God. *No one comes to the Father less the Spirit draws him.*

### III How do the Found **FOLLOW**?

Whether we're talking about Ananias, Paul, or any of us, the reality is the same: **We follow thru abiding/responding to the will of God found in the Word of God revealed by the Spirit of God.** In considering Ananias, we get a picture.

*In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he replied. 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 have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here w/ authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” 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.” So Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so you may see again and be filled w/ the H.S.” 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...*

**Ananias is an example of an abiding follower.** How do I know? He easily recognized and responded to the voice/call of God — *My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.*

**The found follow in the same way they’re found – by responding to the leading of the H.S.** This can be a great challenge for many of us today b/c many of us have grown up in a church tradition/environment that’s been reluctant to embrace the H.S. So we’re not always comfortable when the Spirit moves. To be honest, there are some in the faith who give the impression the emotion of the Spirit is greater than truth, but that’s not true. Jesus told us clearly in **John 4** that we’re to worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

These two items aren't contradictory but compulsory. We can't have one w/out the other. They go hand/hand. Like a plane. Who's going to board a plane w/ one wing? No one! Why? B/c we all recognize that a plane requires (2) wings, equally balanced and operable to get a plane in the air.

Similarly, to get our faith airborne, it requires a balance b/w the emotion of the Spirit and the truth of the Word.

The Christian life and church works only when we as believers learn how to walk in alignment with God under the influence and in submission to the H.S. in the abiding life.

I saw this illustrated in the Biblical Gardens at Yad Hashmona in Israel as I walked through the vineyard. The statement of Jesus to the disciples was so clear.

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* John 15:5

No branch can produce fruit unless it's connected to the vine. It shoots forth from the vine, growing to maturity, to produce fruit. So when we're in Christ, the H.S. flow into and then thru us evidenced by this fruit of love, joy, peace...

**How is this possible?** I read a story this week I think answers these questions about a guy attending a Youth Ministries class at Hannibal-LaGrange College in MO,

**He wrote:** When I got to class, everybody was doing their last min. studying. The teacher came in and said he'd review w/ us before gave out the test. We went through the review, most of it right on the study guide, but there were some things he was reviewing I'd never heard. When questioned about it, he said these points were in the book and we were responsible for everything in the book. We couldn't really argue w/ him. Finally, it was time to take the test. The prof instructed the class to leave the tests face down on the desk until everyone had one – and only then would he tell the class to start. When the class turned the exam, every answer on the test was filled in! At the bottom of the last page the class found the following statement: "This is the end of the Final Exam. All the answers on your test are correct. You will receive an 'A' on the final exam. The reason you passed the test is b/c the creator of the test took it for you. All the work you did in preparation for this test did not help you get an" A". You have received this grade not b/c of what you have done, but b/c of what has been done for you. It is called GRACE."