

Preacher: Brian Townsend

Title: "The God of the Lost Causes and the Least Likely"

Text: Acts 9:1-19

Date: 2/22/26

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 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.

MEANWHILE...the last time we find that word was also connected with Saul

*Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Acts 7:58)

*And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. (Acts 8:1)

NOTE:

You can almost always count on a "meanwhile" in your life...

When God is doing good things the Enemy will be up to no-good.

Your "meanwhiles" will never be greater than God.

There will be no "Paul" that can stop God's Purpose.

Maybe you are asking, "What is the deal with Saul's hate?" We don't exactly know but we can make some guesses from what we do know.

*Saul/Paulus- is a Jew with Roman citizenship from Tarsus (modern day Turkey) (Acts 22:3; 25-28)
(mentored by Gamaliel the grandson of Hillel who cautioned against harming the apostles (see Acts 5)

*He was a strict Pharisee (Phil 3:5-6) The "separate ones" who believed that through strict observation of Torah that they could usher in the reign of the Messiah. It was their religious and nationalist duty

*The Pharisees and Jesus had a history of beefs that would have caused Paul to see Jesus as a heretic.

*The idea of the resurrection probably led Paul to believe all Christians were lunatics

So Paul was determined to rid the Earth of these "false-messiah believing people to make room for the Real Messiah to show up and show out to secure Israel's freedom.

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

(14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. 16 ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. –from Acts 26:14-15)

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 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. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Note: Paul was the Roadblock to the Promise Jesus had given the disciples at the beginning of Acts- that they would receive power and they would be His witnesses not only in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria but to the ends of the Earth.

But...There is no Roadblock when Jesus is on the road.

***Jesus- “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18)
For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. (II Corinthians 1:20)***

NOTE:

The mission of the church at this point in the story seems like a lost cause
Paul would have been seen as a lost cause at this point in the story

But ...

Paul wasn't big enough to stop God's purpose for the church.

Paul's past wasn't dark enough to stop God's plan for him.

Our pasts are platforms for God's grace

God wasn't going to use Paul in spite of who he had been. He would use him because of who he had been.

Paul would write these words, to celebrate that God is the God who delights in lost causes:

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” (I Corinthians 15:9-10)

But... Paul's transition from Persecutor of the Church to the world's greatest evangelist was not yet complete. He would spend 3 days in darkness.

Did Paul doubt in the darkness?

His beliefs

His purpose

His Identity

God's character?

NOTE:

He is there for you even when you can't see Him.

Your "darkness" doesn't hide you from Him

It is easy in darkness to doubt and wrestle with giving up on God.

God hasn't given up on you. More than that, He won't give up on Himself.

We can be assured of this: ***If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.***
(II Timothy 2:13)

Introduction to the unlikely disciple:
Before Saul can truly become Paul he needed an “Ananias”

*Jesus had radically changed Paul’s life by appearing to Him in the light and by dealing with Paul in the darkness. But Paul needed an Ananias, an ordinary and unlikely disciple, to bring him into the light again.

***10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”
“Yes, Lord,” he answered.***

(“Here Am I, Lord”-ESV)

11 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. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

13 “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

15 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. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

NOTE:

Ananias was ordinary but he was available.

“Here Am I Lord” vs “Who are You Lord”

His “Yes” came before the Request.

***“My Sheep hear my voice”-Jesus
(John 10:27)***

Ananias was available but he was hesitant. It is human to be hesitant.

**Did Ananias view Paul as hopeless?*

**Afraid of harm?*

**Maybe resentful*

Think of all the excuses Ananias could have made

Think of all the excuses we make

God will ask us to do hard things. We have to Get over it.

Ananias got over it. He obeyed.

17 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—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

SIDE NOTE: *The Pattern in the Book of Acts*

People believe and are baptized.

3,000 baptized on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), the Samaritans (Acts 8), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), Saul/Paul (Acts 9), Cornelius (Acts 10), Lydia (Acts 16), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), and the Ephesians (Acts 19).

Baptism is the expression of faith and it is the visible announcement that we believe that our old self has been buried with Christ and resurrected through Christ into newness of life.

Paul writes this: ***“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6:3-4)***

We all need an Ananias to remind us of who we are and who God is.

REMINDERS:

You should be reminded today that...

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (II Peter 2:9)

I want to remind you today that if you feel like you are unwanted or unlikely that being unlikely makes you the most likely. Listen to the words Paul spoke over the Corinthians and speaks over you.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised...so that no one may boast before him. (I Corinthians 1:26-29)

REFLECTION:

- ***Hearing God is not a skill you must master but a master you must meet. Do you hear the voice of God today calling you to do something? Maybe something hard.***
- ***Your greatest ability is your availability***
 - ***Will you obey what God is asking you to do today?***