

(P. outline)
April 15, 87 A.M. ✓
May 16, 98 Prayer meeting ✓

"A HOPELESS CASE"

Acts 9

INTRODUCTION:

Everyone who studies this passage of Scripture may well have someone in mind that they believe is so wicked and so weak, that they consider their case as a helpless one.

We are to look at a passage of a hopeless individual. He was considered tough even to God though the Holy Spirit had already been given.

As someone has said, next to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, this is possibly one of the most important events to happen in the history of the world. The conversion of Saul - who is better known as the Apostle Paul.

Now this sounds like an extreme statement - humanly speaking. Paul had more to do with the establishment of the Christian church than any other individual in the Western world. He personally carried the Gospel to Asia Minor, Greece, Rome - establishing churches. He fought against the forces that would have split the early church.

He wrote almost 25% of the New Testament. His letters, those that are notable - Romans, and Galatians - have had great effect on the thinking and the behavior of people in the world. If you check the Library of Congress catalogue you will see how many books have been written about Paul and his epistles.

Luke uses about 8% of Acts to tell the story of Paul's conversion. He includes three separate accounts. In the 9th chapter, the 22nd chapter, and the 26th.

As he tells the story of the early church, and the history of the Apostle Paul. Paul is one of the great historical evidences of the resurrection. For it was the appearance of the risen Christ that brought about his conversion.

Paul, the Apostle, was a Roman citizen. Born in Tarsus, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, he was the most self-righteous man who ever lived. Yet he classified himself as the chief of sinners. He was the worst enemy of Christ in the church. He put thousands to death. Yet he became the greatest servant of the church. And for Christ, that the world has ever known. He probably suffered more for Christ. He worked harder for Christ. He won more souls to Christ than any other Christian. He was a man with a marvelous personality. And a mighty Christian experience.

Why do you keep reading your Bible all day long?

Youngster asked his aged grandfather.

Well, he explained, you might say I was cramming for my final examination.

Paul is exhibit A to this truth - that if there are hopeless cases - they no long^{ER} become hopeless.

I want us to look under this chapter and divide it up into five sections. There are five individuals that are mentioned, in this chapter. And I think that each one can be classified in a way that it will be helpful for us to remember the entire chapter. The one that is Hopeless is Saul. Helpfulness Ananias - V. 10. Hospitality Barnabas - V. 23. Health Eneas - V. 32. Heartbroken Dorcas - V. 36.

There are several things that will come to us in this chapter. The conversion of the Apostle, some of his early work, the coming on the scene of Peter - one of the Apostles who will occupy the last part of the chapter with two remarkable healings.

I. HOPELESS SAUL - V. 1-9

At the close of chapter 8, Philip was going everywhere evangelizing and now chapter 9 begins with a bitter contest. Saul is going everywhere persecuting.

V. 1 - He is seeking to destroy Christians. He is seeking with all the hatred of his heart. He has vowed that he is going to stamp out Christianity. And the Bible says that he went on his murderous mission. Somehow, try to understand Saul. And seek to know why. He went forth in such a fashion as is stated here. Threatening and slaughter. He was like a war horse who snuffles the smell of battle. He breathed on the remaining disciples - the murder that had already been given and brought to others. The taste of blood and the death of Stephen reveals that Saul meant business.

V. 2 - He asked for himself a favor. He makes a request that he might somehow get letters to go to the city of Damascus - the most enduring in the history of the world. It was some 140-150 miles Northeast from Jerusalem. Here the Jews were strong in numbers. At one time, 10,000 were butchered by Nero - later on. Now they had taken refuge from Saul's persecution in Judea. They had set up their own synagogues in this place. And he wanted to get those of the way - that was the common method in the book of Acts in describing Christianity. As the way of life. The way of righteousness and opposed to the way of wickedness. In America the Indians used to call Christianity the Jesus road. That was their way of speaking. So Luke here specifies that Paul wanted to get a letter against those of the way.

The great Sanhedrin claimed over Jews and foreign cities the same power in religious questions which it exercised in Jerusalem. And to be sure of the Jews in Damascus were very numerous. And this was part of Paul's plan. Saul was a very religious man but here was the example of a man who had the wrong religion. You have heard many people say, any religion is alright just so you are sincere.

That statement is very wrong. Saul was sincere - but his sincerity was in the wrong direction. If his sincerity had been the true religion, he would not have been on this journey whose chief delight was to kill the Christians. What did Saul have against the Christians. Why was he seeking letters to take such action against them.

First, Paul looked for the Messiah. A Jewish hero who would sit on David's throne and bring all nations under the royal law.

Second, he believed in the temple and all the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremony. Now the Christians said this was all out of date. This was blasphemy.

Third, he was the proud, self-righteous son of Abraham. And it was something that he could not believe that he had to humble himself and be born again.

Fourth, he had a synagogue in Jerusalem and Stephen's preaching was making in-roads into that congregation. And great numbers were leaving and going over to Christianity.

Fifth, he was a proud and well-educated rabbi. He knew that that he was a brilliant expert in the law and in the prophets.

Sixth, Saul found himself whipped on the inside. He remembered Stephen's shining face and his last prayer. He knew that Stephen had something that he did not have. And his conscience would not let him go. With his heart filled with poison and hatred he went on this tour of persecution.

He was going to track down these Christians.

What did he do?

First, Acts 8:3 - He made havoc of the church. That is the picture of a wild beast, in a field - tramping and tearing up. And that is what Saul did to the church.

Second, he was breathing out threatenings and slaughters. Even his breath was

filled with murder.

Third, he dragged in the violence. He took people off the streets, out of their homes. Disregarded their rights and put them in custody of the police.

Fourth, he scourged them. 39 lashes upon their backs. Men and women.

Fifth, he put them in prison. He exiled them from their own country. He is tracing them down in the foreign countries and trying to arrest them.

He vowed for their death. And probably voted for their death. And probably saw many of them die. Perhaps like Sherman's march through Georgia during the Civil War. He covered an area of 75 miles wide from Atlanta to the sea. Burned and took charge. They did not leave a house, nor fence, nor a building standing. Now this was the type of destruction that Saul wrought upon the church. Everything he could do, he tried to put upon these Christians. And he was going to Damascus, he heard that there were some Christians in the city. And he was going after them to arrest them, and bring them back to Jerusalem. He had letters of instruction to the rabbi in Damascus. He had some helpers and attendants. That were going along on the journey.

Hopeless

Some times we think children & young people literally hopeless - Preacher asked a little boy - would you be afraid of the devil? - Boy said, not a little devil like me, but I would be afraid of a great big devil like you! - But Christ, up in Heaven, had his eyes upon Saul. Just like he does upon you.

And he is going to change this man's heart. And this man is going to have to suffer *story - Preacher went eat Family 2 Boys - Both instructed to act right, talk right, good manners himself.*
Table - serves Preacher - NO sooner seated call Preacher give Thanks - Boys began dig in - one said "Pass the Cotton Picking Potatoes" - Father, yanked him up, out side, Barn & beat within inch of life - Hear cry for mile - Back to table - Father looked at other boy & said "V. 3 - It is difficult to know on this occasion how they were traveling. But don't want any of those 'Cotton Picking Potatoes'"
this journey brought them somewhere near the sea of Galilee, across the Jordan at the lower place. And many pictures today, picture St. Paul on horseback. This may well

have been the way they were traveling, from Jerusalem to Damascus. Following the track of caravans.

And they proceeded up through the desert country. About 140-150 miles. That was a mighty light from Heaven - V.3 that shined around about him.

V. 4 - A great voice - why persecutest thou me? He fell to the ground in terror. And the voice spoke very clearly. He heard what was said. It was a direct message to his heart.

But here was Saul blinded by a flash of light. And he fell on the ground and as he lay there, he heard the voice - Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Saul knew that he was now being confronted by God.

And he knew that the voice was a voice of authority. Why persecutest thou me is a great question that maybe we ought to take to heart in our own lives. Here at this point, a personal interview took place. V. 5 - the question of the voice - who art thou, Lord? He said, I am Jesus and why do you persecute me? These are very revealing words. The question was not asked, why do you persecute the church, why do you make havoc of my fellowship, why do you try to destroy and put to death Christians. But the question was, why persecutest thou me? Saul was persecuting Christians, but he did not know that he was persecuting God Almighty and God gave him to understand that when a child of his is hurt - God is hurt. It is true today. If some servant of the Lord is trying to do the Lord's work and is persecuted, you are really not hurting him most directly. But you are hurting the cause of Christ and the heart of God. He, who is Almighty, will not stand aside and see this done without punishment. And Saul came to learn a great lesson here. He discovered that it was Jesus. He came to know that God and Christ are one. And he came to know that Jesus, whom he hated, was the God whom he tried to serve as a Pharisee.

Who was Jesus to Saul of Tarsus. He was a dead man. Disgraced and hated. But

now the voice of Jesus = that he thought was dead is alive. Jesus, that he thought was disgraced is in the center of Heaven. The Jesus he hated, spoke to him in tones of love.

For it is hard to kick against the pricks. Now in Bible times, they used oxen to pull the plow. At first, these animals when they would begin plowing or pulling the cart, would back up in protest and refuse to move. So the farmer had a cruel device. He had some sharp iron spikes on a beam. And when the oxen kicked or backed up - he would be sharply wounded. Even a very stubborn ox would get tired of that and settle down and go to work.

Now these pricks had been sticking the conscience of Saul. He could not get away from Stephen's angelic face. He knew that that man died with peace on his face - and he had seen other Christians suffer and die. He saw them as heroes and their hope in their hour of death. He knew they had something different. Something that he did not have. So he kept asking the question, what inspired these Christians. Could Christ be true. Was he really the Messiah. He tried to put these thoughts down but they kept rising up. And they pricked his conscience.

V. 6 - Paul surrenders. What would thou have me to do? Paul lost all interest in destroying the church. He forgot the legal papers that he had in his pocket. And he no longer breathed threats - he knows that he has made a mistake. He forgot his mission. He comes as a humble sinner - what must I do? What does the Lord want me to do?

Now every person listening to me must come to the same place one day and as Jesus said, except you become as a little child, ye shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Now Paul came in this manner - he did not boast of his goodness here. He did not

boast of any of his works. He came simply as we must come. The poet wrote -
could my tears forever flow, could my zeal no anger know, these for sin could not
atone, thou must save and thou alone. In my hands no price I bring, simply to thy
cross I cling.

All of Saul's tears, his grief, and his sorrow could not save him. But the minute
he made full surrender, Jesus was ready to save him. You ask the average Christian
today how to get to Heaven. He will tell you you must be good. You must be kind to
others. You must pay your debts. You must give to charity. And they try to seek to
establish their own righteousness.

But drops of grief can not repay, the debt of love I owe, here Lord, I give
myself away, tis all that I can do. Saul gave himself for Jesus Christ. His own
will was overcome. The will of the Sanhedrin, meant nothing to him now. The will
of Christ meant everything.

Paul seems to say something must be done and whatever thou teaches, whatever you
say, I will do.

Now Jesus commanded him to do one thing - arise, go to the city, and it shall
be told to you what thou must do. This is the method of our Lord. He always tells
us a very simple thing to do. He told him to go to the city and to wait for further
instructions.

Jesus very simple today tells people, you step out, you acknowledge me before
men and you will be saved.

v. 7-10 - We are told that he followed the instructions of the Lord. He went
to the city. And at the same time a vision appeared to Ananias.

II. HELPFULNESS ANANIAS - V. 10

At this point we pick up the thread of another individual in the story. Ananias, a Christian, who lived in Damascus - a follower of Jesus Christ. Received a message - his Jehovah is gracious.

V. 11 - The street call^{ED} Straight. The place had been selected and it was called Straight.

Now this can happen today. Somebody with hatred and with sin can hear Christ speaking to his heart. And saying, make a journey to the street, called Chesapeake Avenue. There is the house of God in South Norfolk. Someone will instruct you in the way of the Lord. The modern version - but that is exactly what happened to Saul.

Not Bent - "crooked" structure

Bababab

talked around

A man of God would come and instruct him concerning the faith. A crooked man was put on a Straight Street. The grace of God works this way. Crooked men - and he puts them on a straight road. The story impresses us with the naturalness as well as the super-natural. Those early Christians as Luke writes, and he doesn't stop or think it is necessary to explain any of this in the account. I imagine Ananias was surprised at first. That here is a persecutor that is coming to our town, on the street called Straight, to the house of Judas. And there is Saul of Tarsus and behold he is praying in a vision - and he sees you coming to him. I imagine Ananias said to himself, Lord, you don't mean Saul of Tarsus. He knew about the havoc he made in the church. But the Lord told him to go ahead and that everything would be alright and that he would not harm him. This is one thing that shows that Saul was saved. He is praying. When a man is on his knees and is lifting up his voice in prayer, you can be sure that he is really praying. When God says a man is praying, you know that he is praying.

So the Lord said two things to Ananias - first, he is going to be a chosen vessel to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles. And second, he is going to be a man that is going

to suffer. V. 15-16.

V. 17 - Ananias enters the house. He finally puts his hands upon him and says, brother, Saul. This means that he took him to his own heart as a brother in Christ. He welcomed him. And I imagine this was very comforting, a tender spirit. That as he had just been won to Christ - what else could Ananias say. The Lord even has appeared to Thee on the Damascus road. And sent me too - that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Saul again was assured that Jesus was God at this point.

Saul was imprisoned in blindness.

V. 18 - Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales. He looked up into the face of Ananias and I imagine he smiled and put out his hand, and they had fellowship together. And he went out and he was baptized. Now we never hear of Ananias again - but he had done his part in leading Saul to Christ. Somehow, I think he'll have a high place in Heaven. This is what every man can do - you can witness and lead somebody to Jesus. No body may blow a trumpet for you, when you lead somebody to Christ. And you may be in an obscure and out of the way place--but the person who is brought to Christ may never become anybody mighty or great. And yet how marvelous. Acts 22:13. It was a faith that Saul had never seen before. But the expression of Christian love assured him of the reconciliation of God. He had been chosen to know the will of God.

V. 19 - He was baptized. His body was strengthened with food.

You can imagine as the scales fell from his eyes, he had fullness of sight. This tells of a new vision. It came in in fullness. He became a chosen vessel to

bear the Gospel for the Jews, the Kings, the Gentiles, and the people and rulers of the earth. He was a new man. What a great change. The conversion was sufficient to prove that Christianity is divine. Saul was arrested at the height of his zeal. Christ like a skillful physician healed him when his fever was at its worst. The truth of the resurrection was in great power, and present. But it forcefully brought Paul into the kingdom. Here is a great religious lesson. We see the values set by God. That here was a man who began to do things in ignorance and in unbelief. Augustine said, Paul in his unconverted state was like a sick man who through madness tries to kill the physician. Unbelieving ignorance.

*Douglas Hick - 7 year boy - 31 yrs, ago - was: People Hungry -
 former couple - Pt Bernd Frankfurt, prostitute - Hick, Smith & gone
 food - coffee to Carter. Her man wounded Paris - 4 more than before Paul
 Karl & Eleanor Sonderrmann married - Pictorial note Hall. Hick left.
 Now after 31 yrs - found Hick, Arlington was - most letters - 500 per
 Walther family in Europe - report with manual
 Dan premiere - 50 conditions
 Trip 1941
 as was first
 Hungry to talk
 to someone -*

III. HOSPITALITY BARNABAS - V. 23

Paul began to stand before the synagogue - V. 21. And to use his training to uphold the cause that he came to destroy. The Jews were astounded. They knew what he had been in Jerusalem and what he had come to Damascus to do. And now his conviction - he never hesitates. His energy grows. And he continually gets stronger.

V. 23 - They plan a plot to assassinate him. The city is kept watch over by soldiers. The city gates day and night. They intend to kill him.

V. 4 - They deliberately took counsel and watched him day and night.

V. 25 - There was the frustrated part of it. Paul was finally delivered through the wall in a basket at night. Providence provides and delivers a way of escape. This was just a beginning from the unguarded part of the wall - in the darkness of the night, this basket was lowered for Paul's escape.

V. 26 - Paul went back to Jerusalem, the same road that he traveled. He saw

familiar faces. I wonder how Paul felt. And how they felt.

V. 27 - We have the helpfulness and the hospitality of Barnabas. Barnabas took him and declared unto the brethren how that he had preached. Gal. 1:18 - they had some information that had come to them. He had no letter of recommendation from the Christians of Damascus. Because they were afraid of him. And he had been a Christian less than three years. He had fellowship with some, but he had spent a lot of time in Arabia.

Some had heard about his change. The persecution which he commensed was still raging. Those who remembered Paul or Saul, would feel the horror at the mention of his name.

And perhaps there were some who thought that it was a trick - that he might catch a larger number of them. And there was general distrust and confidence. And they were slow to accept him.

The kindness of Barnabas, a man well-known to all of them - pleaded for Saul - that he knew the risen Christ.

V. 28 - He enjoyed the fellowship of the church.

V. 29 - He preached Christ boldly.

IV. HEALTH Eneas - V. 32

We come now to meet the first time, the fisherman of Galilee. We have just met the tentmaker of Tarsus. And both of these were chosen companions of our Lord. And in passing over, in a few words - Luke does not linger here with the record. Now what

took place between Peter and Paul, we do not know. But we do know in V. 30 - Saul or Paul is in exile from the earthly Jerusalem. Again, he is gone. And we read in V. 33 about a man by the name of Eneas which had been in bed for 8 years - sick of the palsey. V. 34 - Tells us about a remarkable healing. Peter said to him, make thy bed. In other words, other people have been making up your bed, helping you - moving you about. Now he says may Jesus Christ make you whole. Arise and make thou own bed.

V. HEARTBROKEN DORCAS - V. 36

v36
v37
At Joppa, the seaport at Jerusalem, we discover here one by the name of Dorcas. She was sick. V. 37 - she died. Her name means the creature with the beautiful look. Nothing is said about her husband, she probably was unmarried. She is the second woman mentioned by name after Pentecost. But this woman carried on beautiful deed by herself.

V. 37 - In the upper chamber. They had washed her for inturnment.

V. 39 - They stood by him - this is the most vivid picture in the New Testament. A group of widows as they stood around Peter weeping and showing, and pointing with pride to the garments that had been made by this woman from time to time. It was really a heart-breaking scene. It is most touching. As they showed him the coats and the garments. That this woman had knitted with her own hands. Her handiwork - as they spread it out. And now she was dead. They were standing in the presence of a woman who had lived a useful life. Full of good works. She did not just talk about it. Now there are many people who talk of doing certain things. Who never get around to fulfilling the expressions of their mind. This woman made coats and garments for poor widows. She did the work herself. She must have been a very kind person. At this point, we discover that the church was gathering around and sorrowing because of the value of her influence. This happens quite often, death robs

us of some of the most useful people in society. And on the other hand, some of the worthless and most corrupt people continue to live. But here was a saint who expressed herself in service.

V. 40 - We find that wherever the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. And the spirit manifests itself in gifts. Due to the victories of our Lord, death had done its work. Dorcas had been washed and ready for the grave. Is there anything stronger than death. You remember, Job asked the question. If a man die, shall he live again. Then we are made to realize that the power of the resurrection is much stronger because it is able to abolish death.

It was not Peter that raised Dorcas. It was Christ. Peter was merely an instrument. The life of Christ, when he arrived in that chamber - and when Peter said, arise. Power of healing came. What Jesus did through Peter that day - he will give power to his disciples of every age. He will enter the death chamber someday and will say to each of his own arise. We read, behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed. Now this display of Christ's power over death is most encouraging. As awful as death is, we should think of Christ who holds the keys of life and the keys of death. And to know that those who believe in Christ, should one day be raised from the dead.

Someone would say, why is it that men (do not) still raise the dead. We remember that this happened only on three occasions. The little girl, the young man Lazarus, and Jesus raised them for the comfort of those that mourned. He brought them back - the little girl and the young man to grow old. And Lazarus had to come back into the conflicts of life. Somehow we have a feeling that we ought to thank God that he does not raise more into this world of conflict and trial.

But to me, the greatest victory is the victory of spiritual death. Paul says we are dead in trespasses in sin. We return to our original subject - a hopeless case.

Remember Saul was converted and changed into Paul. Helpfulness was offered by Ananias - a humble Christian. There in Damascus. A task for you. Hospitality is given him by Barnabas. This is something that every church member could sure exhibit. Health was given to Eneas through the prayers and blessings of Peter. There are many sick people who need our prayers. Our help today to get them back to health. And finally the heart-broken scene of Dorcas. In which she was presented alive. So a hopeless case. A sinner, the chief of sinners - was saved. A man of 8 years in his bed sick. Was healed. A hopeless case. A woman, had died, and was restored.

After a fierce battle, a chaplain walked out on the battlefield. His Bible under his arm. He found a boy wounded and dying. Would you like for me to read you something out of the book. The boy replied, I am thirsty. I would rather have a drink of water. The chaplain hurried off to return with the water. Then the boy said, could you lift my head and put something under it. He put his overcoat - to make him comfortable as a pillow. He said, I am so cold, I wish I had something over me. The chaplain took off his other coat and wrapped it over the boy. Then the boy looked up in his face and said, oh sir, if there is anything in that book that makes a man do for another - what you have done for me, let me hear it.

Yes, there is something in the Bible - it is Christ. Let him come into your heart. He will transform your life, stand by you in death, and will take you home when your journey is over. Do you want to know him? Then let what has been placed here in the 9th chapter of Acts challenge you to action for Jesus Christ. Your case is not hopeless!