

## Eyes Wide Open

(Acts 9:1-19)

### Introduction

1. Theme: Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. Big Idea: We are blinded by our sin & religion until we come face-to-face with Jesus.

### Jesus reveals our spiritual blindness [Acts 9:1-9]

1. [1-2] Reintroduced to Saul, a young Pharisee
  - a. Pharisee means “separated one”; trained under a Scribe/Rabbi.
    - i. They started with a good idea: They want people to obey the Bible.
    - ii. But they turned it into religion: Man’s effort to earn God’s favor by the merit of their works
  - b. He’s the villain.
    - i. [Acts 7:58-8:1] Lurking in the background; encourages/approves Stephen’s murder.
    - ii. [Acts 8:3] Unleashes persecution to ravage the Church, scattering them out of Jerusalem.
  - c. [1] Now breathing murderous threats against Jesus’ followers.
    - i. [2] He asks the High Priest for extradition papers for Christians in the Syrian city of Damascus.
    - ii. “Followers of the Way”: Followers of Jesus (cf. John 14:6).
2. [3-7] Saul has an eye-opening experience
  - a. [3] Near Damascus (~135 mi journey), experiences light flashing from Heaven.
    - i. Supernatural magnitude, outshining noon-day sun (cf. Acts 22:6; 26:13).
    - ii. Theophany/Christophany: Encountering the power/glory of the presence of Jesus as God.
    - iii. [4] It knocks Saul down, & Jesus speaks to him personally: “Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”
  - b. [5] Saul meets Jesus
    - i. [5a] Saul inquires about Jesus’ identity: “Who are You, Lord?”
      1. This is not a confession of faith; Saul doesn’t know who Jesus is (cf. John 10:27).
      2. But he recognizes Jesus is supernatural & worthy of respect (“Lord”).
    - ii. [5b] Jesus identifies Himself, & reiterates Saul’s persecution of Him.
      1. When Saul persecutes Jesus’ followers/body, he’s doing it to Jesus.
    - iii. [6] Jesus instructs Saul to get up, go to Damascus, where He will give him further instructions.
  - c. [7] The Temple police accompanying Saul are scared speechless.
    - i. They heard the divine voice from Heaven, but do not understand it (cf. 22:9).
    - ii. They saw the divine light from Heaven & were knocked over too (cf. 26:14), but do not see Jesus.
    - iii. They all experienced the presence of God, but the encounter was specifically for Saul to meet Jesus.
3. [8] The outcome: Saul’s eyes are open, but he sees nothing.
  - a. He thought he saw/knew the truth about God, & how to follow Him.
    - i. But when he looks at Jesus (His work & truth; cf. Heb 12:2), Saul saw nothing all this time.
    - ii. Saul sees himself as righteous in God’s eyes through his own merit/actions; he’s spiritually blind.
  - b. Biblical blindness
    - i. Being born blind is not always a result of sin (cf. John 9:2-3), though there are times when God’s judgment is manifested in blindness, to curtail wickedness (cf. Gen 19:11; 2 Kgs 6:18; Acts 13:11).
    - ii. In the New Testament, seeing, light & darkness are often metaphors with spiritual overtones (cf. Luke 2:32; 8:16-17; 11:33-36; 16:8).
    - iii. After seeing Jesus face-to-face, he experiences a physical reminder of a spiritual truth.
  - c. When we meet Jesus, He always reveals our spiritual blindness.
    - i. Application: Are your eyes open, but really blind? How is Jesus showing your blindness to Him/sin?

4. [9] The response of repentance
  - a. As a result, Saul has darkness in his eyes, but an awakening of his heart.
    - i. Fasts for 3 days: Humbly seeks God's presence in prayer (cf. 9:11) & repents of sin (1 Tim 1:12-17).
  - b. When Jesus shows us we're blind in our sinfulness & rebellion against Him, the answer is repentance.
    - i. Repentance: A change of heart, mind, lifestyle.
    - ii. Turning from sin, to God, by faith, through Jesus.
  - c. Application: Repent of our legalism & licentiousness.
    - i. Legalism: Judging self/others by the merit of our man-made rules & works.
      1. Results in loving our rules, not loving our neighbors or enemies, and not loving God.
    - ii. License: Don't like legalists because we love our sin more than we love Jesus. Repent of rationalizing our license to sin (cf. Rom 6:1-2).
    - iii. Either way: We see everyone else's problem (sinful or judgmental), but are blind to our own.

### **Jesus changes our life's mission [Acts 9:10-16]**

1. [10-14] Ananias' dilemma
  - a. [10] Introduced to Ananias; not the one who lied to the Holy Spirit & died (cf. Acts 5:1-11).
    - i. He's the opposite: Humble, faithful follower, whom Jesus calls by name.
  - b. [11-12] Jesus sends Ananias into danger.
    - i. [11a] "Here I am": He responds positively, present, willing to be sent/used (cf. Exo 3:4; Isa 6:8).
    - ii. [11b-12] Jesus instructs him to find Saul, who is fasting/praying, awaiting Ananias.
  - c. [13-14] Ananias' reluctance: He knows Saul's reputation & personal mission against Christians; he's afraid.
2. [15-16] Jesus has a plan for Saul: He personally chose him to do something new.
  - a. [15] After seeing Jesus & being transformed by His grace, He will be sent to bring Jesus to all peoples.
    - i. Regardless of ethnicity/culture (not just the children of Israel)
    - ii. Regardless of threat of influence/power (even to kings; cf. Acts 19:21; 23:11)
    - iii. Similar to our church vision: Crossing generations & cultures together in Christ.
  - b. [16] There's a catch: Saul will suffer much for Jesus' sake, more than he inflicted on other Christians.
    - i. Not because Jesus is mad/punishing; this is the cost to follow Jesus (cf. Luke 9:23-24).
    - ii. Saul's previous life mission: Hate Jesus/followers; pursue them all the way to Syria.
    - iii. Saul's new life mission: Love Jesus/all people who don't know Him (even Gentiles/kings); pursue them to the ends of the earth.
  - c. Jesus changes our life mission (cf. Acts 1:8)
3. Application: What's your personal mission in life? Is it the same as Jesus' mission for you?
  - a. Where do you make the most sacrifices of time, energy, resources/money, devotion, attention?
    - i. For what are you willing to sacrifice?
  - b. Are you "on-mission" for Jesus at school/work?
    - i. In character & competence?
    - ii. In not only living out Jesus, but also speaking out in His name?
  - c. Is your mission: To work hard for money, comfort or security? To get acceptance, please people (fear of men vs. God)? To escape responsibility, have as much fun/pleasure as possible? Be in control?
  - d. If we don't embrace our real mission, life will center around a "shadow mission."
    - i. Something else that's unworthy, selfish, dark.
    - ii. What's your shadow mission?

### **Jesus changes our identity [Acts 9:17-19]**

1. [17] Ananias' response
  - a. [17a] Ananias could have responded with fear or anger.
    - i. Saul is responsible for the widespread persecution against Ananias and his friends/family in Christ.
  - b. [17b] He faithfully obeys, praying for Saul's sight to be restored, to be filled with the Holy Spirit
    - i. He calls Saul "brother" in Christ (instead of enemy).
  - c. Application: As we trust/follow Jesus, He prompts us to risk for the gospel, even ministering to enemies.
    - i. Even if they don't change, Jesus asks us to be faithful (not necessarily fruitful). The fruit is up to Him (cf. John 15:5); issue: Will we obey His prompting?
    - ii. How is Jesus prompting you to do something uncomfortable? To risk for Him?
    - iii. Who's the person Jesus telling you to reach out to, out of your comfort zone?

2. [18-19] Saul's response
  - a. [18a] His physical sight is restored
    - i. The weird crusty, flaky scales drop off his eyes.
  - b. [18b-19] Saul displays external responses to his healing.
    - i. [18b] He gets up, and gets baptized into the way, the truth & the life of Jesus.
      1. Magnitude: Public symbol of changing sides, personal declaration of allegiance to Jesus.
      2. It now marks Saul to be persecuted alongside followers of the Way.
    - ii. [19] He now eats & is strengthened (vs. before not eating/drinking in humble conviction; cf. 9:9).
  - c. Saul has experienced an internal change after encountering Jesus & being healed.
    - i. He was once spiritually blind, but now he sees Jesus; he knows, trust & follows Jesus.
    - ii. It's not just an external change of action, behavior, lifestyle to be "on-mission."
      1. That would only make him a "good Pharisee" for Jesus.
    - iii. He has also experienced an internal change in his identity/allegiance.
      1. From dead to risen with Jesus, persecutor to persecuted, "separated one" to welcoming one (in Christ, to Gentiles), enemy of God to lover of Christ.
      2. He will later declare to live is Christ, to die gain (Phil 1:21); all the heritage, rules/traditions, persecution under his belt are loss/rubbish compared to knowing Jesus his Lord (Phil 3:7-8).
    - iv. Jesus changes our identity & allegiance.
  - d. Application: What do people see as your primary identity?
    - i. Are you willing to raise high Jesus' banner in your life, as a sign of your new identity?
    - ii. Even when others are spiritually blind, will you allow Jesus' light/life be seen in you?

## Conclusion

1. Like Saul, all of us see ourselves as the hero of our own story.
  - a. We maximize others' wrong, minimize our own; we are spiritually blind.
  - b. Reality: Like Saul, we are the villain of our own story.
    - i. It's not everybody else that's the problem; it's me.
    - ii. It's not just everyone else is wrong or a sinner; it's that I am.
  - c. But Jesus is the hero of our story.
    - i. He came to transform the blind to see, the hurtful to humble, the purposeless to purposeful, the religious to the genuine, the dead to alive, sinners into forgiven