

Acts 9:1-31 Manuscript

## **Introduction:**

Car theft is a huge problem in South Africa. \$776 million dollars worth of cars are stolen in the country every year.

Knowing the lucrative black market business of stealing cars, a man tried his luck to steal a car.

So he used a jamming device to get into the vehicle and when he got inside, suddenly the auto-lock system activated he could not get out, trapped in the very car he wanted to steal.

He was stuck there for almost 2 hours, asking people to help him get out, with people passing by pointing and laughing until the owner returned screaming, 'What are you doing in my car?' He was then arrested.

You see many of us face interruptions every day. Many of us non-criminals face interruptions daily, on the phone, getting a random telemarketer call, losing our keys and looking for them making us late to work, sometimes even getting bumped in the rear of our car as we are driving.

For the criminal getting interrupted looks as comical as getting trapped in a car by the auto-locking system that you were trying to steal or as dark as dying from gunshot wounds in a gunfight with the authorities.

God does the same. He is not passively watching by, he's actively governing our world. He interrupts our world. Sometimes an interruption as small as a text message notification, or as big as a cancer diagnosis.

And so today we are continuing our sermon series on Jesus interrupts, specifically Jesus interrupts the sinner.

And so here are 3 ways:

3 Ways Jesus Interrupts The Sinner

### **1. Jesus interrupts the sinner's plan**

## THE SINNER

The first thing we see here, is that Jesus interrupts the sinner's plan. We see this in v.1-9.

Look at v.1 'Now Saul' where we take a look at the sinner. In fact, the chief of sinners, Saul of Tarsus or as we know as Paul.

We all know who Paul is. He is an apostle and he wrote the majority of the books in the NT.

We also know that he had a terrible past. We see back in Acts 7 that Saul was responsible for the stoning of Stephen, a faithful Christian who was preaching the gospel. We see this in Acts 7:38 where witnesses to Stephen's stoning laid their robes at Saul's feet. In Acts 8:1, we see Saul approving the murder of Stephen with 'hearty agreement'.

But it wasn't enough for Saul. Look back at v.1 where it says that he was 'still breathing threats and murder'. He wanted to destroy more Christians, destroy the Way, which is what early Christians called them selves because Jesus said 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'. To Saul destroying Christianity was essential as breathing air to him.

## THE SINNERS PLAN

And so he had a plan. Verse 2. Saul was requesting for letter of support from the chief priest so that he could arrest Christians at Damascus. Without support, the Jewish synagogue there could easily reject Saul and he would be unable to capture Christians.

Saul was very intentional and strategic about his plan to destroy Christians. He was like a hunter carefully watching his pray, laying traps, and waiting at the right time to attack.

The deadliest criminals are the ones who are careful and who have a plan to accomplish their wicked desires. If you've seen How to Catch a Predator, a show where old men prey on underaged girls for inappropriate activities, they show how some are calculated and careful. Some planning their drives, one prepared a contract that the girl would have to marry him so their activities would not be deemed legal. Had Chris Hansen not been there ready with cops to catch these predator men, these men would have been successful in their plan.

We often say in Christendom that people are looking for god no they're not. Saul wasn't looking for God he was looking to kill God. Romans

Application : Understand that when people get become Christians it's not because they were looking for God but God interrupted them and saved them. That's what we see in verse 3

## SAUL UNDER ARREST BY JESUS

So Saul goes on with his plan and goes to Damascus in v.3, but his plans suddenly come to a crash when a light shines from heaven.

Many years ago, I was driving towards a stoplight and about 15 feet away from it. I decided to hit the gas and beat the light but that was a foolish decision. As I hit the gas and came to the stoplight it turned red, and I ran the light. Immediately, the cars behind me started flashing red and blue. I knew it was over. The cop asked me, 'what happened?' I said, 'I have no excuse, I ran the light.'

Saul was in deep trouble. He was in trouble with the law, and the ultimate lawgiver.

Verse 4, 'he fell to the ground' and Jesus said to him, 'Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?' Jesus was, "you're under arrest Saul of Tarsus. I'm charging you with persecuting me, a class 1 felony."

Christ is the head of the church, and so if you mess with his church, you mess with him.

So how does Saul respond? Look at verse 5. Saul says, 'Who are you, Lord?'

His response shows us 2 things:

#1 Saul knew what he was doing was wrong.

In How to Catch a Predator, the predator went to meet the girl at the girl's house alone with no parents, and Chris Hansen approaches the criminal. Many times they will ask, 'police'? Only people who are doing evil would ever ask 'police' to ensure they won't get caught. An innocent person would never just randomly ask someone, 'are you the police' unless they have done something wrong. Likewise, Saul knowing he was sinning said, 'Lord?'

#2 Saul knew who he was sinning against. If you look at Saul's response you will also see how foolish it is! He answers his own question in the same sentence! 'Who are you, Lord?' When criminals get caught, they always say something stupid to defend themselves! There's this silly game called Among Us, and I've been playing it with the youth, and even Jobelle's mom played with us. There's two teams, imposters and crew. The imposter's goal is to eliminate the crew, and the crew's goal is to identify who the imposters are. Some of the most laughable moments are when I see an imposter literally committing the crime right in front of me, and then he tries to defend himself, 'what are you talking about? 'Dude, I saw you do it right in front of my eyes!'

Criminals know that they are breaking the law so they're scared of the police. They're scared to get caught so they become paranoid and ask random people, 'are you the police' when they're

not. Saul was the same here, only he was right that the one accusing him is lawmaker himself, the Lord.

And so the Lord Jesus repeats his charges against Saul again, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'

Oh, what a terrifying thing to hear from the Lord! 'You are persecuting me!' Many times when someone encounters God in the Bible they are afraid because of God's immense holiness and power. But to hear God accusing you of sin almost always accompanied death! Just look at Daniel 5, where God charges King Belshazzar for not giving honor to the true God, Yahweh, and God ends up killing him after!

#### GOD INTERRUPTS WITH SALVATION

But instead the Lord had different plans for Saul.

Verse 6 'but get up and enter the city it will be told what you must do'. Notice how the Lord doesn't ask for Saul's opinion, Saul's feelings, or Saul's decision. Instead, he just tells Saul what to do as if he owned Saul or something. In fact, the Lord Jesus does own Saul at this point!

You see, in Christendom, we like to say 'if you accept Jesus into your heart' or 'Jesus is a gentlemen, he won't come in unless you let him'. And it's true that we do indeed count the cost to follow Jesus and that there is some sort of decision that we make. But we forgot that it all ultimately comes down to God!

You see Ephesians says that we are all trapped in a fortress of evil. Ephesians 2 talks about the layers of evil influence in our lives, Satan, the world, and possibly the worst: ourselves!

And so who are we to believe that we have the power to break through the max prison cell of evil that we are trapped in?! We don't! In the same chapter in v.4 it says, 'But God'. God is the one who rescues us!

The reason you're a Christian today is not because you accepted Jesus into your heart. No, you're a Christian today, because Jesus knocked you off your high horse and said, 'you're mine!'

#### NO DECISION OR EFFORT FROM SAUL

If you still don't believe me, look at the next verses! Verse 7, we see that other's were witnesses to this event, just in case anyone tried to declare that Saul was insane or something, that's completely out the window with witnesses here.

Verse 8, he could see nothing, they were leading him by the hand and they brought him into Damascus. Does that sound like someone who saved himself? Sounds more like someone who knocked out.

Saul did absolutely nothing here that attributed to his conversion. He was blind, he was unable to go anywhere unless people felt like lugging him around.

Verse 9, he didn't eat or drink for three days. He was absolutely in awe and in shock of what happened. God intervened his life so violently that he could not help but think of what happened to him, not even eating or drinking was on his mind.

The description of Saul after encountering Jesus, is not a triumphant proud man, 'I did it, I accepted Jesus pat on the back' but one of completely whimpering weakness like a beaten dog.

There's nothing in scripture more obvious and clear that God is sovereign in salvation, that Jesus interrupts the sinner more than the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

**Application:** So here's what we ought to do with this:

#1 Any person that we hope to come to Christ we need to trust God and keep praying for them. If God can save an enemy and tormentor of the church like Saul of Tarsus, he can save your Muslim friend, your Buddhist friend, your Atheist friend, your friend who doesn't care, your homosexual friend, your fornicating friend.

#2 Love God. When we realize that we are not the ultimate decider in our salvation, we come to love God more! As painful as life can be, especially now, nothing brings greater joy and comfort to know that we had nothing to do with our salvation but that it was all God. That we hated God like Saul and that we all deserved eternal punishment. But instead he destroyed that fortress of evil that we were imprisoned in, saved us, and brought us into his kingdom! Even for those of you who were Christians at a very young age, realize that if it weren't for God coming in and taking over your heart early, you would not be a believer but a God hater.

So that's Jesus interrupting the sinner's plan looks look at the next thing Jesus interrupts:

#2 Jesus interrupts the sinner's ability

#### MAKING THE CHRISTIAN WEAK

We see this in verses 10-19. Saul still blind, is helplessly praying to God for help. That's why we see in verse 10, God calling Ananias to help Saul because verse 11, Saul is praying, he's calling to God for help. He's no longer breathing fiery threats and murder like a wild beast. He's a broken man calling out to God!

And this is Jesus interrupting the sinner's ability. This is Jesus taking away the strength from the sinner to show him how weak he really is! He didn't have to make Saul blind. He didn't have to make Saul weak. But God chose to do this to show Saul how weak he is, blinding him to show

him how as a Pharisee, doing good deeds and practicing ceremonies does not make you any more righteous before God!

We see this also in Daniel 4:28-33 where we see Nebuchadnezzar walking on the roof of his palace, looking proudly at his city saying 'is this not babylon the great which I have built as royal residence by the might I of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'

But God responds and says that for Nebuchadnezzar's crime of pride, giving glory to himself and not God that he will be like an ox eating grass for 7 years!

We see this also in 2 Corinthians, where Paul is given a thorn in the flesh from God!

#### TO SHOW GODS POWER THROUGH HIS HOLY SPIRIT

But why did God want to show Saul how weak he is? We see the answer in verse 12, where we see God made Saul weak, so that he would cry out to God for help, and then God would restore his sight and fill him with his spirit! God wants to fill Saul with the Holy Spirit so that he would be strengthened and so that he would go serve God.

Verse 12, 'Ananias come in and lay his hands..' In the early church, the Apostolic community would lay their hands to show support and affirmation of a person's turn to faith, and God would also put his Holy Spirit through the laying of hands.

But Ananias had doubts as we see in verse 13, he heard how much harm Saul did to the church, and what he planning to do to get more Christians killed by arresting them as we see in verse 14.

So God encourages Ananias by letting him know that Saul is his chosen instrument in verse 15, to bear his name, to share the Gospel to Gentiles (non-Jews), kings, and Israelites and that while he would have a glorious role in serving God in this way that there would be suffering to come along with it in verse 16.

So Ananias obeys as we see in verse 17 where we see him coming to Saul, laying his hands on him and saying what the Lord Jesus had told him.

Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and then in verse 18, his sight is restored, and he begins eating again. Saul's strength return and as we see later on that Saul begins to boldly preach the Gospel.

So we see here God made Saul weak to show him how powerless he is, and to show him powerful God is by giving him His Spirit!

Look back at Nebuchadnezzar after being grazing grass for 7 years, he began to give God glory and say, 'but he does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no can ward off his hand or say to him, what have you done?'

And again why did God give Paul thorns in the flesh? 2 Cor 12:9 so that Paul would understand that, '

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'

Zechariah 4:6, not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.

If you've ever done weight lifting, and you were doing a bench press. And you load the bar with really heavy weights and you lay down on the bench and prepare yourself to lift. And as you lift the bar off the holder, you begin to have feel serious dread as you realize that this bar isn't going back up, it's way too heavy. In fact, this actually happened in 2017 when 15 year old Ben Shaw was found dead crushed under a bench press. The total weight was 216 pounds. Had he had a spotter, a friend who could've helped him put the weight back up in case he couldn't have lift it, it would have never happened.

Church, we can do nothing without the Holy Spirit. We are weak without the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit we're weak. Without the Holy Spirit we can't serve. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us spiritual gifts to serve the church. God interrupts our ability by replacing our human strength with His Holy Spirit so we can be strengthened and so we can serve our church!

If you're feeling weak today, whether your sick, or just discouraged, or even feeling that your enthusiasm for God is starting to get colder, remember that God is allowing you to feel weak so that you would seek to be filled with the Spirit and remember that his grace is sufficient for you, that his power is perfected in weakness!

This is why we are commanded in Ephesians 5:18 says, 'And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.'

Human power to overcome sadness and sorrow is to get drunk with wine. But that's now what Paul did here, he did not start getting himself drunk when God blinded him, instead he sought to be filled God's spirit for strength!

So how do we fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit? Are we to speak in tongues, do a wild dance?

Understand that when the Bible says be filled with the spirit, that the Greek verb is present tense, meaning it is a continuous on going, daily action! You need to do it every day, and you do it by submitting yourself to God's control over your life every day! Recognize that without God's Holy Spirit you are weak and then you pray, you read the Bible, you go to church! That's how we fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit!

The final way God interrupts the sinner is by

#3 interrupting the sinner's past.

#### WITH FORGIVENESS

Let's look quickly at the remaining verses. We see that Saul was with the fellow Damascus Christians for several days in verse 20. The same people who were afraid of him like Ananias were now his friends!

And so Saul begins to proclaim Jesus that he is the Son of God in verse 20. Then verse 21 people were amazed because they knew Saul as a Christian hater. It would be as incredible as seeing a well known KKK member or a neo-Nazi start proclaiming in the streets that that he was wrong!

But of course it doesn't come without opposition as many people would have certainly doubted Saul that he was perhaps insane but instead in verse 22 Saul kept increasing in strength rather than becoming discouraged and overcame all the Jewish arguments with proof in the OT in all the prophecies that Jesus is the Christ.

Then the Jews planned to kill him in verse 23 and but Saul became aware of it in verse 24. Verse 25, Saul escapes through in a large basket lowered in an opening in the wall.

Incredible the same people who were terrified of Saul are the same ones who lovingly helped him escaped from being murdered. These people would have probably loved for Saul to be killed for all the harm he's done to him, but now that he's a believer they love him!

And I just find it funny how they lowered Saul in a basket, it's almost comedic! It's so creative, and their creativity came because of the love they truly had for Saul. Their fear of him became love for him.

I want you to begin noticing that God interrupts the sinner's past by covering it with love. 1 Peter 4:8 says 'love covers a multitude of sins'. In Christ we are a new creation, behold the old is gone and the new has come. That's what the disciples at Damascus did! They saw Saul no longer as the persecutor of Christians but now as a fellow brother in Christ! They forgave him, because Christ forgave his children of their sins by dying for them on the cross!

That's right, if you are a believer, God lovingly forgives all your sin, future, present, and past. And if not.. GOPSEL

#### TAKING AWAY SHAME

But sometimes we know that God has forgiven us, but we still feel ashamed of what we did.

We see this in the final verses starting in verse 26 where Saul escaped to Jerusalem so he wanted to be in community with the church there but they were afraid of him because his past and they didn't believe him.

Thankfully Barnabas in verse 27 takes him to the Apostles, and Saul explains what happened to him.

And then verse 28 it says, 'he was with them, moving about freely, speaking out boldly'. Saul was no longer hindered by his shameful past but instead had the support of his fellow brothers in the Lord and felt free to go and serve God.

See if God can wipe the slate clean for Saul and give him a new beginning, then there's no need for us to feel that the shame of our past or sin can prevent us from serving God.

Maybe you feel I did this sin, so there's no way God can use me. Remember, God used Saul.

And God will also bring fellow Christians to encourage you. Look at verse 29 and 30 where the Jews were planning to kill Saul just like they were trying to kill him at Damascus but instead of Saul becoming aware of it like last time, this time the brethren became aware of it in verse 30 and helped him escape. God used Saul's fellow Christians to save him from the hands of the Jews.

That's why we need church. We need each other, because God uses us to encourage one another, and so I encourage you especially with COVID making it harder to communicate with one another to continue getting involved with one another because you don't know how God may just use you to encourage a fellow brother who needs help. Come to church with the attitude, someone here needs help today and I want to help them.

Finally I want to encourage you with the impact you make. It's easy to feel like we don't really make a difference at church especially when we don't see results right away. But in verse 31, we see that because of the addition of Saul to the church, the church enjoyed peace. Possibly peace from Saul no longer persecuting them but also most likely the peace from the encouragement to know how God interrupted Saul's past. That's why it says 'being built up' and they went on in 'the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit' because true love and peace doesn't exist without also having a healthy fear of God and his holiness. And finally the church 'continued to increase' not only spiritually but physically in number as well. Yes, we may not be the apostle Paul and make the same impact as him, but when you were saved by the Lord Jesus and are added to his church you make an impact by being an encouragement to others and adding to the Lord's ranks.

Conclusion: If anyone knows being interrupted by God it would be no one other than Joni Erickson Tada. Joni Erickson Tada is a famous Christian who suffered an injury diving in her early years causing her to be paralyzed in her hands and feet. Yet she said this, 'The more my paralysis helps me get disentangled from sin, the more joy bubbles up from within. I can't tell you how many nights I have lain in bed, unable to move, stiff with pain, and have whispered near tears, "Oh, Jesus, I'm so happy. So very happy in you!"' She saw her paralysis as a way of God making her depend on completely on God and by doing so made her realize more than many of us how wonderful and powerful God is. She even said, 'I thank God for my wheelchair' thanking God for her situation. Yes, Jesus interrupts the sinner. He interrupts their plans, their ability, and their past.