



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for June 30, 2019**  
**“Champions of the Church: Saul”**  
**Speaker: Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Acts 9:1-9**

### **Ripe for God to Do His Thing**

God has a way of intersecting life. His every desire is to lay claim to our lives. He wants us to respond and will do just about anything to make that happen.

God is persistently at work to bring us to the place of decision. God’s grace is constantly wooing us with the intent of us finally accepting what he has to offer.

God’s power to win people over is no more clearly displayed than in the conversion of Saul on the Damascus Road.

Saul was a passionate firebrand who breathed threats against the church.

He stood to the side in quiet agreement at the stoning Stephen.

He was also the one commissioned by the High Priest to go to Damascus to throw those who professed faith in Christ into prison.

The trip from Jerusalem to Damascus was about 150 miles back in those days and took about five or six days to complete. The time gave Saul lots of time to think. I’m sure the stoning of Stephen, among other things, was on his mind.

The more Saul walked the more things weighed on him. Saul was ripe for God to intervene in a powerful way.

Interestingly, the road to Damascus went right through Galilee, the birthplace of Christ’s ministry. I’d like to think that Stephen was not only on Saul’s mind, but that Jesus was as well.

### **(Read Acts 9:1-9)**

#### **Blinded by the Light**

The clouds have finally passed, but until this week it seemed like it had been raining forever. The sun has finally come out.

There’s nothing like the bright summer sun. I have gotten quite used to wearing sunglasses these days.

Light is a powerful thing and because of that when we go from dark to light, our eyes need some time to adjust.

Sometimes light can be absolutely overwhelming. That's the way it was for Saul on the Damascus Road.

The scripture shares that Saul was blinded by a light from heaven. It shouldn't surprise us that in his darkened state light from heaven would be the thing to blind him.

### **Trying to Get Our Attention**

The scripture reports that upon being blinded by the light, Saul fell to the ground and the voice of Christ rang out, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*"

Saul was called out by name. There was no mistaking that this was Saul's time to stand before the Lord.

Jesus is calling your name as well. Christ is constantly trying to get your attention. He wants you to listen.

Sometimes he'll even put you in a circumstance where we can do no other but listen. For Saul that circumstance was that light from heaven.

I had a fellow in my first church who upon giving his testimony said that he had "*cornfield religion.*" He had met Jesus while farming one day.

Whether on the Damascus Road or a cornfield, whether by a still small voice or a blinding light, God is fast at work to awaken you to his presence and his every desire to see your life turned his way.

### **Remaining Steadfast**

I have known so many who have had a spiritual awakening during a troubled time. Conversely, I have known those who when faced with trouble have become embittered.

Whenever we face some of the tragedies of life like the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or the loss of a job, we find ourselves at a crossroads. We either turn to God or we allow ourselves to become embittered.

It is only human that when things are good we barely give God the time of day, yet when things turn south we run to him as if our very lives depend upon it.

The real challenge for any of us is to remain steadfast, regardless of the circumstance.

### **In the Presence of the Almighty**

I've always been struck by Saul's response to Christ's words. "*Who are you, Lord?*" he asked. Saul knew he was in the presence of the Almighty, he just didn't fully understand.

There was no mistaking the fact that Christ was indeed present. Saul knew Christ was dealing with him.

For some, it takes something as demonstrative as a flash of light. For others, it takes something as quiet as an answered prayer in the still of the night.

If the heart is open and the ear is ready to listen, we are able to receive like we never thought possible.

### **Our Weakness, God's Strength**

It's interesting that Saul's new life in Christ was given birth during a time of vulnerability.

Saul was "*Mister Tough Guy*." The whole church feared him. Now God had struck him down and left him blind. He literally had to be led by the hand into Damascus.

Saul couldn't depend upon himself. He had to rely upon others. More important, he had to rely upon God.

It is here that God does his best work. When we are weak, he is strong.

Later Paul would write in II Corinthians 12:7ff, "*To keep me from becoming conceited, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*"

*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That's why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" (II Corinthians 12:7ff.)

Our weakness only serves to point out the power of God to see us through

### **But by the Grace of God**

The vulnerability caused by Saul's blindness was the very thing that caused the eyes of Saul's soul to be opened to Christ.

In spite of all that Saul had done, God still loved him and wanted the very best for him. No wonder Paul wrote so much about grace.

Hear this from I Corinthians 15:9-10, "*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.*" (I Corinthians 15:9-10)

### **Awakened from Spiritual Blindness**

Max Lucado tells the story of a fellow by the name of Bob Edens who for fifty-one years was blind. For almost the entirety of his life Bob couldn't see a thing.

Edens felt his way through five decades of darkness, before he could see. A skilled surgeon performed a complicated operation and, for the first time, Edens was able to see and he was simply overwhelmed.

*"I never would have dreamed that yellow is so...yellow," he said. "I don't have the words. I am amazed by yellow. But red is my favorite color. I just can't believe red.*

*I can see the shape of the moon--and I like nothing better than seeing a jet plane flying across the sky leaving a vapor trail.*

*Sunrises and sunsets are extraordinarily beautiful. At night I look at the stars in the sky. You could never know how wonderful that is."*

Saul was healed from his **spiritual blindness** by a flash of light and a compelling conversation with Jesus. In the mix of that, Saul could do no other but respond with obedience and do what Jesus instructed him to do.

William Barclay states, *"What happened to Saul was not so much a conversion as it was surrender."*

Saul had surrendered all for the sake of knowing Jesus and because of that Saul, also known as Paul, would become a *Champion of the Church*.

### **Change and Transformation**

Down through the years, a lot has been made of Saul's Damascus Road experience. Many have asserted that everyone needs to have that sort of crisis experience.

I have known people who have surrendered their lives in the blink of an eye and others who have done so over a season of time.

Conversion is conversion and surrender is surrender, whether it comes in an instant or over a season of time. What's critical is this: A heart that is changed and a life that is transformed.

*"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* writes Paul in Romans 3:23, *"and we are made right with him by his grace and have been set free from our sin all on account of what Jesus did on the cross."*

What Jesus did for Saul is no less available to you and me. All of us fall short of the glory of God.

What Christ did on the cross offers light to the end that the guilt of our sin no longer weighs us down. We are freed from its bonds and are able to live as God wants us to live.

In Christ, God goes to great lengths to bring us to the light, his light. The work of Christ on the cross seals it.

*"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

*The true light that gives light to everyone was coming to the world.*

*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name; he gave the right to become children of God."* (John 1:4-5, 9, 12)