



## St John Lutheran Church

1017 Montana  
Libby, MT 59923  
(406)293-4024

Acts 9:1-20

### "What Has Jesus Been Doing Since His Resurrection?

#### What Jesus Did for Paul He Does for You"

**This reading from Acts** tells us what Jesus is doing since his resurrection. **It's the story** of how our risen Lord met a man named Saul... **a persecutor** of the church... **and turned** him into the Apostle Paul... **the foremost** missionary the world has ever seen. **The Lord does** work in mysterious ways. **One who was** responsible for zealously killing Christians...**becomes one** of the greatest teachers and pastors that the Church has ever seen.

**This account from Acts** tells us in very **clear terms** that the risen Christ has not taken a vacation or gone into retirement... **but instead** has been very active in sending out men to preach His Gospel... **the Good News** of forgiveness and life in his name. **And Jesus gave** that forgiveness and new life to Paul Himself... **before he** sent him out.

**And Jesus did** for Paul the very same that He does for you: **He forgives your sins. He gives you new life. Jesus turns us around** and gets you going in the right direction of God's Word and His Will ...**and opens** your eyes to the truth. **Today we will** see that how the Lord dealt with St. Paul... **is also** exactly how he continues to deal with us.

**First there is the law. We need the Law** to see that we are sinners in need of the Lord's forgiveness. **Certainly that was** the case for St. Paul...**or really**, Saul still at this point. **Saul of Tarsus**, and he certainly *was* no saint... **But he thought he was! He thought he** was pretty righteous under God's Law. **He thought he** was keeping it as well as it could be kept. **And he was proud of that.** **Later on, in** the book of Philippians, he would reflect back on those days: "**If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.**"

**Saul was advancing** about as far as you could go in Judaism. **And he saw** this new upstart group... **this offshoot** sect of "Christians" as a threat to the Judaism that he knew. **And so he** thought he was actually doing a service for God by persecuting the church. **Saul had participated** in the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the church. **And now he** had secured letters from the religious officials in Jerusalem to go out and arrest any Jews who had defected over to the Christian sect. **That's what Saul** is doing as we encounter him in our text. **He is on** his way to Damascus... **an important**

city northeast of Israel, where a large population of Jews was living. **He wanted to** wipe out this Christian menace before it got any further.

**As Saul nears** Damascus, suddenly a great light from heaven flashes around him. **He falls to** the ground and hears a voice saying, "**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**" **He doesn't know** who it is that is saying this. "**Who are you, lord?**" **he asks...not necessarily** meaning that he knew it was "**Thee Lord**"... **But Saul was saying** "lord" in the sense of "sir," as you would address anyone in a superior position. **And in this case... surely this must** be someone with authority from God... **evidenced by** the light from heaven and the voice. "**Who are you, lord? You've got my attention with this light business. I'm down on the ground. You know my name; I don't know yours. Who are you?**"

"**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,**" came the reply. **Wow, what an answer! Like a bolt** out of the blue! "**I am Jesus.**" **Thee very One** you hate so much. **Jesus of Nazareth. The One** who got this Christian "heresy" started. **The One who** was crucified for His blasphemy just a few short years ago. "**I am Jesus.**"

**What must Saul** be thinking... **as it begins to dawn** on him how wrong he was about this Jesus? **Jesus really was...He really is... Just exactly** who He said He is. **The Son of God Himself. Now risen from** the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father... **with all** might and power and authority. **Who Jesus is... in all His** ascended glory... **comes now** in a searing flood into Saul's formerly dull conscience.

"**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**" **Now...If that is** who Jesus is... **then what** is He going to do to me? **Because look at** what I have been doing! **I've been persecuting** the church... **the very** people who proclaim and believe in this Jesus. **In fact, Jesus** is saying that I actually have been persecuting Him PERSONALLY! **What have I done? What a fool** I have been! **I have been** fighting against God **instead of doing His Will! Now what is** going to happen to me? **What's next... a bolt** of lightning to burn me to a cinder?

**No, at least** not right away. **Jesus tells Saul** to get up and go into the city... **and there** he would be told what's coming next. **But when Saul** gets up and opens his eyes... **he can't see anything. He's been struck** blind. **So his " Jewish police"** escort... **his entourage** that had gone with him to help arrest Christians...**these now** have to lead him by the hand into the city. **And for several** days he's in a house there... **doing nothing...unable to do anything** except to think about what he had done and what might happen to him now.

**There he is... the mighty** and powerful persecutor of the church... **the terror** of the Christians in the flesh... **sitting there** blind and helpless. **How fitting it is that** the Lord had struck him blind. **For that is** what he had been... **unable to** see the truth... **the truth** about God... **the truth** about himself. **Imagine the sorrow** and contrition that filled his soul.

**That is the work of the Law in a person's heart. God must show us how blind and how foolish we have been. He must show us how we have been going against His Will and have broken His Commandments. He must show us our great need...our need for God's forgiveness and for a Savior. He must show us that we are to give up on ourselves and our own self-righteousness before we are ready to receive a gift from God.**

**Now...Do you personally realize your need for God? Do you see that you are a sinner? Maybe you and I have not been persecuting the Church as did Saul... but we have been going against God in other ways... our Lord tells us that when we break one Commandment...we have broken them all.**

**Notice that Jesus said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Now Saul was not persecuting Jesus physical Body. But Saul was persecuting our Lord's Christians. And Jesus takes such attacks as attacks directed against Him. Remember when Jesus said, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, that you do unto me." When we sin against our neighbor... we are sinning against God, who commands us to love and do good to our neighbor. You learned it in the catechism, "We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor" ... but rather help and do good to the neighbor. How we treat one another is a reflection of how we are regarding God. This then helps us to see our sin. That we have been going against God. That we do need His forgiveness daily. And so God deals with us first by way of the law, so that we can see... clearly... just how blind we have been. So we will be ready to receive gladly the great and good news of a Savior and forgiveness.**

**First, the Law. Then the Gospel. This is what happens next with Saul. No well deserved thunderbolt to strike him dead. No, Christ has already taken that punishment for him, on the cross. Now there is only absolution ... free forgiveness for Christ's sake. The Lord has a man named Ananias ...whose very name means, "The Lord is gracious" ...to go to Saul and bring him the gospel of His Grace.**

**Ananias lays his hands on this poor blind fellow and says, "Brother Saul"... Listen to what Ananias called him! "Brother Saul!" Ananias knew what a great persecutor of the Church Saul had been... he knew that Saul was on his way for the very purpose of doing away with some more Christians. And yet, at the Lord's bidding... Ananias greets Saul here as "Brother Saul." What marvelous Grace this is! These words... "Brother Saul" are an absolution in itself. God is not going to strike him down. No, God now makes Saul a member of His family... taking Saul in as His own dear child. And the other Christians are going to accept him as a brother. What Grace there is immediately for Saul the murderer!**

**"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me to you so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Now, Saul, your eyes will be really opened... not only physically but spiritually also. Now you will see with clarity... the unlimited mercy of God in pardoning even the chief of sinners. Now you will see why Jesus died on the cross, not as a blasphemer... but as your Savior. You will be filled with the Holy Spirit, who will work faith in your heart and**

**keep you in the faith and produce in you the fruits of faith. Now you will be enlightened with his gifts... the gifts of forgiveness ...and life... and salvation for Christ's sake. Come and be baptized and have your sins washed away.**

**And so Saul was baptized. He could see again. He ate and regained his strength. So it is for us. The Gospel has come into our lives. We have been baptized. Our sins have been washed away. God has taken us into His family...it's called the Church. He accepts us as His dear children. He gives us brothers and sisters here who love us... and who accept us and with whom we can learn to love. The Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel and He enlightens us with His gifts. The Spirit has brought us to faith in Christ our Savior and He keeps us in that one true faith. All this happens by means of the Gospel... through Word and Sacrament....our Lord's Means of Grace. This is how God deals with us... this is how our Lord communicates His forgiveness to us...just as He did with Saul.**

**From arch enemy to "brother." And then to "chosen instrument." "This man is my chosen instrument to carry My Name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel." For St. Paul, his conversion was also his "call document"... his commissioning into the Holy Ministry. He would go from persecutor of the faith... to preacher of the faith. He went about preaching that Jesus is the Son of God... that Jesus is the Christ.**

**Now you may not be called into the ordained ministry. But you have been baptized into the royal priesthood of believers. You are part of our Lord's Church...His "ecclesia"...those called out. You do live a life of service dedicated to God. If you cannot preach like Paul... there is still work for you to do. You can live a life of love for your neighbor. You can live in an honorable... God-pleasing way... whatever your daily vocation... father, mother, son, daughter, church member, citizen, employee, butcher, baker, or candlestick-maker. Whatever you do... do it all for the Glory of God and the good of your neighbor. The Lord will launch you into a life of service... He will use you as He sees fit...even as He did with Paul.**

**So what has our Lord Jesus been doing since His resurrection? He has been sending out preachers... men like the Apostle Paul... men who serve in Christ's Holy Office. Through His Means of Grace and the Ministry of His Bride the Church...our Lord has collected sinners far and wide and He has made them His own! He has done this for you and Jesus wants you to know all that He has done for you. He has conquered sin and death for you... He gives you His life and forgiveness. That's the on going Good News this Easter season...the "never gets old or stale news" that Jesus has defeated death and we are restored to God's favor! Jesus is alive and well and very active... bestowing on you all of His Divine gifts... given to you through the Church's Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Jesus did it for Saul..later to be called Paul. He does it for you. In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen**

Easter 3C, 2007

Rev. Eric M. Christiansen  
St. John Lutheran Church

"What Has Jesus Been Doing Since His Resurrection?  
What Jesus Did for Paul He Does for You"

