

The Third Sunday of Easter

April 10, 2016

**Prayer of the Day:** O God, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world from the despair of death. By his resurrection to life, grant your faithful people gladness of heart and the hope of eternal joys; through your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Our hearts were burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us. Alleluia! (Luke 24:32)

**Sermon Text:** Acts 9:1-19

What do you consider “spectacular?” Is it a picture of glitzy, flashing Las Vegas lighting up towering hotels, dancing fountains, and the majestic replicas of the Eifel Tower or the Statue of Liberty? Do you consider the breath-taking view of the Grand Canyon, the Great Smoky Mountains, the roaring oceans, or the wildlife roaming your backyard as something “spectacular?” How about special effects in movies like Star Wars: The Force Awakens or Batman versus Superman— things that would be impossible to film if it were not for computers creating them? Do you find amusement

**Acts 9:1-19**

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

<sup>5</sup> “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. <sup>6</sup> “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

<sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

<sup>13</sup> “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

parks spectacular for pushing the limits on height and speed, twists and turns?

Exciting sights and powerful sounds leave people speechless. They stir the imagination; they push the limits on what was never before thought possible. They command the mind's curiosity and arouse a desire to ponder the scene longer. Sights and sounds leave many considering Vegas or nature or movies or theme parks "spectacular."

Do you consider worship "spectacular?" You hear God's Word expose the hell sin deserves and you hear God announce forgiveness. You follow three Bible readings and hear a message anchored in what God has said. You hear Pastor share responses of peace to you and you share responses of peace back to the Pastor. So, is worship "spectacular?"

Your life is filled with spectacular sights and sounds. Yet, today, see what God considers spectacular. See how his Word already works inside of you and then flows through your thoughts, words, and actions. **THE SPECTACULAR WORD WORKS SPECTACULAR RESULTS!** *It calls the worst of sinners. It equips the saints of God.*

You have a spectacular example of that in the book of Acts. In our first reading you meet a man named 'Saul.' You probably know Saul by a better name: 'Paul.' This is the same man who declares freedom from sin in Romans, who shares God's forgiveness in Ephesians, who encourages the Philippian Christians, who chastises and heals the un-Christian life choices of the Corinthians. Before Saul ever changes his name to Paul, before Paul ever carries God's Word to the ends of the world, you get to see what his life was like.

[...] **Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.** He was a Jewish leader, not a Christian leader. According to Jewish teachings, Saul believed that he could earn God's forgiveness by being circumcised, by eating certain foods, and by following Old Testament worship laws ([Philippians 3:4-6](#)). Yet, Jewish Christians did not consider the great Jewish leader Moses as their most important teacher. Instead, Christians confessed that Jesus obeyed God's commandments in their place. They trusted that Jesus' life made them worthy to stand before God. These Christians even called Jesus God's own Son and the promised Savior of the world!

Christianity went against everything Jewish leaders taught and held as important. So, Saul tried to destroy Christianity. He joined other Jewish leaders in dragging a Christian named Stephen out to an open place and watched as they threw stones at him until he died ([Acts 7:54-8:1](#)). Then, he went from house to house, kicking down doors, and hauling Christian men and women off to prison ([8:3](#)).

This man stopped at nothing to erase the very breath of Christianity. **He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.** Suddenly, a light brighter than the sun shining at 12noon flashes all around Saul. **[Saul] fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"** He looks up into the sky and does not stare at the sun; he is looking into the very throne-room of God Almighty. He hears: **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."**

What a spectacular sight! You have it all. The God-man Jesus speaking straight down out of heaven. Sheer blinding light piercing through bright sunlight. A very angry and violent man forced to the ground. The sights, the sounds, they are all so spectacular— and maybe a part of us wishes that God would still amaze us in this way today. How much easier it would be trust God if only he ripped open the skies and daily blasted his glory throughout our world! How much easier it would be to believe God's Word only if he spoke directly to you (or directly to Pastor and he

would share it). Does it ever seem like God's Word [the Bible] is just simply too weak to really change anything?

Is it the sights and sounds that makes this scene truly spectacular? Light from heaven does not create faith. Being blind does not change the heart. The truly spectacular thing is that God even comes to Saul at all. If Saul hated God so much that he would go out and kill members of God's family, then God had every reason to let Saul destroy himself in unbelief forever. Even though he does not deserve it, God comes to Saul.

Must we need to stop there? Do you not share in that same spectacular event? Why would God come to you (us) at all? How often have the sinful choices you made cared less if it destroyed the faith in your heart? How many times have you promised to God that you would end a pet sin, only to stumble and fall into it again and again? How often have you pointed a finger at someone else's faults, only to realize that you struggle with the same fault (or something more destructive)? My dear friends, is not the truly spectacular thing about God's Word the simple fact that God even continues coming to sinners like me and you?

**THE SPECTACULAR WORD WORKS SPECTACULAR RESULTS!** Jesus speaks; Saul listens. **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting..."** Notice, who is speaking? Jesus. Where is he? Not dead. He is in heaven. Only the Word of God almighty leads Saul to believe that Jesus still lives to be the only the Way, Truth, and Life ([John 14:6](#)).

Even today, Jesus speaks in the Word of God; we listen. The Bible so clearly says: *By nature we are dead in sin...* ([Ephesians 2:1](#)). I have no power, no spiritual strength to do something like invite Jesus into my heart as my personal Lord and Savior. Nothing I can do is able to make God happy with me, smile at me, and then want to bring me into heaven. I can do nothing spectacular, but God can.

Only the Word of God reveals his endless patience. God tells us that he allows his only Son to be persecuted by his creation. Jesus hears crowds call his miracles "a work from the devil" ([Mark 3:20-23](#)). He listens to Jewish leaders (who have studied the Bible for their whole life) call him a liar ([Matthew 26:63-65](#)). Then Jesus dies the death reserved for those who reject his Word, who consider it less-than-spectacular for life. He comes back to life to declare you at peace with God!

That message did not come from heaven ripping open and blinding you. Jesus chooses to speak to you today only through his Word, the Bible. Without the Bible, you could only hope to discover who God is and what he has done for you. With the Bible, you know with certainty that Jesus is your Savior. **THE SPECTACULAR WORD WORKS SPECTACULAR RESULTS.** *It calls the worst of sinners. It equips the saints of God.*

You see that. Not only does it change Saul's life forever, but it changes Ananias. Ananias is already a believer. You watch him go about his normal, everyday way of life in Damascus. Suddenly, **The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"**

The instructions are simple. **"Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."**

"Lord," Ananias answered, **"I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."** Who could blame scared Ananias? Saul's job is to arrest and kill Christians! Who would approach a killer and try help him? You could die if he turns on you!

Yet, the spectacular Word is sent out again. Jesus speaks; Ananias listens; his life changes. [...] **the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.** Jesus speaks and Ananias goes! No more questions asked. No frantic pacing over the task. No challenging God’s love for a violent man. Jesus’ gentle word of assurance strengthens Ananias’ trust in what he must do. What Jesus has planned is as good as done. Because Jesus says what he will do, Ananias trusts that message. **THE SPECTACULAR WORD WORKS SPECTACULAR RESULTS.** *It equips the saints of God.*

**THE SPECTACULAR WORD** continues **WORKING SPECTACULAR RESULTS.** It already has done just that. The powerful Word of God is attached to the waters of baptism. When your parents carried you to those waters or when your feet stood next to the font, the water and the Word of God washed you into the family of God! We do not use special water. The power of baptism does not rest in your personal commitment. God’s powerful Word creates faith and changes hearts.

That spectacular Word continues reaching your ears. Your Jesus chooses to come to you only by his Word. That means when you hear the Bible you are hearing the thoughts and words of God himself! If you ever wondered: “What would God say today?” or “Does God really care if...”, then read the Bible and see what he already has said. The Word of God removes every “I think God would say...” or “I feel God would do...” God gives statements of truth. Truths which never change—and still truths that continue applying and remaining relevant to life situations.

That is good to know. Your Jesus remains powerfully active in your life. He still sits in heaven, concerned about what you are going through. It means that when you struggle with sin, the Word of God brings about the change. When you wrestle with fear, the Word of God calms you. When you challenge what God says, the Word of God increases your trust in the truth. God’s Word does not go out empty. It returns to him having accomplished its purpose ([Isaiah 55:10-11](#)). **THE SPECTACULAR WORD WORKS SPECTACULAR RESULTS!** *It equips the saints of God.*

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The Word of God is what makes our congregation spectacular. God chooses to come to us. You and I get this wonderful privilege and opportunity to hear what God has to say about life. We continue having so many chances to read or to worship here so that our faith may continue to be strengthened.

The Word of God is what God considers spectacular. He sends out his Word so that it works inside of you and flows through your thoughts, words, and actions. **THE SPECTACULAR WORD WORKS SPECTACULAR RESULTS!** *It calls the worst of sinners. It equips the saints of God.*