

Text: Acts 19:10-31

Title: “Unstoppable Love” Pt.2

ILLUSTRATION – We are very blessed in our church to have so many young families and their little ones. This is Mary Elizabeth Hampton (Lee and Beth); Paul Robinnett (Wes and Chrystal). When babies come into a family they obviously need extra-special attention. They need someone to carry them, feed them, dress them, change their diapers and much more. But our hope is that the child will grow someday to be able to do all those things by themselves. But for now they need to the love, care, attention and protection of their physical family. And the same thing is true of spiritual babies. When we are born again we start out as babies in Christ. We don't know how to feed ourselves spiritually. We have trouble walking with Christ on our own. We haven't yet learned to dress ourselves with the qualities of Christ-likeness. We need a spiritual family, the church, to help us grow to become fully-developed followers of Jesus. So just like this little child needs people around him/her to love, care for, pay attention to and protect them, so new Christians need that kind of spiritual care and attention in order to become all that God envisions they will become as followers of Jesus. Thanks, mom and dad for sharing your child with us.

Open your Bibles with me to Acts 9 where we have the record of the conversion of one of the most important people in Christian history ... a man named Saul. Just to review, Saul of Tarsus was, for all practical purposes, a Jewish hatchet man. His passion in life was to destroy the reputation and the followers of Jesus Christ. He had received special permission from the High Priest in Jerusalem to go all the way to Damascus (in modern day Syria) to find believers there, arrest them and bring them back to jail in Jerusalem.

But on his way to Damascus something happened that no one, expected. Traveling along the road Saul was suddenly confronted by Jesus Christ. That's right! The risen Lord Jesus Christ literally spoke to Saul out of a blinding light: “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul asked “Who are you, Lord?” Jesus replied, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” And so Saul, this great opponent of Jesus Christ is dramatically saved. Jesus tells Saul to go into Damascus where he will be told what he must do next. He is blinded by the light so Saul has to be guided by the men who are with him. So instead of proudly parading into the city as a vindictive tyrant to defeat the Christians, he limped into town humbled and helpless.

Little does Saul know that this is God's unstoppable, unrelenting love being lavished upon him, saving him and setting him apart for God. As the account unfolds here in Acts we'll see how God's unstoppable love then continues to flow into Saul's life through believers in churches in two different cities, Damascus and Jerusalem, and through two men in particular ... Ananias and Barnabas. This is God's unstoppable love flowing through others to help Saul develop as a follower of Jesus. But Saul of Tarsus, staggering into Damascus, is a long way from the great Apostle Paul that he would later become. He will need to be helped by others.

There are some important truths I want us to catch as we move through these verses in Acts 9 together.

#1 - GOD HAS A PURPOSE FOR US TO FULFILL IN LIFE.

Do you believe that ... that there is something unique that God has called you to do with your life? Discovering that unique purpose is one of the most important things to happen in life. Interestingly, God revealed Saul's purpose to someone else before he revealed it to Saul. **Read Acts 9:10-16.**

There it is ... Saul's purpose and calling in life ... to be an instrument that God will use to proclaim the name of Jesus ... and he will suffer in an extraordinary way for it. But again, God shows this to Ananias before he shows it to Saul. So here's the next truth:

#2 - GOD USES OTHERS TO HELP US FULFILL OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE.

ILLUSTRATION – As I thought about this, I don't want to be like trees that grow in my yard. They've grown large and dense, but nothing can grow under them. They dominate everything. They block the sunlight from getting to the grass and plants underneath. Their massive root system sucks all the nutrients and moisture out of the soil so that nothing can grow under them.

Today we're putting the prayer spotlight on school teachers and administrators. School is starting up and we are grateful that God has placed you in that strategic role whether it is in public schools, private schools or homeschooling. You have the opportunity to touch lives and shape the future by helping your students find and fulfill their God-given purpose in life.

God raised up a man named Ananias to help Saul fulfill the God's purpose for his life.

Acts 9:17 - 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."

Do you see the sense of calling in Ananias' life? "The Lord has sent me so that you..." I love that. Just as God was calling Saul, He was also calling Ananias to help Saul discover his purpose in life.

Acts 9:18-19 - Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

With the help of other disciples in the church in Damascus he regains his strength. He's been saved and now he is baptized. Here's the next thing I want you to see:

#3 - DISCIPLES REPRODUCE DISCIPLES.

You see the word “disciple” pop up frequently in these verses. Ananias is called a disciple (v.10). Saul spent time with believers in Damascus who are called disciples (v.19) ... followers of Jesus. And in their circle he is baptized and he is strengthened. This is what disciples do ... they develop and reproduce other disciples. Before Jesus ascended back to heaven He said...

Matthew 28:19-20 - Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And that’s what these Christ-followers in the church at Damascus did for Saul. They baptized him and taught him. That kind of discipleship has to be part of the DNA of every church. Can God trust us with new believers knowing that we will be obedient to make disciples ... to baptize and teach them to follow Jesus?

Jesus said that it is as we love one another in this way that the unstoppable love of God flows into our lives. Jesus taught His followers:

John 13:34-35 - “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

It’s Christ-like love that causes us to make this kind of investment in one another. So with Ananias’ and the other disciples’ encouragement Saul grows stronger and stronger as he sets out to fulfill God’s unique calling and purpose for his life.

Read Acts 9:20-23.

Again, God had already revealed that this would be path that Saul would take. He would be a chosen instrument to carry the name of Jesus everywhere. And he would endure great suffering in doing so. That’s exactly the way it unfolds in Damascus, so he is forced to leave.

According to v.25, some of his followers (the same word as disciple) protected him by lowering him through an opening in the wall. That’s the kind of protective love that we should have for each other.

Is the life and love of our church strong enough to produce men like Paul? Is the love here strong enough to embrace and enfold and engage and equip others to fulfill their calling? Again, disciples reproduce disciples. We grow in an atmosphere of learning to follow Christ with other followers of Christ. That’s what the church is supposed to be about. Here’s the next truth:

#4 - WE NEED OTHERS TO BELIEVE IN US.

There’s plenty that can happen in life that can cause us to doubt ourselves. That’s why we need people around us who believe in us ... or better yet believe in what God will do in us.

We've already seen this with Ananias. He believed in Saul when others were afraid of him. Put yourself in Ananias' sandals for a moment. Ananias probably would have been one of Saul's main targets when he came to town to persecute the church. To go to Saul for any reason was like turning himself into the police. But Ananias saw God's activity in Saul's life and went to him.

Now there's probably a gap here of three years between v.25 and v.26. But even after three years Saul still needs to be discipled. And God has plans for that to happen in the church in Jerusalem. But at first they don't believe in him.

Acts 9:26 - When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

Saul's past was well known by everyone in Jerusalem. So we can understand why the believers there were suspicious of him. Is there anyone who will go to bat for Saul ... who will believe in him in spite of his past? Yes and his name is Barnabas.

Acts 9:27 - But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

By the way, we're introduced to Barnabas back at the beginning of the book of Acts. Remember after Pentecost how there was this explosion of selfless love in the church after the Holy Spirit came upon the believers. People shared everything with each other. And we're introduced to Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement." He sold a piece of property and generously gave the proceeds to help needy people in the church.

ILLUSTRATION - One way of looking at this is that we all have "plus-people" and "minus-people" in our lives. Minus- people are those who subtract from our lives. Whether it's by their selfishness or constant criticism or fault-finding or discouragement they leave us poorer. They are minus-people. But then there are the plus-people in our lives who add to our lives. They are marked by generosity, encouragement, appreciation and hope. They are the plus-people who leave us richer and better equipped to face the challenges of life. So which are you?

Here's another truth I found in these verses:

#5 - WE ALL HAVE THE POTENTIAL OF BEING LEADER-MAKERS.

So there's an atmosphere in the church in Jerusalem where Saul can grow and fulfill his God-given calling. You see it in...

Acts 9:28-29 - So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.

There Saul is fulfilling his calling ... speaking boldly in the name of Jesus. But he could never have done that without the influence of men like Ananias and Barnabas.

You don't necessarily have to be a leader ... just be available and sensitive. Both Ananias and Barnabas were sensitive enough to God that He could show them what He was doing in Saul's life.

And what you do for the cause of Christ may go unnoticed for many years ... maybe until you get to heaven. Ananias is never again mentioned in Scripture, except in Acts 22 where Paul retells this story. But Ananias will share in the rewards of Paul because of how he invested in his life. And Barnabas soon fades into the background as well. At this point in Acts they are spoken of as Barnabas and Saul. In a few chapters we begin to read about Paul and Barnabas. And later it is only Paul. But Barnabas will share in the Paul's reward because he came along at a crucial time in his life. You never know how God is using you to make a difference in someone else's life ... and through them to countless others down the road.

ON SCREEN - HOW?

- Serve in the preschool, children's, student or college ministry.
- Take a college or seminary student into your life and family.
- Become a one-to-one mentor.
- Inspire your children with spiritual biographies.
- Pay for a student to go on a mission experience.

It means we need to stop being so self-absorbed and self-centered so we can be part of what God is doing in the lives of others. These are the kinds of people ... this is the kind of church ... that make Sauls into Pauls.