

Jesus Stands in The Way

Have you ever thought you were heading in the right direction in life only to later discover you were completely off course? Maybe a friend or family member intervened – asked a question, called you out, somehow got your attention. Sometimes the most loving thing a person can do is get in our way. But what happens when the person who gets in our way is Jesus?

1. Jesus stands in Saul's way 2. Jesus sends Ananias to pray 3. Saul proclaims Jesus is the way

1. Jesus stands in Saul's way (Acts 9:1-9)

There have been a lot of protests happening in the streets of Hong Kong over the last several weeks. They surround a law that would enable mainland China to extradite (deport) the people of Hong Kong in order to bring them to trial. The citizens of Hong Kong are clearly concerned about their freedom – free speech, right to worship, freedom of the press are just a few areas being threatened.

The beginnings of these protests saw a huge number of followers of Jesus flooding the streets – with the Hymn “Sing Hallelujah to The Lord” becoming an anthem. According to a press release by organizers the motto of the gathering was “*Salt and light, for justice we walk together*” and was designed to “*provide all Christians a platform to express themselves outside the church, hoping people would safeguard Hong Kong by singing, praying, worshipping God and at the same time speaking up for justice and standing together with all the Hongkongers in difficult times.*”

Acts 9 re-introduces us to a man named Saul – leading member of a Jewish group who held to a strict observance of the OT Law, who wants to hunt down followers of Jesus and extradite them (bring them back to Jerusalem for trial).

Saul was there when Stephen was stoned to death. 8:1-3

It wasn't enough for Saul to attack the church in Jerusalem. Wanted to snuff out this heretical group wherever it was = Damascus (135 miles from Jerusalem – 6 day journey by foot)

V2 followers of Jesus are referred to as those who belonged to “the Way.”

Jesus described himself as “the way, the truth and the life.” Jn 14:6

Saul was on his way to arrest those who belonged to the Way but Jesus stood in his way!

Saul was backed by the same High Priest who took the leading role in the trial of Jesus (declaring him guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death).

Out of nowhere a light flashed around him, he fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*”

Jesus begins with a question Saul would never forget; *a question that would have a revolutionary impact on every aspect of his life.*

This is straight ambush! Sneak attack.

Saul is set out to attack Jesus' followers but Jesus stands in the way. Set out in wrong direction!

This is intervention. Jesus, the risen King who Saul thought was a false teacher at best is now standing before Saul in brilliance and glory. Asking a question = alive!

Maybe you've been fighting against Jesus for years, pushing him away out of fear of what he might ask of you - but Jesus keeps standing in the way.

Maybe you've been hurt or disillusioned by Jesus' followers but Jesus keeps getting in the way.

9:5 Saul asks a question in reply. It's the right question to ask. One everyone in this room has wrestled with or is currently still wrestling with. *"Who are you, Lord?"*
"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting..." Jesus so identifies with his followers; his followers are so united to him that to persecute THEM is to persecute HIM.
Imagine what was racing through Saul's mind in that moment! = "Is this *really* happening?"

NT Wright: *"Suddenly Saul's world turned upside down and inside out."*
Terror, ruin, shame, awe, horror, glory and terror again – sweeping over him!
A tidal wave of fulfillment – as if Saul was caught – wave after wave after wave washing over him. Ancient promises met in Jesus! *Volcanic eruption – Walter Mitty
"The God he (Saul) had been serving and seeking had done what he always said he would – but in a shocking, scandalous, horrifying way."
The one who set out to arrest Jesus' followers was himself arrested by Jesus.
The one Saul was fighting against was pushing back. **V6!**
9:7 the men traveling with him are speechless. Heard sound but didn't see.
Saul gets up and discovers he's blind.
Physical blindness a symbol of the spiritual blindness he was walking in.
The one who thought he saw clearly was really blind – and now needed to be led by the hand to Damascus. Humbled.

Having misunderstood and misapplied the Scriptures, he's filled with anguish at the thought he was opposing the God he was so zealously trying to serve.
He refuses to eat or drink for three days. = Prayerful, repentant reflection.
The claims of Jesus, the OT Law, prophets, psalms racing through his mind.
Imagine the connections he was making over the course of those three days.
Fulfillment, expectation – the absolute necessity of letting go of beliefs he held tightly to that were contrary to who Jesus is and what he accomplished – AND processing what it meant to embrace Jesus as the Messiah!

2. Jesus sends Ananias to pray (Acts 9:10-19)

This was a time of crisis and revelation for Saul. Times like this often drive us to our knees - draws us to the Lord in desperate need, spurring spiritual growth.

Jesus stood in the way but doesn't stop there. He then *sends* Ananias.

The book of *Acts* is about the acts of Jesus through his first followers.

9:11-12 Ananias' reservations are understandable!

Who here would want to approach a man committed to arresting and possibly approving of your death? Jesus asks Ananias to do something that doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense. Ananias informs Jesus what's up – being honest.

Wrestling with what Jesus is asking. Ever been there?

9:15 Hold up! *Saul* is going lead the way into places Jesus said to go! Acts 1:8!

9:17-19 What was Ananias thinking as he entered the house? A mixture!

= *"Yup, the one who wants to imprison or murder me – the cause of my displacement."* *"Jesus I know you're up to something here! Not what I expected but I trust you."*

He opens the door and immediately begins to look for alternate exits just in case. No! Ananias is courageous, filled with love and compassion = he's on mission. Ananias placed his hands on Saul. "*Brother Saul*" = some of the sweetest words Saul would ever hear! Ananias is a follower of Jesus, a member of Jesus' family and an extension of Jesus himself. = BROTHER Saul.
"*The Lord Jesus, who appeared to you – has sent me*" "Jesus isn't finished with you! He's gotten in your way but that's just the start! Relationship, mission and purpose connected with it! Jesus intervened NOW he's sent me to intercede!"
"*so that you may see again AND be filled with the HS*" IMMEDIATELY something like scales fell from his eyes. He got up and was baptized. He surrendered!
The last thing Saul ever intended to do when he set out for Damascus was to become a follower of Jesus!

Ananias brought affirmation (support and encouragement). Saul had sat three days in prayerful repentance. The only way out of the darkness of his unbelief and rejection of Jesus was for Jesus to confront, pursue and save.

*escape room w/ Leader's Collective – one hour. NO way I could figure it out on my own!
Romans 5:6-8

3. Saul proclaims Jesus is the way (Acts 9:20-31)

The one who was going to Damascus to destroy the movement of Jesus followers is now defending and proclaiming Jesus is the Son of God, proving Jesus is the Christ. The two go together = Son of God + The Christ / Messiah! Romans 1:1-4; 14-17
Declared w/ enthusiasm and conviction! Everyone's astonished. Staggered. Freaking.
V23 "After many days" = up to three years! Galatians 1:13-24; 2 Corinthians 11:32-33
The religious leaders have had enough – Saul's message is a threat, has to be stopped. Saul's disciples – those sitting under his teaching, lowered him in basket through an opening in the wall of the city! Savage.

Saul heads to Jerusalem where the disciples are not only skeptical – they're afraid of him. Think he's putting on a mask to bring more persecution.
Barnabas - earlier in Acts sold property (generous man!) and called "son of encouragement" = takes Saul to the apostles / intervenes, stands with Saul when everyone else is suspicious (Saul spent 15 days with Peter and James)
It's not like Barnabas was exempt from the pain Saul brought to those he loved!
Barnabas will go on to be a missionary partner to Saul – we know later as Paul (grk name)
The ones who killed Stephen want to kill Saul now. Things have come full circle!
V31 "a time of peace!"

Can you think of people, events and circumstances that show Jesus' initiative in reaching you with his love? Have you been fighting against Jesus - trying to run from him? Have you encountered Jesus personally - acknowledged your own blindness, surrendered your life before him as King and Savior? Revelation? – crisis?

Jesus stands in our way today. He's calling you to surrender, inviting you into his family and mission.