

When you go in for a test at the doctor's office you hope for an answer on the first visit. But, then it turns out you will have to wait for a few days (or more) to get the answer.

Perhaps you remember a time when you just finished an exam that will determine the next step in your life, and for what seems like an eternity, you had to put your life on hold while you waited for the results.

All kinds of things can cause our lives to pause.

Maybe right now it feels like God has put your life on hold. You need something to happen in your life, it would REALLY help if something would happen in your life, but nothing seems to happen.

You pray, you reflect, you counsel with other believers - you may even submit your prayer to the prayer chain, but still, you hear nothing.

Your life is in the dark.

You have to wait. You don't want to wait, but here you are, waiting.

So during this time of waiting, life goes on around you, but, there you sit. Waiting.

Here in our text today, we tend to notice the flash that surprises everyone, we tend to notice the voice that confronts Saul and we tend to notice Saul falling to the ground - but we pass over the most important part - the time when Saul is literally, sitting in the dark.

Do you see that there in verse 9? For three days Saul was blind, he didn't eat or drink. Think about this: Saul sits there in the dark, not knowing how long he will sit there, not knowing what will happen next, not knowing when he will ever see again. Wasn't Jesus dramatic enough to get Saul's attention with the flash, a surprising voice? Why have Saul wait for three days in the dark?

God knows what we fail to realize: Waiting with God isn't wasting time.

How did Saul get to the place where God has him wait in the dark?

We saw back in chapter 7, a believer in Jesus Christ named Stephen claim that Jesus was greater than the Temple. Stephen argues that God historically met with people before the Temple was built so we don't need the Temple to communicate with God. Stephen argues further that since Jesus is the one and only atoning sacrifice for all time - Jesus is all we need...and the Temple in Jerusalem is redundant, it is not needed.

For this, Stephen was killed by the highest religious court in the land - and there at the execution was Saul, giving his consent. Remember, those who threw the stones placed their cloaks at his feet - they took off their cloaks so they could easily heave the heavy stones at Stephen.

Saul is the first real enemy of the Church of Jesus Christ, and here in verse 1, Saul asks for, and receives papers of authorization to hunt down Christians. Now, can Saul pick up just any Christian? No, Saul cannot arrest just any Christian. Saul is only after the Greek speaking believers. Perhaps the high priest thought that if the Hellenists were brought under control, the situation would settle down.

We saw that Stephen, was a [Hellenistic Jew](#), which is a person of Jewish ethnicity who spoke Greek as their first language, as opposed to Jews who spoke Aramaic as their first language. Remember, examples of [Aramaic speaking Jews](#) would be the Apostles and Jesus Christ. These Aramaic speaking Jews tended to be locals in Palestine, while Greek speaking Jews tended to be outsiders to Palestine. Stephen was a leader in the Church yes, but Stephen was specifically a leader in the part of the church that spoke Greek. It is these Greek speaking Jewish believers who are being targeted by the high priest. They are the one who are seen as creating all this trouble about Jesus and the Temple since this idea about Jesus being greater than the Temple originated in the Greek speaking community.

Back chapter 8 it was the Greek speaking Jewish believers who fled Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, not the Aramaic speaking Jewish believers - we saw the Apostles, who were Aramaic speaking, were left alone. Saul is on his way to Damascus to arrest Greek speaking Jewish believers who have fled Palestine.

How can Saul do this? Aren't the Romans in control of the territory? Well, yes the Romans are in control of punishing civil and criminal crimes, but the high priest had special extradition rights to bring back Jews for over one hundred years at this point in history.

The Jewish State won independence under [Hasmonaean Dynasty](#) in 142 BC. This independence required neighboring states to grant the Jewish state the right of extradition. Then in 47 BC Julius Caesar himself, confirmed these rights to the Jewish nation (although it was no longer a sovereign state) and in particular, to the high-priesthood. So, the high priest can issue legal papers to extradite residents back to Palestine. The high priest is authorized to bring back from [Damascus](#), refugees from Jerusalem, not native Damascus Christians.

So those Christians who are native to Damascus have no fear of arrest from Saul. I tell you all this because Ananias is an Aramaic speaking Jewish believer, and not a Greek speaking Jewish believer. Ananias should have no fear of Saul.

Now, we know Ananias is an Aramaic speaking Jew, because in verse 17 Ananias addresses Saul in the Aramaic form of his name "Saoul" (Σαούλ) rather than the Greek form of his name "Saulos" (Σαύλος). Ananias calls him Saoul because his first language is Aramaic, and so Ananias is an Aramaic speaking Jewish believer. We will get back to Ananias in a bit.

Back to Saul.

Why does Saul head to Damascus?

Damascus is a very old city, it was a city in the days of Abraham. It is located in what is now the country of Syria. There was a very large Jewish population in this city at this time, perhaps as high as 18,000 according to [Josephus](#). Damascus is the closest place outside of Palestine with a large Jewish population, so it would be natural for Greek speaking Jewish Christians to head to Damascus first. So, Saul's best shot of stopping the Greek speaking believers from spreading this idea that Jesus is great than the Temple would be in the city of Damascus. By Saul getting to Damascus quickly and arresting the Greek speaking Jewish believers there, Saul could stop this the spread of this idea.

You will notice in verse 2 that Christianity is not known as Christianity yet, here it is called "The Way". At this point "the Way" a designation for the movement of the followers of Jesus Christ. It was known as The Way of life, or The Way of salvation, within Judaism. We also see Christianity called "The Way" five other times in the book of Acts. (19:9; 22:4; 24:14; 16:17; 18:25-26).

For us this doesn't mean that we need to stop calling ourselves Christians and say we belong to "The Way," for us this morning this small detail shows that Christianity is all about Jesus, for the name the way itself points to Jesus Christ, as the way to salvation.

So, Saul, heads out to Damascus with extradition papers in hand and somewhere on the road, closer to Damascus than Jerusalem, Paul sees a flash, falls to the ground, hears the voice of the person of Jesus Christ. Later in the book of Acts Chapter 22 Saul recounts the incident, Saul fills in some details not given here. Here in Acts 9, this is a short version of what happened. There Saul tells us that it was the bright light that blinded him and that he was led by hand into the city of Damascus.

Saul's companions hear the voice, but they cannot distinguish what is being said, only Saul can distinguish what Jesus is saying to him. This was a public event, but it was personal, only for Saul's understanding. Those around Saul knew something tremendous had happened, but they weren't clear on what had happened. For Saul, he knew what had happened, but he didn't know what it all meant. He will have to wait to find out.

The voice addresses Saul in Aramaic, because of course, Aramaic is Saul's first language. Saul doesn't know the voice and so he asks who is it? Apparently at this point Saul is already blind. 5 "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Remember, we have learned that the book of Acts is all about Jesus, not the Apostles or the Church. So here, we see that Saul THOUGHT he was persecuting the followers of Jesus, but Jesus corrects Saul and tells Saul that he is persecuting, not the followers of Jesus, but Jesus himself.

The people that Saul was throwing in Jail were innocent of any crime, they were people who just believed in Jesus. The people who were thrown in jail were thrown in jail because of who Jesus is, not because of who they were themselves.

Many times we get confused, because we are self centered people. Christians are hassled even today, not because of who they are, but because of who Jesus is. Step back and look at your situation carefully, is this really about me, or is this situation about Jesus?

Notice this in verse 6: Essentially Jesus tells Saul to go into the city and wait.

Jesus doesn't give any timeline. Jesus doesn't give any details. Jesus doesn't say, everything will be all right - Jesus just says, just go into the city, and wait.

Saul is taken to a house belonging to a man named Judas (a common name of the day). The house was on one of the main thoroughfares called [straight street](#).

And so, there in the house of Judas, Saul sits. From Saul's perspective he sits there for an undetermined amount of time. Saul knows something will come next, but Saul does not know if it will be hours, days or weeks. Understand this, that since Saul is newly blind, he is dependent upon others to help him with everything. People who have been blind for some time are able to do things for themselves, but for a person who is dependent upon sight, everything becomes much more difficult.

What we see here is Saul in the flip opposite situation of where he had been earlier in the day. Earlier, Saul led others to Damascus, now Saul is led. Before Saul was in command, he was independent in his life, now Saul is dependent, even to find his way across the room. Before Saul could do everything himself, now, fully blind, Saul is almost helpless.

The truth is, like us, Saul only thought he was in control. Now as Saul waits, as the hours go by, then the days go by, the longer he waits, the more it becomes self evident to Saul, how little control over his life he really had.

Doesn't waiting on God do this to you too?

The longer you wait, the clearer it becomes that you are not in control. The more time you spend waiting, the more you realize, "This is about God, this isn't about me."

For some of us that takes more than three days.

Now this is more than a issue of dominion of Jesus Christ over Saul. This is also about being ready to accept the change that is at hand - a change Saul was not looking for, a change that Saul did not want. For Saul everything will change: His name will change from Saul to Paul; His friends will change from local people to people worldwide; The language he speaks everyday will change from Aramaic to Greek; He will go from being the persecutor to the persecuted; Saul will give up his home; Saul will give up his ties to

the past, but most of all Saul will give up his old worldview - the one where Saul was the center of the universe to the one where Jesus is the center of the universe.

Here, in the dark, Saul is forced to recognize who he had been. Saul is forced to examine, exactly what was it that got him in the place where he was sitting right now. This forced reflection prepares him to be able to accept what will happen next.

Is Jesus Christ placing you in the dark too?

If you are in place of waiting for something to happen in your life, have you realized these things? You are not really in control of your life, God is in control of your life; Your life is more about Jesus, than it is about you; And what exactly was it that got you into the situation you are in right now?

Saul waits. He is in the dark. He has no clue what will come next.

God does that to us too, doesn't he?

We wait, as if we are in the dark, we have no clue what will come next.

As Saul waits, Jesus calls upon Ananias. This is not the same Ananias we saw struck dead earlier. Ananias was also a common name at the time. Ananias is a local Jewish Christian who probably lived in Damascus his whole life.

The Lord gives Ananias very specific instructions, even the fact that Saul has seen who Ananias is in a vision, even though Saul is blind. God doesn't place Ananias into an impossible situation. God let's him know that Saul is expecting him and when Saul sees him he will know that he is the man that Jesus himself has sent.

Ananias responds. Now Ananias doesn't say that he will not go and do what God commands, in fact, I think you have to read into verse 13 and 14 to say that Ananias is complaining. Ananias' words are more of surprise - Saul? This guy who is killing Christians? Did I hear you right?

Remember, the truth is that since Ananias is a resident of Damascus, Saul has no authority to arrest him, for the papers that Saul has from the high priest are state level extradition papers for residents of Palestine - Damascus falls outside the high priest's territory.

I like this Ananias. God speaks to him and this Ananias is surprised and what God is telling him, but this Ananias is not surprised that God is speaking to him. It is as if God speaking to him is a normal experience - perhaps it was for Ananias. Whatever the case, I'm sure God picks Ananias because he knows he will do what God asks him to do.

Ananias is a confident man, he believes what God has told him. Now even though God does not spell it out for Ananias that Saul is now a believer, Ananias is able to catch the clue and he heads to the house of Judas knowing that Saul is a changed man. We know Ananias know that Saul is a believer before he arrives because what are the first words that Ananias says to Saul when he meets him? (verse 17)

Brother.

How great is that?

Imagine, Saul has had his world turned upside down and he has to be wondering, "these people I have killed, I am now one of them, but who would ever believe me? All kinds of things must be running through his mind, things like, "Won't they just think I am attempting to trick them if I say I am a follower of Jesus?"

Then, on the third day, a visitor is announced, and his first words are, "Brother."

Whatever the circumstances were that you came out of - as a Christian, you are never alone. This is the first thing Saul learns as Ananias places his hands upon Saul.

He does not have the power to commission Saul. That Saul should receive the Holy Spirit through the hands of some obscure disciple from an out of the way place such as Damascus, again reaffirms to us that the Holy Spirit is given by God and not through human power. Saul is first commissioned by God, not the apostles.

When the scales fall off of Saul's eyes, he sees the world in literally a different light.

Let me reiterate that the flash of light was significant, and the voice of Jesus was absolutely significant for Saul, but, I would contend that the time Saul spent waiting in the dark was just as significant.

By waiting in the dark, Saul found that he was not in control of his life like he had imagined; Saul found his life was about Jesus now, and not himself anymore and he was forced to reflect on exactly how he got where he was now waiting.

Yes, God makes us wait, and waiting with God is never a waste of time.

Let me end with this:

For Sparky, school was all but impossible.

He failed every subject in the eighth grade. He flunked physics in high school, getting a grade of zero.

Sparky also flunked Latin, Algebra, and English. He didn't do much better in sports.

Although he did manage to make the school's golf team, he promptly lost the only important match of the season.

There was a consolation match. He lost that one too.

Throughout his youth, Sparky was socially awkward. He was not actually disliked by the other students; it was just that no one cared that much about him. He was astonished if a classmate ever said hello to him outside of school hours.

Because Sparky never once asked a girl to go out with him while he was in high school. He was too afraid of being turned down.

Sparky was a loser. He, his classmates... everyone knew it. So he rolled with it. Sparky had made up his mind early in life that, if things were meant to work out, they would. Otherwise he would content himself with what appeared to be his inevitable mediocrity of just blending in with the crowd.

However, one thing was import to Sparky: drawing. He was proud of his artwork. Of course, no one else appreciated it.

In his senior year at high school, he submitted some cartoons to the editors of the

yearbook. The cartoons were turned down.

Despite this particular rejection, Sparky was so convinced of his ability that he decided to become a professional artist.

After completing high school, he wrote a letter to Walt Disney Studios. He was told to send some samples of his artwork, and the subject for a cartoon was suggested. Sparky drew the proposed cartoon. He spent a great deal of time on it, and on all the other drawings he submitted. Finally, the reply came from Disney Studios. He had been rejected once again. Another loss for the loser.

So Sparky decided to write his autobiography in cartoons. He described his childhood self: a little boy loser and chronic underachiever.

The cartoon character would soon become famous worldwide.

For Sparky, the boy who had such lack of success in school, and whose work was rejected again and again, this man who was a devote Christian, was none other than [Charles Schulz](#).

He created Peanuts, and the cartoon character whose kite would never fly and who never succeeded in kicking a football – was none other than that of Charlie Brown

All that time spend waiting with God, it certainly wasn't a waste of time.