

Dear Heavenly Father,

Praise

Those who heard of Saul's conversion said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy," and they glorified you because of Saul (Gal 1:23–24). I praise you today as the God who can change a blaspheming, murdering persecutor of the church into a God-honoring, loving preacher of the gospel! Jesus Christ displayed in Saul his perfect patience as an example to those who believe in him for eternal life (1 Tim 1:16). Glory to God for such wonderful salvation!

Today in Your Word

Today you told me about the great persecution that arose against the church in Jerusalem. This teaches me that there's no such thing as a resistance-free ministry. If I'm laboring to build your kingdom, I can count on Satanic opposition, for the sufferings of Christ naturally overflow into the lives of those who bear his name (2 Cor 1:5). Saul led the persecution, and his zeal was such that he dragged men and women off to prison, tried to make them to blaspheme, beat them, and voted to put them to death. This had the effect of scattering the disciples throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, and as they went, they preached the gospel. This teaches me that you can turn persecution into an opportunity to reach the lost. I need to be looking for ways of sharing the gospel in every situation. If I end up in prison, I should reach out to my fellow prisoners; if I'm exiled, I should be a witness wherever I go. Philip ended up going to the Samaritans, the very ones that James and John wanted to burn up with heavenly fire (Luke 9:54). His work there reminds me that the gospel knows no social or religious boundaries, for it spans the divide between different cultures. You even had Philip minister to an Ethiopian eunuch, and the man's salvation shows that those who seek you with their whole heart will find you (Jer 29:13). Saul, still breathing threats and murder against your disciples, pursued them even to Damascus, but Jesus met him on the road and stopped him: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" This teaches me that when the world persecutes me, they are really persecuting Jesus, for I'm part of his body. It also shows me that I should pray for those who mistreat me, for you may have a plan for their lives in which they are converted and labor to spread the gospel. How amazing to think that the great persecutor of the church was transformed into the great apostle to the Gentiles! I especially loved the part Ananias played in Saul's conversion. Here was a man who was scared to death of Saul, yet you used him to call Saul to repentance. In this way, the very church that Saul was trying to destroy, reached out to him in love and brought him into the Kingdom. How marvelous are your ways!

Reflection

I was struck by Philip's obedience when you told him to go south to the Gaza road. Here he was in the middle of a great revival with many people being saved, and suddenly you're telling him to leave all that and go out to some deserted stretch of road. It didn't make any sense. Do I obey even when it doesn't make sense? Do I follow the direction of the Spirit when circumstances seem to point the other way?

Request

Father, help me to have a good attitude when I suffer for the sake of Christ. May my life show forth the light of Jesus, and may his Spirit always shine through me.

Thanksgiving

When Paul thought back on your mercy to him, he said, "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever" (1 Tim 1:17). I say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord!

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Suggested Hymn: "Keep on Shining" – Charles W. Naylor.

Meditation Verse: Acts 8:30–31.