

Meet Saul

Acts 8:1-4

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Message Transcript

Last Sunday, we took all of Acts chapter 7. 60 verses; that is not something that we usually are able to do. That very well may be a Sunday morning record for us. You may have been asking yourself, Is this the right church? Did I come to the right place? Is this Anchored Fellowship? Well, I'm going to bring you all back to Earth this Sunday, because we're only going to be looking at four verses. And then next week, we're going to pick up the pace a little bit. But it was important to me last week in chapter seven, to try to take all of Stephen's sermon in one setting, and for the most part, I think we were able to sufficiently accomplish that. Admittedly, we did not get to spend any time on the last four verses, verses 57 through 60. So we bumped those to this week, kind of. Verse 57, is sufficient on its own with no commentary for me. I suppose that's tough to do, but I'm going to do that. Verse 58, we are going to insert into this study as we get moving through Acts chapter eight. And as far as verses 59 and 60 go, I just want to say that it was a very strong finish for Stephen. He went out the way he came in, and that would be very Christ like, Steven was Christ like as a faithful congregant. That's where it all started for him. He was recognized by the fellowship for that faithfulness. And then of course, they selected him unanimously, to serve as a deacon and then Stephen stepped into that Deacon role, and became a very Christ like servant, just faithfully serving others, as a deacon, passing out meals to widows. Then Stephen, transitioned from Deacon work to elder work, where he began to share the Word of God. And, again, Steven was very Christ like, in how he handled the Word of God, he taught the same things that Jesus taught, it's why he ended up dead. And he taught it in the same way that Jesus did, with great boldness. So all of the examples that Stephen gives us is very Christ like finally then, of course, the Sanhedrin, contrary to any kind of substantial evidence, convicted Stephen, and sentenced him to death. And what did Stephen do? He went out the same way he came in very Christ like. His death very much mirrors that of Christ. So if you flip back to chapter seven, and look at verse eight, this is what or pardon me verse 59, this is what it says: And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. Is that how you would pray? If someone were in the process of taking your life? Is that how you pray for him? I don't see any hands going up, I know, that's tough. It is tough to pray for enemies like that, especially in extremes like that. The way Stephen prayed reminds me very similar to Luke chapter 23, verse 46, the final words of Jesus from the cross where Jesus prayed, Father into your hands, I commit my spirit. So that is that sublime confidence that those who killed the body cannot kill the soul, just as Jesus told us, the soul was secure in the hands of the Lord. And by the way, that is a great verse to explain what happens at death for the Christian. Notice that Stephen did not pray, now I lay me down to sleep, to at thy Second Coming awake. No, the Bible doesn't teach soul sleep. The Bible doesn't teach the annihilation of the soul upon death. But the Bible teaches just as Stephen prayed, Stephen prayed, Lord, receive my spirit. In other words, I understand my body is going to stay behind for a while, but Lord receive my spirit. My spirit is on the way, it's coming home. And of course, the apostle Paul taught us that as well. Second Corinthians chapter five, verse 8, Paul said, To be absent from the body as a Christian, is to be present with the Lord, or as the ESV puts it, we would rather be away from the body, and at home with the Lord. I'm going to ask you to refer to the New King James Version on that verse because the ESV sounds too much like an excuse to skip church, we would rather be away from the body, that's you all the church body, and at home with the Lord. Now, that's not an excuse to skip church. What Paul means there is that the Christian spirit leaves the body upon death, instantly is rushed into the presence of God. But I digress on all that because at some point today, maybe around noon or so we're going to need to get into chapter eight. So

quickly verse 60, that's our final verse, And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Now that reminds me of another statement from Jesus on the cross. How about it? Luke chapter 23, verse 34, Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. So what a guy Stephen, his race may have been very short, but it was very well run from beginning to end, from Salvation to martyrdom, he ran that race well, I am so looking forward to meeting this guy one day in heaven, and hearing about this story from his own mouth. But that somewhat, I guess, adequately brings us to chapter eight, verse one, and let's begin reading there.

And Saul approved of his, that is Stephen's, execution, Saul approved of his execution. The King James version and the New King James Version both say here, that Saul was consenting to Stephen's death. And that's a fine translation. I like that translation. But I do have to admit the ESV is more accurate with this, because the Greek word *anairesis* means the act of killing. Therefore, the word execution from the ESV is a more accurate word choice than the word death found in the King James Version, or New King James Version. And the word approved is better than the word consenting. Because this was not just like a, you know, a mental nod that oh, yeah, they're making the right decision. I feel like they're making the right decision by executing Stephen, No this wasn't just a mental nod or a mental assent or a mental agreement with a decision. Rather, this was an official legal approval by Saul of Tarsus, meaning that Saul actually voted legally, for the death of Stephen. And that, of course, is one of the scriptural indicators that Saul of Tarsus was, in fact, a member of the Council, the Sanhedrin. For all we know, he may have been a member of the Sanhedrin voting for the death of Jesus, but he was for sure, a member of the Sanhedrin voting for the death of Stephen. The other indicator to this, which for me makes this undeniable comes from verse 58. So let's read that verse again, real quick. Acts, chapter seven, verse 58, then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses lay down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. Now that, if you study Jewish history, that verse just oozes with Jewish orthodoxy. In other words, they are going by the book in verse 58. It was a scriptural Old Testament command from the law of Moses. It wasn't just something that Jews came up with over time. No, this was from the law of Moses, that if you reported a crime, our Wednesday night group knows this because we've studied through Leviticus. If you are the one that reported a crime or a sin, if you were the one that was accusing another person of a crime or sin, and they were found guilty by the priest, it was the Old Testament priests that handled this at the time, well, then you would be the one responsible for the execution of that person if their crime was punishable by death. That was just a fact. Of course, the priests weren't going to be the ones responsible for execution. No, that was up to the witnesses. So if you came forward and said, Yep, I saw this guy do that it's deserving of death. That meant from the beginning, okay, if you do sentence him to death, I'll be willing to stone him or execute him in any way that the council prescribes. Well, the Sanhedrin kept that approach, the Sanhedrin, of course, that whole group, that council does not come from the scriptures, that is something that evolved over time. But they kept that whole approach to things that the council would decide on matters of judgment, they would make convictions, and if that conviction would result in a death sentence, and of course, it would not be the Sanhedrin that would execute those accused or those guilty, I should say, rather, it was the witnesses or the accusers that came forward, that would be their responsibility. And that gives all new meaning to what we studied in chapter seven. Because if you remember there in chapter seven false witnesses came forward against Stephen. That means we know they were not legitimate witnesses. These were not actual accusations, but they found people willing to step forward as false witnesses. And this meant that from the moment that they signed up for this, they weren't just agreeing to give a statement of prosecution against Stephen and then call it a day and go home to their nice warm houses. This was an agreement and an acknowledgement from the beginning, that as false witnesses against Stephen, if he was convicted to death, that meant they were ready to pick up stones, and stone him to death. Now, the fact that we read this as we do in verse eight, it is very by the book, and it reveals a lot to us. It tells us that

the council decided on execution, it tells us that a member of the Sanhedrin, as was always the case, was assigned over the responsibility of the execution, he was overseeing that whole process, he wouldn't get his hands dirty, but he would oversee it and make sure it got done. The witnesses and the condemned were taken outside of the city because they never executed people in the holy city of Jerusalem. And they were taken there so that the witnesses could stone Stephen to death. And obviously, when you go to stone, someone, you want to be able to get a pretty good wind up on that. You want to be able to get a pretty good fastball. So what you do is, you take off your outer garments, you strip down to your sleeveless tunic, that way you can get a really good wind up when you go to stone someone to death. That's what is taking place here. They've taken off those outer garments in order to stone Stephen. And as was always the case, and always the way they laid those garments down at the overseeing Sanhedrin member. So what does that tell us? That tells us Paul's position in all of this. It tells us that Saul of Tarsus was the Sanhedrin member that was chosen to oversee the death of the first Christian martyr, at least excluding Christ, we should say. So, and of course, again, verse one gives us Saul's vote as a Sanhedrin member, he wasn't just overseeing the execution of Stephen, but he voted for it. This is what Saul thought ought to be done. Now that is the last word that we're going to get on Stephen. Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit begins to move on now, shifts his narrative to a three verse long, I guess, four verse long portrait of Saul of Tarsus. And then he's going to break from that introduction to Saul, the character, and he's going to give us the rest of the chapter as a history about this guy, Phillip the evangelist as he's known in Acts chapter 22. Or pardon me chapter 21. And then after that, in the next chapter is going to come back to Saul of Tarsus, who were introduced to briefly here, and he's going to give us a portrait of Saul after a conversion. So we have a before portrait of Saul, we have an after portrait of Saul, he gets converted, he becomes known to us as the Apostle Paul. And I think when we teach that Acts chapter nine, I'm going to title that message, Better Call Saul, breaking good. Because that makes perfect sense. This is about the Lord calling Saul. And then him breaking from his bad behavior and breaking good. Those of you who laughed, I know for a fact you are way too up on current pop culture, shame on you. But I think that's gonna be a good title, I might stick with that. Well, then what happens is that the rest of the book of Acts, with the exception of just several chapters, is all about the life and ministry of Paul. For that matter, the rest of the New Testament, with the exception of just a handful of chapters, is all either about Paul or from Paul. So you wonder why I speak in human terms at times and say, Paul was the greatest apostle to ever be an apostle. But it's reasons like that. If you take Paul out of the New Testament, the New Testament is number one, very short. And number two, not very informative. Could you imagine the book of Acts without the story of Paul? Acts chapter eight, done. Can you imagine the New Testament without the doctrinal teachings of Paul? Oh my goodness, we'd be lost, trying to figure out how the New Testament and the Old Testament gelled together but no, this is why I always say that after the Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul is the next most central figure in all of the New Testament, so we're going to spend our time and I've already wasted a lot of that. But we're gonna spend our time today on this little introduction into the life of this guy named Saul. So let's continue reading in verse one.

And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day, on the day of Stephen's execution, in other words, as a direct result from Stephen's martyrdom, a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea, and Samaria, except the apostles. Now, I'm sorry to read this out of order. I know that we are all over the place today. But there is a method to my madness, I think. I want to include verse four with verse one, because they go together in my mind, verse four says, Those who were scattered went about preaching the Word. So here's where we are. intense persecution has called what the Greek language would refer to as a diaspora, a dispersion of the New Testament Church, the early church, and it was persecution that caused that, they were scattered from Jerusalem, to Judea, and to Samaria, and right about now there should be bells going off in your head. Where have I heard these locations

grouped together before? Let's see Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria. I know, I've heard that before. Where have I heard that? It'd be Acts chapter one, verse eight. Remember the words of the Lord? He said, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you'll be, this is my plan for you, you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth, as I like to say the uttermost and gutter most parts of the earth. That was God's plan, right? So at chapter one, verse eight, Christ wanted the gospel to go out into all of the world and he had that map laid out, he wanted it first to be spread through Jerusalem, to the Jews, to the Orthodox Jews living there in Jerusalem. Secondly, he wanted it to make its way outward into the greater region of Judea, and then ultimately making its way up north into Samaria. And then of course, the uttermost and gutter most parts of the earth. But Acts chapter seven, there's a problem. The church isn't budging. The church isn't moving. And no wonder. The New Testament Christian church in Jerusalem was a powerhouse Church. The best preaching and teaching in all of the world was happening in the Christian church in Jerusalem. Acts chapter five, verse 12, tells us that miracles were regularly happening there among the Christians in the Jerusalem church. So you just don't leave a church like that very easily do you?

It just wasn't happening. Everyone was happy, wouldn't you be happy? Man, comfy. Every week, every day as often, as you meet, just totally impressed by the things that the Lord was doing. No, they weren't budging from that spot. And not only were those from Jerusalem, not leaving Jerusalem, but then other people who are outside of the region of Jerusalem, were coming into Jerusalem for the Jewish feasts, and they would hear the gospel of Christ, they would see the power of God in the New Testament church in Jerusalem. And then what did they do? They relocated to Jerusalem. So people were relocating to Jerusalem by the scores, the Jerusalem church just keeps getting bigger and bigger and fatter and fatter and happier and happier. And no one is taking the gospel out to these other regions that Christ commanded. If there's one thing we Christians are good at, it's staying where things are good. We like that, that is real natural for us. In fact, I think way too often we use that as our criteria when we're trying to figure out if something is God's will for our lives or not. The criteria that we use, very carnal by the way, but it's basically this: if God is going to take me from a bad situation or a not so great situation into a better situation, ding ding, ding, that's The Lord's will for my life, I just know it. But if the Lord is going to take me from where I'm happy and comfortable and where things seem good to me, and he's going to take me to something worse, harder, tougher, riskier, then I think I'm gonna have to conclude that's not God's will for my life. The Lord would not do that, to me, he loves me too much. It's a very carnal set of criteria to use when we're trying to figure out what the Lord's will is. But if we're being honest with each other, that is usually how we prefer to handle it. It's easy for us, when God says, Leave the worst situation, and go to the better when we say, Yes, Lord, I love it. That's brilliant man, I can feel the spirit in that. That's you, Lord, I just know that. But then when the Lord says, You know what I know things are good, I know you're happy, I know, you've got your roots dug down deep, and you don't want to budge, but I'd like for you to leave this comfy situation, get out of your comfort zone. And I'd like you to go somewhere where you might struggle for a while, it might be difficult for a while, and there's gonna be a whole lot more risk of failure there, but that's what I want you to do. And in those moments, we say okay, I hear you, Lord, I think it's you. Then again, I don't know. I'm gonna need more confirmation on that just to make sure this isn't the devil, trying to talk me out of something really good. Yeah, yeah, I'm not sure this is you, Lord, I'm gonna need way more confirmation on that. And when we say those kinds of things to the Lord in prayer, what we usually mean is, I'm not moving, you are going to have to move me, Lord, you're gonna have to push me out the door, if you want me leaving this comfortable situation. When you find the perfect job, the perfect church, like anchored fellowship. When you find the right one, that special person, that might be the Lord, probably is most of the time, it probably is. But I need to remind you of something you may not want to hear this morning. And that is that when you lose that perfect job, and you go from making 50 an hour to 10 an hour.

And when that perfect church situation that you had going breaks up and you find yourself looking for another one. Or when that special someone that you thought was special, has kicked you out in the cold, I need you to know that very well may be the Lord too, probably is. It usually takes God allowing the comfortable and the blessed situations in our life, to fall apart around us, to crumble at our feet, so that we will finally surrender to His voice, and he can drive us from where we are to where he wants us to be. So question: If the Lord's promise to the church is that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, then why would the Lord allow intense persecution to break up this wonderful thing that they had going in Jerusalem and scatter them abroad to different regions? Why would the Lord allow that to happen? Here's the answer: He had to. He absolutely had to, in order to get the church moving with the gospel. There's an old quote that says, and I've quoted in here before, very spiritual quote, one of my favorites, that Christians are like manure. Spread out, we do a lot of good. But clumped all together, we just stink. That quote, is crude as it may be, makes a great point, doesn't it? Christianity was never meant to be kept to ourselves. It was never meant to be a bunch of people to get together in like a good old boys club. And we celebrate what we have, but we never take it outside our doors. Christianity was always intended by the Lord, to be spread by those that are Christians. That's the only reason he leaves you here on the earth, right? If he didn't intend for you to evangelize, if He didn't intend for you to speak the gospel to other people in your life, well, then you'd get saved and you just go to church, or pardon me, you'd get saved and then you'd go to heaven. And our church would be empty because man, as soon as people got saved, they're gone. The Lord would do that if he didn't intend on you to evangelize but he leaves you on this earth. He doesn't rapture you into heaven at your salvation because he wants to use you to spread Word. God leveraged persecution, so that the whole church might scatter, except, as verse one tells us, except the apostles, they stayed put for now in Jerusalem and kept the church doors open. Isn't that odd? The Lord is driving them out of Jerusalem, and the apostles stay put. So it raises the question in our minds, well, who's right here? Are the apostles right for sticking around, regardless of the persecution against them? Are the rest of the Christians right, for having some common sense and fleeing that persecution so that they can minister elsewhere? Is it cowardly for the congregants to run? Or is it stubborn for the apostles to stay? And I would say to that, well just slow down because the answer to that question is not so simple. To answer that question, I need to take you all the way back to the introduction of this book, the book of Acts, do you remember the introduction that I gave? Let me answer that for you. Of course, you remember. You remember everything I teach from up here. Well, in our introduction to the book of Acts right off of the top of our study, I shared with you that what the book of Acts really is, it is a guidebook on how to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts, was never intended to be a manual for us on what to do in every church situation. But the book of Acts was to teach us in every situation to depend upon the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts was not primarily meant to be a one size fits all church methodology book; here's what you do in this situation, and here's what you do in that situation. But rather, it is to teach us that we need to understand that there is something better than methodology when it comes to the operation and functioning of the New Testament Church. The New Testament Church, and this is the big lesson of the book of Acts, it cannot be run like a business organization, it has to be run as a living organization. And what's better than methodology for direction in the church is the dynamic of the Holy Spirit. That's what the book is about, don't depend on methodology, or systems, or philosophies, depend on the day to day, moment by moment, direction of the Holy Spirit.

So to that end, if you ask me, the apostles are right for staying. Because that's how the Holy Spirit lead them. And if you ask me, the rest of the church who are running for their lives, they are right for running for their lives, because that is how the Holy Spirit led them. Those who stayed in my opinion, they are brave for sticking around in the face of persecution, in order to stick to the assignment that the Lord gave them. But those who are running, they're not cowardly. Because notice we read at Verse four, as they're running, what are they

doing? They are boldly sharing the Word of God. So to me, it is wise, that they depart from a situation that has the potential of short circuiting their ministries for the Lord and they are brave to preach and teach everywhere they go, the gospel of Jesus, that's my two cents anyway, I know you didn't ask so you can keep the change. Verse 2, devout men; now when that term devout men is used in the Bible, it probably doesn't mean what you think it means. It is never used to refer to Christians, never. Every time you see that phrase, devout men, it is always speaking of God fearing men. That is, people that love the Lord and are seeking the Lord. They're sincere, but they aren't yet Christians. And so we see here that it is not Christians that are burying Stephen. Why? Well, because they're all running for their lives. It's not Christians that are burying Stephen, but it is devout men. It is people within Judaism who are perhaps somewhat on the fence between Judaism and Christianity, and based on their lamentation, buried Stephen and make great lamentation over him. That tells us that perhaps they are stuck. They are starting to slightly lean away from the harshness, the cruelty of Judaism at the time, and toward the love and grace that they're finding in the Christian circle. Verse three, but Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now, if you thought it was bad when the JW's come knocking at your door, how about if you are a first century Christian and Saul came knocking at your door, you know, any Christians in there? Hi, I'm Saul, from Saul's door to door persecution service. You have a moment to talk about Jesus of Nazareth? It's one of those things where, honey don't answer the door. That's a trap. It is unimaginable. The horror that this guy Saul of Tarsus caused for Christian families in the first century. It is easy to read about it in a comfortable church where the heat is set to just the right temperature for everybody. Probably except Tammy. It's true, you know it. It's easy to read about in a comfortable setting like this, but to be alive at this time in the first century. And understand that this this really happened historically, this really happened. And it's not just Christian literature that tells us this persecution happened. This stuff really happened and Saul was in on this, Saul was prying moms and dads out of the arms of their screaming children, Saul was prying the beloved husband away from the heartbroken wife and dragging them off that they might be similarly executed, slaughtered because of their faith in the resurrected Jesus. This guy Saul was an absolute monster. And yet, the weird thing is, you wouldn't find a more religious guy. He told us that himself in Philippians chapter three, verses five and six. And you have to read this with the eyes of a Jew that is deeply entrenched within Judaism. But Paul says there in those verses, I was circumcised on the eighth day, sign of the Old Testament covenant of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, good Jewish lineage, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee. So, keep in mind, Saul was one of the conservative ones. The Sadducees were the liberal, Saul was a conservative Jew within Judaism. And then he says, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law. In other words, humanly speaking, as we choose reckoned righteousness by external adherence, he says, I was blameless, I was top notch within Judaism, Paul is telling us. The one about zeal really gets me because Paul, thinking with the mind of a first century Jew, within Judaism, uses persecution against the church to show the extent of his zeal, isn't that crazy? Like, I was so zealous about Judaism, that I killed a bunch of Christians. That was how he measured zeal. Very strange to me. But, boy, he gets the point across, doesn't he? That was a badge of honor for him, before he knew the Lord. He thought that he was doing the Lord a favor by trying to rid the earth of Christianity. All in the name of protecting Judaism. He loved Judaism, he loved his religious system, the Lord gave that to them in the Old Testament, kind of. They had stacked a lot of rules and laws on top of that, but the foundation of that came from God. And Saul was holding on to that with all of his mind, even though it turned him into a murderous beast, a monster that was bloodthirsty for Christians from this moment on. What what Stephens death did to Saul is like the same thing that smelling blood in the water does for a shark, it drives you into a frenzy. This this death of Stephen, the message of Stephen before his death, the angelic glow on the face of Stephen, the words of Stephen as he was dying, this drove the apostle, well, this drove drove Saul of Tarsus mad for a while

and he went on an absolute rampage. You know what that did to Saul? Love of religion. That's what did that to Saul, love of religion will do that to you. It does All the time still to this day, it will cause you to break up your family relationships, it will cause you to excommunicate friends from your life. All sorts of damage is done because people, instead of loving the Christ of Christianity, will love some religious version of it. Some system of worship, some church institution, one thing or another, but it's not Christ that they love. You'll see the change in Saul once he comes to know Christ, and love Christ. But in chapter nine, this monster, Saul, he is converted. Now apart from Jesus, again, there's no character in the Bible that I think more highly of than Paul the Apostle. And once again, from Acts forward, the New Testament is basically built around him again, I know I'm speaking humanly here, very fleshly terms, but you understand what I'm saying. Paul is one of the biggest miracles of the mercy and love of Christ that we could read about in the Scriptures. And if the gospel of Christ can penetrate a heart like Saul of Tarsus, then there isn't anyone that he can't reach. That's what this tells me, that the Lord, the power of the gospel unto salvation is so powerful, we underestimate it so much, that it can reach the hardest hearts, it can take root in the driest soil, it can crack the toughest nuts, there's nothing and no one that the Lord can't break through with the power of the gospel. So I think we get this wrong a lot. When we try to look at people and figure out if they're close to getting saved or not, you ever do that? And usually, it's, I don't know, sometimes we're so simple, we don't even think about what we're doing. But we'll look at a person and we'll say, they are so close to giving their heart to the Lord, they are so close to getting saved, and we have to temper people, we have to be like, Okay, calm down.

You got him to come to church with you once. That doesn't necessarily mean they're going to be the next Billy Graham. Alright, let's just accept this for what it is. It's a step. That doesn't mean they're close to the Lord. People like Saul of Tarsus, people who are hostile against the gospel, hostile against the word of God, we say, there is no hope and heaven on earth for that person. There's no way they're ever going to get saved, that's exactly what we would have said about Saul of Tarsus had we known him in the first century and survived him. There's no way that Saul of Tarsus gets saved, he is about as far from salvation as a person can get. But no, he's not. In fact, the truth is, and I try to always tell this to people, I don't think they believe me, but I always try to tell this to people. The truth is that usually, the more adamant, a person is against Christ, the more hostile they are against Christ, believe it or not, that is typically a good sign. Because what does it mean? It means that the Lord is working harder through the power of the Holy Spirit on that person than he is on the apathetic person. It's the apathetic people you got to worry about. Those are the people that scare me, they come to church, how was it? That kind of person scares me, the person that will fight with me, the person that would get angry with me because I've shared the word with them, now I know I've got a fish on the hook. Now I know I got a fighter. Now I know that there's something behind this. The Spirit is working on that person's life. It is conviction that drives people to their animosity against Christ. That is what made Saul what he was before Christ, a murderous beast, it was conviction that drove him to that. As I've said before, when you throw a rock into a pack of dogs, the one that yips is the one that you hit. That's the way the Word of God is. It usually is the one barking the loudest against the gospel, that you can say, Ooh, they're close. The Lord is working on that person's life. The apathetic person, they still scare me. But the Lord has that person close to the kingdom. Back when I was in high school, confession time. There was a kid that I could not stand. He was big, and I don't mean, big, muscular, just big everything else. He was tall. He was overweight, and I couldn't stand him because he used his size to bully people around, that's why I didn't like him. He looked like a 30 year old mechanic going to school with a bunch of little kids. He was huge. And I couldn't stand the guy because of how he was, he was a bully. And several years ago, which would be about 25 years after I had gone to high school with this kid, he sends me a Facebook friend request and I thought, this ought to be good. I could not stand that guy. I wonder how many times he's been in prison. I wonder how badly he's messed up his life. I wonder what his facebook wall looks like. So I began to poke around a little bit on his Facebook wall, and I

could not believe what I saw. This guy, this monster, this beast from high school, that I couldn't stand which by the way, I got saved, truly converted, and I lost my animosity for him, but I still never had hopes for him. This guy got radically saved. His Facebook wall was amazing. Committed devoted to the Lord, beautiful family, as far as I could tell, wonderful life. And you know what the first thing I thought was, you know what it was? First thing I thought was? How could the Lord save that guy? How could the Lord get through to him? Oddly enough, he's probably thinking the same thing about me, because I was no saint in school, told you this was a confession. How could the Lord save that guy? If there's anyone that I thought no way ever it's that guy and yet there he is, saved. Committed to the Lord. All I'm saying to us is that we can never assume. And we can never short sell the Lord on what he can do. One of the greatest testimonies in the New Testament comes from this guy Saul of Tarsus, who was so out there, was such an animal, was such a beast, such a terrible person, that you'd feel justified in hating and yet, look what the Lord did in his life. The Lord took that monster, and I told you before, he redirected that tenacity, that Moxie. He redirected the guts of Saul of Tarsus and made him one of the most committed and determined workers in the New Testament Church, Saul was largely responsible for the gospel going into the world. So here's what we need to do; we can never count anyone out. We need to start looking at friends and family and acquaintances much different. Don't bother pre judging people before you decide to try to plant the seed of the Word. You just plant everywhere that you can plant and you let the Lord be concerned with raising up fruit because he can do it anywhere. He can reach anyone. And I want to encourage you with that today, I'm going to ask you to stand, worship team come on up. This might be a good morning, for you to be praying for those people that you have long given up on. Those people that you said, Lord, there's no way. No way that person is ever going to come to you. It might be a good morning to pray for them. I would have to think I was one of those people. Maybe you're looking around this morning, and you're looking at some of the people in this church and you're saying a similar thing. How did they get saved? I knew them before anchored. How are they here? Hey, it is a miracle of the Lord. The best thing we can do is not give up praying for those that we want to see saved, the Lord can do it. I don't care how hard it looks to the human eye, through the power of the Holy Spirit, it can be just a nudge that sends them launching out of their doubts and into complete faith in Christ.