

Acts 9:10-19 Jesus makes all the difference in the world! Easter 3 May 5, 2019

God's grace and peace have come to you as you believe in your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.
God's Word is from Acts 9:10-19
These are God's words. They are truth. Amen.

Dear people of God in Christ,

There is a song called "One Solitary Life" by Bill Anderson. He wrote, "All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever set sail, all the rulers that have ever ruled, all the kings that have ever reigned on this earth, all put together have not affected the life of man on earth like this one solitary life." Is that a true statement about Jesus? Can you personally say?

Jesus makes all the difference in the world!

First, all people need Jesus, but many don't want Him. When Saul was brought to faith in Jesus on the road to Damascus, many other Jews and soldiers were with him, but as far as we know: none of them changed. Among the Jews in Damascus, a small number believed that Jesus was the promised Savior, but the majority of the people of the town did not believe. Today, in our country which has a Christian background, there may be 40% who actually practice their Christian faith. Where are the other 60%? In countries like India or in Europe, the number is less than 5% who profess to believe in Jesus as their Savior. How can we say that Jesus makes all the difference in the world when most of the world doesn't care for Him?

Just because many people in the world don't recognize Jesus doesn't keep Him from ruling over the world. Jesus said that "*all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me*" (*Matthew 28:19*). Despite His rule, evil things still happen in this world. But they would be much worse if Jesus were not Ruler over all things for the sake of the true believers (*Ephesians 1:22*). We see that in the case of Saul. Jesus allowed him to persecute believers for a time, but then the Lord stopped him and changed him. In the end, Saul (Paul) brought the good news of Christ to people in many new countries.

He wrote, "*I thank Christ... that He appointed me to His service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor..., I was shown mercy.... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.... I was shown mercy so that in me... Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life*" (*1 Tim 1:12-16*).

Knowing Jesus as his Savior made all the difference in Saul's life. He went from harming Christians to saving lives with the news of Christ. He went from breathing threats against the followers of Jesus, to breathing prayers to Jesus on their behalf. He went from fighting against God to fully serving God to the point of being willing to suffer pain or death because of Jesus. His whole life was a testimony of Jesus' grace, love, and patience.

Second, all people need faith to accept the difference Jesus makes. Saul needed Jesus, who converted him to faith on the road to Damascus. He began immediately to preach that Jesus was God's Son, who became a man to suffer and die and rise from death to win an eternal victory. Saul knew that his preaching wasn't going to change the whole world. Yet, the Lord added people to the Church daily as they heard the message of Christ. There were spiritual victories like Paul and many others who heard him.

In our verses we learn that Ananias needed faith to accept God's Word. Ananias was a Jew who had lived in Damascus for some time. How did the Holy Spirit bring him to faith? We learn earlier in Acts that as Saul persecuted the church in Jerusalem, many believers fled to places like Damascus and brought with them the message of Christ. So, indirectly Saul was responsible for Ananias hearing about Jesus.

Now it was Ananias' turn to bring the message of Christ directly to Saul. Jesus appeared in a vision and told him to go find Saul and speak to him. Ananias answered, "*Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name*" (v.13-14).

Jesus said, "*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name....*" "*Ananias ... laid his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. '* ...*he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized*" (v. 15, 17-18). Although Ananias faced a difficult task of meeting Saul the former persecutor, Jesus had prepared both of them. He had already made the difference in each of their lives so that all went according to God's plan. Whatever differences they had before, were set aside so they could carry out what Jesus wanted them to do. Ananias not only healed Saul's blindness by the power of Jesus' name, he baptized Saul. That very day Jesus equipped Saul with the Holy Spirit to do powerful mission work.

It is difficult for any Christian to tell an unbeliever about Jesus. Because people who don't believe in Jesus by nature have their minds set against Him. Yet, Saul (Paul) could tell you that as some people hear the message they do believe, just like he and Ananias. More people need to hear! Jesus later told Paul, "*I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins....*" (*Acts 26:17-18*).

We also have received Jesus by faith. How has that made a difference for us? We know that if Jesus hadn't paid the debt of our sin by dying for us, we would die in our sins and suffer forever in hell. We don't want anyone to die in their sins. Do people at work, at school, or at home see the difference with Christ as our Savior? Our sins are forgiven! Our debt to God has been paid! Whenever something bad happens to us, we do not need to fear. For God loves us in Christ and will work everything for our good. With Paul we say: "*Give thanks to the Father.... He has... brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" (*Colossians 1:12*).

The one solitary life of Jesus had made all the difference in the world for believers! For Paul, despite facing persecution from unbelieving Jews and Romans, he carried the message of Christ until the day he died. For the Christian Church, despite many atheists, cults, and false religions of our day, the Church still stands on the message of Christ and it will not fall. For us, despite our personal sins, Jesus has called us by the Gospel so that we are changed and filled with confidence in Jesus to save us! Jesus continues to work through us to affect children and adults, family and friends for Christ. Every Christian should clearly be able to say: Jesus' one solitary life has made all the difference! Amen.