



Potomac Hills Community Church, PCA

GRACE ORIENTED • CHRIST CENTERED

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The Acts of the Apostles: The Spirit sends the Church with the Gospel Acts 9.1-19 The Hunter becomes Hunted

INTRODUCTION: “*The Most Dangerous Game*”¹

When I was growing up, sometime in Middle School, I think, we had to read a series of short stories in some English class, which, for the most part, bored me to tears. There was one exception.

And after the short story, *The Shepherd*, by Frederick Forsyth, this short story is my second favorite ... to this day. It's written by Richard Edward Connell, and it's his **famous** story, *The Most Dangerous Game*.

The Most Dangerous Game tells about the adventure of his hero, Sanger Rainsford, one of the world's most celebrated big-game hunters. Rainsford accidentally falls from his speeding yacht at night while en route to a hunting expedition along the coast of South America. He is a strong swimmer and manages to beach himself on a foreboding island. Rainsford knows the island is inhabited because he has heard shots during the night. To his complete amazement he finds a palatial chateau inhabited by a Russian nobleman, General Zaroff, and his servant. The general recognizes his visitor's name and welcomes him warmly because he too is a big-game hunter. Rainsford is pleased with his good fortune — until the formal dinner that evening when during the conversation the general announces that he is hunting a “new animal” on the island.

When Rainsford inquires as to the identity of this “new animal,” the general answers, “It supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. No other hunting compares with it for an instant. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a quarry with which I can match my wits.”

When Rainsford's face shows great bewilderment, the general explains, “I wanted the ideal animal to hunt. So I said: ‘What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?’ And the answer was, of course, ‘It must have courage, cunning, and,

¹ The introduction is taken from the short story, *The Most Dangerous Game*, by Richard Edward Connell, now out of print, but it can be found in [The Norton Introduction to Literature](#), pages 1-15.

above all, it must be able to reason.”

“But no animal can reason,” Rainsford protests.

“My dear fellow,” the general responds, “there is one that can.”

“But you cannot mean —” Rainsford exclaims.

“And why not?”

“I cannot believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a grisly joke.”

“Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting.”

To his growing horror, Sanger Rainsford, the world-famous hunter, learns that **he** is Zaroff’s intended game. **The hunter has become the hunted.**

I won’t tell you how it turns out ... it’s very politically incorrect as under the surface it’s a slick commentary on U.S. – Soviet relations in the 1950’s, but on the surface, it’s a fascinating story about the hunted turning the tables on the hunter.

And on an infinitely higher level, that is what Acts 9 is all about.

Here too the pursuer became the prey.

Saul, a fierce persecutor of the church of Christ, discovered first to his horror and then to his eternal delight that he, the hunter, was also the hunted.

For all of us who belong to Christ, the story in Acts 9 is a picture of how we came to be His. As we study Saul’s experience, we will learn how the divine hunt is conducted. We will see the workings of God’s providence and we can take great hope in this, not just for ourselves, but also for our friends and family still in the chase. Let’s turn to ...

Acts 9:1-19, *“Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord’s followers, so he went to the high priest. [2] He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.*

[3] As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! [4] He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?”

[5] “Who are you, sir?” Saul asked.

And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting! [6] Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

[7] The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of someone’s voice, but they saw no one! [8] As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind. [9] So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days. And all that time he went without food and water.

[10] Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, “Ananias!”

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

[11] The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you arrive, ask for Saul of Tarsus. He is praying to Me right now. [12] I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he can see again."

[13] "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! [14] And we hear that he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus."

[15] But the Lord said, "Go and do what I say. **For Saul is My chosen instrument to take My message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.** [16] And I will show him how much he must suffer for Me."

[17] So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit." [18] Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. [19] Afterward he ate some food and was strengthened.

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days."

If you remember, **Saul's** not a good guy. Saul makes his first appearance in Scripture in connection with Stephen. When Stephen was executed, Saul guarded the robes of those involved in the stoning. His position so close to the action suggests he was deeply involved with the whole affair.

There is no question as to Saul's role in the persecution that broke out after Stephen's death—he was its mastermind and ringleader. As we saw at the beginning of Acts 8, Saul was terrifyingly adept at persecuting believers. The Jerusalem fellowship broke up under the force of his attacks. Many of the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians apparently bore the brunt of the persecution and fled Jerusalem.

As the events of this chapter unfold, Saul is hot on the trail of those who fled to Damascus. In his testimony to King Agrippa in **Acts 26:9–11**, he spoke of the fierceness of his assault, "*I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. [10] Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many of the believers in Jerusalem to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. [11] Many times I had them whipped in the synagogues to try to get them to curse Christ. I was so violently opposed to them that I even hounded them in distant cities of foreign lands.*"

Saul the hunter! Yet this persecutor, by the grace of God, became an apostle of Jesus Christ. It's a fascinating story ...

v. 1-2: THE HUNTER IS HUNTED ²

The story begins with a description of the hunter and his prey, verses 1-2, *“Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord's followers, so he went to the high priest. [2] He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.”*

Saul was the hunter, and the hunted, according to our text, were *“any followers of the Way”* — believers who long before they were called Christians were called *“The Way.”* This was fitting because Christ had said in **John 14:6**, *“I am **the way**, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.”*

The Way is an appropriate title for Christianity, since it is the way of God (Acts 18:26), the way into the Holy Place (Hebrews 10:19–20), and the way of truth (2 Peter 2:2).

And those in The Way, these early followers of the Lord Jesus Christ were the hunted; they were the targets of Saul’s hatred! Saul the hunter was a cruel, callous, brutal, and bloody man. His goal was nothing short of the complete extermination of The Way! Acts 9:1 says, *“Saul was uttering threats with every breath.”* Literally that reads, ***“breathing in threats and murder.”***

The New Testament Linguist, A. T. Robertson, comments about this that, *“Threatening and slaughter had come to be the very breath that Saul breathed, like a warhorse who sniffed the smell of battle.”*

He was a frightening, violent enemy ... a callous, self-righteous, bigoted murderer set on a full-scale inquisition. Soon Jerusalem couldn’t hold him. He sought and received extradition papers from the Sanhedrin so he could go to Damascus and ravage the growing Christian community there as well. It was 150 miles to Damascus (about a week’s travel), but he would have traveled a month for the privilege. Persecuting Christians consumed him; it had become his whole life. The very air he was breathing was that of threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. The term ‘disciples’ refers to all believers, not merely the twelve Apostles. Every Christian is a follower of and learner from the Lord Jesus Christ

2 The exposition of the text is adapted from Preaching the Word: Acts by R. Kent Hughes, pages 125-132 and The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 1-12 by John MacArthur, pages 261-276.

Other works used include The NIV Application Commentary: Acts by Ajith Fernando, pages 270-281 and Acts by James Montgomery Boice, pages 152-160.

A. T. Robertson quote comes from his book, Word Pictures of the New Testament, Volume 3, The Acts of the Apostles, page 113.

Information on Damascus comes from The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts by F. F. Bruce, page 194.

... and Saul wanted every one he could get his hands on.

Hearing of a group of Christians in Damascus, driven by deadly ambition and twisted religious zeal, Saul went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. The high priest, in his capacity as president of the Sanhedrin, was viewed by the Romans as head of the Jewish state. He thus had authority over internal Jewish matters such as this one. Accordingly, Saul needed letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus to have authority to apprehend Christians.

Damascus, the ancient capital of Syria, had a large Jewish population, as evidenced by the massacre of some ten to twenty thousand Jews in A.D. 66. Given the size of the Jewish population, there would have been several synagogues.

Having obtained the necessary papers, Saul and his entourage set out for Damascus. The normal route north and east would cause them to pass through Samaria. The revival there, led by Philip, Peter, and John, may have infuriated Saul even more. With intense hostility he approached Damascus and the encounter that would turn his world upside down.

The dramatic story of Saul's conversion and spiritual transformation ought to remind us never to write anyone off as being beyond the love of Christ. We do so with relatives whom we know have heard the Word for years without any response, or a sinner who has gone to some crass level of depravity, or someone who has gone into a cult or is propagating false doctrine.

But Scripture is clear — **God** can reach anyone!

The workings of **the divine hunter** are subtle and profound.

As Saul set out on his bloodthirsty hunt, he, unknowingly, was the hunted. The Hound of Heaven was tracking him down just as surely as the persecutor was tracking down the saints of God. God was still at work.

We know from **Acts 26:14** that Jesus said to Saul at the time of his conversion, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to fight against My will.*"

Literally, that says, "*It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*"

A goad was a sharp stick with which one poked an ox to get him moving. Sometimes an ox would kick up its heels at the stick — a fairly futile endeavor. Essentially, Jesus was saying, "Saul, your kicking against the work of God is pointless." Or as it's translated here, "*It is hard for you to fight against My will.*"

These goads included Stephen who prayed for his murderers, including Saul, in **Acts 7:60**, "*Lord, don't charge them with this sin!*"

These goads included the men and women who bravely refused to deny Christ, suffering imprisonment and even death instead.

Such goads kept poking the persecutor, and in moments of honesty he must have wondered whether his attacks on the Church were indeed just. “How can people suffer and die like this if they are believing and preaching a lie?”

But Saul would kick against the goads and push the thoughts away. He had to know something was wrong but was apparently unwilling to examine himself or repent. He was oppressed by guilt but silenced his conscience by giving himself even more to his terrible pursuit.

That fateful day on the Damascus Road, Saul had no idea of what was about to occur: the hunter was being hunted, and the interior assaults of God’s grace were softening him for the final onslaught.

The Hound of Heaven was at hand. And so ...

v. 3-9: **THE HUNTER IS CAPTURED**³

Saul’s destiny was about to change as he approached Damascus, a beautiful white city on a green plain. Verse 3, “*As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him!*”

In the military we had acronyms for everything, some of them were quite creative, and one of those was B.F.O. And people would say it in much the same way that teenagers today can look at you and say, “Duh.”

B.F.O. means “Blinding Flash of the Obvious.” **And Saul** had a B.F.O.

There’s a blinding flash, and suddenly Saul is lying in the dirt, verse 4, “*He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?"*”

The voice began with the traditional formal double use of his name.

How many of you saw the movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean*?

In that movie, there’s a scene where the bad pirate, Captain Barbosa, is making the good pirate, Captain Jack Sparrow, walk the plank. And Jack Sparrow is trying to talk him out of it. And Barbosa puts his arm around hiim, and says, “Jack, Jack, there’ll be none of that now.”

It’s like that!

"Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?"

But Saul didn’t know who’s speaking to him. He didn’t know what was going on, verse 5, “*"Who are you, sir?" Saul asked.*”

The voice’s response hit him like a bolt of lightning, “*And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting!"*”

Jesus’ words triggered an ongoing explosion within the young persecutor.

At least two things burst on Saul’s conscience.

First, Jesus Christ was alive!

3 C. S. Lewis quote comes from his book, Surprised by Joy, page 229.

Acts 9:17 of our text, as well as 1 Corinthians 15:8, indicates that Saul actually saw Christ. Later he would present this vision as part of his Apostolic credentials. Everything in Saul's life had opposed this, but now he knew Christ was alive, and if Christ were alive ...

Then **second**, Saul now knew he wasn't merely attacking those belonging to the Way — he was persecuting Christ. He now understood the spiritual unity between the Savior and the saints. This truth was at once terrible and wonderful, but at first Saul was overwhelmed by the terror.

While Saul lay face down, the voice instructed him, verse 6, "*Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do.*"

Luke goes on to describe the situation in verses 7-9, "*The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of someone's voice, but they saw no one! [8] As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind. [9] So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days. And all that time he went without food and water.*"

The great hunter who was going to wreak havoc on the Damascus church entered Damascus led by the hand — blind, weak, and helpless. Saul was frightened and in despair. This was the dark night of his soul.

His physical blindness now paralleled his spiritual blindness.

Though he was now blind, he had seen Christ, and as he saw Christ he saw himself for the first time. His life was utterly wrong. He was a criminal before God. As he wrote later in **Romans 7:18**, "*I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned.*"

The English Standard Version translates that verse as, "*For I know that nothing good dwells in me.*"

As Christ's enemy, he had drawn blood, and now darkness was everywhere ... especially in his own soul. The hunter had been hunted down. There was no escape.

So ... What do we learn from all this?

Primarily that **Christ** is always the initiator.

He still seeks sinners, just as by grace he exposed Saul to the faith and courage of Stephen and the other followers of The Way. We can never be sure in whom this grace is working, but we know that God **always** makes the first move. We search for Him **only** in response to His advance. Jesus orchestrated the Damascus confrontation, and He directs our encounters with Him as well.

Francis Thomson's early life was one dead end after another. He studied for the priesthood but didn't complete the course. He studied medicine but failed. He joined the military but was released after one day. He finally became an opium addict in London. But he couldn't get away from God's persistent love for him. In

the midst of his despondency Thomson was befriended by an associate who saw his poetic gifts, and eventually Thomson was able to share his experience in verse. His famous poem is, of course, *The Hound of Heaven*, which has been called one of the finest odes in the English language. Many of us have experienced the truth of Thomson's powerful words:

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
 I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
 I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
 Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
 Up vistaed hopes, I sped;
 And shot, precipitated
 Down Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
 From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.*

Christ is always the Hunter and the initiator. He brings us to our knees, acknowledging how desperately we need Him. If there was ever anyone who had come to the end of himself, who was now truly "*poor in spirit,*" it was Saul.

That's why years later he was able to write, **Philippians 3:7**, "*I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.*"

Have we been brought to the end of our resources?

Have we ever been completely helpless unless the Lord intervened?

Have we ever given up and given in to Christ?

Our Damascus Roads are generally less dramatic than Saul's, but they are meant to have the same effect — to break our **compulsive independence and arrogance** ... and to bring us to Christ for salvation.

Our Damascus Roads are meant to convey **our emptiness** and the greatness of Christ. Have we gotten the message?

It's amazing to realize, **the Hunter chooses us!**

The Lord told Ananias, verse 15, "***For Saul is My chosen instrument to take My message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.***"

And so Saul would gladly proclaim Christ for the rest of his life.

He marveled at the splendors of God's grace, and so should we, as he would later write in **Ephesians 1:4-5**, "*Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us **and chose us in Christ** to be holy and without fault in His eyes. [5] His unchanging plan [literally – He predestined us] has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure.*"

C. S. Lewis saw this clearly in his own conversion ... "I did not then see

what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Lord which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? The words compel them to come in, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and his compulsion is our liberation.”

That final line is my favorite, *“The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and his compulsion is our liberation.”*

Sometimes the inner workings of God’s grace touch our lives in ways we are not even aware of — appropriate words spoken here and there, pressures or lack of pressures, joys, sorrows — subtle workings orchestrated by the mercy of the Divine Hunter. Finally our eyes are opened, and we can really and truly see for the first time! He brings us to the end of ourselves, and we have the joy of being the Hunter’s prize.

Not only is the hunter captured, but then, amazingly enough ...

v. 10-19: THE HUNTER IS LOVED ⁴

Those traveling with Saul finally gained their composure and led Saul by the hand into Damascus, where an amazing thing happened. The hunted do not usually minister to the hunter. Normally that would be as crazy as Peter Rabbit caring for Mr. McGregor or George Bush caring for Saddam Hussein.

But that’s exactly what happened in Saul’s case, verses 10-12, *“Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, “Ananias!”*

“Yes, Lord!” he replied.

[11] The Lord said, “Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you arrive, ask for Saul of Tarsus. He is praying to Me right now. [12] I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he can see again.”

I can imagine Ananias listening to the Lord and responding positively, and then asking a question or two.

“Go to Straight Street ... Okay, Lord ...

“A man from Tarsus? Fine ...

“**Saul? The Saul?** The guy who has been tearing up the church?

“Lord, are you sure ...?”

⁴ The list of “nobodies” is found in the [Life Application Bible Commentary: Acts](#) at the reference on Acts 9:10.

Verses 13-14, *"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! [14] And we hear that he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus."*

This man's fears were understandable, but the Lord's answer was good enough for him, verses 15-16, *"But the Lord said, "Go and do what I say. **For Saul is My chosen instrument to take My message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. [16] And I will show him how much he must suffer for Me."***

Spiritual usefulness and honor go hand in hand with suffering. Both were part of the Divine Hunter's plan for Saul — and for us. Ananias probably left his house with great apprehension, but to his credit he obeyed. As with Philip the deacon, Ananias' obedience made him part of a great work of God, verse 17, *"So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul."*

Angels sung when they heard those words of forgiveness. Ananias probably knew some young women who had been widowed by Saul. Perhaps some of his friends had been orphaned by Saul or had been killed themselves. But unlike the Ananias of Acts 5, this Ananias lives up to his name, which means, **"God is gracious,"** and forgave him. Because the two men were now brothers in Christ, they were parts of the same body. And with his hands on Saul, Ananias said, *"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit." [18] Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.*

Ananias is one of the obscure heroes of the Church.

We never hear of him again, although he did a great work.

Given Saul's selection as a key person in the vast program of God, we might think that Peter or one of the other Apostles should have been chosen to minister to this important new convert. Not so. God called an unknown disciple named Ananias for this task. This has been true throughout church history.

Consider this list of "nobodies" ...

How many know the name of John Staupitz?

How many know the name of John Egglan?

How many know the name of Edward Kimball?

How many know the name of Mordecai Ham?

John Staupitz helped lead Martin Luther to Christ.

John Egglan was instrumental in the conversion of Charles Spurgeon.

Edward Kimball was a shoe salesman ... who led D. L. Moody to Christ.

Mordecai Ham was a little-known evangelist who preached the night that Billy Graham gave his life to Christ.

How many know the names of these great saints of God?

The Divine Hunter knows, and that's enough.

The physical scales falling to the ground mirrored Saul's spiritual transformation — all things had become new. The eyes of Saul's heart had been enlightened. The one who had persecuted Christ by hating His people now belonged to Christ — forever.

And the amazing thing is that this is not an uncommon event, because ...

APPLICATION: *Hunted + Captured + Loved = Transformed*⁵

A long time ago, a young man went to sea. Like most sailors of his day, like most sailors of most days, he lived a life of rebellion and debauchery. For several years, he worked on slave ships, capturing slaves for sale to the plantations of the New World. So low did he sink that at one point he became a slave himself, captive of another slave trader. Eventually, he became the captain of his own slave ship. The combination of a frightening storm at sea, coupled with his reading of Thomas á Kempis's classic work, The Imitation of Christ, planted the seeds that resulted in his conversion. **John Newton** went on to become a leader in the evangelical movement in eighteenth-century England, along with such men as John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and William Wilberforce. On his tombstone is inscribed the following epitaph, written by Newton himself: "John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and Libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy." When he penned the hymn, "Amazing Grace," he knew firsthand the truths it proclaimed.

One day in August, a professor of rhetoric named Aurelius sat despondently in his garden. Although the son of a Christian mother, he had abandoned his mother's faith in favor of the Persian religion known as Manichaeism. He also took a mistress, with whom he lived for thirteen years. Abandoning Manichaeism as unsatisfactory, he continued a futile search for truth. Through the preaching of the great and wise churchman named Ambrose, he became intellectually convinced of the truth of Christianity. Yet he held back, "prevented from accepting the faith by weakness in dealing with sexual temptation." Now, in the midst of his turmoil, he heard a child's voice singing in Latin, "take and read ... take and read." In his autobiography, appropriately entitled, Confessions, he describes what happened next ... "I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could

⁵ John Newton story comes from 101 Hymn Stories by Kenneth Osbeck, page 28. Augustine's story comes from his classic book, Saint Augustine: Confessions. For other conversion accounts see Great Conversions by Frederick Leahy and 131 Christians Everyone Should Know by the editors of Christian History Magazine. For the definitive account of the life of the Apostle Paul see Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free by F. F. Bruce. Good historical fiction accounts (and thus easier to read) which are pretty accurate are The Apostle by John Pollock and Paul: A Novel by Walter Wangerin.

only be a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall. ... So I hurried back ... for when I stood up to move away I had put down the book containing Paul's Epistles. I seized it and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell, **Romans 13:13-14**, "*...not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*" (NKJV) I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled."

Delivered from a life of sin and confusion, Augustine went on to become the greatest theologian the church had known since the Apostle Paul.

Church history is full of such accounts, which highlight the power of the gospel to transform sinners. But no transformation is as remarkable, or has had such far-reaching implications for history. So significant an event was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus that Scripture records it no less than three times – here in Acts 9, and again in Acts 22 and Acts 26.

It's fitting that such a unique individual would have a unique conversion.

Saul was by birth a Jew,

by citizenship a Roman,

by education a Greek,

and by the grace of God a Christian.

He was a missionary, theologian, evangelist, pastor, organizer, leader, thinker, fighter for truth, and lover of souls.

Except our Lord Himself a more godly man never lived.

Saul was now a mighty hunter for God! Instead of breathing threats and murder, he helped men and women find life in Christ. Instead of bondage, he brought freedom. His life is a miracle!

When we read about Sanger Rainsford's discovery that he, the celebrated hunter, was now the hunted, our skin crawls at the horror of such a discovery.

Not so with the Divine Hunter, for his is a joyous, life-giving hunt.

On our own we would never find peace or purpose. But God brought others along to minister His grace to us. And now He gives us the privilege of participating in the Great Hunt to reach others.

All around us miracles are waiting to happen. We must never write anyone off. We must be like Ananias, willing to be the life-giving ambassadors of God. We must be like Saul-become-Paul, pursuing the world for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some have foolishly attempted to explain away Saul's experience ... but for the rest of his life Saul offered only one explanation—he had in fact seen the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

This miraculous conversion, without human involvement, is an example of the power of the saving, sovereign grace of God. Paul himself testified to that grace in **1 Timothy 1:12–17**, *“How thankful I am to Christ Jesus our Lord for considering me trustworthy and appointing me to serve Him, even though I used to scoff at the name of Christ. I hunted down His people, harming them in every way I could. **But God** had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. [14] Oh, how kind and gracious the Lord was! He filled me completely with faith and the love of Christ Jesus. [15] This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the worst of them all. [16] But that is why God had mercy on me, so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of His great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in Him and receive eternal life. [17] Glory and honor to God forever and ever. He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; He alone is God.”*

Again, that salvation by grace initiated by God is nowhere more powerfully stated than by Paul to Titus, **Titus 3:3-5**, *“Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled by others and became slaves to many wicked desires and evil pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy. We hated others, and they hated us. [4] **But then God our Savior** showed us His kindness and love. [5] He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit.”*

And all those who have received the kindness and love of Christ said, “Amen.”