

# Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

**Date** : 6 October 2024

**Sermon Title** : Catching God's Vision

**Speaker** : Rev Shannon Chan

**Text** : Acts 9:1-22

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## INTRODUCTION

Today's passage shows us that Saul was a vicious and malicious human being who threatened murder against the Lord's disciples. From his involvement in the execution of Stephen, the first recorded Christian martyr, Saul was obsessed and consumed by the idea of eradicating all followers of Jesus. He was on a personal crusade, traveling 140 miles to Damascus in search of followers of Christ, so that he could bring them in chains back to Jerusalem. With heartless cruelty (as some had commented), he sought to capture both men and women not caring what families he destroyed or whose lives he ruined. Saul saw himself as devoted to the law of Moses. He saw himself having caught God's vision for Israel and he would eradicate the followers of Jesus as they were perpetuating heresy among God's people. Saul was very religious but catching God's vision is not about being religious. Being religious does not mean one will catch a true vision and the will of God.

### **Catching God's Vision (Acts 9:1-9)**

- It is not about being religious – a religious person can be sincere, but be sincerely wrong.

We can be sincerely deceived. We can be fervent, devoted and zealous for a wrong cause. Ultimately it is about God's truth as recorded in the Bible. This is in contrast today to 'truth' that is subjective but is not God's truth and not God's way. We can be very zealous for the wrong thing and doing things contrary to God's truth and God's will. That was Saul's problem.

- It is about encountering Jesus – In order to catch God's vision truly, Saul had an encounter with Jesus. Nearing Damascus where he was going to arrest the followers of Jesus, Saul was struck to the ground by a brilliant light from heaven and rendered sightless. It was at this moment that Saul got a glimpse of the Lord Jesus in His glory, but the brightness of the light caused him to go temporarily blind. (vv.8, 17) The Lord continued speaking, instructing Saul to go into the city where he would learn his true mission. (v.6)

Saul, a leader like many of us whether in church, at work, in the marketplace or in our families, believed he was doing what God had given him to do. But in the middle of it,

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he was caught off guard, shocked, knocked down and escorted off the field, blinded. Yet this experience will become the most life changing moment in his life and leadership. What some might count as his greatest loss will become his greatest gain. As a writer suggests, sometimes we have to lose our sight to gain a vision. In those moments, we are given the opportunity to catch a vision of God – we lose our sight but gain God’s vision that we would never have chosen on our own, and we learn to walk by faith in that vision, not by our own senses, abilities, experience or capacities.

- It is about dying to sinful passions – Saul was blinded for 3 days and did not eat or drink anything. It seems that Saul was so shaken by the experience that he was unable to eat or drink and simply sat in blind silence. What could be going through his mind at that time? Maybe thoughts like: “God, how could I have been so wrong? What have I done!” It must have been a humbling experience and Saul must have wrestled deep within himself his previous ideas about who God was and what pleased God. In the three days, Saul could have been dying to himself, dying to his sinful passions including pride, hatred, anger and fits of rage as he pointed out some of these sins in Galatians 5:16 and 19. Don’t miss this –

When we capture a vision of God, we recognize our serious need for a purified heart.

In Isaiah 6, the Prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne, and the seraphim flying to and fro and calling, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory”, and how Isaiah was immediately, profoundly and acutely aware of his desperate need for a purified heart. He declared “Woe is me! I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips.” When Isaiah’s vision was filled with the holiness, purity and majesty of God, he was caught up by his need for cleansing of his soul – to clear away the debris of personal sin and rebellion.

What about us? According to a seminary professor, it is the universal contention of classical spiritual writers that we need to confront the profound reality of our sinfulness. This is not a popular concept in churches today but ignoring it is at a great risk to our spiritual formation. To deny our propensity to sin or to ignore our need for purification is the worst kind of personal self-deception. Richard Foster wrote about the gift of tears. Maybe the people of God need to pray for the gift of tears. Some of us when we sin or commit wrongdoings we weep because we are caught, we are being punished or disciplined. But we do not actually weep about our sins - the sins that break the heart of God. Compunction means heart sorrow, being cut to the heart with contrition and repentance – can we make space and place for compunction over our sins because we know this breaks the heart of God?

## **Catching God’s Vision (Acts 9:10-22)**

- It is about how God sees – In the another part of the city, there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called Ananias in a vision and asked him to go to the

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house of Judas and ask for a man from Tarsus, named Saul, to pray and lay hands on him to restore his sight.

How would you feel if you were in a situation similar to Ananias'? – If you know a person who hates Christians, and he has been reporting to authorities whenever someone speaks to him about the gospel. But one day, God suddenly calls you to meet this man at a certain place, to pray and lay hands on him. What would you do? We can understand Ananias' hesitation and reluctance to reach out to Saul and much less to pray for him – because we also could be reluctant if we know we will be reported to the authorities. Ananias was asked to pray for someone he thinks is beyond God's reach, someone he rightly perceives as an enemy who means harm to him, to his family, and to followers of Jesus.

Are there individuals or types of people in your life that you assume are beyond God's reach, so that if God spoke to you about speaking to or praying with them, you may question the instruction?

- It is about obedience to Divine vision – God told Ananias to just go. He revealed to Ananias a picture of God's vision of Saul's future. God said that Saul is His chosen instrument to bear His name before the gentiles, their kings and the people of Israel. God will show Saul how much he must suffer for God's name. It was then up to Ananias to decide whether or not to accept what God said.

Ananias believed God and chose to see how God sees. Even though he did not fully understand, he chose to see Saul as the Lord saw him; and as someone who was loved by God, someone to whom the grace of God was also extended. Ananias chose obedience to Divine vision:

"When we see as God sees, we will do as God says!" - a city pastor

- It is about choosing faith over fear - pondering our inner journey ...  
- practising discernment

Ananias' faith in God's word triumphed over his fear. Ananias was a devout man (Acts 22:12) A writer reminds that we always need to ponder our inner journey as it influences the outer journey of our Christian spirituality, which is our conscious human response to God - how we are nourished, equipped and empowered by the inner life of prayer, meditation and devotion and the windows God opens for ministry and service to others, just as God did for Ananias.

It is also vital for us to truly recognize and respond to the presence of God by practising discernment. But recognizing and hearing from God can be abused at times. People do come and say that this is what God told me, this is what God said, this is what I saw as God's vision. That is not necessarily true as things can be filtered through our carnal coloured lenses of hearing and seeing. So, we need

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to be careful. The Bible speaks of discernment of spirits. In 1 John 4:1, we are reminded to test the spirits whether they are from God, to help us discern or distinguish the real from the fake, the true from the false - both in the world out there and also in the inner world of our thoughts and motives.

Ruth Haley Barton shares this:

*“Discerning people are able to recognise God’s guidance. Sometime by the very fact that, to some onlookers, it appears at some level to be foolish. But because we have come to a place of indifference, it doesn’t matter.”*

Typically, indifference has bad connotations, but in this case from a spiritual formation standpoint, indifference means I am indifferent to anything and everything but God’s will. *“When we have died to our need to be wise in others’ eyes or to prove ourselves according to human standards, we are finally ready to ask for God’s wisdom and receive it”.*

## **CONCLUSION**

We need to catch God’s vision truly. It’s not about being religious and doing religious things. It’s about encountering Jesus afresh each day of our lives and choosing to die to our sinful passions. It’s about recognizing our desperate need for purified hearts. It’s about seeing as God sees. It’s about being obedient to God’s Holy Word and direction. It’s about choosing faith over fear as we live our Christian lives. It’s about considering our inner journey so we may choose to live aright before God always. It’s about being discerning, choosing to be indifferent to anything but God’s will.

### **A. Review Sermon Application**

***Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God’s truth.***

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?
  
- 2a. Why is it important to catch the true vision of God?
- 2b. How should knowing “Catching God’s vision is not about being religious because a religious person can be sincere, but be sincerely wrong.” impact the way you live your life, do ministry and your leadership?

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## **B. Relate Sermon Content**

***Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.***

3. Invite someone to read Acts 9:1-22 aloud.
  - a.
    - (i) Imagine you were Ananias. How would you respond to God's call?
    - (ii) Why do you think Ananias could respond the way he did?
  - b.
    - (i) What hinders you from being able to discern God's will and way?
    - (ii) What is one thing you can do to better discern God's truth?
  
- 4a. Do you recognize your propensity to sin?
- 4b. When was the last time you wept over:
  - (i) Your sin? Why or why not?
  - (ii) The sin of others? Why or why not?
  - (iii) The sin of the world? Why or why not?
- 4c. How can your group members encourage one another to recognize your propensity to sin and make space and place for compunction because sin breaks God's heart?

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## C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

*Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.*

5. Share an incident where God revealed to you that your fervour, passion and dedication or religiosity was not according to God's vision, and you had to die to your personal passion to catch God's vision and fulfill His will.

OR

Give thanks to God that when we die to our need to be wise in others' eyes or to prove ourselves according to human standards, we are finally ready to ask for God's wisdom and receive it.

6. As a group, commit to fulfilling 3b(ii) and 4c above seeking the Holy Spirit's empowerment to make space and place for compunction in your group. Pray also for our church to desire to catch God's vision so we may see as God sees and always choose God's way by faith.

### Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. You Are Good - Israel Houghton

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YC9mF\\_pCCBM&ab\\_channel=jltm](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YC9mF_pCCBM&ab_channel=jltm)

2. Behold the Lamb - Passion

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1QRtxUF50&ab\\_channel=PassionVEVO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1QRtxUF50&ab_channel=PassionVEVO)

3. Be Thou My Vision - Hymn

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT\\_Hjg&ab\\_channel=EvolsiyTulip](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT_Hjg&ab_channel=EvolsiyTulip)

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