

# Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

**Date** : 20 October 2024

**Sermon Title** : God Is There!

**Speaker** : Rev Kenneth Huang

**Text** : Acts 9:23-43

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 6 October sermon on Acts 9:1-22, we heard about how God had touched the life of Saul, a persecutor of the early church, and opened his eyes (literally and more importantly, spiritually) to the truth of the resurrected Jesus and give Saul God's Vision. We praise God for changing the life of Saul - a man who thought he really knew who the God of the Bible was, but in fact, despite all his training, was actually quite ignorant and blinded to the truth about God. We also thank God for His faithful and brave servant Ananias who obeyed God and helped Saul have his eyes opened. The last few verses of that sermon, Acts 9:19b-22, set the context for today. It was really great to hear of how Saul, instead of preaching against Jesus and going against His disciples, had been converted and was now witnessing for Jesus and urging fellow Jews to believe that Jesus was the Messiah – the Anointed one from God – that they had been waiting for.

## Acts 9:23-43

Let us look at a map of the places mentioned: Jerusalem, Lydda, Joppa and Tarsus



Having read today's passage, our immediate response is to really rejoice:

- at the conversion of Saul from him being a persecutor of the early church to becoming a strong and key witness for Jesus who would eventually bring the Good News of Jesus from Jerusalem to the ends of the known world in his time.
- at the healing of Aeneas of his paralysis and how it helped win people to the faith.
- at the bringing back to life of Tabitha who died and how that also led many to believe in Jesus.

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*For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7*

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We rejoice because we are reading of God acting in His grace and miraculously intervening as He saw fit in the lives of these 3 persons we have just mentioned and the immediate and wonderful effect it had for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Especially when Saul, a key enemy of the early church, became a key disciple of Jesus, for his conversion led to the early church, enjoying a time of peace and being built up, as it once again had a growth in numbers. (v.31)

It was also recorded that the early church was “living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit”. What a beautiful description of how the life of Christians and the life of any church should be lived and living – *in the fear (i.e.: deep reverence and obedience) of God and encouraged (i.e.: being led and empowered) by the Holy Spirit.*

## **The common truth to take note of and really believe in**

God is there whenever His disciples face:

(i) Persecution or great difficulties due to our faith, (ii) illness, or (iii) death, and He will make a way for us as He sees fit.

For if He were not there, then all the wonderful things we just read of and praised Him for would not have taken place. This may seem obvious, but the question is.....

**Do we believe, really personally believe that God is indeed there with us when bad things happen to us (as bad things happened to the newly converted Saul with the persecution he faced, to Aeneas with his major illness, and to Tabitha with her untimely and even wasteful death), and that He has not abandoned us?**

If we do, that is great and praise God! But if we do not believe that God is there for us, we may slowly but surely be disheartened in our faith and may even leave the faith, as we accuse God of being unloving, unkind, unfair and so unfaithful to us. This kind of response is the very opposite of what God wants for us to experience. Remember that He wants us to live in the fear (i.e.: deep reverence and obedience) of God and encouraged (i.e.: being led and empowered) by the Holy Spirit, resulting in us having peace and being built up in our faith – which, by the way is what we really need, especially when bad things happen to us.

**To avoid us being disheartened in our faith, we must affirm that God is there for us and that He will make a way for us as He sees fit:**

❖ When we, for example, face persecution/great difficulties due to our faith, just as the newly converted Saul did – once in Damascus and once in Jerusalem. Saul faced immediate, intense and fierce opposition and persecution from his fellow Jews as he witnessed that Jesus was the Messiah - strong push back and death threats, resulting in him having to quickly flee. (vv.23- 25) Thank God that Saul learnt of these plans to kill him in Damascus and again fellow disciples of Jesus

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found out of death threats to Saul in Jerusalem (vv. 26, 28-30). In both incidents, the truth is that God was there for Saul, for Saul himself testified later that God had intervened and told him personally to leave Jerusalem. (Acts 22:17-18)

Praise God that He was there with Saul when he faced persecution and made a way for him both times. For if God had not intervened to save Saul's life, God's call on Saul's life as stated in Acts 9:15 would have been cut short and we would not have the rest of the Acts of the Apostle where the Good News of Jesus, as per Acts 1:8, move out of Israel into modern day Türkiye and from there, to Greece and beyond through the brave and faithful witness of Saul, who later became Paul the Apostle.

## Do not be fussy

As a man with a price on his head, Saul must have been glad that God was there with him and made a way for him to escape. Yet, we wonder if he was ready to be unceremoniously pushed into a basket and lowered down out of a hole in the wall in Damascus or later, rushed away from Jerusalem and sent home to Tarsus. A lesson here for all of us is that when we are faced with persecution or difficulties because of our faith, let us not be fussy as to the manner God helps us. Let us also not specify exactly how we think He should help us. Instead, let us just be glad that God is there for us, and that He will make a way for us, as He sees fit.

❖ Whenever we have to face grave illness and even death as in the cases of Aeneas and Tabitha respectively. For Aeneas, God determined that Peter should help bring immediate healing to him in the Name of Jesus as Aeneas was cured of this paralysis, somewhat similar to how Jesus healed the bed-ridden man in Mark 2. For Tabitha, God determined that Peter, after a time of prayer, called her to "Get Up" and she opened her eyes, sat up, and with his help, got up on her feet alive once more. In both cases, the miraculous healing of Aeneas from his paralysis and the miraculous bringing back to life of Tabitha after she died, had massive impact on both the people who knew them and those who did not. For Aeneas, it was stated "*All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord*" (9:35), and for Tabitha, it was stated, "*This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord*" (9:42). Through the miracles they experienced of being healed and being made alive again, many more were brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Yet, it goes without saying that not all Christians who are persecuted, gravely ill or who die will be rescued, healed or brought back to life. There are and will be times – probably more times – when God is there and yet in His wisdom, He determines that it is better for a good and faithful Christian not to be saved, healed, or brought back to life. This is very difficult to immediately appreciate, especially when we have been praying for God to take away the persecution or great difficulty, or the illness or the impending death facing us or our loved ones.

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We read later in Acts, that Saul “sometimes he didn’t quite escape. Sometimes they caught him, imprisoned him, beat him (nearly to death). He did indeed have to suffer many things for Jesus’ sake.” (Boice). Then, we quickly remember the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7); not to mention, the deaths of the original Disciples of Jesus and countless others.

At times like these, we can only acknowledge that God, in His wisdom, decided that these faithful disciples should not be saved, healed or brought back to life and He would bring them to be with Him forever, with the promises stated in Rev 21:1-4 to be experienced, “a new heaven and a new earth” ...“where He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain”,....

Some of us may wonder – whether the Good News of Jesus would have spread so much faster and wider around the world to all peoples if only disciples like Stephen, Peter and Paul had, by God’s power and grace, been “kept alive” and not allowed to be persecuted or to become ill or to be killed. Yet, this has never been God’s plan for the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus – the Good News – to those who still do not know who Jesus is. His plan remains and will always be that **you and I in our time and generation are to make disciples intentionally** wherever we are, to whoever we meet, whatever the time it may be, and for how-ever long it may take.

## CONCLUSION

To avoid being disheartened in our faith when bad things happen to us, we must affirm that God is there for us and that He will make a way for us as He sees fit. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul responded in faith when he faced difficulties, saying: “*But God said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*” By living in fear of God and being encouraged by the Holy Spirit, we too can navigate the difficulties due to our faith, illnesses and even death, without losing our faith. Let us be empowered by the Holy Spirit to share the Gospel and make disciples in our time and generation, wherever we are, to whoever we meet, whatever the time it may be, and for how-ever long it may take, trusting that God will make a way for us as He sees fit.

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# **Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion**

## **B. Relate Sermon Content**

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

3. We learnt that the early church was “living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit”.
  - a. Why is it necessary for the church to be “living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit”?
  - b. Are you living in the fear of the Lord and being encouraged by the Holy Spirit?
  - c. If you are not, or unsure, what is one thing you can do and how can your group members encourage and support you in it?
  
4. Reflect and share about the difficulties or challenges you have faced due to your faith, or grave illness or even death, in the past, or today:
  - a. Do you usually specify exactly how you think God should help you?
  - b.
    - (i) Had you been able to affirm that God is there for you and that He will make a way for you as He sees fit?
    - (ii) If you had not been able to affirm that God is there for you and that He will make a way for you as He sees fit, how can your Life Group encourage and support you to do so?
  
- 5a. Discuss the actions you will take, to make disciples intentionally, “wherever you are, to whoever you meet, whatever time it may be, and for however long it may take”, in your time and generation.
- 5b. As a Life Group, seek the Holy Spirit’s leading in how your group can also live out 5a above in 2025.

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## **C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action**

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

5. Share and give thanks to God if the Holy Spirit had encouraged you to share the Gospel of Jesus and make disciples wherever you are, to whoever you meet, whatever the time it may be, and for how-ever long it may take.

OR

Give thanks that God is indeed there with you when bad things happen to you and He will make a way for you as He sees fit.

6. With a prayer partner, affirm one another of God's faithfulness and pray for your spiritual eyes to be opened to see His presence and help that He sends when you go through difficult situations in your life so your faith may be strengthened. Confess and repent if you had doubted His ability to make a way for you or if you have insisted in the exact way He should help you. Seek the Holy Spirit's empowerment to deliver you from persecution, illness or any other challenges that you are facing. Pray also for our church to be committed to living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit so we will be able to share the Gospel of Jesus and make disciples wherever we are, to whoever we meet, whatever the time it may be, and for how-ever long it may take and fulfil God's plan for us.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. Behold the Lamb – Passion

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

2. God I Look To You - Bethel

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3u3ZG8ztGEI&ab\\_channel=HimigWorshipSongs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3u3ZG8ztGEI&ab_channel=HimigWorshipSongs)

3. God Will Make a Way – Don Moen

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoYC1jRI1cU&ab\\_channel=WorshipVideos%28LouangeetAdoration%29](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoYC1jRI1cU&ab_channel=WorshipVideos%28LouangeetAdoration%29)

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