

9:1–2 *Saul’s Threats and Plans*

The Wrath of Saul Was Not Permitted to Succeed.

Ephrem the Syrian: This is why the humble voice accompanied the intense light, so that from the combination of the humble and the sublime, our Lord might produce help for the persecutor, just as all his assistance is produced from a combination of the small and great. For the humility of our Lord prevailed from the womb to the tomb.... His nature is not simply humble, nor is it simply sublime; rather they are two natures, lofty and humble, one mixed in the other. Homily on Our Lord 34.4

9:4 *Why Do You Persecute Me?*

The Heavenly Lord on Earth.

Augustine: How can we show that he is there and that he is also here? Let Paul answer for us, who was previously Saul.... First of all, the Lord’s own voice from heaven shows this: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Had Paul climbed up to heaven then? Had Paul even thrown a stone at heaven? It was Christians he was persecuting, then he was tying up, then he was dragging off to be put to death, then he was everywhere hunting out of their hiding places and never sparing when he found them. To him the Lord said, “Saul, Saul.” Where is he crying out from? Heaven. So he’s up above. “Why are you persecuting me?” So he’s down below. Sermon 122.6.5

The Lord Shared Our Human State.

Basil the Great: For it is written, “And when all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be made subject to him who subjected all things to him.”⁹ Do you not fear, O man, the God who is called unsubjected? For he makes your subjection his own, and, because of your struggle against virtue, he calls himself unsubjected. Thus, he even said at one time that he himself was the one persecuted; for he says, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” when Saul was hastening to Damascus, desiring to put in bonds the disciples of Christ. Again, he calls himself naked, if anyone of his brothers is naked. “I was naked,” he says, “and you covered me.”¹⁰ And still again, when another was in prison, he said that he himself was the one imprisoned. For he himself took up our infirmities and bore the burden of our ills.¹¹ And one of our infirmities is insubordination, and this he bore. Therefore, even the adversities that happen to us the Lord makes his own, taking upon himself our sufferings because of his fellowship with us. Letter

The Humility of Jesus.

Ephrem the Syrian: The One who conquered persecutors [here] below and reigns over angels [in heaven] above spoke from above in a humble voice. The One who on earth pronounced ten woes ¹³ against his crucifiers, above pronounced not a single woe against Saul, his persecutor. Our Lord pronounced woes against his crucifiers to teach his disciples not to flatter their killers. Our Lord spoke humbly from above so that the leaders of his church would speak humbly. Homily on Our Lord 26.1.¹⁴

9:5 I Am Jesus, Whom You Are Persecuting

Paul Drawn by Christ Himself.

Chrysostom: The eunuch was on the road and Paul was on the road, but the latter was drawn by no other than Christ himself, for this was too great a work for the apostles. It was great indeed that with the apostles at Jerusalem and no one of authority at Damascus, he returned from there converted. And those at Damascus knew that he had not come from Jerusalem converted, for he brought letters that he might place the believers in chains. Like a consummate physician, Christ brought help to him, once the fever reached its height. It was necessary that he should be quelled in the midst of his frenzy, for then especially he would fall and condemn himself as one guilty of dreadful audacity. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 19.¹⁵

9:6 Rise and Enter Damascus

Christ's Wise Dealing with Paul.

Ambrose: Although Paul was struck and taken up and was terrified because blindness had befallen him, still he began to come near when he said, "Lord, what will you have me do?" ¹⁸ For that reason he is called the youngest by Christ, ¹⁹ so that he who was called to grace could be excused from the guilt of his hazardous years. Yes, Christ saw him when the light shone round him; because young people are recalled from sin more by fear than by reason, Christ applied the goad and mercifully admonished him not to kick against it. Joseph 10.58.²⁰

9:8 Saul Could See Nothing

The Injury Was for Good.

Ephrem the Syrian: [Saul's] impairment did not [result] from our compassionate Lord, who spoke humbly there. Rather, [it was the result] of the intense light that shone intensely here. This light was not a punishment that befell Paul on account of the things he had done. It injured him with the intensity of its rays, as he himself said. Homily on Our Lord 26.2.22

Encounter with Christ.

Ambrose: Although he saw nothing when his eyes were opened, still he saw Christ. And it was fitting that he saw Christ present and also heard him speaking. That overshadowing is not the overshadowing of blindness by grace. Indeed, it is said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you." ²³ On the Patriarchs 12.58.24

9:9 For Three Days

The Power of the Resurrection.

Chrysostom: "And for three days neither did he eat nor drink, being blinded." What could equal this? To compensate the discouragement in the matter of Stephen, here is encouragement, in the bringing in of Paul. Though that sadness had its consolation in the fact of Stephen's making such an end, yet it also received this further consolation. Moreover, the bringing in of the villages of the Samaritans afforded very great comfort. But why did this take place not at the very first but after these things? That it might be shown that Christ was indeed risen. This furious assailant of Christ, the man who would not believe in his death and resurrection, the persecutor of his disciples, how should this man have become a believer, had not the power of his resurrection been great indeed? Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 19.25

9:10 A Disciple Named Ananias

Paul Converted Only by Christ.

Chrysostom: Why was it that he did not draw upon one of the trustworthy and great, or cause one to be forthcoming for the purpose of instructing Paul? Because Paul was not to be brought in by a man but by

Christ himself, as in fact this man taught him nothing but only baptized him. For once baptized, he was to draw upon himself the grace of the Spirit by his zeal and great eagerness. That Ananias was not among the very distinguished is clear. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 20.1

9:13 I Have Heard About Saul

Obedience Greater Than Fear.

Chrysostom: Let no one imagine that Ananias speaks in disbelief of what was said or because he imagines that Christ was deceived. Far from it! Rather, afraid and trembling, he did not even pay attention to what was said, once he heard the name Paul. Moreover, the Lord did not say that he has blinded him. Fear had already taken hold of Ananias's soul at the mention of Paul's name. "Look," he says, "to whom you are betraying me. 'Indeed he came here for this very purpose,' to arrest all who invoke your name. I fear he shall take me to Jerusalem. Why do you cast me into the mouth of the lion?" He is terrified even as he speaks these words, so that we may learn from all sides the excellence of the man. For it is not surprising that these things were said by Jews, but that these men should be so terrified shows very great proof of the power of God. Both the fear is shown and the obedience that is greater after the fear. For there was indeed need of strength. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 20.2

9:15 A Chosen Instrument

A Chosen Instrument.

Jerome: Why is the apostle Paul called a chosen vessel? Assuredly because he is a repertory of the law and of the holy Scriptures. Letter 53.3.3

9:16 He Must Suffer for the Sake of My Name

An Acceptable Sacrifice.

Orosius: When Paul was saved there where he had bound Christ by persecuting him, he would be afflicted with suffering for Christ, right up to his own death, but [he would] be glorified in the resurrection. So it is, because "mercy and truth go always before the face of God;"⁵ so that if a voluntary sacrifice of an afflicted

spirit and a contrite heart is offered in time by the lamenting person, truth arises in mercy, and in the end mercy is exalted over judgment. Defense Against the Pelagians 14.6

9:17 Filled with the Holy Spirit

The Action of the Holy Spirit.

Cyril of Jerusalem: The Holy Spirit worked immediately and not only changed Paul's blindness to sight but also imparted the seal to his soul, making him a vessel of election to carry the name of the Lord who had appeared to him before kings and the children of Israel; and he fashioned his former persecutor into a herald and a good servant who "from Jerusalem round about as far as Illyricum completed the gospel of Christ." 7 Catechetical Lecture 17.26.8

Saul Taught to Think Modestly of Himself.

Chrysostom: It seems to me that both Paul and Cornelius, as soon as the words were spoken, received the Spirit. And yet he who gave it was not great. Thus there was nothing of man [humankind] in what was done, nor was anything done by man, but God was present, the worker of these things. At the same time [the Lord] both teaches him to think modestly of himself, in that he does not bring him to the apostles who were so admired, and shows that there is nothing of man here. He was not filled, however, with the Spirit that works signs, so that in this way as well his faith might be shown. For he worked no wonders. "And immediately," it says, "in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' " Not that he is risen or that he lives, but immediately and precisely, he expounded the doctrine that he is the Son of God. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 20.9

The Right Order of Teaching.

John Cassian: He sent him then to an old man and determined that he must be instructed by his teaching rather than by his own. Otherwise what might have been rightly done with regard to Paul would have given a bad example of presumption to those who came after him, since each individual would conclude that he too should be trained in similar fashion under the guidance and by the teaching of God alone rather than by the instruction of his elders. Conference 2.15.1.11

9:18 *Sight Restored, Paul Is Baptized*

Eyes Open and Still Unseeing.

Chrysostom: “And there something like scales fell from his eyes.” Saying these words [Ananias] laid hands on him. Some say this was a sign of his blindness. Why did he not blind his eyes [entirely]? It was more paradoxical that “when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing.” This he suffered in respect to the law, until the name of Jesus was laid on him. “And immediately,” it says, “he was baptized and took food and was strengthened.” He was weakened then both from his journey and from his fear, both from hunger and from dejection. Wishing therefore to deepen his dejection, he made the man blind until the coming of Ananias; and to prevent him from thinking the blindness imaginary, the scales. Paul needed no other teaching; his experience was his instruction. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 20.12

Paul’s Conversion Was Not Coerced.

Chrysostom: If anyone should call this the effect of compulsion, [let him note that] the same thing happened to Elymas. How was it then that he was not changed? What could be more compelling than the earthquake at the resurrection, the report of the soldiers, the other miracles and the sight of him risen? These things, however, do not compel belief but are apt to teach it. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 19.15

9:20 *Immediately Paul Proclaimed Jesus*

Paul Preaches the Full Gospel from the Beginning.

Chrysostom: “And immediately,” it says, “in the synagogues he preached Jesus.” Not that he is risen—not this. No, nor that he lives. What then? Immediately he strictly expounded the doctrine that this “is the Son of God.” Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 20.2