

# "God's Unique Solutions"

Text: Acts 9:1-20

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, our text for today needs no introduction. It is the account of the conversion of St. Paul and it is found in the Ninth Chapter of the Book of Acts:

**ESV (Acts 9:1-20) But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. <sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. <sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." <sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." <sup>17</sup> So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; <sup>19</sup> and taking food, he was**

**strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."**

This is the Word of God. May you never doubt that these are just that - the very words that God himself has given us – and that we are blessed whenever we hear these words and treasure them. To this end we also pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Everyone can recognize problems, it's the solutions that often remain in question. Especially ironic here is the fact that the solutions are most often also easily recognized, it's just that mankind does not want to do what the obvious solution requires. Think of AIDS, for example. Simple morality (following God's rules of right and wrong) would all but eradicate the disease within a generation, but man would rather throw billions of dollars at the problem to find a treatment that would allow for continued disobedience. Or think of things like teen pregnancy and drug abuse. Obviously big problems, but the solutions are not at all complicated. Individually and collectively, we just don't want to do what needs to be done. It would require cleaning up our society and returning to really *raising* our children - **"bringing up a child in the way he should go"** – and few seem willing to make that sort of commitment and sacrifice.

Many will accuse us of being a naïve and simplistic here, yet these are very real solutions. Sinful mankind just lives in a high state of denial that God's simple cures can work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This represents half of the reason why mankind rejects God's solutions to today's problems. To mankind, God's cures lack the necessary sophistication.

The *second* reason mankind rejects God's solutions is that on which we will focus this morning: In the mind of sinful man, in addition to their lack of perceived sophistication, God's solutions are just too strange and unbelievable to really work.

First let me ask you, how do *you* go about solving problems? Whether we realize it or not, almost all of us try to solve problems along very similar lines. The first thing we usually do is to try solutions that have worked in the past, either for us or for others. The baby is crying and last night it worked to rock him to sleep, so that is what you do. You spilled milk in the back seat of the car and now it stinks in there, but someone told you to pour vinegar on the spot to kill the bacteria and the smell will go away, so you give it a try. When faced with problems

we almost always turn to our own memories and experiences to solve them. In other words, whatever has worked in the past is what we try in the present. The next thing we do, especially if we have no experience with a certain problem, is to apply what seems right and reasonable. Your car won't turn over. It's never done that before and so you have no "history" on which you can draw. What do you do? You wiggle the steering wheel and the ignition. Opening the hood you wiggle the battery cables, thump on the starter, kick the fender. All of this seems reasonable, so we give it a try.

Most people quit trying at this point and begin to look for outside help. A rare and wonderful few, however, will get desperate and try anything. This is probably how some pretty bizarre solutions were discovered over the years. How else would someone discover that you can hypnotize an alligator by turning it over and stroking its belly? (It is said that the Seminole Indians discovered that little trick, by the way, which probably explains why there aren't many Seminole Indians around anymore.)

What does all of this have to do with our text and topic for today? The point here is that we immediately tend to reject the truly wise solutions that come from God, and opt instead for our own resolutions. Our text presents a perfect example. To understand what went on in our text we must first try to remove from our consideration all that we now know about the Apostle Paul in his later life, and fill our minds only with what we and the early Christians knew about the Pharisee Paul – or Saul as he was then known. Before this man was converted and renamed "Paul," he was public enemy number one to the early Christians. They knew him as the man who went from house to house in Jerusalem arresting and imprisoning Christians. It was his personal mission to annihilate "the Way" - which is what early Christianity was first called. When Saul had done his worst in Jerusalem, our text tells us that he got official sanction to carry his work to other cities, beginning with Damascus. Note the chilling contrast in our text, where we are told that Saul "went on his way" as he attempted to destroy "the Way."

Imagine the Christians in Damascus at this time. They knew that Saul was coming and they knew what he intended to do to them - as also he had done to the Christians in Jerusalem. We know this from the words of Ananias in our text. These Christians *knew* that they had a very big problem and you can bet that they prayed long and hard to their Lord Jesus for a solution to that problem. What they didn't know was that God also had a need to fill at this time. He needed a special man to carry the saving message of the gospel to the Gentiles. God, in his superior wisdom, power, and grace, supplied a solution to both problems at once by the conversion of Saul.

The reaction of the Christians was interesting, but typical. Is this the solution they would have pursued? Probably not. Killing Saul along the way would have seemed a more reasonable and reliable course of action – although that surely would have resulted in terrible reprisals from Jerusalem. It would also have given credence to the charge that Christianity posed a threat to the then-current ruling structure. So it was that since God's solution was not man's solution, Ananias was ready to reject it - even after the fact. God told him in our text what he had done to Saul and what he expected Ananias to do, but how did Ananias respond? He challenged God's solution. He presumed to offer God information - as if God did not already know all things. Ananias told God just what he knew of this man Saul and what he believed Saul's intentions to be. What did God say in reply? **"Go!"** In man's judgment, God had articulated an irrational solution and therefore man was ready to reject it. God said simply, **"Go!"** God was telling Ananias, *"This is my solution. It doesn't have to make sense to you, Ananias. Just do it. I have plans for this man."*

How many of *God's* plans and *God's* solutions in your life do not make sense to you? How many of God's solutions are you ready to abandon simply because they seem too unsophisticated, or they are not what you would have suggested? Ask yourself this: What was once your greatest problem and what was God's solution? The answer is that each one of us, from conception to coffin, was steeped in sin. Sin invades and contaminates every aspect of our lives. Every thought, every word, every deed is polluted – so much so that Isaiah lamented: ***"We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."***<sup>ESV</sup>([Isaiah 64:6](#))

The Bible tells us clearly that even one sin is enough to damn us to hell. Since all have sinned, all had been condemned to hell forever. But God provided an absolutely amazing solution to this problem. Again, reason this out for yourself, considering whether God's solution to our sin problem was logical, rational, or predictable? God's solution was to send his beloved Son to suffer and die for the sins of the world. Jesus had no sin of his own, but our sins were placed on him and he was killed for them. Isaiah tells us in his 53<sup>rd</sup> Chapter that ***"the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."*** And now God further tells us that he freely forgives all sins to all men for Jesus' sake. This forgiveness does not only apply to us if we believe that it is true. God in Christ has said "Not guilty!" to every man, woman and child because of what Jesus has done! Your doubting does not change what Jesus has done

for you. The debt of your sins has been paid whether you believe it or not.

Think of it this way. Imagine that an attorney walks up to you and announces that you have just inherited \$10 million from a long lost relative, as he holds out a check for the entire amount (less fees, of course...). If you refuse to believe that the whole thing is for real, would that in itself make it untrue? Of course not. If the inheritance is yours, it is yours. So it is with our salvation. God has pronounced you "not guilty" because of what Jesus did. The unimaginable gifts of forgiveness of sins and eternal life are yours. Is it possible to "tear up the check" and refuse the incredible gift of Eternal Life in Jesus Christ? Yes, it is, but that does not change the fact that your sins were paid in full on the cross of Calvary. Only your unbelief can now damn you – your rejection of God's solution.

Does this sound reasonable to natural man? No, it does not. We would naturally expect to have to perform some difficult and painful penance, or provide enough good works to "make up for" our sins. God tells us instead in Ephesians 2:8-9, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast."***

Learn from this that God's solutions very often do not make sense to us. You will find them in his Word, but you must allow that Word the time and silence to speak to your heart. Learn then both to recognize and to accept God's solutions as *true* wisdom, knowing that his is the kind of wisdom that solves financial problems by *forgetting about* financial problems and focusing instead on the Kingdom of God (***"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."***) His is the kind of wisdom that calls for solving marriage problems not by trying to fix what you believe to be wrong with your spouse, but by focusing on your own sins and shortcomings. His is the kind of wisdom that solves problems of greed and coveting by focusing on thanksgiving and contentment. His is the kind of wisdom that tells us that sometimes the problem itself is the solution to a far greater problem of which we were not even aware, as when this same Apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh" prevented him both from becoming prideful and from taking credit and glory for what God alone had accomplished.

In the end, we will all see that our Good Shepherd never once allowed one problem to enter our lives that he did not use in some way for our spiritual good. Since we have a God who can be trusted without hesitation and without reservation – a God who keeps every single one of his promises – we can also now trust him to provide solutions for every single one of our innumerable problems – starting with sin itself.

Carry your problems to your merciful God in prayer. Lay each one before his throne, ***"casting all your cares upon Him, because He cares for you."*** In thanksgiving therefore we pray: *Dear Father, we thank you for your most radical solution to our sin problem. We pray now that you would give us both your guidance when we face problems in our lives, and the wisdom and courage to accept and implement the solutions that you have revealed to us in your Word. In Jesus' name we ask this. Amen.*

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 5:1-7** Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, <sup>4</sup> and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>5</sup> And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." <sup>6</sup> ¶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 21:1-14** After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> ¶ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. <sup>7</sup> That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. <sup>9</sup> ¶ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Second Sunday after Easter – May 5, 2019**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 467 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Built on the Rock the Church doth Stand"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Revelation 5:1-7) Because the imagery is often disturbing or unclear, many Christians read the Book of Revelation with a certain amount of trepidation and uncertainty. The Book is, however, intended by God himself as a source of comfort for Christians of all ages. We are to read the Book as God's promise that no matter how dark things appear here on this earth, Jesus Christ has already triumphed, and the sacrifice he made as our sin payment has already been accepted by his Father as full and complete. When asked what he was getting out of his study of the Book of Revelation, one Christian summed it up nicely: "All I know for sure is that Jesus is winning."

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Page 26)

**The Second Lesson:** (John 21:1-14) Our second lesson records another appearance of Jesus after his resurrection from the dead, this time to some of his disciples as they were fishing on the Sea of Tiberius (also known as the Sea of Galilee). Our curiosity is piqued by Peter's declaration that he is "going fishing." Some read it as his decision to return to his former way of life, others as Peter simply deciding how best to use his time as he awaited direction from his Lord. Whatever he had in mind, the bottom line is that he didn't hesitate to arrange his life according to his Lord's direction.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 35 (Red Hymnal)

"Songs of Praise the Angels Sang"

## The Sermon – Text: Acts 9:1-20 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"God's Unique Solutions"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 320 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus, Think on Me"

## The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 780 (Brown Hymnal)

"Dear Lord, to Your True Servants Give"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (27) Average (34)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Women's Fellowship Meeting
<b>Monday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Study Conference in Pierre
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour

**CLC News –** ILC Teaching Program Graduates Nathan Buck and June Schmid have been assigned to St. John's of Clarkston and Faith of Markesan, respectively. Seminary Graduate Sam Naumann has been assigned to Resurrection of Corpus Christi. Pastor David Schaller has returned the call to Prince of Peace of Loveland. Pastor Terry Stringer, who previously applied for colloquy into the CLC, has now expressed his intention to enroll in the Pre-Theology Department of ILC.

**Women's Fellowship Meeting –** The Women's Fellowship of St. Paul is scheduled to meet this morning following the fellowship hour. For more information please see Cindy Ollenburger.

**Easter Flowers Available –** We still have Easter flowers that can be taken home by those who bought them or shared with someone in the community.

**Confirmation Sunday –** June 2 has been designated as this year's Confirmation Sunday at St Paul. Colin Fettig is this year's confirmand. Holy Communion will be moved from May 26 to June 2, and a fellowship meal is planned.