

Sermon Transcript

April 27, 2024

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By the way, I think I've forgotten in the past, as you know, we have a Kenyan church plant that we're working on.

And the last time I was there, they asked me to bid you greetings from them, and I think I forgot to share that.

So I want to bid you greetings from our Kenyan brothers and sisters who are worshiping over in another room here in the same building.

They are always pleased to be attached to our church.

And they were pleased to have me over there and receive the greetings from our church here.

So, greetings.

And it is a special day, I think, because summer is playing hide and seek with us.

I don't know if you guys looked at your thermometers this morning, but I remember when I looked at the weather forecast and I saw what it was going to be today, I was like, I was super looking forward to this.

Because as most of you know, I am not from the desert or the Southwest or Arizona or anywhere where 120 degrees is normal.

And seeing that the high was going to be less than 80 put a little extra pep in my step today.

So I'm happy, I am pleased to be here.

I wanted to share with you a story, if I may, about an architect.

Architect who lived in Middle Eastern country and really had an interesting life.

And I guess it's more interesting because I'm not from the Middle East, so anything from another culture automatically captures my interest.

And so this gentleman lived in the Middle Eastern nation that was ran by an extremist group.

They kept a pretty good tight grip on the people.

Everybody was expected to follow the state religion.

They didn't have the freedom of religion in the same way that we do.

They weren't allowed to choose where they wanted to go worship.

They weren't able to hop, skip and church shop, et cetera.

There was one religion and you will follow it.

Anyone caught going to the wrong church would be arrested.

It would be turned in for punishment.

And if it was known that you were previously part of the state church and you left the state church, the punishment was usually death.

I mean, unless you could come forward and say, okay, I changed my mind.

I'm going back to the state church.

I'll be obedient.

If you couldn't do that, if you couldn't recant and become part of the state church, your sentence was pretty well set at death.

And there really wasn't a whole lot anybody was going to say in your defense.

That's just the way it was.

This architect, and please understand, he was only an architect by trade.

He went to school, he got the degree, he got the education, he learned everything about it so he could make good money.

You ever know anybody who just took a job, made a career because the money?

Anyone?

Someone.

Okay, one or two.

Jazzy, thank you.

I'm glad you knew someone like that.

Because I think it's probably more common than what we realize.

Not everybody actually goes out and chases down that dream career that they would, you know, the childhood dream.

You know, you're growing up, my childhood dream was baseball.

And I chased that until I tore my hamstring.

And then I found another career to chase.

It wasn't until later in life that I found my dream job was actually being a pastor.

And the Lord, I didn't have to chase that.

The Lord drew me into that.

But, you know, I praise God for that.

But this architect was an architect because that's what was gonna make him money.

He was highly educated, he could make a good living, but it wasn't his passion.

That wasn't what was in his heart.

He had something else in his heart that he really wanted to do.

He was really caught up in the religion of this extremist group.

And he spent more and more time with these people.

He hung out with them, he had dinner with them.

He got more and more involved in the workings of this religion.

And he had friends who their activity was to go hunt down the people who were going against the state religion.

That was what they did.

And so he started getting involved with them.

And you know, please understand at first, you know, he's got his job, and he's very dedicated to making his living.

That was a big thing.

If you could make good money, you made good money.

Because it wasn't common in that land that you could make good money.

But more and more, he found himself drawn to take days off from work so that he could go with his friends and go hunt down these people.

There was something about the thrill of the chase.

There was something about that got him excited and he got revved up, I guess you could say.

And there was something about finding these people and breaking into their house and tying them up and dragging them off to court so they would have to face the punishment for their crimes of going against the state church.

And he got very caught up into this and he got very driven, so to speak, to pursue this more and more and more.

His friends kept pressuring him to keep coming with him.

The more he hung out with his friends, the more he wanted to be part of them.

The more he went with them, the better he got.

It was a surprise, his comrades, at how good he was at sniffing out these little cells of apostate people, we'll call them.

That's what they call them.

He got really good at this.

He had a network.

And he found that people were cueing him in at where these people's suspicious religious activity might be happening in this house down in the basement because they heard singing and it sounded like worship.

And so he was really good at this.

He wasn't a pastor.

He wasn't a religious leader.

He was trained as an architect.

But this was his passion, the church.

And he just knew in his heart that he was doing what God wanted him to do.

And there was excitement amongst him and his friends once because they had captured a really high profile Christian.

This guy, he wasn't a pastor either.

He wasn't an evangelist.

But he was getting people in large numbers to follow him to leave the state church and to become Christians.

And so they were really excited because they finally captured him and they were bringing him to court and he was gonna have to face his crimes.

And so they all took off work that day and they went.

And they watched the trial with anticipation.

And as they watched the trial, the going back and forth, the accusations being made, and then the defense came up and it was a good strong defense.

Don't get me wrong.

This guy knew what he was doing when he was defending.

He could have been a lawyer even though he wasn't.

He was really gifted.

And they watched and they watched.

And as these courts sometimes do, they reached a point where they didn't even bother to wait for a decision.

They didn't even bother to wait for a sentence.

They were so angry at this guy who had the audacity to bring his faith into their courtroom that they drug him out and they killed him right there in the street.

And this architect watched it all happen and it triggered something inside him.

He knew this is what his life was supposed to be, to root out that evil of these Christians.

Well, the leaders of this group had been watching this architect for some time.

They liked what they saw.

He was zealous.

He went after people.

He got results.

He was better than any of the others in getting people and bringing them to court so that they could try him.

And they'd been watching him for some time and so they decided, you know what, we need to promote this guy up in our ranks.

We need to bring him in.

We've been watching him and in fact, we've been mentoring him into this.

And I believe that if we were to bring him in amongst the leaders, he could be maybe train other people so that we could root this out and get rid of this Christian religion forever.

Get it out of our midst.

And so they did.

They raised him.

They made him part of their group.

What he didn't know is that as much, and what they didn't know, is as much as he was seeking Christians to bring them to trial, someone else was seeking him just as hard.

And this seeker would not be denied.

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Genesis chapter three, verse nine.

Thank you, Phil, for reading that.

As always, you read it with emphasis and I appreciate that.

Genesis three, verse nine.

"Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'"

You see, what was going on in the Garden of Eden is God had created Adam and Eve and the garden and everything in all perfection.

You see it all throughout the Bible.

Every day, it was good, it was good, it was good.

And then he gets to Adam and Eve and it was fantastic.

I'm paraphrasing, but it was fantastic.

God was happy.

He was elated.

He created everything in perfection and everything was laid out the way that he wanted it to be.

And he sent Adam and Eve in the garden.

He sent them about their business, but something had happened because someone else had infiltrated the garden and come along and tempted Adam and Eve.

And with the choice that they weighed out in their heads, they made almost an instantaneous decision and they chose the enemy of God instead of following God.

And so the same day, the same day, God comes down to the garden.

It's what he usually did.

He always stopped in the evening.

It's like a dad getting off work and coming by and stopping to see the kids, you know, before supper and to have supper with the family.

That's the way God the Father was with Adam and Eve.

And as he enters the garden, he's walking along through the plants, looking around.

Adam, Eve, where are you?

Now, this is God Almighty.

He knows where they are, right?

He doesn't have to look, but Adam and Eve are hiding.

The Bible says that they were afraid of God.

They heard him in the garden and they were afraid, so they hid.

And so Adam and Eve are back there hiding in the bushes away from God like that's gonna stop God from seeing where they are.

God knew where they were before he ever walked into the garden.

That wasn't God's point.

God's point was he was seeking, where are you in our relationship?

Why are you suddenly afraid of me?

What has happened to come between us?

And it's not that God wants to know.

He wants Adam and Eve to know.

He wants them to stop and think about this.

What is different about me coming into the garden to spend time with you today than yesterday?

What is the difference?

And so God comes down and he's seeking Adam and Eve, not physically, but emotionally and spiritually.

Where are you?

What has happened?

I like to call that heavenly hide and seek, except it's not a game with God.

And I'm not condemned.

Please don't take it as I play hide and seek with Seth, not as much as he would like, but we enjoy a good game of hide and seek.

It's all good.

But with God, hide and seek is serious.

Hide and seek is serious because there's a problem that has entered when Adam and Eve chose to go against him, when they chose to follow Satan and what Satan wants.

And there's a problem there because they have separated themselves from the source of life.

And without God, they're going to die.

And these are his children.

And I don't know how many of you are parents, but as parents who have children, you'll understand what I'm saying.

When you've got children who are in danger of losing their life, you're going to go after your children.

Amen.

I don't think you believe me.

Parents, come on, man.

Where are you at today?

Parents, if your children are in danger, are you going to go after your kids?

You're going to do whatever you can to save your children because they're in danger.

I know I would, and I know whether you say it or not, that's what's in your heart.

Because we're in the image of God, and that's God's image.

In fact, where are you?

You could use those three words to summarize the entire contents of the Bible, because this is the history of God seeking his children.

Everywhere that you go through, he was seeking Moses and he found him by a burning bush.

He found Rahab in a house of ill repute.

He found Samson between a couple of pillars in a Philistine temple.

He found David in a sheep herd.

He found Elijah in an abandoned cave.

He found Jonah at the bottom of the sea in the belly of a fish.

He found Nathaniel under a tree.

And he found Saul on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians.

Turn with me to Acts chapter nine.

We're gonna look at verse three.

Acts chapter nine, verse three.

I call Paul an architect because he was a tent maker.

That was his livelihood.

That's how he made his money, and he was good at it.

Acts chapter nine, verse three.

This is Saul journeying towards Damascus.

It says, "As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?'

Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do you want me to do?'

Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'"

You see, we look at this picture of God, a God who loves his children, even children who've gotten off on the wrong track, even children who are associated with the wrong people, even children

who are doing things directly against them, even children who have rebelled so far that they're taking them to court, or they're causing them pain, or they're costing them money.

God is looking at those children, those rebellious children who have so much anger in their hearts for their parents, and he's looking at them, and he's looking at Paul as one of those children.

He's like, "But I love you.

You are my son, and I see the road that you're going down, and it's a dangerous road, and I've got to do something to get your attention.

I've got to do something to get you to turn around on that road and come back to safety.

You are in danger, Saul."

And so God comes after Saul.

I mean, that's a pretty dramatic way to get somebody's attention, isn't it?

Wouldn't you say?

I mean, we don't hear of God ever doing anything like this for anybody else, just for Saul, to reach out and shine a light so bright that it blinds him and he falls off his horse.

And so why are you persecuting me?

God just doesn't do that every day, but he does it for Saul.

And I would suggest to you that God does, for finding his children, whatever it takes to find that particular child, because we are all different.

We're all gonna respond to different things.

And Saul was, Saul, we've tried other things.

We've tried other things, Saul.

You were at the trial with Stephen.

You heard what Stephen said.

He went through the scriptures.

He gave a whole testimony of how the scriptures talked about Jesus and how Jesus is the Christ and how the church, the state church was so corrupt that it killed the very son of God.

You heard that, Saul.

There must have been something in your head that triggered a thought.

In fact, he studied under Gamaliel.

Even before that, he studied under Gamaliel.

Gamaliel is the one, when Peter and John were arrested and they stand before this anhedron, that Gamaliel says, "Wait a minute, guys.

You remember this guy, he started this uprising. 400 men followed him, but it petered out.

It didn't work.

This other guy, he started another uprising too, and it didn't work."

And Gamaliel said, "What I'm suggesting is you leave these guys alone, because if it is of God, it will amount to something.

If it's not of God, it'll go out on its own.

But if it is of God, you're gonna find yourselves on the wrong side fighting against God.

Just leave them alone."

That was Paul's teacher, Saul's teacher.

Saul had these little seeds planted over time where God was trying to reach out to him.

He's trying to lead him to the conclusion that Saul, this is the wrong direction.

And Saul just kept turning harder and harder against the goads.

He kept turning against the seeds that were planted.

He kept fighting it and working against God and persecuting Jesus Christ.

And so Jesus said, "Okay, well, if nothing else is gonna work, let me shine the light for you so you can see the path."

You know, and we, for the record, we often talk about this in the sense that God struck down Saul with blindness and knocked him off that horse, right?

Did you read?

It says, "And suddenly a light shone around him from heaven."

It doesn't say it struck him down with blindness.

God just turned on the light.

"Saul, you're asleep.

Let me turn on the light and wake you up."

But the problem is, is Saul was so entrenched in the darkness of the life that he was living in and God's light is so pure and bright, the natural result was that he became blind.

And we think about God struck him down off that horse.

No, it says he fell off the horse.

He was in such utter shock of what was going on in the brightness of that light.

And this voice that's crying out to him, he fell off of his horse.

God didn't knock him down.

And I would suggest it because God is not a cruel God.

God is not gonna get your attention by beating you up.

God is not gonna take revenge out on you and cast you and make you blind to teach you a lesson.

He is gonna shine a light to get you to wake up.

And you may get disoriented and you may fall off your horse in the process.

But God is a loving God and he's reaching out to his people.

And the more desperate the situation gets for us, the more desperate God is gonna reach out to get your attention.

Amen?

Can we agree with that?

So God has got Saul's attention now.

God has got Saul's attention.

He had been fighting with so much zeal against Christ in the name of God that he needed to look directly into God's light to see anything different.

He thought he was serving God.

He thought he was doing what God wanted him to do.

And God turns on the light because God had been seeking Saul for a long time.

So as the story goes, you can read through it this afternoon after the seminar.

Verses 10 through 19, Saul goes into Damascus.

He's staying at a house.

There's a man named Ananias who receives a vision from the Lord and God says, "Ananias, I want you to go heal Saul of Tarsus of his blindness."

Wait a minute, God.

I know who Saul of Tarsus is and you want me to do what?

I mean, he's been chasing down.

He's been persecuting you, Lord.

And you want me to go and heal him?

If he's blind, he can't go seeking out people to persecute them anymore.

Trust me, he's had an experience.

Go to him, heal him of his blindness.

Ananias is a good disciple.

He went and did it.

He heals Saul.

And the Bible says that when he had received food, he was strengthened.

Verse 19, "Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus."

But something happened when Ananias went to heal him.

I want you to look at verse 17.

"Ananias went to heal him."

And it says, "And Ananias went his way and entered the house and laying his hands on him

said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you came has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"

You see, Saul had an experience that went beyond just a physical healing.

Yes, there was physical healing involved, but the Lord sent Ananias for a higher purpose because Saul has got some resources.

Saul has got some ambition.

What he's lacking is the Holy Spirit.

And so he sends Ananias to pray over so that he could be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And man, let me tell you, when God pours the Holy Spirit out into Saul, he pours the Holy Spirit into Saul, doesn't he?

Because you see what happens after Saul has received the Holy Spirit.

He's got this connection with God.

You know, we do this illustration up here with the pitcher cup saucer plate, and I always tell you, God is pouring out, right?

Well, he's pouring the Holy Spirit out into Saul, and Saul's cup is overflowing now.

Because Saul, it says in verse 20, Acts chapter 9, verse 20, "Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Then all who heard were amazed and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem and has come here for that purpose so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?'

But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who dwelled in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

He's been filled with the Holy Spirit, he's spent time with the disciples, with his church family, loving one another, and now he's out witnessing for Jesus Christ.

And you see the evidence.

He goes out, immediately is he preaching, but immediately those who would argue with him are confounded.

They can't argue against him, because you can't argue against the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit is giving the word from God, there is nothing that you can say that makes sense to argue against, because the Holy Spirit is preaching truth.

And Saul is so filled with the Holy Spirit that nobody, nobody can disagree with him and make any sense.

Paul or Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit, overflowed into his community, and you look, we've talked about it before, we don't need to look at it, but look at all the people that were affected by his ministry, by his preaching.

Timothy, Titus, others.

They're listed out throughout the Bible.

People ask me all the time, or they used to, they don't now so much that I'm older, but when I was younger, they used to ask me, 'What's your favorite flower?'

My answer's always been the same, it's remained the same ever since I can remember, lilacs.

It's always been lilacs.

So if anybody's wanting to get me flowers, my wife and I both love lilacs, so you can get us a lilac bush and that would be fantastic.

But they smell beautiful, they look beautiful, but those aren't the reasons why I like them so much.

You see, when I was a kid, we used to play hide and seek.

We loved to play hide and seek.

If you can imagine kids liking hide and seek.

We used to love going out and we used to play, and we lived in one of those neighborhoods where there were no fences between the yards.

I mean, we were allowed to run in my neighbor's backyard.

He knew who we were, we could play there all we wanted.

And so we would play hide and seek.

And I had found this lilac bush.

And if you crawled through all the green leaves and all the little violet, purplish colored flowers right in the middle, there was this big open spot right around the trunk of this bush.

And I could crawl in there, I could sit there and I could see out, but they couldn't see in.

And I would go in there, I would sit there, you know, and it was fantastic for the first half hour.

After a while, you kind of want them to find you because it's like, it's a little bit boring being here, but I'm pretty stubborn.

So I kept quiet, you know, and I stuck it out even after dark when my mom was like, where are you?

I'd still be quiet.

But the game hide and seek, I don't know how you played it, but the way that we played it, when the person who was it would find you, now you would partner with the person who was it and go help

them look, you would help them seek so that you could find people.

And everybody that was found, then they turned into seekers.

And you had your seekers just multiplied and multiplied until you found everybody, right?

That's how we played hide and seek.

God is no different.

You see, God sought out Paul.

He found Paul on the road to Damascus.

And after that, Paul starts finding these other people and he starts tagging them and then, okay, you're going to go help look for people too.

And that's how the ministry of Christ works.

The ministry works.

God was seeking us all throughout the Bible.

But as he finds you, now, come on, come with me.

We're going to go search for other people.

We're going to seek the other people that are hiding.

That's what this afternoon's seminar is all about.

We're not asking you to become preachers.

We're not asking you to become evangelists.

We're not asking you to become any big glorious anything.

It's just, this is heavenly hide and seek.

God has found you because you're here.

God's asking you, come on, help me find the others.

Because God is not happy to leave anyone behind.

God is playing hide and seek, heavenly hide and seek to find every last sinner, to find every last lost person on this earth.

Because he wants everyone to come home to dinner with him.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you that you've allowed us to be part of heavenly hide and seek.

That you want us to be part of this.

And Father, we pray that whether we come to the seminar or not, that you would enable us, that you would empower us to be good seekers for you.

That as we go through our lives, as we find those people who are hiding from you, that you would give us eyes to see.

That you would work through us and call them for you.

Lord, we pray that as they come in, that they will join in the game and help seek other hidings as well.

We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.