Acts 9:5b He replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

 Think about the last sin you were involved in. Need some help? Maybe you were lipping off to your parents when they asked you to do something? Maybe it was a tirade of bad language as something upset you and you vented vehemently? Was it that last time you fabricated that great big lie because you think lying is going to get you somewhere? While you were out shopping you saw that the cashier missed something but you didn’t say anything? Your teacher at school asked you to sit down and be quiet and you just defied him or her to the utmost? Was it those pictures you were looking at? Got a little to tipsy the other day? How about you were just sitting at home defying the desire of Jesus that you worship and praise him? Maybe it is just that stupid little sin that you refuse to give up though you know it is eating at your soul? Is it that gambling problem, drug problem, just being kind and compassionate problem?

 Think about that sin you were last involved in and then ask yourself what you would do if while in the midst of that sin Jesus Christ himself was all of a sudden standing right next to you? You look over and there is no doubt it is him. He is standing there, looking right at you, watching your sinfulness, shaking his head. And you notice he has tears in his eyes. Tears because your sin and defiance of him causes hurt and harm to his heart.

 Now what? You realize there are basically just two possible reactions to Jesus in this situation. The first is that you look at him, see his tears and then grimly say, “What is your problem?” And you just keep on doing your wrong as if there was not a thing wrong! In your darkened mind Jesus is the problem, his Word is the problem. But not you! Or the other possible reaction is that you fall to your knees and say, “Oh Lord, I am such a miserable sinner. Help me. Forgive me, please!”

 All I can say is that I pray that whether it is you or me in this scenario that it is words of faith and repentance that come from our mouths. For Christians that is the only godly and faith based answer.

 You realize the reason I asked that question? It is because in the life of a fellow by the name of Saul, such is exactly what happened to him. It was a bit more involved for Saul, because the Lord had plans for this persecutor and killer of Christians. Let’s look at the history of our text and contemplate the lesson under the theme: **WHEN JESUS SPEAKS!**

 If you are like me you recognize the history before us as one of the more dramatic and awe inspiring events of the redemptive work of Jesus. Here it is, a number of months after the ascension of Jesus into heaven and this man named Saul has begun a campaign against those who have declared their faith in Jesus. He started out small. He was the man who basically headed up the stoning of Stephen the very first Christian martyr of the Church. It seems that from that point on, this man, filled with zealousness and fervor for the work of God, took it upon himself to persecute, jail and when necessary, kill those who followed Jesus. He was so thorough in his job that after a number of months, he needed to go to other large towns since all the Christians in Jerusalem were in deep hiding or gone. He gets from the Jewish leaders letters of authority to go to Damascus and weed out the Christians in that city. Saul is doing all of this: In the name of Adonai Elohim, the God and Lord of the Jews.

 The problem is that Saul is wrong. Instead of actually serving the Lord God, the true Lord God, Saul is following a path of evil, of rejecting Jesus as Lord and Savior, yes, actually, rejecting everything that his Jewish religion had always been about. The Jewish faith was about the Savior to come. About the Savior who would forgive sins and redeem God’s people from their sins. Saul for the last number of months had been rounding up and destroying the lives of those who dared to follow Jesus, the guy Saul felt sure in his heart was a fake and phony in each and every way.

 On his way to Damascus Saul will learn he is wrong. And from this point on his life, his very being is going to be changed. Saul is confronted, as he is going to fulfill his murderous desires, by the living, the risen Lord Jesus. Imagine his shock as a light from heaven flashed around him and he falls hard to the ground. Imagine his shock as he hears that voice and those cutting words: **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”**

 Please don’t miss the depth of those words. In truth, Saul was persecuting believers in Jesus, the people who followed Jesus. But it is clear that Jesus takes this persecution on a personal level. Every believer struck was a blow against Jesus. Every hateful word spoken against the faith is a hateful word to Jesus. Every violation of God’s law is a violation against Jesus! In truth, that is the nature of each and every sin. Sins are an affront to our God and Lord. They are directed against Him and his graciousness. Please, let the depth of these words sink in.

 And Saul says, **“Who are you, Lord?”** Again, marvel at these words. Saul doesn’t know who is speaking to him and yet a few things are already very, very clear to him. He is being confronted by a supreme being. He is being confronted in such a way that there is no doubt that this is the Lord! Saul uses the very name of God given to Moses at the burning bush, the “I am”. This is “the Lord!” This is the gracious, compassionate, all-knowing, all powerful God of creation in whose hands rests the redemption and souls of mankind. Although Saul doesn’t have a specific name at this point, it is clear that Saul grasps that the one confronting him is the Lord, the ruler of all.

 The answer: **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”** I can only imagine Saul’s shock and his drastic confusion at this point. “Jesus! No, Jesus as far as I am concerned is a fake and phony, a false god, an idol that silly Jewish people have been conned into following and believing! Jesus? You are Jesus?” And at this point or rather shortly after this point Saul realized that all along he had been opposing, fighting against, hating and spewing hatred at the one who was really his God and Lord.

 You heard how this history continues. The men with him saw the light, heard the voice but did not see anyone! I think they too are in total shock and confusion. They lead the now blind Saul into the city of Damascus. For the next three days we are told the Lord just let Saul sit and wait! Again learn a lesson from this. For Saul, the best thing for him was to sit and wait. This gave him time to contemplate and think. Notice it says he did not eat. He is rattled to the core but the best thing for him is to sit and wait. The Lord always knows what is best and always does what is best for us, even when He has us sitting and waiting on his gracious goodness and love. Don’t get upset about sit and wait, rather trust that the Lord knows what He is doing and if anything, ask yourself what you should be learning as you sit and wait on the Lord.

 Eventually Saul is sent a vision and a Christian named Ananias is sent a vision. Again, pay attention. Saul was very well known as a hater of Jesus. Ananias is given a vision by the Lord to go and find Saul and Ananias doesn’t want to go! The Lord tells him to go anyway and so it is. What a good example of faith is found in Ananias here. God says, “Go” and even though he is afraid and doubts God’s wisdom here, notice he goes! To believe means to hear and follow.

 What we will then hear is that Saul has his blindness healed. Very dramatic. Listen again to what Ananias says, **“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, whom you saw on your way here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”** You know what I think? Saul has very much, during the ministry of Jesus been a stooge and arm of the Jewish leaders. I think Saul, while Jesus was alive, heard and saw his miracles. I think Saul was definitely in the crowd shouting “Crucify Him!” I think Saul saw Jesus die and now he has seen the living and risen Jesus. That’s why there is no second guessing here or no trying to pass off this miraculous conversion. Saul knew that the person he saw was Jesus, the very Jesus he had worked against on behalf of the Jewish leadership. Jesus has appeared to him and now Saul is given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

 Understand, the job of the Holy Spirit is to call, gather, and strengthen people in the wonder and marvel of Jesus. Trust me, Saul is going to experience a lot more in the months and years to come. That’s because this Saul is later to be called the Apostle Paul, the very apostle this church is named after. Paul, the man who now absolutely believes in Jesus as the Lord and Savior from sin, will become a premiere disciple of Jesus. Paul will become instrumental in the spread and in the wonder of what Jesus is about. All of this is the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit! You are here because of the Holy Spirit of God. You are listening or reading and thinking about Jesus because of the Holy Spirit of God. On Sunday morning we are bringing a soul into the kingdom of God by baptism. That is the same baptism given to Saul, the same baptism that made him Paul, the baptism that God says brings salvation and forgiveness because of the power and wonder of Jesus and his redemption. The same baptism that God still uses to grant souls faith and redemption in Jesus.

 This man, who will be called Paul is later on responsible for 13 books of the New Testament. His writing, directed by the Holy Spirit, will lay out and reveal the depth and marvel of what Jesus is about. Not because that is what he wants to do but because that is what Jesus now calls him to do. To go from enemy of God to servant of God. To go from hater of the light to follower and reflector of the light. Such is the power and marvel of Jesus. Jesus who lives and reigns over all for the good of his Church and the salvation of souls.

 And what an impact this call of Jesus will have. In the New Testament we are told of at least 3 missionary journeys that Paul goes on to share this message of Jesus. This man will endure so much for Jesus. Listen to Paul give a catalogue of events (2 Corinthians 11:23ff). **“Are they ministers of Christ? (I am speaking in a crazy way.) I am even more. I’ve done more hard work, been in prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I’ve been close to death many times. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day on the open sea. I have often been on journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger on the sea, in danger among false brothers. I have worked hard and struggled. I’ve spent many sleepless nights. I’ve been hungry and thirsty. I’ve gone without food many times. I’ve been cold and lacked clothing.”**

That’s not all that Paul says of his ministry. He goes to speak of his visions and revelations from the Lord. He then speaks of his thorn in the flesh that he asked God to take away but that God told him he had for his own good and salvation. He concludes this catalogue of his life this way, **“That is why I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for the sake of Christ.”**

Yes, why all of this? For the sake of Christ. That we might proclaim Christ and live Christ. That we might glorify and honor him. That we might share his love and compassion, his sure and certain grace and mercy given to each of us. That we might be confident in his salvation and in the gift of faith Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into our lives to give. God is still working among us. God is still proclaiming Jesus. Jesus, the Savior and the Son of God. Jesus our confidence and hope in our life now and in the life to come.

I pray that when Jesus comes to you, that you will hear and believe. And He does come to us. He comes in his Word, Jesus speaks in his written Word. He proclaims his marvel and majesty in his Word. He tells us of his suffering and death for our souls in his Word. He proclaims his resurrection and eternal life in his Word. Every time you and I hear the Bible, it is Jesus speaking to us, Jesus telling us His truth and wonder. Every time we hear the Bible God tells us his Holy Spirit is working in our hearts and minds for the granting of faith and salvation. It is Jesus upon whom our faith rests. Jesus who saves, Jesus who changes hearts and lives by his Holy and inspired Word, the very word that speaks to us. May all of us humbly, and truly hear and believe in Jesus! Amen.