Acts 9:1-22 (NIV)

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” 5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. 6 “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” 11 “Yes, Lord,” he answered. 12 The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 13 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” 14 “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 15 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” 16 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 17 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” 18 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 19 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 20 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 21 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 22 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” 23 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

INTRODUCTION:

–Saul—with strong religious ideas and investments—was on a crusade against Christ, until he encountered Christ. He thought he was serving God, until he met God. HOM.idea. That’s what Saul experienced. –Religious zeal isn’t a measure of spiritual health. Saul’s devotion was in the wrong direction, until his encounter with Christ transformed it—Acts 9:1-22 (NIV). Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

I. Why Doesn’t Everyone Have These Kind of Encounters?

A. Not everyone needs bright lights from heaven or Christ’s voice audibly confronting them. (But Saul was stubborn in his religious convictions and blindly committed to his religious zeal: “Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples.”)

B. God encounters people in whatever way He wants, but sometimes He gets out the big guns. [Sadhu Sundar Singh’s encounter with Christ similar to Paul’s; Gulshan Esther’s healing encounter with Christ even more impressive; Muslim stories of Jesus coming into their dreams are common.]

TRANS: God meets us when, where and how we need to be met. (If we need a Damascus-road experience, we’ll get it! But whatever He gives—a mental epiphany while reading Scripture, a still small voice in our hearts, or a mighty rushing wind blowing through our living room—each encounter with God is meant to transform us. Let’s read vs.7-16. The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. The Lord
told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

II. Do Our Personal Encounters with Christ Affect Us Alone?

A. No, others can also be affected by our encounters with Jesus. (The first affected by Saul’s vision were his traveling companions: they were “speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.”)

1. Remember, these men were also persecutors of Christians, bent on following Saul’s leadership in destroying the church.

2. When Saul was blinded by the light, they became witnesses of a symbolic judgment on both him and on them, for it showed their own religious ideas and commitments were a form of blindness!

B. Saul’s encounter also affected Ananias, who feared Saul as a dangerous persecutor. (Christ’s visionary command to seek out Saul was a test to Ananias of his own faith’s courage to obey.)

TRANS: Others are affected by our encounters with God. Saul was blinded physically to show him the spiritual blindness of his religious logic and loyalties. At the same time, it warned his companions of their religious blindness in persecuting the church. And it gave Ananias the chance to have his faith stretched and strengthened. Saul’s encounter forever changed his own life, his attitude and his actions, but His conversion affected the whole Mediterranean world! Let’s read the rest of the passage—vs.17-22. Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. [Sharing time in church is crucial!]

2. We’re to be open about our changed thinking and transformed life—Mat 5:16 (KJV). Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (They said of Saul, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc...?” The answer is no! This was a new man, a “new creation” in Christ Jesus!)

CONCLUSION:

–Encountering God transforms our attitudes and our activities. That encounter must always happen a first time, but it’s never just a one-time deal. It’s meant to be ongoing. We should be encountering Jesus not just daily but all day long, as the Holy Spirit continues the process of our transformation.

–Read about Saul’s life as the Apostle Paul. You’ll see that he kept on growing. Our conversion isn’t a static event. It begins a new life of dynamic change for the rest of our lives. Jesus makes Himself available to us 24-7 for transforming encounters. That means that today, right now, isn’t just the beginning of the rest of our life. For believers, it’s the next phrase in the rest of our conversion.