

An Unlikely, Unexpected Apostle (Acts 9:1-9)

1. Isn't it interesting how God saves people? And isn't it interesting whom God saves?
And how he changes people?

- A. Some hear the gospel and immediately take hold of it while others spend a lot of time considering the claims of Christ and gradually come to faith.
1. Some people have a profoundly emotional experience, while others feel very little.
 2. Some experience immediate deliverance from sinful impulses and patterns, while others spend a lifetime seeking to put certain sins to death.

B. But there is one thing that is always the same.

No matter who it happens to or how it comes about, salvation is always a supernatural work of God in which blind eyes are opened, giving a person the ability to see who Jesus is and the faith to trust him.

- C. As we work our way through Acts, we're talking about salvation—God's salvation that is being offered to all people.
1. We've seen God's salvation purposes and power in Jerusalem and then move out to Judea and Samaria. And we know where this salvation message is headed from there—to the ends of the earth.

2. In chapter 9 we meet the "unlikely, unexpected apostle" who is going to be the chief voice of the salvation message. This man, Saul, is the last person any of the Christians of his day would have expected God to save, let alone choose as his representative to the world.

2. Saved in Spite of Past resistance. (1-9)

A. Saul's background.

1. Saul grew up in the busy streets and crowded bazaars of the city of Tarsus, in Turkey. Tarsus was a Greek city devoted to learning. His family lived in a Greek city but they were Jewish.

Philippians 3:5 "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;"

2. On the day of his circumcision, he was given a double name—Saul, the name of his ancestor, the first king of Israel, for the Jewish part of his life; and Paul, a Greek name for his life of trade in a Greek city. By the time he was 5 years old, Saul was probably already learning to read the scrolls of the OT. At six, he would have begun to be schooled by a rabbi to become immersed in the law. Between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, Saul was sent to Jerusalem to study under a respected teacher of the law, Gamaliel.

B. Our first glimpse of Saul.

1. He stood and watched the men of Jerusalem hurl huge stones at Stephen that broke his bones, bloodied his body, took his life.

Acts 8:1 "Now Saul approved of putting Stephen to death."

2. This seems like an understatement. It seemed to “whet” Saul’s appetite for more.

Acts 8:3 “But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and he would drag away men and women and put them in prison.”

3. His whole life was in Pursuit of “The Way.”

Acts 9:1-2 “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them in shackles to Jerusalem.”

A. Saul ate and slept and breathed out that hatred.

1. It wasn’t enough to persecute the believers in Jerusalem. He was in pursuit of believers in other places as well, even foreign cities. He set his sites on the nearest large city outside of Palestine and packed his bags.

2. He and his friends would not hesitate to drag old men and old women, and mothers with children back to Jerusalem in chains. He didn’t really care if they survived the trip.

3. He had no moral quandary about it. He was convinced that Jesus was dead and that what he was doing was right.

4. He had a letter from the high priest in his pocket. He planned to present that letter in Damascus.

B. A heavenly interruption.

Acts 9:3 “Now as he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;”

1. It’s the middle of the day. The sun was in the sky, but this was not the sun. (“a light from heaven flashed around him.”)

Acts 9:4-5 “and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” 5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,”

2. The Jesus he thought was dead was clearly not dead. Not only was he not dead, he was the living Lord of the universe! And he took personally Saul’s assault on those who had put their hope in him.

3. Saul, with his face to the ground is perhaps beginning to understand that Jesus was so united to those who loved and believed in him that every cruel thing Saul had done to any of them, he had done to Jesus.

4. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. (7-9)