

Acts of the Apostles

Week 11 – Acts 9:1-31

Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee (Acts 9:1-9)

- Last week we met Saul the Pharisee at the stoning of Stephen. And Stephen's prayer "Lord, don't hold this sin against them" is immediately answered – one of the executioners (guilty by association) is saved! Oh, how far the forgiveness of God can go!!
- Saul the Pharisee, a quick bio:
 - From Tarsus on the Mediterranean coast in Cilicia, 10 miles inland on the ancient Cyndus River, SE modern-day Turkey
 - As a strictly observant pharisee, Saul would quote the Shema 3 times each day – *Shema Yisrael, Adhonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad!* "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one!" Like a patriot saluting the flag, this was the sign that he was a loyal Jew. And he knew that if God's people kept wandering from the Law and the Temple, this restoration of Israel would never happen.
 - Studying under the famous Gamaliel, one of the greatest rabbis of his time, Saul studied not only the law but the oral traditions as well – his zeal grew. Gamaliel believed in "live and let live" but not Saul.
- Damascus was 135 miles from Jerusalem to the northeast – it was on a major trade route, under Roman control, highly influenced by the Greek culture with a sizable Jewish population.
- NT Wright speculates that Saul was on the long hot road to Damascus, praying the Shema, perhaps even thinking of another chariot, the one Ezekiel saw and described in **Ezekiel 1:26-28**. He watches the spinning wheels on the chariot in the hot desert sun then suddenly hears a voice, sees a face, and we too hear Jesus speak post-ascension.

This is the first of 3 separate times Dr. Luke will give us Paul's story of the encounter on the Damascus Road (also chapters 22 & 26). Paul will write years later "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (**1 Corinthians 9:1**) Everything in Saul's life, right down to his name would never be the same.

*Saul of Tarsus knew what it took to be in the family of God – **Philippians 3:5-6***

Saul the Seeker (Acts 9:10-19)

- Ananias – He's got one job and one job only in the New Testament.

- God's command to Ananias is "**Go!**" For God has a "**Go!**" for Saul too – the time has come for God's message to be proclaimed to the world.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "*When Christ calls someone, He bids them come and die.*"

Ananias greets Saul as family, "*Brother Saul....*" He hasn't been baptized, signed his membership card, or received his church welcome bag.

Apostle Paul the Preacher (Acts 9:20-31)

- Don't call it a come-back, it's a total 180; the pharisee becomes the preacher!
 - Preacher Saul/Paul in Damascus
 - In the synagogue
 - Jewish response – some speculate Paul receives his first of five synagogue beatings (**2 Corinthians 11:24**)
 - Saul/Paul's escape – to Arabia and the cities there (Luke omits this trip, AD 33-36)
 - Preacher Saul/Paul in Jerusalem (AD 36 or 37)
 - All around town – in **Galatians 1:18**, Paul talks about going to meet with Peter (and James)
 - Jewish response/Church response
 - Saul/Paul's escape
 - Saul/Paul – Gospel Message
 - No matter the side – Paul is a force that cannot be ignored
 - **Acts 9:20** – "Jesus is the Son of God" – Jesus is the Anointed One of Israel, the Messiah
 - The church at peace – whether in favor or at odds, God uses the church for His saving purpose in the world

Upon encountering the Risen Lord, Paul immediately gets to work sharing the Good News.

Closing-

"Maybe the church is born again every time we gather together in one place to hear what we know, only to be addressed by what we never imagined." May we be open this week to new birth in our own lives whenever the Holy Spirit wills a holy interruption. Amen.

Sources

Fernando, Ajith, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).
 Willimon, William, *Interpretation Commentary: Acts* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1988).
 Wright, NT, *Acts for Everyone, Part 1* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2008).
 Wright, NT, *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2018).