

May 15, 2011 Acts 9:1-19

A couple of notes:

- Saul (Hebrew) and Paul (Greek) – 2 names b/c of different languages, not a name change when he began following Christ
- Probably most famous conversion story; Luke includes it three times: once in own narrative and twice in Paul's speeches in his letters
- "the way" – another name for "fellowship of believers" in John 14:6; Jesus named himself "the way."

Saul has a plan at the beginning of the chapter – he's going to go after the followers of Christ and bring them back to Jerusalem – "breathing threats and murder." (This is his pre-conversion state). He really wasn't in any kind of mood to consider the claims of Christ (Stott).

He's on his way to Damascus, most likely having traveled for almost a week, and suddenly there's a light from heaven and a voice, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Does Saul answer the question? No, he asks his own question, "Who are you, Lord?" Isn't it interesting that he calls him, "Lord"? And it's Jesus who answers his question, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Saul has been persecuting Jesus' followers and Jesus is telling him that when you persecute one of his followers, you persecute Jesus himself!

So, the facts are stated and Jesus moves on – he's still willing to work through this man, Saul, who has been threatening and murdering his followers! Can you believe it? Jesus can work through even someone such as Saul?

Jesus tells Saul to go and that he will find out more. Saul continues on his journey not knowing what is to come next.

So, Saul's plans were to enter Damascus full of pride and hate, ready to capture Jesus' followers. Instead, he's stumbling into town blind and led by others – "a captive of the very Christ he had opposed (Stott)."

This is where we have a scene change and a new character emerges in our story – Ananias.

The Lord comes to Ananias in a vision and tells him to go find Saul and lay his hands on him so that he can regain his sight.

How does Ananias first respond? "Are you crazy, Lord?" You want me to do what? It would be like someone who is on the run, wanted by the police to simply walk up to them, hoping that

they've changed their mind. Saul is out looking to capture Jesus' followers and Ananias, a follower of Jesus, is supposed to go to him? What if he hasn't changed? It would be certain death for him.

You will notice that Ananias isn't being called to travel very far to do Jesus' work – he's simply being asked to go across town! And yet, listen how hard it is! Maybe it would be easier to be called to the ends of the earth instead of down the street to a person who literally hates everything that Ananias believes.

Amazingly, Ananias heeds the call of Jesus through the vision he receives – it's actually an amazing three words in verse 17, if you think about it – "So Ananias went." He went to find Saul. The Lord told him that this murderous man named Saul would be an instrument for him. So Ananias went.

We are told that Saul, who has been without sight for three days, has also been without food or water and has been praying; that's how Ananias finds him. "What Christ said (to Ananias) evoked a willingness to follow" (Stott) and upon laying hands on Saul, Ananias does not say "I hope this works with this lost cause," but he calls him "Brother Saul." He's welcoming him and recognizing him as an instrument of Christ. He tells Saul that he will not only regain his sight, but he will receive the Holy Spirit as well. And immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight is restored. He gets up, and is baptized, eats some food and regains his strength for the work that he is about to do.

Saul is healed, baptized, eats, gains strength and becomes a witness. What a remarkable story, not about Saul the person, but about the power of Christ and faith!

Don't you see? It's never too late – never too late! We have a big God who can take someone such as Saul and turn them around to not only know Christ, but to love him and serve him as a witness of faith!

It is Christ who opens our eyes so that our hands can be open to serve others in his name. And it is through that very service that maybe, just maybe, someone's heart will open to the love of God given through a Son, Jesus the Christ, who continues to work through us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What scales would have to fall off our eyes to see someone, to the ends of the earth or just down the street from us, who needs to hear the good news?

Helpful Resources: Narrative Lectionary podcast; *The Message of Acts*, John R.W. Stott

