

June 3, 2018

“Empowered: The Church on Fire!”

“A Journey through the Book of Acts”

“A Fire Redirected!”

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him, even though I used to blaspheme the Name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted His people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.” 1 Timothy 1:12-13

A. Saul was a prime example of the most recognized Jewish heritage...

“I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Philippians 3:5-7

1. Saul was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, as was Ehud (great warrior who delivered Israel from Moab), Saul (the first king of Israel), and Queen Esther and Mordecai.
2. Saul was a Pharisee with strict obedience to the Law.
3. Saul was from Tarsus. Tarsus was a highly educated, urban center. It was recognized as a university town and the center of philosophy. Highly recognized for its learning, at the level of Athens and Alexandria.

“Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Philippians 3:8a

B. Saul was traveling to Damascus...

“Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord’s followers. So he went to the high priest.” Acts 9:1

1. The trip from Jerusalem to Damascus was about 150 miles and took about 6 days.
2. Damascus was known as the hub, as it was a center point for Syrian, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Persia, and Arabia.
3. If the Way flourished in Damascus, the potential of it flourishing in all these areas was even more threatening to Saul.

“He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.” Acts 9:2

C. Saul became Paul...

“I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that all must repent of their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do.” Acts 26:20

1. Paul’s conversion story is shared in Acts 9:1-18; Acts 22:4-16; and Acts 26:9-18. It was his personal testimony of transformation.
2. Saul was struck down by a blinding light, and a voice that only he understood!

“As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?’” Acts 9:3-4

3. Saul was led by his companions to Damascus.

“Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus.” Acts 9:8

4. Saul fasted for three days.

“He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.” Acts 9:9

5. Ananias, a believer in Damascus, was called to go to Straight Street at the house of Judas, to see Saul of Tarsus.

“Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, ‘Ananias!’” Acts 9:10

6. Ananias went to Saul and prayed for him.

“But the Lord said, ‘Go, for Saul is My chosen instrument to take My message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name’s sake.’ So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 9:15-17

7. His sight returned, he got up and was baptized!

“Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.” Acts 9:18

D. Paul’s story continues...

1. Paul wrote over half of the New Testament. Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon

2. Paul suffered greatly in his mission of sharing the gospel.

“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from

bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

3. In spite of his great suffering, Paul never lost gratitude for God’s faithfulness!

“Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.” 1 Timothy 1:14-16

E. Points to ponder...

1. God took the most unlikely life and totally changed his life. Nothing is too hard for God...no life is unlikely to find Jesus.
2. God’s mercy and power are not limited...if He can save the “chief of sinners,” then nothing is beyond His reach.
3. Paul’s transformation came suddenly and unexpectedly! There did not seem to be any gradual process that brought this transformation.
4. It was only God that brought this change in Paul’s life.
5. Ananias was fearful about his role in Paul’s life but was ultimately willing to be used of God.
6. Following Jesus does not mean we will be excluded from suffering or hard times. In fact, it may mean we will suffer...so keep focused!
7. The powerful presence of God will go with us and rest on us if we keep our grateful hearts focused on Him.

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