

The Parish of Wellow

'Be Daring and Dynamic' 24 Studies in Acts

Acts 9:1 - 19 – God arrests Saul

Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below or join us at **Coffee 'n' Stickers** Monday 31st July 7.45pm at the Vicarage to discuss the questions further.

1. Talk Passage

Acts 9:1-19

- 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 travelling 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!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.
11 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.
12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."
13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.
14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."
15 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.
16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."
17 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."
18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,
19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

2. Talk Notes

2.1 Introduction – Looking back.

- Have you ever looked back and considered those major events in your life when things changed dramatically?
- As Paul writes his letter to the church in Galatia he looks back to a time when he met with Jesus on the road to Damascus. And as he does so he shares with us that moment when his life changed forever: *"I want you to know brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."* (Galatians 1:11-12)
- To fully understand how life changing Paul's meeting with Jesus was on that Damascus road we need:
 - i. To look at Paul or rather Saul before the meeting
 - ii. To consider what happened at the meeting itself
 - iii. To consider what Paul became as a result of the meeting

2.2 Saul before his Damascus road meeting with Jesus – A crusade against the early church

- The first time we meet Paul or Saul in the Bible is at the martyrdom of Stephen Acts 8 verse 1: *"And Saul was there, giving approval to his death."*
- Two verses later we learn that Saul is the person leading the charge against the early church Acts 8 verse 3: *"Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison."*
- The very reason that Paul is going to Damascus is to destroy the emerging church in that city too Chapter 9 verses 1-2: *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.*
- Why is Saul so against this newly emerging church?
- The answer lies in his views and the views of his fellow Pharisees about Jesus.
- They had put Jesus to death because he a mere man had claimed to be the son of God John 19 verse 7: *The*

Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law Jesus must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

- Having put Jesus to death what Paul and his fellow Pharisees discover is that instead of this new church being snuffed out it begins to grow and its followers begin to claim that: not only is Jesus the son of God but that he has been raised back to life and that the Pharisees and the religious authorities have his blood on their hands Acts 5 verses 30-31: *The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead-- whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.*

2.3 Saul meets with Jesus on the Damascus Road – Acts 9:3-5

- Saul is a religious man clearly headed for great things.
- He is a student of Gamaliel, trusted by the Sanhedrin, a man of considerable intellect and learning.
- Saul is therefore in many ways simply the most unlikely candidate to become the spiritual giant of this newly emerging church that he is busily squashing.
- Why would God choose to meet Saul the very person who is so vehemently against everything that God is doing?
- God always seems to choose the most unlikely candidates for leadership. Look at Moses a man brought up in the court of Pharaoh, a murderer who has run away from his homeland and yet God chooses him to perform one of the greatest rescues in history to bring his people out of Egypt.
- If God can choose Moses and Saul for great tasks he can also call each one of us for great tasks as well, even though we may feel thoroughly unqualified.
- There are other encouragements for us from this encounter too. If Jesus can meet Saul a renegade and persecutor of the church than he can meet us too each of one of us wherever we are and however we are feeling at the moment.
- At the centre of this encounter with Jesus is 'change.' *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asks.* The answer Saul receives in three devastating words is: *"I am Jesus."*
- In those three words Saul receives a revelation that is central to the Christian faith.
- Saul knew his Bible. The words "I am" would have rung bells in his head about the encounter that Moses had with God in Exodus 3 verse 14: God said to Moses, *"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*
- For Saul to hear the words 'I am Jesus' underlines in language that Saul would understand that Jesus was the son of God.
- He discovers that he is and has been spiritually blind and God underlines this for Saul by making him physically blind for three days verse 9: *For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*
- But Saul also discovers in these three little words that Jesus is the son of God and that was indeed alive.
- How often are we blinded to truth by our own arrogance and beliefs? How often do we think we are doing the things that God wants when actually we are doing the complete opposite. How willing are we to embrace 'change'. Only when we are in relationship with Jesus can be certain that we are doing his will.
- May I challenge each one of us today? What is it that Jesus would wish us to be doing at the moment in the kingdom? And is what we are doing what he would have us to be doing?

2.4 The result of Saul's meeting with Jesus

- Saul's encounter with Jesus that day on the road to Damascus and those three little words 'I am Jesus' were to be central to everything that Paul went on to do.
- Paul never forgot the central truths. He realised that Jesus was the son of God and that he was indeed alive and at the centre of it all was the Cross.
- To the church in Corinth he wrote: *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.* (1 Corinthians 15: 3-8)
- This is the same message we have to tell today however unpalatable it may be. This message turned Paul's world upside down. Are we prepared like him to go out and share this message with others?

3. Coffee 'n' Stickies Questions

3.1 Why is Saul so vehemently against the early church?

3.2 Why does God choose to meet Saul on the Damascus road? What can we learn from this encounter?

3.3 Why is Saul physically blind for three days following his meeting with Jesus?

3.4 How can we as individuals and as a church be sure that we are doing God's will?

3.5 A friend of yours says that it was fine for Saul because he met Jesus. Why doesn't Jesus meet us like that today?