

Saul – the Damascus Road Conversion

Read: Acts 9: 1-19

As this is quite a chunky portion of Scripture, I don't have time to open up all of it. As I read through these verses, I felt God highlight four main things that I would like to look at a little closer:

1) Don't ever write anyone off. Don't ever look at what someone is doing, their lifestyle, their reputations and think there is no hope for them.

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some count slackness, but He is long suffering toward us, ***not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.***"

I wonder how many of us have God's heart on this matter. Are we selective? Do we see the God potential in people? Do we see through their current behaviour or external appearance and see what God sees in them?

Look at what Saul was doing:

Acts 8:3 "***As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men & women & committed them to prison***"

Acts 9:1-2 "Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples..."

Saul was not a nice person!

Even Ananias, when God tells him to go to Saul, he questions God based on Saul's reputation **Vs 13-14** "***Lord I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done, and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name***"

Yet what is God's response? "***Go for he is MY chosen vessel to bear my name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel.***" Isn't our God so full of grace and mercy? Here is Saul, a murderer, killing anyone who dares to believe in Jesus and yet God sees none of that, He has a plan and purpose for his life.

Don't let us ever judge people based on what we see on the exterior. **Romans 8:29-30** "***For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.***" God will do the work in each one that is required! He will take us just as we are and conform us to the likeness of His son!

God knew each one of us before we were born, each one of our days were written in his book before one of them came to be (see Psalm 139). You and I

do not have this intimate knowledge of anyone, so let's not write anyone off based on what we see on the outside. Let us choose to believe that God can touch any life and transform those whom He has called!

In verse 5, which I found in the KJV and NKJV but was missing from some of the other translations (eg ESV and NIV), it says ***"It is hard for you to kick against the goads."*** A goad is a pointed stick for urging on a team of oxen. Even though Saul was still doing all the things he had always done, it appears that his conscience was already being prodded by the Spirit. Saul was a man who thought he was doing the right thing. He was passionate about persecuting Christians! He thought he was doing the world a favour! But something must have been going on inside of him. Back in Acts **7: 58** ***"The witnesses lay down his (Stephen's) clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul"*** – It doesn't specifically say that Saul was present when Stephen preached the gospel just before he was stoned, but some translations say that he may have attended the synagogue where Stephen preached – I believe that somewhere at some stage he heard the gospel and even though outwardly he continued to do the things he did, his conscience was being prodded by that which he heard. Despite what we may see on the outside, we just never know what God may be doing on the inside!

2) Once Saul encounters Jesus, there are 2 questions that he asks:

- Who are you Lord? (vs 5)
- What do you want me to do? (Vs 6)

First we need to have a revelation of who Jesus is. More than just a head knowledge. Saul may have known about Jesus, but He had not encountered the person of Jesus. He may have known from the Scriptures something of the Messiah to come, but had no experience of the Jesus who had already come. **Math 16:15-18** Jesus says to his disciples ***"Who do you say that I am?"*** Peter answers, ***"You are the Christ, the son of the living God"*** and then Jesus says to him ***"Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah.... upon this rock (which was the revelation of Jesus Peter had) I will build my church and give you the keys to the Kingdom."*** First Peter had the revelation of who Jesus was and then Jesus says ok, now I can give you some keys!

We see the same here in Acts. First Saul encounters the person of Jesus in a way he had never before. It is so important that we know Him first otherwise everything we do will be done with the wrong motivation and we will lose our joy because we will constantly be striving, performing, or doing things because we think we have to or it is the right thing to do.

Who is Jesus? We need to know the Jesus who has already done everything for us, the Jesus who gave up His divinity, came down to earth as a man. The Jesus who at the cross became our sin (despite never once sinning) so that we could become His righteousness, the Jesus who took every sickness, every disease so that we can be whole! The Jesus who fulfilled every requirement of the law so that we could live FREE! We need to know this Jesus so that we are not bound and restricted by rules and regulations, trying to meet the requirements of the law and constantly failing. We need to know the Jesus who made a public spectacle of the principalities and powers, who put them under His feet and now, we who are seated with Him in the heavenly places, can live victorious lives over a defeated enemy! We have to get excited about these things! If we aren't excited about Jesus and all He has done for us, why would you expect others to be? If Jesus doesn't excite you then either you have not encountered the real Jesus of the gospel of grace or your love has grown cold. Get into His presence and discover Him all over again or for the first time. Saul had one encounter with the person of Jesus and his life was radically transformed. Once you know this Jesus, it is so easy to do the things we are called to as Christians, not out of duty or because we think that we have to now live up to our end of the deal, but simply out of love and relationship with him. You, like Saul, will come to God with an open heart and say "what do you want me to do?" Once you know Jesus, you can be trusted like Peter was, with the keys to the kingdom because your motivation will be correct and your ministry will be effective.

Each of us needs our own revelation, because you will never own it unless it is your own revelation. Another man's revelation may stir you for a time, but it will fade away. Although the other disciples were with Peter, Jesus said to Peter alone ***"I will give you the keys of the kingdom"*** because it was Peter who had the revelation of who Jesus was. All the other disciples could come up with what other people said about Jesus. But Peter was able to respond to Jesus out of his own revelation and the result was that we hear more about Peter and his ministry than any of the other disciples!

In **Gal 1:11** ***"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man nor was I taught it but it came thru the revelation of Jesus Christ"*** As Saul received revelation of Jesus, he knew what he had to do! No one had to tell him. **Acts 9:20** ***"Immediately he preached Christ"***

Ask Jesus to reveal himself to you, so that you can then effectively do the things he has called you to!

3) Saul encountered the glory of God and was struck blind for 3 days. I believe during that time, God blinded him physically so that his spiritual eyes could be opened. Instead of being led by what he saw in the natural, he was receiving spiritual insight into things he would never even have dreamed possible. I believe we need to get more into the presence (glory) of God, so that we are not so much driven by what we see in the natural, the obstacles, the stumbling blocks, the impossibilities, the giants – but rather we begin to get a glimpse of the incredible things God has in store for us. The adventures, the mountains he has for us to scale, the people he has for us to encounter, the treasures of His kingdom he is waiting to reveal to us! **Eph 1:17-19** ***“May give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and what is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe”***

Again we see here a dual purpose – first that we would know Christ and then that we may know his purpose and power in our lives! We are co heirs with Christ, that means equal heirs, and everything that he inherited by his death and resurrection is now ours to enjoy! Now, not one day when we get to heaven! Find out what is the riches of this glorious inheritance and begin to enjoy it now!

There are so many stimuli coming in thru our eyes and bombarding us every single day. And we are so driven by what we see, that’s why adverts are so successful – they more enticing and attractive it is to the eye, the more effective it will be. Think of how many hours people spend setting up displays, how pamphlets are always covered with beautiful pictures, bright colours, everything comes in through our eyes primarily. So we have got to make a concerted effort to get into the presence of God, shut our physical eyes and begin to dream, begin to imagine, allow God to open the eyes of our hearts and understanding so that our minds can be renewed by what He shows us. Begin to see the potential He has for us, the divine plans and the seemingly impossible dreams. Dare to dream again! Dare to imagine! Choose to see what God sees in you and for you and what he desires to do through you!

4) What about the importance of the Holy Spirit? I think in many churches today, this has been down played, it has become an optional extra rather than an essential part of our born again experience. The Holy Spirit is vital in the effectiveness of our ministry. Jesus himself did not begin his ministry until he had been filled with the Holy Spirit. The disciples were instructed to wait and not go anywhere or do anything until they had received the Holy Spirit.

Look at Saul, immediately he is converted, Ananias prays for him to receive the Holy Spirit and the church's greatest opponent becomes its greatest advocate!

In the book of Acts, they did nothing but by the power of the Holy Spirit. They were men anointed from on high, not doing anything out of reputation, experience or fame – these were ordinary men like you and I! Yet they did extraordinary things! Today much of the church has learnt to “do “things quite well without the Holy Spirit! Programmes, agendas, teams and rosters ensure churches run efficiently but we don't see the demonstration of power and miracles that the early church moved in. Look at some examples of what the disciples did after they received the Holy Spirit:

Acts 4: 33 *“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”*

5: 12 *“Through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people”* and **vs 16** *“Multitudes gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those who were tormented by unclean spirits and they were all healed”*

“The wind (the Spirit) blows wherever it pleases” - we can't dictate how or when we want the Holy Spirit to move. We can't prescribe how the Holy Spirit manifests itself in our presence. What we can do is have hearts that acknowledge that however he comes, we need the Holy Spirit!

It is not even about the signs and wonders and whatever other things may happen when we give the Holy Spirit room. It is about what accompanies that!

Acts 5:14 *“And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”* Every time the Holy Spirit moved, people were being saved! It is more about lives being changed and transformed!

What about our own lives outside of church meetings, out in the market place, in our spheres of influence? Are we filled with boldness as the early church was? **Acts 4:31** *“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.”* Boldness in the Greek is “Parrhesia.” (Par-rhay-see-ah)

It means outspokenness, unreserved utterance, freedom of speech, with frankness and cheerful courage and is the opposite of cowardice, timidity and fear. It denotes a divine enablement that comes to ordinary and unprofessional people exhibiting spiritual power and authority. Parrhesia is not a human quality but a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We are fools if we think that we can be effective witnesses without the empowering of the Holy Spirit! Multitudes are out there thinking they know who Jesus is when they don't have a clue because no-one ever took the time to tell them or had the courage to! It is intimidating talking to people! There are some scary people out there! We need this boldness that comes from a life continuously filled with the Holy Spirit. Once is not enough! Every day we get

battered and the Spirit leaks out of us. We need to continuously position ourselves in God's presence and allow ourselves to be topped up.

Let's just recap

- 1) Don't judge anyone by outward appearance – have God's heart that none should perish
- 2) First get a revelation of Jesus before you do anything, a right revelation of Him will fuel your doing!
- 3) Take time to get into the presence of God and allow the eyes of your heart and understanding to be opened so that you see the possibilities God has for you
- 4) Go in the power of the Holy Spirit, and let us say like Paul was able to in Romans 1:16 "I am not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation"