



Acts study #3 - Acts 9:1-31

Introduction

Once again today we're looking at a wonderful passage. It is so incredible to see what the Lord did in the life of the apostle Paul.

Saul begins the chapter as a terrifying opponent of the gospel. Notice that he is already travelling far and wide to root out all those who, at the time, must have been very recent converts. The gospel had only just reached Damascus, the capital of Samaria. And yet Saul was on his way there in what could be described as a secret police operation aimed at capturing any followers of Jesus. It's as if the church was at risk of being stamped out even though it had only barely got started.

Study

1. Saul's blindness seems to be an apt sign from the Lord. Why do you think that the Lord chooses to stop Saul in his tracks by afflicting him with blindness instead of another kind of ailment?
2. Why is verse 5 so surprising? What might we expect Jesus to have said here? How might this reality be of great comfort to those believers being persecuted in our day?
3. In Ananias' reply to the Lord (verses 13-14), we learn that Saul's reputation is going before him. Imagine the trepidation with which Ananias would have gone to see

Saul.

4. How does he address Saul when he first meets him? How significant is this?

God's amazing plans for Saul are outlined in verses 15-16.

In 9:17 Ananias tells Saul to, ".....regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit...". After these things take place Saul is baptised. Of the 3 above mentioned events, the Lord had not spoken to Ananias about these last 2 (being filled with the Spirit and baptism). And yet it would seem that for Ananias, these two, even in the case of the apostle Paul, represented something like "standard practice" - the normal way of responding to the outworking of God's extraordinary work in saving people. See also Acts 22:12-16.

5. What is different about the two accounts?
6. In what happens next, from 9:20-30, how does Luke describe the manner of Saul's ministry?
7. What essential truth lies at the core of his teaching? Why is this so incredible?

Paul escapes the city of Damascus by being lowered down the wall in a basket. The wonderful irony of this event would not have been lost on Luke's readers. Nor on Paul's readers of his letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:30-32) where he sees the whole event as a badge of honour - his crowning achievement! (In Antiquity, the Roman soldier who was the first up and over the wall in an assault against a besieged city would have been crowned with glory and honour. Paul however glories in something quite different - see Acts 9:16.)

Verse 31 closes this section with another of Luke's famous summary statements.

8. What characterises the life of the emerging church?
9. When you read "comfort of the Holy Spirit", what does this remind you of?

Reflecting on Stephen's death and on Saul's conversion

We know nothing about what would have been going on through Saul's mind as he stood by and watched, "approving" of Stephen's stoning. Had he listened to all of Stephen's speech and had it made an impression on him? We will never know. Stephen himself could not have known as he stood and spoke before the crowd that, very soon afterwards, this powerful and dangerous man would be boldly preaching the one whom he had sought to destroy. What a wonderful testimony to the Lord's grace and kindness! And in his sovereign work in the world! Even though Stephen's life would be cut short, it would not be without

impact. Paul would preach Christ all over the known world and would suffer for Jesus' Name. God's plan and timing for both men were perfect. We can never know in advance what the Lord has in store for us. But we can trust Him with our lives, fixing our eyes on Him as He rules and reigns from heaven.

Prayer

- Managers, bosses, supervisors. We all have them. They can be demanding, uncommunicative, inconsiderate, and all other negative words we can use to describe them. Well, Saul was worse than all of your bosses; he was murderous towards Christians (you may feel that your bosses are too)! But Jesus turned him around to be Paul. Pray for your bosses. You know very well that they need Jesus. If not for their sake, at least for your sake too!
- Crossroads Escape is a three day camp in which evening congregation members from Crossroads Lake G and City have the opportunity to deepen their connections with one another and with Jesus. Please pray that questions about faith, Jesus, or other aspects of Christian living to be answered, and energy for Crossroads staff members and volunteers.