

SERIES: **THE MOVEMENT- A journey through the astonishing book of Acts**

TEXT: **Acts 9:1-31 // The Life-Changer**

Hook: *Have you ever set out to do something that didn't turn out the way you expected?*

'Pumice (pemas) rock'- rough volcanic rock to scrub your crusty feet – tell story of using it on armpits

This morning we are going to look at our friend Saul from Ch.7-8, as he set out to do one thing, but it turned out a different way than he expected

THE TENSION- Whether you are a mature Christian or just curious about Christ- Jesus wants to change you

If you recall, Saul was one of the authorities approving of Stephens murder (1st person to die for their faith in Jesus) **Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest ² and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way (this is where we get our name; several times in Acts), he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.**

A few things:

Saul despises Christians! Went out of his way to catch them (*me with flies*)

The sad thing is he thought he was doing it for God when in fact it was satan using him

He touches on this in Ephesians 2:1-5

John 16:2 They will ban you from the synagogues. In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God.

The second thing to note: the gospel was spreading outside of Israel (Damascus) (the movement continues)

³As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him.

Acts 22:6 tells us it was noon, the brightest time of the day!

⁴Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

PAUSE/can I chase a rabbit trail, it'll payoff:

Mandela effect: No horse is ever mentioned; there likely was one, but Saul was likely not on it when this happened

Remember "**Noon**"?- that was an established time of prayer.

Pharisees prayed 3 X's throughout the course of the day in imitation of King David (*Psalm 55:16-17*)

Every day at noon, devout Jewish men recited prayers while standing on their feet and facing toward Jerusalem.

Saul, the zealous Pharisee that he was, prob observed midday prayer on that day as he traveled along.

This means he was, or was about to begin praying, when Jesus shows up!

Aint that crazy! So he prob didn't fall off his horse

⁵"Who are You, Lord?" he said. "I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting," He replied.

can you imagine that moment for Saul! His worldview was demolished! (I love it)

In Acts 26:14 (one of several places Saul would recollect this moment) he adds "*why are you kicking against the goads*"

A **goad** was this stick jabbed into the back of an ox's leg to guide them in a direction.

What had been prodding against Saul that he was trying to dismiss?

The death of Stephen. Unanswered questions about Jesus.

The way people were changed by their belief in Jesus. It didn't make sense!

These goads were bothering Paul, wounding him, so he was kicking against them.

(He was getting more violent)

God has been pursuing YOU

Paul had goads prodding him; Some of you have those things.

Maybe unanswered questions about life, death, or God.

Maybe you've seen the joy in a Christian friend's life as they've gone through pain, and you've thought, "I don't have that."

Maybe you experienced love in the Christian community.

Maybe you've felt within you the Spirit of God moving, more than just a feeling, something greater, and it probably happened again here today

Maybe its been in a painful way- He's not punishing you He's pursuing you in the only way you will actually pay attention

We cannot overlook a monumental truth here: "I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting,"

A Comfort and a Caution: Jesus identifies personally with the injustices done against His own

Jesus takes personally the slander, abuse, hurt, against his church

He takes what abuses happen to YOU Christian, personally! (that's how much He cares)

That also goes for Christian VS Christian fighting, be careful how you treat the children of God

Jesus calls the church is his "BRIDE." You can't love Jesus and hate his bride/ badmouth he church

You can't have Jesus but not Jesus' people

⁶ "But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. ⁸ Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. ⁹ He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

Saul started off with authority and power going in, but was humbled to the dirt and for 3 days had to be led by others

He set of to lay hold of Christians, but then Christ got ahold of him

Jesus, to whom belongs all power and authority humbled Himself when He came down,

was humiliated and put in the ground for 3 days, BUT THEN the third day came, that changed everything!

And its about to change for Saul also

¹⁰ There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Here I am, Lord!" (YES SIR!) he said. ¹¹ "Get up (YES SIR!) and go to the street called Straight," the Lord said to him, (YES SIR!) "to the house of Judas, (YES SIR!) and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. (Excuse me what sir?)" ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so he can regain his sight." (Ananias spit his drink out at this point)

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints (the bible calls ALL Christians saints) in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name."

To be fair, Ananias doesn't know what has happened to Saul yet, all he knows is the guys' bad news

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites.

Maybe you had a reputation, maybe you were infamous for this or that,

but **when God choses to use you, no one's opinion matters!**

"MY" God calls Saul His; God calls you first to himself, and only secondarily to a task

God wants U more, than he wants to USE you

God indeed used Saul to take the gospel to the nations, stood before kings,
but God wanted Saul more than He wanted what Saul could do

¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for My name!" (hold up, what!)

Chosen...to suffer??

Saul would suffer much (1 Corinthians 11:23-28) eventually killed in Rome

But he would learn to find joy in those sufferings (as he would state in almost all his letters)

James, the half-brother of Jesus would say it best:

James 1:2-4 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

We demand to always understand. ("God, I'm willing to suffer if you're willing to explain.")

He may not. Sometimes you just have to trust him.

Suffering doesn't always mean something's wrong

Sometimes the sin you struggle with and the pain you go through make you uniquely qualified to speak redemption to others in the same condition.

John Newton- *"The reason God allows us to continue to struggle all of our life with indwelling sin is he wants us to grow ever more amazed at his grace."*

So whether you're suffering because you hate the sin you give in to, or because life is cruel and painful; God is there

¹⁷ So Ananias left and entered the house. Then he placed his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight.

when he opened his eyes, everything looked different; how do I know? Look what it says next-

Then he got up and was baptized. ¹⁹ And after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some days.

Saul's physical blindness was a sign of his spiritual blindness-

now united to Jesus by faith and sealed with the Holy Spirit, he goes public with his faith and gets baptized

²⁰ Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: "He is the Son of God."

Ironically, he had gone to the synagogues in Damascus to hunt Christians *and now* he is there to preach Christ!

He did not wait, he immediately started sharing what he knew

Share what you know is gospel truth. What you don't know, just say that, "I dunno yet"

²¹ But all who heard him were astounded and said, "Isn't this the man who, in Jerusalem, was destroying those who called on this name and then came here for the purpose of taking them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ²² But Saul grew more capable and kept confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this One is the Messiah.

²³ After many days had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him, (irony again- the persecutor became the persecuted)

²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. So they were watching the gates day and night intending to kill him, ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the wall.

Wall- ancient cities were walled for protection

Saul who previously had such place of dignity and power that he wouldn't even dirty his hands with the stoning of Stephen, now experienced a humiliating rescue operation

Notice V25- he already had disciples, people following him as he followed Jesus

V.23 'Many days' is 3 years. How do we know that? Paul tells us himself in *Galatians 1:15-18*

3 years passed before Paul met the first Apostle (only met Peter and James)!

What did he do during those 3 years?

Spent time with Jesus; brought people to Jesus one by one.

Then after 15 days he left again. For 14 years. How do we know that? Paul explains in *Galatians 2:1*

Well, what happened during those 14 years? Again, we're not sure, though we get clues in his writings:

he had some visions in which God clarified his calling and gave him some crucial insights about Jesus; and we know he was persecuted, a lot (*2 Corinthians 11*)

Most of that happened... in that little WHITE SPACE in your Bible between vs. 26 and 27

*Some scholars disagree as to whether the 14 years are between vs. 26 and 27 or between vs. 27 and 11. Either way, the point is the same. **God took a long time preparing him***

Between ch. 9 and Ch. 13 where we'll see him pop up again, **God took a minimum of 17 years to prepare him.**

Moses-40; David-15; Joseph 20; Paul- 17

Don't waste the wait!

It's where you learn character; it's where you learn patience.

It's hard. That waiting space is singleness/joblessness/ etc.

but it's where God teaches you, molds, changes and builds you

Saul would soon change his name to "**Paul**," which means "small" or "humble"

"Saul" was a strong Jewish name, the name of the first, mighty king of Israel.

Saul the mighty had to become Paul the small.

²⁶When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple. (LOL!) ²⁷Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that He had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.

Be a Barnabas – assume the best of people, go out of your way for those in your way

²⁸Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they attempted to kill him.

Now, this is amazing, Saul has taken Stephen's place! (Likely same crowd that stoned Him in Ch7)

³⁰When the brothers found out, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in numbers.

Our text today began with threats against the church and ends with those threats still there, but also peace, encouragement, and growth

For Christians, external turmoil should magnify our internal peace

There are two things about the gospel that are really difficult to believe.

**That you are so bad that Jesus had to die to save you;
that he was so gracious he was glad to die to save you!**

MAIN TAKEAWAY- Jesus wants to change you so that you may change others also

God pursues sinners- it's the thread of the bible- that's not the issue,
the real issue is what happens once He catches you! Will you embrace Him or kick against Him?

There are only 2 responses to the gospel- embrace it or reject it
If today you are not yet ready to receive it, you are in rejection; ask yourself-
what's in my way? What's keeping you from embracing it.

God took the greatest **terrorist** against the church, with the blood of God's saints on his hands
& made him its greatest evangelist!

No one is beyond the reach of the gospel

Not every conversion is dramatic or sudden (paul, me)-
but all are miraculous and life changing (Lydia in ch 16, my wife)

Christian- are you an Ananias? Hesitant?

THE CHALLENGE- What is your *immediate* next step in following Jesus?