

Living out your faith Pt 11

Acts 9:1-22

V1-5

- Chapter 9 picks up where chapter 8 began, with Saul continuing his relentless persecution of the church. Verse 8:3 tells us how he wreaked havoc on the church (havoc-describes a wild animal attacking and devouring its prey) chasing people from city to city; entering homes dragging women and men out screaming and torturing his victims in an attempt to get them to denounce Jesus. So devoted was this man to stamping out Christianity, so great was his hatred for the church that he went to the high priest to get approval to chase believers as far as Damascus, which wasn't under the control of Judea, and extradite them back to Jerusalem for trial (verse 2). So in verse 1 when it says Saul was breathing out threats it wasn't idle threats – he backed them up.
- If you were to poll the Jewish citizens of this time and asked who was least likely to be saved many would have said Saul of Tarsus hands down. Verse 3 - He's traveling with his posse' nearing Damascus and suddenly he finds himself on the ground. It's not heat stroke or an aneurysm that causes him to fall, but a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. He sees a bright light from heaven and hears a voice speaking his name and asks him, "Why do you persecute Me? Verse 7- tell us the men with him also saw the light and heard the sounds, but later in verse 22:9 we're told they couldn't make out the words. Verse 5 - Saul asks, "Who are you?" and I love Jesus response. Jesus tells Saul exactly Who He is instead of giving him mystical response where the answer is a riddle like in a science fiction movie. Jesus then refers to something uncommon to us, but very common to persons living in this time "Kicking against the goads". Kicking against the goads was a device used to domesticate and tame a wild animal.

V6-22

- Up to this point Saul had thought he was serving God faithfully. He was a Pharisee through and through, the son of a Pharisee. He was taught to defend the law with his life and remove anybody who spoke against Judaism. He learned under Gamaliel the foremost spiritual authority of his time. History says when Gamaliel spoke of Saul, his prized student, the only complaint he had was finding enough books for him to read. Now, with all of his great learning Saul finds out that he's still spiritually blind. He did not understand what the **Old Testament** taught about the Messiah (**1 Corinthians 1:18-23**) and like many of his countrymen Saul stumbled over the cross and in his ignorance he laid waste to the church (**Galatians 1:23**). Verse 6 – his response is of a person who has surrendered after an encounter with Jesus "Lord what would you have me to do"
- Verse 8 - when people stumble, after a great experience they're expecting everything to be fine and boom! Immediately things are changed and not, for the better. Before his encounter he could see physically but was blind spiritually. Now, he can see spiritually but he's blinded physically as God is beginning the humbling process of this great, proud, learned man who is in need of deflating. Verse 9 - he goes three days without sight and it causes him to fast for the entire time. Verse 10 - we're introduced to another Ananias, who was a devout follower of Christ. He knew the reputation of Saul of Tarsus and how he had imprisoned

many believers. This is significant because Damascus was a week's journey from Jerusalem, which shows how violently Saul had been persecuting the church.

- Verse 13 - after being told what the Lord wanted him to do and who he was to speak to, Ananias wanted to make sure the Lord knew exactly who Saul was – Lord your saints have suffered much by the hands of this man, and he's here to continue his warfare against you and your church – Lord do you know this! Ananias is like many of us who are available to do God's will, but sometimes, we're not anxious to obey God's commands. He started out with "Lord here I am", but upon hearing the command, he's thinking, hey if Saul is blind that's a good thing. Verse 15 - the Lord's responds "go thy way". What the Lord is saying – don't worry about My decisions, don't try and council Me, but just so you know even though I don't have to explain Myself to you, I'll let you in on something – "He's My chosen vessel".
- He's exactly what I needed, a man who is learned in all the ways of Judaism, one who could travel freely through the Roman Empire, spreading the gospel to both Jew and Gentile. Saul was able to do both being a Pharisee and Roman citizen, having dual citizenship. Verse 16 - is also where people stumble when they hear the plans God has for them and it doesn't match with the plans they had for themselves. Verse 17 - Ananias obeys and goes to Saul speaking beautiful music to his ears by calling him brother. After Ananias lays hands on him the Holy Spirit falls upon Saul and the scales fall from his eyes so he can see again and he identifies with his new identity by being baptized. Verse 19 - after he is strengthened physically, he's also strengthened spiritually by being accepted by believers he once persecuted.
- Verse 21 - this is why we should never question God; He knows what He's doing. The people were astonished how a man like Saul could now become a follower of Jesus. This was important because if Ananias didn't accept Saul, and if the believers in Damascus hadn't received him with open arms this doesn't occur. Everyone needs to accept God's choosing and come alongside if we want to experience the fullness of His blessing. Verse 22 - Saul used his theological training to good advantage in pressing home the truth that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Saul went to Damascus to persecute the church but he ends up preaching Jesus. What a contrast, no wonder they were confounded.