

Saul the Unlikely Christian | Acts 9:1-22 | 2/13/16

- Saul
 - Saul - persecutor of the church
 - Before Paul became the apostle, the chosen instrument of God to be the greatest missionary to spread the Gospel, he was known as Saul.
 - Saul prior to his conversion was the exact opposite of what we think a Christian should be like.
 - We know that Christians love God, they put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ who came to earth to die on the cross for our sins.
 - A Christian strives to live their lives in obedience to Jesus, to proclaim His truth into all the world.
 - This however was not Saul.
 - Satan used Saul to tear down God's church.
 - Galatians 1:13
 - "For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I persecuted God's church to an extreme degree and tried to destroy it.
 - Satan did not want the church to grow and he was doing everything he could to prevent it from spreading.
 - One of his methods was to bring severe persecution to anyone who would follow or proclaim Jesus Christ.
 - Because if he could prevent them from teaching about Christ and could prevent people from seeking Him then he could stifle the growth.
 - So Satan filled Saul's heart with evil desires and intentions, he despised Jesus Christ and anyone who would follow him.
 - Acts 8:3
 - "Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison.
 - Acts 26:9-11
 - Acts 9:1-2
 - The Way
 - "The Way" was used to describe Christians, those who followed Jesus Christ which was derived on a description Jesus gave Himself.
 - John 14:6
 - "Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
 - He took it upon himself to do whatever he could to weed out the Christians by either imprisoning them or even having them put to death.
 - **Does Satan use people today to persecute the church like Saul?**
 - Saul the Pharisee
 - Saul was born in Tarsus and lived his life as an extremely devout Pharisee who studied at the feet of Gamaliel (one of the most respected Pharisee's who was a teacher of the law)
 - Acts 22:3
 - "He continued, "I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel and educated according to the strict

view of our patriarchal law. Being zealous for God, just as all of you are today.

- Galatians 1:14
 - “I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because **I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.**”
 - At first we might take his zealously being just for the Scriptures but he clearly states traditions.
- Saul’s knowledge of Scripture focused on the Torah.
 - While they had the complete Hebrew Bible consisting of all 39 books of the Old Testament he put all of his attention and focus on the Torah the first 5 books.
 - **The law is what they emphasized more than anything.**
- So what is a Pharisee?
 - They were a Jewish sect that was devoted to the exact observance of the Jewish religion.
 - They required strict adherence to the Law and traditions of their predecessors.
 - They had the written law which was Scripture it was the first 5 books of the Old Testament (Torah)
 - Their “tradition” was a complex oral law that specified in detail how to properly apply the written law in every situation.
 - So they added upon the law given in Scripture.
 - They viewed their oral tradition to be equal with the written law (Scripture)
 - “Sinners” to a Pharisee were those who did not keep to their standards.
 - The Pharisee’s for all their knowledge were spiritually blind.
 - Even though they strived to obey the law of God more than others, they were the most blind.
 - They focused purely on their “religion” and not on God and couldn’t recognize when God was right in front of them when He came as Jesus Christ.
 - **They had the Scriptures yet didn’t believe them.**
 - They missed that it was the righteousness of God through Christ that one obtains eternal life.
 - John 5:38-40
 - “You don’t have His word living in you, because you don’t believe the One He sent. You pour over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me. And you are not willing to come to Me so that you may have life.
 - John 5:46-47
 - “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me. But if you don’t believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”
 - Their unbelief left a veil covering their minds and their hearts.
 - 2 Corinthians 3:14-16
 - “But their minds were closed. For to this day, at the reading of the old covenant, the same veil remains; it is not lifted, because it is set aside only in Christ. Even to this

day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”

- The Pharisee was the only Jewish party group to survive the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD.70.
 - Modern day Judaism shared the beliefs of the Pharisee and they still strive to keep the oral tradition.
 - The Jewish writings we have since then like the Mishnah and the Talmud reflect the views of the Pharisee.
- So Saul being a devout Pharisee means that he knew the Law of God and their traditions very well, but he like the others was blinded to rest of the teachings of the prophets.
 - Saul did not believe that this Jesus Christ was the Messiah he firmly rejected Him since he was trying to drive the Christians out.
 - Saul and the rest of the Pharisee’s and Sadducees were spiritually blinded because of their unbelief.
 - They sought eternal life from obedience to the law by their own righteousness. Saul sought it by his own good works.
 - Philippians 3:3-6
 - Paul however later realized this righteousness was not by his works but through faith in Christ.
 - Philippians 3:8-9
- Saul’s conversion on the Damascus road | Acts 9:1-22
 - Saul meets Jesus
 - **Read Acts 9:1-9**
 - Saul had an encounter with Jesus that changed his life forever.
 - Saul had an encounter with the one whom he had been persecuting.
 - **Yes, he was persecuting the followers of Jesus, but to persecute the Christians is to persecute Jesus.**
 - This should give us great encouragement knowing that we as Christians are tied so closely to God that when we are attacked because of our beliefs that it affects God.
 - Saul’s realization that he has been persecuting Jesus who is Lord.
 - It seems that Saul even as he asked the question “who are you” that he knew who it was as he addressed Jesus as Lord.
 - Saul does not tell us all of his thoughts at this moment, but we can certainly imagine what might have been going through his head.
 - Jesus is alive and he is Lord!
 - Saul thought he was serving God, yet he was persecuting Him instead.
 - Acts 26:9
 - “In fact, I myself supposed it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus the Nazarene.”
 - Saul realized that he truly was lost, but no longer because he believed.
 - All those years of studying Scripture suddenly made since, he could see Christ in the Scriptures that he “thought” he knew so well.
 - The veil had been removed
 - 2 Corinthians 3:14-16

- “But their minds were closed. For to this day, at the reading of the old covenant, the same veil remains; it is not lifted, because it is set aside only in Christ. Even to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”
- The change in the unbeliever who meets Jesus Christ.
 - We see this seemingly immediate change in Paul after he has met Jesus Christ.
 - This is also true for the unbeliever who opens their heart to God’s calling.
 - While there is not an immediate full life change, there is an immediate understanding and belief in Jesus Christ when one believes and has saving faith.
 - **How would you describe your personal encounter with Jesus when you realized who He was?**
- Saul obeys the commands of Jesus and goes into Damascus.
 - Jesus blinded Saul in this moment when He came in the light and Saul obeyed Jesus by going into the city of Damascus.
- Saul’s purpose
 - ***Read Acts 9:10-19a***
 - Ananias is called to be God’s messenger to Saul
 - God then appeared to His disciple Ananias and told him to go to the house of Judas and ask for Saul.
 - This took Ananias back for a moment because he knew WHO Saul was.
 - Saul wasn’t a disciple or follower of Christ but instead he was a persecutor.
 - His reputation had preceded him.
 - God had a plan for Saul
 - God had a plan for Saul that began even before his birth.
 - Galatians 1:15
 - “But when God, who from my birth set me apart and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, so that I could preach Him among the Gentiles,…”
 - God always had a plan and a purpose for Saul.
 - Saul’s purpose revealed
 - God now reveals to Saul what his purpose is.
 - Acts 26:16-18 -> Recorded in later chapters from his testimony.
 - But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and of what I will reveal to you. I will rescue you from the people and from the Gentiles. I now send you to them to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that by faith in Me they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified.
 - Saul was commissioned by God to proclaim the light of Christ into the world.
 - Saul was to bring the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles so that all people regardless of their ethnicity or nation could hear the truth of Christ.

- God used him beyond just time on this earth in his public preaching, but that it was God’s will that his Holy Spirit inspired teachings to be written down in our Bible so that we could read it here today.
 - So that the world could know the truth of Christ.
- God also has a plan in place for all Christians before our birth.
 - All Christians have a God ordained purpose for their lives.
 - We have all be set aside to do His good works to proclaim His kingdom.
 - Ephesians 2:10
 - “For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.”
 - God will use our past experiences, even if Satan used them for evil God will ultimately use them for good.
 - Galatians 1:23
 - “they simply kept hearing: “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they glorified God because of me.”
 - Acts 9:19a-22
 - **His past was not erased, but God still used him.**
 - If we turn from our evil ways to obey Christ God, we will be set apart and useful to Him to do His good works.
 - 2 Timothy 2:20-21
 - “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver bowls, but also those of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.
 - **Do you think how you live your life in obedience to God affects your “usefulness” to Him?**
- God uses us like Paul even when if we think we are not worthy.
 - The example that Paul shows us is that no matter how we might think that we are not worthy to share the Gospel because of who we used to be, we can see that God used even a great persecutor to proclaim His glory.
 - **Do we have any excuse as Christians to so sat that because of our past sins that God will not use us?**
 - **How often does God turn the heart of a modern day Saul to become a great messenger of the truth?**