**ACTS AND US**

*“He Qualifies the Called”*

*FROM LAST WEEK: ADVANCING THROUGH ADVERSITY*

***ACTS 8:3-4***

*Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.* ***4****Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”*

*“What is meant for evil, God uses for His good” (based on Gen 50:20 – Joseph)*

*AS a result of the awful persecution, the word went forth in all directions and the church immediately expanded.*

**This Week: Saul of Tarsus – “Extreme Makeover”**

*(I have a friend who was on a national TV series about Extreme Makeover, where they helped him lose weight and transform his image and identity. It was amazing to see how great they made him look and appear on the outside. The problem was that the makeover was entirely superficial. He told me later, on the inside he felt worse than he ever did because he had wandered far away from God in the process.)*

Saul had the opposite experience. Jesus got a hold of him and the Holy Spirit completely transformed him, from an awful, mean-spirit agent of evil, to one of the most powerful men of God who ever lived. He may have looked like the same old Saul of Tarsus, but on the inside he was extremely transformed.

**WHO IS SAUL?**

“Saul of Tarsus” -> “Paul the Apostle” – (Not one of the 12, but a leader of the Early church and writer of most of the New Testament)

* Saul of Tarsus was born in approximately AD 5 in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia (modern-day Turkey).
* He was born to Jewish parents who possessed Roman citizenship which he also possessed.
* Sometime between AD 15—20 Saul began his studies of the Hebrew Scriptures in the city of Jerusalem under [Rabbi Gamaliel](https://www.gotquestions.org/Gamaliel-in-the-Bible.html).
* He describes himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews”, an Israelite, and a [Pharisee](https://www.gotquestions.org/Sadducees-Pharisees.html) of the tribe of Benjamin.
* He oversaw the stoning of Stephen and threatened to kill others also.
* He ravaged the church, entering the homes of believers in Jerusalem dragging off men and women to prison. He then planned to persecute other areas as well.

Saul’s Conversion

**ACTS 9**Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest **2**and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. **3**As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. **4**He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

**5**“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. **6**“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

**7**The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. **8**Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. **9**For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

**10**In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

**11**The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. **12**In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

**13**“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. **14**And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

**15**But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. **16**I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

**17**Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” **18**Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, **19**and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. **20**At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. **21**All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” **22**Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. **23**After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, **24**but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. **25**But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

**26**When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. **27**But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. **28**So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. **29**He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%209&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27246a)] but they tried to kill him. **30**When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

**31**Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

**A radical change!**

He was completely transformed by being filled with the Holy Spirit (much like Peter)!

*From* a mean-spirited, murderous, legalistic, Pharisee.

*To* a humble, servant-hearted, sacrificial Christian man who taught us more about love than anyone besides Jesus. (Love is Patient, Love is Kind…)

***And how about Ananias?!?!***

What a brave man he must have been.

Can you imagine if the Lord told you or I to go to the home of an ISIS militant or a notorious murderer and tell them about Jesus?

He was a very courageous, loyal, faithful servant of the Lord (with a lot of what we call: "Chutzpah” - audacity, brazen nerve).

He had the audacity and brazen nerve to go and do what the Lord asked him to do, regardless of the danger and consequences.

The Lord told him that *“This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.”*

The rewards were likely way more than Ananias could have even expected.

* Paul went on to preach to Gentiles throughout the entire region, starting many church movements across Asia Minor, Europe and the near East.
* He wrote half the N.T. and most of what we know as Christian Doctrine.
* He is one of the most read and quoted authors in human history and has influenced billions of people and leaders throughout the history of civilization in the modern world.

All because someone was willing to be obedient to the Lord and share the gospel with this man.

What transpired in the heart of Ananias to be willing to go to Paul and lay hands on him to be healed and filled with the Holy Spirit?

If we look back at the exchange between the Lord and Ananias, we see that there was a bit of a debate. There was hesitancy on the part of Ananias, and it took some convincing on the part of the Lord.

Ananias is telling God who Saul WAS and IS,

The Lord responds by telling Ananias who Saul WILL BE:

**ACTS 9:15**But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

*Again: “Ananias is telling God who Saul WAS and IS,*

*The Lord responds by telling Ananias who Saul WILL BE”*

This is how we all need to approach evangelism.

Recognizing who the people we are trying to reach WERE and ARE,

But having faith and vision for what they WILL BE!

God can save *anyone*; He wants to save *everyone.*

I’m sure you’ve heard about some amazing conversions that have taken place:

Gang Leaders, Islamic Extremists, Hindu Priests, *Atheists* (my experience with one).

*An Atheist who was a sister of a Christian friend of mine, asked me how can I believe in Jesus, when I don’t even believe in God?*

*I told her to ask God to reveal himself to you in some small way that only you would know that it’s for real.*

*I did not know what it would be, or if it would happen but I did have vision for her being a Christian because her sister was one and I imagined that she would be like her.*

*Lost touch with her for years, then got a letter one day telling me that she DID ask God to reveal himself and He DID.*

*She has since become a believer, married a Christian man and is ministering all over the country with the International Bible Society.*

I didn’t know that it would turn out like that, all I did was step out with a little faith mixed with a little chutzpah.

We need to ask God to give us HIS vision for people, not our own.

Think about How God saw you, before you responded to Him.

He knows all about who you WERE and who you ARE,

But He also knows and sees who you WILL BE!

**He is not *as* concerned with where you came from,**

 **as He is with where you are going.**

We need to be like that to each other, and unbelievers as well.

We need to have eyes and hearts that don’t dwell on people’s past and present sins, but focus on what their lives would be like if they became more and more like Jesus. Then we can pray and work toward that end.

God sees our potential. He knows what He wants to do in each of us and what it will look like when it all comes into fruition.

*[ seed pack analogy – what would it look like if this seed fell on good ground? ]*

**1 Sam 16:7** “The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

**Peter in Joppa**

**32**As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord’s people who lived in Lydda. **33**There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. **34**“Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up. **35**All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

**36**In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. **37**About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. **38**Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”

**39**Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

**40**Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. **41**He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. **42**This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. **43**Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.”

Peter was being used not just to teach, preach and lead the young church, but to do miracles of healing and raise people from the dead!

We should never limit God in the ways He wants to use us for His glory!

Some of us may feel completely unprepared and unqualified to be used by God to minister to others. Maybe because we are not eloquent or educated. Maybe because we don’t feel worthy because of past sin.

Isaiah, the most quoted prophet in the entire Bible felt this way. When he was being commissioned, he stated that He was unworthy because he was a man of “unclean lips”. But because he was willing God made him worthy and sent him to speak to his generation, but every generation that has existed for nearly 3000 years.

**Isaiah 6:1-9 “**In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2**Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. **3**And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

**4**At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

**5**“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

**6**Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. **7**With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

**8**Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

**9**He said**, “Go...”**

Each of us has a special calling that God wants to commission us for.

Are you willing to accept that calling and say to Him “Here am I. Send me!”?

*You may feel unqualified for the calling, but remember;*

**“GOD DOESN’T CALL THE QUALIFIED, HE *QUALIFIES THE CALLED”***

Ask God to give you;

* FAITH – That even the hardest hearts of the people in your life can change.
* VISION – To have a glimpse of what it would look like if that happened.
* COURAGE (Chutzpah) – To be willing to speak the right word at the right time.

**God wants to do great things through each of us,**

**even use us to change the lives of others**

**who will also go on to do great things.**

**All we need to do is be willing and obedient, and He does the rest.**