**Transformed: A Survey of the Book of Acts**

**Week 7 (February 20, 2019)**

**Acts 9:1-31 (For full context, please read Acts 8:1-3 & chapter 9:1-43)**

**Helpful Background**

1. Sometimes geography is important to the Biblical narrative. Damascus, a key trading city, was located about 175 miles northeast of Jerusalem, in the Roman province of Syria. In the first century, it had a large Jewish population, a significant number of whom had become followers of Jesus. Saul intended to travel there to zealously continue the persecution of “the Church,” but God had something else in mind for him. Saul, in another Divine appointment, met the Risen Christ, and was confronted with two stunning realities; Jesus was the promised Messiah, and Saul, by his actions against the followers of Jesus, was personally persecuting God’s chosen one. This amazing revelation caused Saul, a man of great faith, to make a radical choice to follow Christ. Saul was transformed and was never the same.

2. Saul/Paul later referred to the event on the Damascus road as the start of his new life in Christ. Paul had previously been very religious, and had been very zealous in pursuing God, but had discovered that religion was not enough. A relationship with Christ, through faith, was what was necessary to truly follow God. Saul had an amazing religious pedigree, kept the law carefully and prayerfully, and tried to do everything to be obedient to what he thought God wanted him to do. He was a “rising star” in the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, and was probably being trained to become the high priest and lead the people of God. His campaign to purify the Jewish religion from the contamination of the followers of Jesus was vicious, but was motivated by a misled understanding of religious zeal for God. (1 Cor. 9:1, 15:8, Gal. 1:15-16)

3. Saul/Paul had 3 days in Damascus to consider what had happened to him; 3 days, no food, no water, no sight, no distractions. Then, he had another Divine appointment with a faithful follower of Jesus, who bravely approached the man known to be a vicious persecutor of “the Church.” This man, sent by God, confirmed all that had happened to Saul/Paul, and helped Paul take his first steps as a follower of Jesus.

4. Ananias was described in the scriptures as “a disciple” or follower of Jesus. We don’t know anything else about him. He’s simply portrayed as an ordinary man, and no fact except that He was a disciple of Jesus is apparently important to Luke. Ananias was given a vision, and specific instructions from the Lord, but please note what he was NOT told. Ananias was not reassured that all would be well for him. He was not given any comforting words for this tough mission. He was just told to go!

5. The Holy Spirit was present and powerful within Ananias. He was able to step out in courage, overcome his fear, and do what God had told him to do. He probably thought that he was walking into the Lion’s Den like Daniel when he went to the house on Straight Street, but yet, he obeyed. The reality of what he found would have shocked him. The Great Persecutor of the followers of Jesus Saul was broken, blind, fasting, and most likely deep in discouragement. Ananias called Saul “brother,” and God worked through Ananias in amazing ways.

6. After Paul escaped from Damascus, he spent some time in Arabia, probably being trained & growing as a Christian. (Gal. 1:17-18) Luke does not mention this time period, but jumps to Saul’s arrival in Jerusalem. Saul/Paul returned to Damascus and continued to serve the Lord there, until it was time to return to Jerusalem. Upon his arrival, only Barnabas would associate with him. Barnabas was the only believer who not only accepted Saul/Paul, but stood up for him and vouched for his faith in Jesus Christ.

**Review Questions**

7. (9:1-2) What does “Meanwhile” refer back to in 9:1? What had Saul been doing while Philip, Pete, and John were ministering beyond Jerusalem? What motivated Saul? What was Saul’s next step in his plan to purify Judaism?

8. (9:3-6) What happened while Saul was on the road to Damascus? What did Saul see/hear/experience? What surprising fact did the voice share with Saul? What was Saul’s response? What was going to happen next?

9. (9:7-9) What did Saul’s travel companions experience? What condition was Saul in afterwards? What is significant about the way Saul entered Damascus? What did Saul do once he got to Damascus?

10. (9:10-12) Who was Ananias? What do we know about him? What did the Lord say to him in a vision? How did the vision start, and what instructions were given? What was NOT shared that could have been helpful?

11. (9:13-16) What was the first response of Ananias? Why was this response both understandable and respectful? What was the Lord’s response to the concerns of Ananias? What point was the Lord trying to make?

12. (9:17-19a) What’s significant about the first phrase in 9:17? What did Ananias do and say once he met up with Saul? What happened? What else happened that most likely Ananias was a part of or led? How did God work through an ordinary man to do extraordinary work?

13. (9:19b-21) What did Saul do after the intense time with Ananias? Then what did Saul do within a few days? Where did Saul teach/preach/share? What impact did Saul have in Damascus? How did people respond?

14. (9:22-25) What happened to Saul’s preaching? How did the Jews in Damascus respond? What plot was discovered and shared with Saul? How did they respond? What did they do?

15. (9:26-27) What does Luke tell us here, and what does he not? What happened when Saul reached Jerusalem? Why is this response both logical and understandable? Who got involved? What was Barnabas able to do? How was Barnabas able to help?

16. (9:28-30) What did Saul do once he had been accepted? What impact did he have? Why did Saul’s preaching/persuasion develop so powerfully in such a short time? What happened as a result? How did Saul’s fellow believers respond? What did they do to protect/save Saul?

17. (9:31) What condition was the Church in at this point? How did the believers live? How did the Holy Spirit play a key part?

**So What?**

18. How are the words of Jesus to Saul strangely comforting for all believers? How do you feel when tough things are happening to you? How do you respond?

19. How are you encouraged by the example of Ananias? What info was he given along with the command to “go” and what was missing? How have you responded when God has called you to do something difficult? What happened?

20. Both Ananias and Barnabas stepped up and stepped out of their comfort zones to obey and to serve. How did they do this? What did they overcome to do this? What happened? How have you been challenged and called to step out of your comfort zone at times? How did you respond? What happened?