

Day 37, Acts 9

by David Servant

God's sovereignty and direction are evident in the lives of those who are receptive to Him, as seen in the conversion of Paul and the revivals in Lydda/Sharon and Joppa.

Scripture: Matthew 25:31, Acts 8:1-9, 1 Corinthians 14:18, Galatians 1:13, 1 Timothy 1:13, 1 Timothy 1:15

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Redemption"

Description

David Servant preaches about the transformation of Paul, from being the world's foremost sinner to a forgiven vessel of God's grace. Despite Paul's violent past of persecuting Christians, God showed him mercy and used him as an example of His perfect patience and forgiveness. Through Paul's testimony, we see that no one is beyond God's redemption and that His grace is available to all, no matter how sinful they may have been.

Transcript

It is no wonder why Paul described himself as the world's foremost sinner in 1 Timothy. He held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, being in "hearty agreement with putting him to death" (Acts 8:1). Soon after, he "began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison" (Acts 8:3). Paul later wrote that he had previously "persecuted the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it" (Gal. 1:13), and described himself as being a "blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor" (1 Tim. 1:13). During his testimony to King Agrippa he admitted: "I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth....not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons...but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities" (Acts 26:9-11).

Yet God forgave him! Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15-16: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." This should give hope to the world's second-greatest sinner (that would be me), and everyone down the line! Amazing grace!

Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (9:4). When someone persecutes the church, he persecutes Jesus, which is His body. Likewise, how you and I treat Christ's followers is how we treat Jesus. When we provide food, drink, clothing, shelter and comfort for "the least of these" among Christ's

body, we're doing those things for Him, proving our love. When we ignore "the least of these," we're ignoring Jesus, and prove that we don't believe in Him. This is what He taught (see Matt. 25:31-46).

Surely Saul/Paul was born again on the road to Damascus. When he heard the Lord's voice, he said to Jesus, "Who art Thou, Lord?" (9:5). He was calling Jesus Lord before he even knew to whom he was speaking. (Wouldn't you have done the same?) He subsequently obeyed Jesus' instructions. And notice that Ananias, when he first met Saul, called him "brother Saul" (9:17). Yet Ananias told "brother Saul" that he had come so he would regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul was born again, but had not been filled with the Holy Spirit. This is so obvious that only theologians will debate it.

The Bible doesn't record Paul's actual experience of receiving the Holy Spirit, but we know that sooner or later he spoke in other tongues, because he said so in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:18). We're seeing a pattern develop here.

Peter was involved in the beginnings of at least two major revivals, one in Lydda/Sharon and the other in Joppa. Both were precipitated by miracles.

Notice the differing receptivity between the people of Lydda/Sharon and the people of Joppa. As a result of the miracle of Aeneas' healing, "all who lived at Lydda and Sharon...turned to the Lord" (9:35). In Joppa, as a result of Tabitha's being raised from the dead, "many believed in the Lord" (9:42). These cities were near one another, yet the people in Lydda/Sharon were more receptive to God than the people of Joppa. This phenomena can be observed all over the world. Receptivity varies from nation to nation, state to state, city to city, and neighborhood to neighborhood. Receptivity also changes over time. There haven't been any revivals in Joppa lately.

God knows who is receptive and who is not, as He is constantly trying to reach every person through His creation and through their consciences. He will direct us to receptive people wherever they are, whether there be a receptive multitude or single individual. Let's stay in tune with the Spirit!

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