

Who would Surprise you the most to become a follower of Jesus?

Acts 9:1-9 February 9, 2020

Acts Series: Taking the Message of Jesus' Kingdom Everywhere

Acts ¹ 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.

Galatians ¹¹ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. ¹

¹ The New International Version. (2011): Zondervan.

1. Letters

Acts 9:1, 2

*asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, ...
... he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. Verse 9:2*

A. An Emotional Reaction

Acts 9:1

Paul was angry toward the followers of Jesus

Uttering threats with every breath (breathing out threats and slaughter)

Breathing ἐμπνέω (*empneō*) a verb used only this once in the Bible

Threats ἀπειλή (*apeilē*) noun; threat or harm used 4 times in the NT and when used with 'breathing' means a series of formal threats uttered.

Murderous φόνος (*phonos*) noun; used ten times in the NT (Galatians 5:20, 21)

Murder or possibly slaughter

Acts 13:9 resolves the name game Saul to Paul. I will refer to him as Paul.

B. Seeking Approval

Acts 9:2

What was Paul's purpose in obtaining these letters?

Followers of the Way – Check John 14:6 for a clue

2. Light

Acts 9:3-6

"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." Acts 9:5, 6*

A. Paul sees the Light

Acts 9:3-5

Jesus' troubling question

'Why are you persecuting me?'

Paul's request for identification

A conversation with Jesus was the last thing he expected

B. Paul gets a new mission in life

Acts 9:6

This starts with a new 'boss'

Must δεῖ (*dei*) A Greek verb used commonly in the NT. It occurs 99 times in the NT (18 times in Luke 22 in Acts, 25 in Paul's letters) δεῖ (*dei*) designates an unconditional necessity; with absolute, unquestioned and deterministic character. In the NT statements with δεῖ are normally understood more or less as divine decrees or plan of God. (Acts 1:16, 21; 3:21; 4:12; 5:29; **9:6**, 16; 14:22; 15:5; 16:30; 17:3; 19:21, 36; 20:35; 23:11; 24:19; 25:10, 24; 26:9; 27:21, 24, 26)

Translated in verse 9:6 NIV, NASB, NLT, NKJV, KJV, Must; ESV, Are

A. Shock and Awe

He had been spiritually blind but was now able to see

B. Responding to an encounter with God

Abraham – Genesis 12, 15

Moses – Exodus 3

Isaiah – Isaiah 6

Jeremiah – Jeremiah 1

Ezekiel – Ezekiel 2, 3

Amos – Amos 7-9

C. New Reality

The arguments he might have used to deny Jesus are wrong

Jesus is really the messiah – Christ

Jesus is Lord – God

Paul had approved of and thirsted for killing Jesus' followers

Who would Surprise you the most to become a follower of Jesus?

Does every conversion happen this way?

We are willing to trust the Holy Spirit to work

We can accept a 'no' with grace knowing God is at work

Think about some people you know who you would be surprised if they became followers of Jesus. Pray for them. Pray that God would touch their hearts and minds. Pray that they would be clearly and miraculously saved.

Study Questions

For your personal study or with family, a friend, mentor or Life Group

Beginning:

1. What insight, idea, question or principle from Sunday's message did you find most helpful, eye opening or troubling?
2. Who would be the person that would most surprise you if they became a genuine follower of Jesus?

Learning:

3. Look at '*the Way*'. Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22. This is a unique phrase for Luke for followers of Jesus. He also combines way with other terms Acts 16:17, 18:25, 26. Paul eventually joins 'the Way' while he was on the way.
4. Paul shares his testimony three times in the book of Acts (9:1-19; 21:1-21 and 26:2-23) and in his letters (1 Corinthians 15:8, 9; 2 Corinthians 11:22-33; Galatians 1:11-24 and Philippians 3:4-15). This was the biggest shift in his life. What is the story of your coming to faith?
5. Paul trained under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) we see Gamaliel in Acts 5:39 provide some interesting wise counsel. How do we know Paul is not really following that counsel? Why does it come as no surprise that Acts 5:39 come true in Paul's life?
6. God often reveals Himself as light (Psalms, 4:6; 36:9, 56:13; 78:14; 89:15; 97:11 or 104:2 or in Isaiah 2:5 or 60:19) Even His voice speaks in light as seen in Exodus 3:4 or 19:16-20. Paul might think God will speak to him.
7. Often when God calls He uses the 'double vocative' (repeats the name twice) Acts 9:3 ties to Genesis 22:11, 46:2; Exodus 3:4; I Samuel 3:4. This again should give Paul a big clue to whom he is listening. What is the correct response when God calls?

Applying:

8. Do you think this is to be the pattern of all 'conversions' or an example of one sort of conversion? How does your experience reflect or differ from Saul's?
9. When we invite a person to consider Jesus to become a follower we need to consider how we respond to a possible no. How many times could Paul have said 'no'? How persistent was Jesus?

Praying:

10. Think of a few people in your life who would be a complete surprise if they came to follow Jesus. Pray that Jesus might open blinded eyes.

Mentoring: Take some time to recount your conversion testimony. Talk about how God may have been at work in you preparing you for this decision. What differences have you found in your life as a follower of Jesus? Where have you been blessed? Where have you been challenged with adversity or opposition to your life as a disciple of Jesus?