

Acts Chapter 9 1-31

It is in Chapter 9 of Acts, that we finally see the conversion story of Saul of Tarsus. A Pharisee “through and through”, verse 1 says that he “breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord”. When read, this seems almost to give an impression of Saul “foaming at the mouth” with anger. Requesting letters from the high priest, he sets out for Damascus, to route out the followers of Christ there.

God, however, has different plans. Appearing to Saul in a blinding light, Jesus asks “Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?”

“Who are you, Lord?” Saul responds.

“I am Jesus, whom though persecute. It is hard for you to kick against the pricks (or goads)”.

It within this short exchange that we find two startling theological concepts: First, that Christ considers persecution of his Church to be the same thing as persecution against him. Second, Christ seems to be saying that Saul’s attack on his church was a direct result of him fighting God’s *call* on his life. The idea of “goads” relates to the goads used by horsemen to control their mounts. The “goad” in this case, was probably the Holy Spirit’s call, as well as Saul’s own conscience, warning him of his wrong actions. Many people have this same reaction today. Some of the people who seem to be bent on attacking the church, often do so in a bad reaction to their own conscience. God leaves no one in the dark; they know when they do wrong. A change in loyalty would require a change in lifestyle, however, and many people are not willing to make that sacrifice. Hence they “kick against the goads”.

Notice also Saul’s reaction, though. Upon realizing the truth, Saul immediately says “Lord, what would you have me do?” What a testimony to the unbelievable changing power of Jesus Christ. Only moments before, this man had surely been planning, daydreaming of his assault on the believers in Damascus. Two sentences from Jesus later, he was a willing servant.

He has been struck blind, of course, and now proceeds to Damascus, with a new purpose on his mind. Led by the hand of the people with him, they arrive in Damascus and stay there for three days before being visited by Ananias, a disciple of the Lord. Although Ananias is hesitant at first, because of Saul’s reputation, he does the will of the Lord, and visits Saul, at the house of Judas, on Straight Street. Ananias then places his hands on Saul, and Saul receives his sight.

Saul wastes no time dawdling. After staying with some unnamed disciples an unspecified number of days (implying perhaps, that he was receiving instruction on the Gospel), he immediately began to preach the Gospel in the synagogues. This confused the locals, of course, as Saul had apparently been

famous for his persecution of the Christian church. This undoubtedly helped to prove his case, and helped add punch to his preaching. The wording implies that his efforts were very effective.

This angered the local Jews. In fact, the story goes on to say that they tried to kill him. Local followers let him out of the city wall by a rope, and he was able to escape to the followers in Jerusalem. They of course, didn't trust him, and Barnabas had to vouch for him.

Then the Grecians in Jerusalem attempted to kill him. This is typical of course with the Gospel. Someone once compared preaching the Gospel to shining a flashlight in someone's eyes. When a person has spent their whole life in darkness, the light can be very offensive.

After this, it is said that the "the churches had rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." Throughout the scriptures, God's people have both good times and bad. It is our responsibility to be faithful, regardless of our circumstances.