

The Life Challenge

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10

Sermon Series: Empowered
Title: Jesus Loves Terrorists
Speaker: Gary Loewen
Text: Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-31
Date: February 4, 2018



WARM-UP

Stirring up the Pot

- Sometimes in high school graduation they decide on a "person most likely to succeed" award. (It's a dumb idea!). Can you identify a person who graduated from high school who absolutely shocked you? You had pretty low expectations for that person, but this person has 'hit it out of the park,' so to speak.
- You have friends, colleagues, neighbors and relatives who are not-yet-believers. Who do you think is the **last person** you would think would become a follower of Jesus?

DISCUSSION

Review: Trace the Transformation of Saul the Terrorist to Paul the Apostle of Christ:

Saul the Terrorist: Acts 8:1-3

- Approves the stoning of Stephen
- Mercilessly imprisons men and women without compunction, puts others to death; trying to get believers to blaspheme
- Self-confessed himself as a 'raging fury' that obsessed him (Acts 26:11)

Saul's Conversion: Acts 9:1-18

- Jesus confronts Saul on the Damascus Road:
 - ⇒ *What catches your attention the most as you hear the conversation between Jesus and Saul?*
 - ⇒ *Saul is blind, won't eat or drink anything for three days. What's going on in Saul's mind, do you think?*
- God had already been at work in Saul:
 - ⇒ Acts 26:14 – God has been prodding him (with goads)
 - * the stoning of Stephen may have been on Saul's mind
 - * was he bothered by his mercilessness to believers?
- Ananias becomes Saul's mentor: (9:10-19)
 - ⇒ *What was his assignment?*
 - ⇒ *What does Ananias think about his assignment? Do you blame him?*
 - ⇒ *What would become Saul's most significant assignment (v.15)?*
 - ⇒ *Beyond getting back his sight, what other things happens to Saul right there?*

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DISCUSSION

Saul's Transformation: Acts 9:19b-22

- The disciples in Damascus and Jewish leaders were confused by Saul:
 - ⇒ What were the evidences of Saul's changed heart, mind and attitude?
 - ⇒ Is it possible that all his studying in the Old Testament now became the texts for his powerful preaching?

Saul's ministry goes beyond just Damascus

- The sequence of events appears to be:
 - ⇒ Saul preaches in Damascus for "several days with disciples" (9:19b)
 - ⇒ Saul expands his ministry to "Arabia" – three years (Gal. 1:17-18)
 - ⇒ Saul returns to Damascus but he has to escape since the Jews want him dead
 - ⇒ Saul goes to Jerusalem and continues preaching to great consternation of the Grecian Jews (9:26-28)
 - * Barnabas becomes Saul's apologist and mentor – convinced that Saul was the real deal. The Jerusalem leaders allowed him to preach in the city
 - ⇒ The brothers sent Saul out to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus (10 "silent years"). (9:29-30)
 - ⇒ Saul resurfaces in Acts 11:25-26 and begins a powerful ministry with Barnabas

Application:

What do we make of the transformed Saul in our setting?

- We see Paul as a towering giant on the advent of church history. We admire him and he blows us away with his abilities, commitment and his vision.
- God may have been working to change Saul for that period of time. God needed exactly that kind of guy for the purposes of reaching out to the Gentiles. But that was then and this is now. We don't see ourselves in the mold of people like Paul, Peter etc. They are simply out of our league??
- We agree that we should live with **a difference-making faith**, but not quite as radical as this Paul guy!!??

What do we learn about the LORD in chapter 9?

- What characteristics of the LORD stands out to you? If those characteristics of the LORD are now the same today, is there someone in your locus where s/he needs to meet that kind of God?
- Are there people you bump into who are totally against Christianity? Have you given up on them?
- The LORD uses two key people to connect Saul to the believing community. Remember that the believers were petrified of Saul. Can you see yourself having the joy to connect people to the believing community? This may be a prodigal finding his/her way back home. This may be a person completely new to Christian ideas.
- Does all this stuff intimidate us? Is this the time **for prayer**? Would this be a time to pray for a fresh invigoration of the **Holy Spirit's empowerment**?