

Week of May 20-26

MORE UNEXPECTED

Scripture Reading: Read Acts chapter 9

In yesterday's devotional, we witnessed how unexpected God's plans can be when Philip's obedience to leave ministry for obscurity led to some unexpected ministry that, in turn, changed the destiny of a nation. As unexpected as the events of Acts chapter 8 were, chapter 9 is filled with an even greater unexpected event: the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Now, because many of us are so familiar with his salvation, we miss how unexpected this event was. If we could translate the magnitude of Saul's conversion into today's terms, it would be like taking last year's headline: Osama bin Laden Killed by U.S. Forces in Pakistan and replacing it with Osama bin Laden Converts to Christianity, Preaches that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the only Savior of the World. That kind of headline would certainly shock the world. In the same way, Saul's conversion rocked the Jewish and Christian world of the 1st century.

When we first met Saul, it was back in Acts chapter 7 as the cloaks of those who took part in the stoning of Stephen were laid at Saul's feet. The opening verse of chapter 8 makes clear that Saul was there giving approval to Stephen's death. Immediately afterward, the floodgates of persecution are unleashed on the church with Saul at the forefront: *"...Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison."* In the opening verse of today's chapter reading, we discover that *"Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples."* Saul zealously tried to eradicate the Christian faith as is clear from his testimony later in Acts 26:10-11. Not exactly a probable candidate for conversion, is he?

Everything changed, however, when Saul met the glorified Christ while he was on the road to Damascus heading to the city to persecute believers there. Being a good Jew, Saul knew the voice he heard was from heaven. What obviously shocked him, though, was that the voice belonged to Jesus! In that moment, Saul's life turned upside down. Everything he thought he knew about Jesus now had to be jettisoned and replaced with the truth that Jesus was the Messiah.

An unexpected conversion to be sure, not only for the Jewish people who shortly afterward heard him preaching the gospel he was trying to eliminate but also for the believers too! According to today's chapter reading, Ananias had trouble believing it at first. Look how he responded when the Lord called him to pray for Saul to receive the Holy Spirit and to be healed of his blindness. The church in Jerusalem also had trouble with it. They probably thought he was pretending as a way to spy on the believers. Thank God for Barnabas and his willingness to vouch for Paul. You see, Barnabas no doubt realized that God was able to reach unexpected people like Saul. And you know what? He still is!

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Is there anyone you know that you thought would never come to Christ? Take heart, based on God's unexpected conversion of Saul, that God can reach the unexpected. Pray for that person today that they would encounter Christ.

Take-a-way: *God still reaches unexpected people, in unexpected places, and in unexpected ways!*