

"AN INSTRUMENT OF GOD"

Acts 9: 1-19

Rev. Ed Hoekstra.

**What is God doing?** Whenever we read scripture, an important question one must ask is: What is God doing here in the reading? The answers can vary, but it is important to know that God is very active. First of all in the preceding chapter (Acts 8), one of the apostles of Christ, Philip is summoned by the Holy Spirit to speak to the Ethiopian Eunuch and speak to him about the Good News. The Eunuch then asked to be baptized. The spirit prompted Philip to 'one on one' contact with the Ethiopian. I believe that sometimes we get prompted by the Spirit to make one on one contact with people we may not know.

The next story (our text for today) is about the most famous conversion in the Bible – the conversion of Saul (later called Paul). This is a miraculous story! We know from Jesus' life, that He was not judgmental, but if there was a group who would be recipients of Jesus' disapproval it would be the Pharisees. These teachers of the law received the greatest criticism from Jesus because of their blatant hypocrisy. These religious leaders acted very pious and holy in front of the common people, but their hearts were filled with arrogance and greed. Jesus referred to them as a 'brood of vipers'. Yet, the 'Pharisee of Pharisees' (the 'top' Pharisee), Saul was chosen by Jesus to be the first missionary of the Gospel. How unlikely is that? It was totally underserved. It was God's grace that made it happen!

**What God can do with a person:** The story of Paul's conversion was totally surprising to a person who is considered the enemy. Though this man was a terrible enemy who every Christian feared, God chose him as God's personal representative! Take a look around you and consider those who would be an enemy to your faith, culture and your personal safety. The person from whom you would expect the worst - that person would be chosen to be Jesus' representative! As evidenced with Paul in our story today, that person's life and gifts were used for God's purposes. God can do remarkable things with a person!

**Who are you?** The first question Paul asks God (Jesus) as he is struck down on the road is: Who are you? This is a personal question and Paul suddenly realizes that this is not the God he knew and who he was serving. Paul had all those years of brilliant training and realized he did not know God at all. God to Paul was a distant God who created the universe, and then set it in motion to run its course. Paul had also learned that God had spoken to Abraham and Moses and other people in the past.

To Paul, God was a not a relational God, but more a God of do's and don'ts. When Paul was struck on the road to Damascus he met a God he never dreamed existed. Paul was asking a relational question of not only "Who are you?" but, "Who are you to me?" Jesus' answer to Paul's question was: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city and you will be told what to do" (Acts 9: 5,6).

**Spiritually Blind.** Remember from previous scripture that Paul stood by and helped to have Stephen stoned. Paul would have heard the story about Jesus from those Paul arrested and persecuted, but He was spiritually blind to the Good News of Jesus. Paul was spiritually blind and Jesus had to

physically blind him to get his attention. What would Christ have to do to get your attention? God may work through a challenge, a loss, to get our attention to put us back on the right road.

The Lord speaks to Ananias in a vision (verse 10ff): *“Ananias”, He answered, “Here I am Lord.” The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas, look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so he might regain his sight”*. Ananias objects saying this Saul (Paul) is bad news. Regardless, Jesus tells Ananias to Go!

**We are raised as consumers.** We too can be spiritually blind to who Jesus is in our lives. We are all raised to be consumers in our culture. I heard on a CBC talk show that retailers try to get young children (as soon as they can sit up) to identify with their products at an early age so the children will carry that brand loyalty into adulthood. This consumer attitude can go deep and also affect the way we see spiritual matters. In our consumer culture, we have the temptation to come to church with a consumer mentality to learn what faith and Jesus can do for me – period. But that is only part of the equation. The message of Jesus’ love goes far beyond what it can do personally for you--to what our faith can do for others! This consumer mentality leaves our faith shallow and blind and frankly, not that inspiring to others.

**\*Go - for he (Saul) is an instrument!** Paul became a huge gift to the early church. God changed (converted) Paul from being a direct enemy to being a direct instrument for the growth of Christ’s church. As soon as Paul received the Holy Spirit, his eyes were restored; he was baptized and received nourishment to regain his strength to work for God’s Kingdom.

How can we be an instrument for our Lord? First of all, remember if God can change the greatest enemy to the Christian church, He can change you! Remember you too have the Holy Spirit to guide you in your ministry. It is not easy to be a passionate instrument of our Lord. However, when we allow our eyes to be opened by the Spirit, we can be used as God’s instruments to bring Christianity to a higher level where it makes a difference in the world! I want to ask you: What can you do to go beyond the consumer mentality with your faith?

I will give you an example from one of our church members who did just that. Perhaps she was surprised by the Spirit’s leading.

She received an email which showed a sign supposedly in front of a Mosque in Michigan. The sign was inciting hatred and violence on Americans. Our member was shocked, upset, and thought it best to go to the source. She quickly went to the local Mosque on Oxford St. and explained to the people there what she had received. They said to her that it appears to be a ‘photo shop’ computer program where one can edit a sign to make it say whatever one desires.

When our member went on a second visit to the Mosque, the Imam, and the technology staff verified to our member that the email is definitely a fake. The Muslim people at the Mosque sincerely thanked our member for bringing this to their attention in order to get to the truth. This kind of action by our member is in line with Christ – action which builds bridges of understanding and respect for our fellow human beings.

How do you understand God? With Paul, we ask: Who are you? Our relational God in Jesus can convert you and keep changing you toward his purposes. The Holy Spirit is a gift for you to receive in order to grow in the potential of being His instrument. Amen.