**Saul, Another Unlikely Conversion**

Acts 7:54-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-22

Introduction:

1. In recent weeks we have studied about Cornelius, Lydia, and the Philippian jailor. All of these, to me, are unlikely candidates for conversion.

 a. Cornelius was a good man, but needed to hear words whereby he would be saved.

 So being good was not good enough.

 b. Lydia was a woman of faith. Even when she was “out-of-town” and there was no

 synagogue she found a place to worship. Very pious, but needed more.

 c. The Philippian jailor was a Roman, if religious, he was probably polytheistic recognizing

 multiple dieties.

2. There is another unlikely candidate for conversion first described in Acts 7:58.

3. I want to describe for you why I think he is an unlikely candidate for conversion and then notice what happened to him.

Discussion:

I. Saul was an unlikely candidate for conversion to Christ.

 A. He was present at the stoning of Stephen. He held the garments of those who stoned

 him and was in hearty agreement with putting him to death (Acts 7:58-8:1).

 B. This tells me that Saul is very opposed to Christianity.

 1. Stephen was one who was preaching Jesus as the fulfillment of the history of the

 nation of Israel.

 a. His story begins in 7:8-15.

 b. When he had opportunity to speak to the Jews he began connecting their history

 with the coming of Jesus (Acts 7:1ff).

 c. He concluded by saying that they had betrayed and murdered Jesus, the

 Righteous One who was the one announced in all this history (Acts 7:51-53).

 d. Stephen said he saw Jesus, standing at the right hand of God. When he told

 them he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God they stoned him

 (Acts 7:54-58).

 e. Saul participated in this. And was in hearty agreement with putting him to death

 (8:1).

 2. Saul proceeded to ravage the church, entering house after house, and dragging off

 men and women, he would put them in prison (8:3).

 C. Perhaps you can see why I think he is an unlikely candidate for conversion.

II. The record in Acts 9 describes more of a “commission experience” than a “conversion experience,” but converted he was, as necessarily implied by what is said.

 A. When I compare what is said here with passages like Isa. 6 and Isaiah’s commission as

 a prophet there are many similarities.

 1. An appearance by the Lord.

 2. A humbled response.

 3. A commission.

 4. Action taken to communicate God’s message to the people.

 B. Most often this passage is looked at as “The Conversion of Saul.”

 1. It is so identified by NASB section title.

 2. Nearly every sermon I have ever heard preached on this text focuses on the

 conversion of Saul, NOT on his commission to preach the gospel.

 3. But the focus is not so much on his conversion as his receiving a commission from

 the Lord to go to the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel (9:15).

 C. Saul was hostile to the disciples (9:1-2).

 1. Still breathing threats and murder.

 2. Asked for letters from the High Priest to the synagogues in Damascus so that he

 might bind Christians and bring them to Jerusalem.

 D. What happened next rocked his world (9:3-9).

 1. The Lord appeared to him.

 2. He was blinded by the light.

 3. He describes what happened himself in Acts 22:6-16.

 4. Note that this qualified him as a witness (22:15). In 1 Cor. 15:8 he makes note of

 this as qualifying him as an apostle to preach the resurrection because he had

 personally seen Jesus alive.

 E. In the words of Yoda, “Become a believer he did!”

 1. And he was baptized by Ananias after God used Ananias to lay hands on him.

 2. Though blinded and praying he was not yet complete.

 3. Some might say he was saved the moment he saw the Lord. Others say you must

 pray for forgiveness before you are saved. Saul was praying, but God sent him

 Ananias. Jesus said, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved”

 (Mk. 16:16). He did NOT say, “He who has believed and prays is saved already and

 does not need to be baptized.”

 4. Ananias told him, “Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His

 name” (Acts 22:16). That’s what Saul said as he rehearsed these events to the

 Jews in Jerusalem.

 a. He has seen the resurrected Jesus and he is not yet free from his sins!

 b. He has believed and he has been praying, but he is not yet free from his sins!

 c. His sins were washed away at the time of his baptism as he called on the name

 of (the authority of) the Lord for forgiveness.

 d. As I reasoned with one man about this he claimed that Saul was saved before he

 was baptized. I asked, “Was he saved before he received forgiveness of sins?”

 He answered, “Yes.” Folks I have a problem with that!!!

 Sin is what separates us from God. It is what we need to be saved from. There

 is no salvation without forgiveness of sins. Saul was not saved WITH his sins,

 but FROM his sins.

Conclusion:

1. At first Saul doesn’t look like a likely candidate for conversion.

2. But once he realized that Jesus was the Christ, that He was alive, there was no turning back after that.

3. Are you as honest with yourself as Saul was with himself?

4. “Why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins calling on the name of the Lord!”