*DEVOTIONAL*

January 15 - 20

*Ananias’ Witness*

**Monday, January 15 Acts 9:1-9**

*“Saul! Why do you persecute me?”*

 The conversion of Saul of Tarsus has been considered one of the most crucial events in the history of God’s dealing with humanity. This man will dominate the rest of the book of Acts and, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, lead the way in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. The account of Saul’s conversion appears three times in Acts (see also 22:3-32; 26:12-18).

 As Saul approaches Damascus, he hears a voice and sees a bright light. The light Saul sees must have been strong, for it is around noon when he encounters it (according to 22:6; 26:13). Saul must have realized that he was in the presence of the Lord God, for he responds to the light and the voice with the question, “Who are you, Lord?” The voice replies, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” In other words, while Saul was hitting the church, Jesus has actually been feeling the pain! Jesus of Nazareth was alive! His disciples had been right after all in proclaiming his resurrection from the dead. The blinded Saul spends three days fasting. Such a fast, for a Jew, was for the purpose of repenting or seeking God’s face. Both are involved here.

*You have called me, Lord, and by faith I have responded. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 16 Acts 9:10-19a**

*“There was a believer in Damascus named Ananias”*

 Ananias’ protest is understandable, considering all that Saul had done to the Christians in Jerusalem and had been planning to do in Damascus. His willingness to obey immediately, after the Lord’s explanation, is commendable. So is his noble act of placing his hands on Saul and addressing him as “Brother Saul.” According to the Lord’s description to Ananias of his plans for Saul, the latter will go to “the Gentiles,” “their kings,” and “the people of Israel.” The order moves from those who receive Paul’s preaching (Gentiles) to those who hear without receiving (kings) to those who reject it (people of Israel).

 Right at the start of his spiritual pilgrimage, Saul is informed that he will suffer for the name of Jesus. Suffering is a basic aspect of following Christ. But before Paul experiences this cross, he will experience Christ’s power. Ananias says that he has come so that Paul may see again and be filled the Holy Spirit. His blindness having left him, Paul has experienced the healing power of Jesus, both physically and spiritually.

*As you used Ananias, Lord, use me in the lives of others. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 17 Acts 9:19b-25**

*“Immediately he began preaching about Jesus”*

 We note the intensity of the word *immediately.* Saul could not wait to go to the synagogues in Damascus to share the good news he had just received. It was too good to keep to himself. He came right to the point: “Jesus is the Son of God.” It was amazing that these words were being spoken by a Pharisee known both for his brilliance and for his previous opposition to Jesus and his followers. The Jews in the synagogues were dumbfounded. None other than Saul of Tarsus was saying Jesus was the Son of God! The persecutor was now a proponent.

 Saul’s immediate witness solidified his vision and strengthened his conviction. There could be no more effective place for him to establish his newfound faith than in the synagogues. He took his stand among his people. There was no turning back now. Saul knew something else right from the beginning – the hostility of his own people. Eventually that would send him on his appointed task of reaching out to the Gentiles. His escape in a basket over the wall in Damascus was only the first of many close scrapes with death.

*Publicly proclaiming you, Lord, solidifies my faith in you. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

January 15 - 20

*Ananias’ Witness*

**Thursday, January 18 Acts 9:26-31**

*“Then the apostles accepted Saul”*

 To understand the chronology of this portion of the ninth chapter of Acts, we check Saul’s account in Galatians 1:15-17 of what happened to him after his conversion. There he states that after he left Damascus he went to the desert near the foot of Mount Sinai where he meditated on the Law of Moses and reflected on what had happened to him on the Damascus Road. He was there for a long time before he journeyed to Jerusalem to meet the apostles.

 The church in Jerusalem was not as accepting as the one in Damascus. The disciples there found it difficult to believe that Saul was one of them. When we remember the feeling of fear he had generated in Jerusalem, having imprisoned believers and participated in Stephen’s death, we can understand their caution. Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement” (see Acts 4:36-37), put his own relationship with the apostles on the line. He vouched for Saul, affirming his belief in Saul’s conversion and new life in Christ. As a result, the apostles accepted Saul and he began to preach in Jerusalem.

*You bring reconciliation, Lord, to those who have been enemies. Amen.*

**Friday, January 19 Acts 9:32-43**

*“Tabitha, get up”*

 Peter’s visit to believers around Palestine indicates that he had a pastoral role throughout the church. We can imagine him teaching, encouraging, correcting and counseling the believers and leaders on these visits. Among the many healings performed through Peter’s ministry, Luke mentions two here – those of Aeneas and Tabitha. Aeneas was from Lydda, twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem. Joppa, the home of Tabita, was the sea port of Jerusalem (modern Jaffa, a suburb of Tel-Aviv). Aeneas had been relatively inactive for eight years because he was a paralytic whereas Tabitha had been extremely active in the service of the needy.

 With both healings Peter clearly places the emphasis on Christ as the healer. The first time he says, “Jesus Christ heals you”; the second time, before speaking, “he got down on his knees and prayed.” After Aeneas’ healing we are told that “all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.” After Tabitha’s healing Luke says that “many people believed in the Lord.”

*Your miraculous power, Lord, brings people to you. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 20 Matthew 9:18-26**

 *“Jesus took the girl by the hand and she got up”*

 One of the leaders of the Jewish community comes forward with a pressing need. He is referred to as a “ruler,” which denotes either a community leader or the head of a synagogue board. By kneeling before Jesus he indicates the extreme honor he gives to Jesus, because kneeling is the appropriate position one takes before God. The ruler’s request shows his confident trust in Jesus’ ability to raise his daughter from the dead. Jesus has compassion on the man and goes with him.

 Jesus’ trip to the man’s home is interrupted briefly by another need – a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. Her condition was all the more difficult because she would be considered ritually unclean and excluded from normal social and religious relations, since those making contact with her would also become unclean. Like the man whose daughter had died, this woman trusts in his ability to heal. She touches Jesus’ robe and is healed. Jesus continues to the man’s home and raises his daughter from the dead.

*The dead being raised, Lord, is yet another sign that you are the Messiah. Amen.*