**The Conversion of Saul**

**The Word**

Read together Acts 9:1-19

**The Big Idea**

Jesus’ call on Saul’s life made an explosive change in his life and made an explosive impact in the world that we are still experiencing today.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Saul’s conviction as a Pharisee was that our role is to maintain the purity of God’s people as we wait for him, staying away from sin and sinful people that might contaminate our purity. Where specifically do you see this mindset alive in the church today, and how do we fight against it?

2. Saul’s persecution of Christians was based on a strongly-held biblical conviction that turned out to be wrong. Can you share a time when you discovered that a strongly-held conviction of yours was wrong/unbiblical? Practically speaking, how do we live with strong convictions while remaining open to the possibility that we may be wrong?

3. For some time, Paul had been “kicking against the goads” (Acts 26:14) which means he was resisting the prodding of God to move him in a new direction. Where might God be goading you of late? Can you think of ways he’s been trying to get your attention that you may be ignoring?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

A. Albert Einstein’s special theory of relativity (E=mc2) was ignored for decades until the late 1930’s where its application had an explosive effect on our world.

B. Likewise, God’s call on his people to be a blessing to the nations (repeated throughout the Hebrew Scriptures) was ignored for centuries until God’s call on Saul had an explosive effect on the world that we are beneficiaries of today.

II. It’s important to understand why Saul is so upset about the early Christians

A. His anger is based on his strong biblical convictions. Convictions about observing Sabbath, tithing, fasting, and observing food laws

B. The Pharisaical conviction = maintain the purity of God’s people as we wait for him to save us. Don’t become contaminated by the sin and the sinful people of the world, but hunker down and preserve a pure remnant as we wait for the Lord.

C. He’s like a wild animal persecuting the church

D. For personal reflection: Sometimes we can have strongly-held biblical convictions that lead us to assume that those who disagree with us are blasphemers. We may need to stop and take a fresh look at what Scripture is saying and acknowledge that our view may not be right. Example: revisiting the parable of the prodigal son as the parable of the two sons.

III. Saul had been resisting the work of the Lord in his life

 A. Acts 26:14: “Saul, Saul, it is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

1. Goading/prodding is what you do to animals to get them to move from one place to another.

2. Jesus had been goading Paul for sometime but Paul was resistant

 a. Paul may have encountered Jesus and his miracles

 b. Paul definitely encountered Stephen’s faithful witness to Jesus

 B. Now God speaks in extreme ways to get Saul’s attention

 1. The Double address: “Saul, Saul” (v. 4) for emphasis

 2. The Double confirmation: He gives Paul a vision of Ananias, and he gives Ananias a similar vision

 3. The miraculous blinding of Saul and the healing of Saul

C. For reflection: Has God been goading you lately? Has God been trying to get your attention through people, circumstances, Scripture, in ways you’re ignoring?

 Example: The Dream Daniel had about the importance of prayer

IV. The Transformation of Saul

A. His whole worldview changed

His understanding of Jesus and the OT completely changed.

B. He identifies with a new social group

Instead of identifying with the Pharisees he now identifies as a “brother” (v. 17) of the persecuted Christians and as a friend to Gentiles.

C. His behavior changes completely

He goes from being like a wild animal seeking to devour God’s sheep to becoming a shepherd of the sheep.

D. Consider the story of the Japanese fighter pilot in Pearl Harbor who was moved by the testimony of the American POW and became a Christian and a missionary to Japan and beyond

E. Consider the grace of God. No matter what wrongs we have done or thought, God pursues us relentlessly with his offer of forgiveness and new life.