

Sermon Series: From Bethlehem to Calvary to Heaven—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—2/15/2004

Title: “The unthinkable made plausible”

Text: Acts 9: 10-19

Intro.: *Ills.: the top 10 things Paul would have done if he had a PC*

Theme: When it comes to advancing the Kingdom, God does not do what we expect or demand but what will best introduce us to the life-changing power of His Son, Jesus Christ.

A Snapshot of the second half of the book of Acts

- ***A conflicted and persecuted Church*** — wolves from within and without trying to stifle the message of grace by faith
 - Jewish Christians promoting performance religion & strife within; Judaizers fomenting persecution from without
 - “Church is not a museum of perfect people but a gathering of forgiven sinners”
- ***Life and ministry of the Apostle Paul*** —his transformation, his passion (converted from Saul to Paul), his ministry
- ***A model for ministry multiplication*** —not a codified clergy but an empowered ministry by all of God’s people
 - Galatia, Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Corinth—all lay people converted and empowered to start ministry
 - “*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.*” Eph 4: 11-13

Are we ready and willing to let God do the unthinkable?

- “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*” declares the Lord. “*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*” Isaiah 55: 8-9
- ***What is your stereotype of what a Christian should look like?***
 1. The “***frozen chosen***” – your ticket is punched for heaven and you’re doing the ***minimally superb*** to get to heaven
 2. The “***elite elect***” – a ***condescending and judgmental religiosity*** which always puts believers/unbelievers on defense
 3. The “***seclusive selected***” – afraid to make waves for fear of persecution and so living ***closet Christianity***
 4. Ananias was no different from us in that he mis-assumed God’s purpose and wrongfully pegged His plan
 1. **Print and read Acts 9: 10-14** (recap what had just happened in the beginning of ch 9 to Saul, the persecutor)
 2. Allowing personal fear rather than personal faith rule his heart as to what God’s intentions for him/us were or are
 - who has “*all authority*” over everything and everyone
 - “*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Rom 8: 38-39
 3. Allowing prejudice rather than perspective rule his mind as to what God’s intention for the rest of the world were
 - “*Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*” James 2: 5
 4. God’s purpose was to reconcile those separated from Him & each other by distrust and hate into one in his Son
 - **Ills.: Reconciliation requires sacrifice**
- ***What is God at work doing in another . . . (Print and read Acts 9: 15-19)***
 5. . . . ***that you are not aware of?***
 1. Saul, later the Apostle Paul, was *chosen* by God from eternity for the launch of the Gospel to the world

(Gentiles)

- You and I are here and believers because God reached the “gentiles” with the good news through Saul/Paul
 - Ananias could not even imagine what God had up his sleeve for Paul; all he saw was evil deeds
 - God may be at work through the teacher you have, the job you currently hold, the neighbor who just moved in
2. Saul, the most unlikely poster child for the new Christian church, became God’s “*vessel*” of grace
 - *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.” 1 Tim. 1: 15-16*
 - **Ills.: Downriver Detroit junkyard treasure find (blue bottles and uniquely shaped bottles)**
 - Don’t count yourself or anyone else out of God’s salvation plan –it’s not about you but about what God does
6. . . . *that you are a part of?*
1. Ananias was not just a spectator but was told to arise, go, baptize, and teach—with him Saul is prepared/launched
 2. When God calls us into his church he intends for each of us to be a working part to move the Kingdom forward
 3. *“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Eph. 4: 16*

Top 10 things Paul would have done if he had a PC

The top 10 things the Apostle Paul would have done if he had a PC:

10. Download MP3s of the Righteous Brothers for entertainment while on those long and tedious missionary journeys.
9. Visit WebMD.com about that persistent pain in his flesh.
8. Include virus protection software in his list of spiritual armor.
7. Proclaim, "To live is Christ, to die is to have a 28K modem."
6. Book boat tickets using Priceline.com.
5. E-mail pictures of Peter eating pork to the gang back in Jerusalem.
4. Assign church officers: pastor, elder, deacon, system administrator.
3. Use decryption software to interpret tongues.
2. Describe conversion experience as the "Divine Reboot."
1. Add spam to list of sins of the flesh.

Reconciliation Requires Sacrifice

On January 26, 2001 Seiko Sakamoto, a plasterer working in a Tokyo subway station, fell into the path of an oncoming train. Lee Su Hyun, a Korean student in Japan for language studies, leaped down on the tracks to save Sakamoto. Both Hyun and Sakamoto were unable to exit the path of the oncoming train and were killed.

This selfless act by the Korean student on behalf of the Japanese laborer has caused many people in Japan to reconsider their long-held prejudices directed toward Koreans. Strong feelings of distrust between the two countries go back to World War II atrocities inflicted upon Koreans by the Japanese. Many Japanese people, including the Prime Minister of Japan, have openly expressed sorrow over their previously held stereotypes of Koreans and have begun to talk about reconciliation. Nobuaki Fujioka, a 62- year-old Japanese said, "I felt a kind of shame. A young foreigner sacrificed his life for a Japanese. This is not an easy thing to do."

Reconciliation rarely occurs without sacrifice. By giving his one and only Son, God took the initiative in healing our

broken relationship with him. He made the supreme sacrifice for us that we might be reconciled to him.

Treasures in Trash

Craig Randall drives a garbage truck in Peabody, Massachusetts. In a garbage container one day, he noticed a Wendy's soft drink cup bearing a contest sticker. Having won a chicken sandwich the week before, Randall checked it, hoping for some french fries or a soft drink. Instead, he peeled a sticker worth \$200,000 toward the construction of a new home, reports *U.S. News and World Report* (11/6/95). What we get out of life depends a lot on what we look for. Are we more likely to see each experience as trash or a potential treasure?

Acts 9:10-19

¹⁰Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, *here am I*, Lord." ¹¹And the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." ¹³But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name."

¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." ¹⁷And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; ¹⁹and he took food and was strengthened.