

Acts 9: 1 -- 20
Family Service -- Gonerby -- August 2011

Introduction.

We have been looking at the early church -- what happened after Jesus returned to heaven.

Last week we looked at the growth of the church and then the beginning of persecution.

(Both continue today -- we see tremendous growth of the church around the world -- particularly in places like China. Equally there is much persecution of Christians)

The book of Acts can be understood as a book of two parts.

First part describes the growth of the church from Jewish roots. It speaks about the work of Peter and the other Apostles in Jerusalem -- and spreading out from Jerusalem to the rest of Israel.

The second part of the book of Acts is all about Paul -- who took the story of Jesus to the non-Jewish world -- the Roman Empire.

Journeys

Question -- what is the longest journey you have undertaken -- in time or in distance?

In a car -- on bikes -- or on foot?

Paul journeyed all over the Roman Empire -- thousands of miles on foot and in boats.

He made three "missionary journeys" and a final journey to Rome from Jerusalem. That is where the book of Acts ends -- though we know that Paul also later went to Spain and back to Greece, before finally being arrested again and executed in Rome.

Meeting Jesus

But it all began -- as we read -- with Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (one of the world's oldest cities).

Paul met Jesus alive.

The Christians had been telling him that Jesus was alive -- had risen from the dead and appeared to them.

But when he was persecuting the Christians, Paul didn't believe them.

Now he encounters Jesus and is thrown from his horse and struck temporarily blind.

The encounter changed his life.

That is because anyone who encounters Jesus finds that He changes your life.

It has been the case all through history --

- From Saints such as Paul or Francis or Benedict.

- From people like John Newton the slave trader.

And nowadays if you read the Alpha News there are always testimonies of people whose lives have changed.

Some were drug addicts and criminals but others were successful businessmen and women. JESUS CHANGES LIVES.

He changed Paul's life.

Jesus said to Paul "Go into the city and you'll be told what to do".

Up to this moment Paul had been doing what he liked, what he thought best, what his will dictated.

From this time onward he would be told what to do.

The Christian is a person who has ceased to do what they want to do, and who has begun to do what Christ wants them to do.

Someone once wrote that the world has never seen what could be achieved by a person fully committed to God's will -- but Paul probably came as near to it as anyone.

What could God achieve through you?