

## Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2021 – Acts 9:1-12,17-18 ‘The Road to Damascus’

The Road to Damascus.... it's not just one of the most famous of all bible stories, it's a phrase which still has meaning in our culture, even today. We use it to describe any moment of revelation which leads to a dramatic change.

And as we go back to the original Damascus Road experience in the last of our series in the Book of Acts, there's so much we could say, so many insights. I've shared some of these in recent Daily Inspirations, and if you'd like to go a bit deeper, I'd commend those to you on our church website.

But today I just want to make one very simple observation about this iconic story, probably the most fundamental reflection of all: **our God is the God who changes lives**. What God did with Saul is what he has always done throughout history, and still does today. *Saul's story is our story*, and, we hope, the story of many others we know and love too.

All of us journey towards faith in different ways. For some it's a gradual realisation, for others a striking moment of epiphany like Saul's. Probably for many of us, it's a combination of the two, and I think that's healthy and valuable. We need *both* types of experience – both the gradual and the memorable – each plays its part in helping us to grow.

That is certainly true for me. I was born into a Christian family, but I also have Damascus Road moments too. The first and most important of these was on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1982 – you could say that my 39<sup>th</sup> spiritual birthday is next week. In historical terms, it was just before my 10<sup>th</sup> *actual* birthday, and I was at the church's monthly family service. I was no more or less devout than any child: for me the chief attraction of Sunday services was the chance to play football in the church hall afterwards.

But on this Sunday, my dad was preaching on Jesus meeting Nicodemus in John 3, and focused on the verse: 'Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.' He was using an OHP – remember them? In fact he had one of those special acetates with extra sides which folded over to make multiple layers – for those of you under 30, that was cutting-edge multi-media presentation for us – and at the key moment he lifted away the snake on the tree, and replaced it with the other side of the acetate, which was Jesus, at which point the tree became a cross.

It was then that I understood what Jesus did for me. Don't ask me why it was *that* Sunday and not the 300 before it, or indeed the ones after. But I prayed a simple prayer: 'Jesus, come into my life', and I knew, even then, that something had changed. Numerous steps forward followed in the years to come – summer camps, mission meetings, youth groups, student services, and so on. But 25<sup>th</sup> July 1982 was *my Damascus Road*.

What was yours? If you can remember such a moment, bring it to mind and give thanks for it. If you can't pinpoint one such moment, give thanks that God has done his work in your life *anyway*. The *Road* to Damascus is still a long road, and not just a single moment.

But as we conclude this series looking at the early church, the Road to Damascus reminds us of something we've encountered again and again over the last couple of months: the Book of Acts is a book for us *now*. Their life is ours. The ups and the downs, the power and the weakness, the joys and agonies, the certainties and the uncertainties, deep community and deep challenges, and above all, **the same, glorious God, in whom we live and move and have our being**.

As we continue to navigate an uncertain future, let us place our lives into the hands of a steadfast God. This God was enough for the church then – he is surely enough for our church now. Amen.