**Jesus and Paul**

**The Word**

Read together Acts 9:1-19

**The Big Idea**

Paul’s encounter with Jesus taught him that Jesus is the all-powerful Lord of all who identifies with his suffering people. Seeing the presence of Jesus in his suffering people can inspire us to love and care for one another with greater passion and joy.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Paul’s encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road is one of the more famous and well known moments in all of Scripture. What about that encounter struck you in a fresh way as you considered it this time around?

2. Consider Paul being confronted with having to change his mind about life in some fundamental ways. When was a time when you had to change your mind and adopt a new paradigm in some significant ways? How did the Lord work through that experience?

3. Jesus’ encounter with both Paul and Ananias were quite dramatic. What sort of openness and even expectation do you think God’s people today should have for those kinds of encounters?

4. Consider this idea that Jesus is present with and identifies deeply with his suffering people. Are there any specific or practical applications you have to that idea at this time in your life?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Background on Saul

 A. He was from Tarsus in Turkey (v. 11)

B. A Pharisee and most likely member of the Sanhedrin with impeccable credentials (Philippians 3:5-6)

 C. Passionately committed to stomping out this new sect of Judaism (7:58, 8:1)

D. Named after Israel’s 1st King who stood head and shoulders above the rest

E. As our passage begins he appears to have the upper hand (v. 1-2)

II. His encounter with Jesus taught him that, in fact, Jesus was the Lord of the Universe who can become our Lord and Master anytime he chooses

 A. Big Saul is brought low by the appearance of the glory of Jesus (v. 3-4)

 B. Jesus is all command, no discussion, with Saul (v. 6)

 C. Saul’s blindness

 1. It is an act of power on Jesus’ part

 2. It is also a metaphor of Saul’s spiritual condition

 a. He thinks he sees so clearly, but in fact he is utterly blind to reality

 b. Imagine spending three days in total darkness!

 1) Saul spent the time fasting and praying

2) He had to come to terms with the fact that all his pride and education and pursuits had led him 180 degrees in wrong direction. So he had to reconsider everything he thought he

knew.

D. Consider Ananias’ Encounter

 1. Jesus asks him to do something that would require a lot of courage

2. Ananias is understandably hesitant, but just as with Saul, Jesus is not really inviting him into a conversation but is commanding him to do what he’s asked him to do

 E. Saul’s encounter with Jesus was deeply humbling

 1. He changed from “Saul” to “Paul” (meaning “little”)

 2. He called himself the Lord’s “slave”

 3. He invites us into a transformed mindset that begins with humility: “Don’t consider yourself more highly than you ought.” (Romans 12:3)

4. His encounter reminds us that this is not our story; it’s God’s story, and we are simply called to play whatever big or small part he has for us.

III. This Jesus, Lord of Universe, identifies deeply with his hurting people

A. “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” v. 4

1. Jesus identifies so much with his people, that when Saul persecutes them, it’s like he’s persecuting Jesus.

2. This must have been a strange experience for Saul: To have such a powerful Lord identify with such powerless and vulnerable people.

 B. This forever shaped Paul’s understanding of the church

1. His favorite metaphor of the church was Christ’s body (see 1 Cor 12:27 and Eph 5:28-30)

2. The church is the only physical embodiment of Jesus today on this earth

Teresa of Avila: “Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.”

3. This is especially true of Christ followers when they are suffering for their faithfulness

 a) The context in Acts is persecution

 b) See also the context in Matthew 25:31-40

 c) Jesus identifies with those who “belong to the Way” (v. 2). That is those who follow in Jesus’ way no matter what.

d) Paul himself became one of these followers of Jesus who suffered and in whom Christ was manifest (see 2 Cor 4:7-11)

C. This has some profound practical implications for us

1. When we ourselves are faithfully suffering, Jesus is so close to us and identifies intimately with us

2. When we consider brothers and sisters in the faith who are suffering, we move towards them with care recognizing Jesus in them.

a. Mother Theresa: “I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash him and tend to him.”

b. This makes caring for others a remarkable privilege and honor, and it also keeps the relationship from becoming paternalistic because we receive as much as we give, recognizing Jesus in that person.