

# A New Way of Seeing

Acts 9: 1 - 20

April 18, 2010

## I. Introduction

- A. A man was walking through a construction site one day
  - 1. He saw several stonemasons working with large blocks of stone.
- A. The man asked one of the masons, "What are you doing?"
  - 1. "I'm cutting a stone," came the reply.
- A. The man walked over to another mason and asked, "What are you doing?"
  - 1. The second worker answered, "I'm building a wall."
- A. The man walked over to a third mason and asked, "And what are you doing?"
  - 1. The man's face lit up as he responded, "I am building a cathedral."
    - a. All three were doing the same thing, but what a difference perspective makes!
- A. That story is told by a fellow named Gordon Johnson
  - 1. And it illustrates an important truth from our scripture text for today –
    - a. As human beings, we tend to see things from a limited perspective
  - 2. Saul, of Tarsus, looked at the disciples and followers of Jesus
    - a. And saw a band of heretics who were dishonoring God
      - (1) And his response was to try to get rid of them
  - 3. Ananias looked at Saul, and all he could see was an enemy of the gospel
    - a. Someone to avoid if at all possible
- A. God offered Saul a new way of seeing things –
  - 1. A new way of understanding what God was doing in the world
    - a. Through Jesus, and through these faithful followers of Jesus
  - 2. And even a new way of seeing himself, and how he could be used
    - a. As an instrument in bringing the gospel message to the world
- A. But that might never have happened if Ananias had not been open
  - 1. To a new way of seeing Saul as well
    - a. If he had refused to go find Saul and share God's message with him
      - (1) And bring healing and restoration of his eyesight
- A. So what about us? Are there ways in which our vision of God is limited
  - 1. Are there times when we need a new understanding, a new way of seeing
    - a. What God is doing in our world, in our church, or in each one of us

- A. I don't know of anyone here this morning who is actively persecuting the church
  - 1. Of course I'm still pretty new around here...
- A. But this text forces me to ask myself - are there ways in which my words or actions
  - 1. Or our way of seeing the world, that are hindering the work of God's kingdom
- A. Are there people around us that we might look at as an enemy of the church
  - 1. Or even as someone God would never choose to be his spokesperson
    - a. Because they...well, they just don't fit our image of an evangelist
- A. Are we open to a new way of seeing those people, if God should say to us
  - 1. Go, and tell that person that Jesus wants to heal you and give you a new life
- A. How different the early Christian church might have been
  - 1. If Saul of Tarsus had never become the Apostle Paul
- A. How different our lives will be if we never meet Jesus and receive new sight
  - 1. And how different the church of Jesus Christ today might be
    - a. If all of God's people could see each other, and our world, as God sees us
- A. God is in the business of doing new things in the world
  - 1. And one of the things I believe God has always done, and continues to do
    - a. Is to give ordinary human beings an extraordinary vision, a new way of seeing
  - 2. Let's take a look at how that might happen for us
- II. Last Sunday, we spoke of the experience of Jesus' disciples seeing him again
  - A. Following his death and resurrection, and how that changed their thinking
    - 1. About this person they had come to know as the Messiah
      - a. And what it meant to be followers of Jesus
  - A. From that first Easter day to the events of our text, a number of weeks have passed
    - 1. Jesus has appeared to the disciples, and to larger crowds of followers
      - a. He has given the disciples what we know as "the Great Commission"
        - (1) To go into all the world and spread the gospel message
    - 2. There have been many converts to "the Way" as it has become known
      - a. But there has also been conflict with the Jewish religious leaders/authorities
  - A. The stoning of Stephan, the first Christian martyr as far as we know
    - 1. Has stirred the passion of a young man named Saul
      - a. Who, we learn later, is a rising star among the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem
  - A. And Saul soon becomes known for his zealous persecution of believers
    - 1. So that many have left the city of Jerusalem for fear of being imprisoned or worse

- A. So Saul takes his campaign on the road, to find believers in Damascus
  - 1. And take them back to Jerusalem in chains
- A. I wonder, how could a man like Saul, who had the best religious training available
  - 1. And the best knowledge of OT scripture one can imagine
    - a. How did a man like that get so far away from the truth
  - 2. That he doesn't have a clue that he is working directly against God
    - a. Until he is confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus
- A. For me, it emphasizes again the importance of not only knowing **about** God
  - 1. But also having a personal relationship **with** God through Jesus Christ
- A. Before this, Saul is zealously guarding the "church", with its teachings and traditions
  - 1. After meeting Jesus, those traditions give way to a passion for serving God
    - a. And doing his part to bring as many people into the kingdom as possible
      - (1) Rather than working to keep the "wrong people" out
- A. Maybe that is an oversimplification, but I see it as one of the biggest changes
  - 1. From Saul the persecutor, to Paul the evangelist for Jesus Christ
- A. There's nothing wrong with upholding our best understanding of church doctrine
  - 1. But I believe that the closer we are to Jesus, the more we will see
    - a. Our primary goal is to reach out to people with God's love
  - 2. Preserving the church becomes secondary to seeing lives changed
    - a. And seeing people transformed into the image and nature of God
  - 3. Seeing in a new way – it's what we need and it's what everyone needs
- A. In their book, *More than You and Me*, Kevin and Karen Miller write this story about the power of a God-given vision or perspective of the world:
  - A. It's about a couple who lived in England over 150 years ago. For the first 10 years of their marriage, William Booth, especially, was in a quandary: What was God calling him to do?
  - A. Then his wife, Catherine, a skillful Bible teacher, was invited to preach in London. While they were there, William took a late-night walk through the slums of London's East End. Every fifth building was a pub. Most had steps at the counter so little children could climb up and order gin. That night William told Catherine, "I seemed to hear a voice sounding in my ears, 'Where can you go and find such heathen as these, and where is there so great a need for your labors?' Darling, I have found my destiny!"
  - A. Later that year, in 1865, the couple opened the "Christian Mission" in London's slums. Their life vision: to reach the "down and outers" that other Christians seemed to ignore.

- A. That simple vision of two people grew into the Salvation Army, which now numbers several million members in over 90 countries around the world.
  - 1. A new way of seeing people that God loved, and doing something about it
- A. Not all of us will see a blinding revelation of God the way Saul did
  - 1. Perhaps we will not even see an inspiring vision like William Booth
    - a. But I believe we must all be open to seeing God at work in new ways
- A. As far as we know, the man named Ananias that we read about in our text
  - 1. Was not a great church leader, missionary or evangelist
    - a. He was simply available in the time and place where God needed him
      - (1) And he was faithful in doing what God called him to do
- A. I would love to know more details about this vision that Ananias saw
  - 1. In which he is instructed to go meet with Saul so that his sight could be restored
    - a. I've never seen God in a vision like that; never heard God speak
      - (1) In the way it sounds like Ananias heard God's voice
  - 2. But the primary thing I see in that exchange between God and Ananias
    - a. Is that when God spoke, Ananias immediately responds – Here I am, Lord
- A. That says something to me about the relationship Ananias had with God
  - 1. He obviously believed that God was able to see something in Saul
    - a. That he found it almost impossible to imagine
  - 2. And he trusted God enough to risk his very life on that belief
    - a. I wonder what I would have done if I had been in Ananias' shoes
- A. It would also seem that Ananias had a very high view of what could happen
  - 1. When a person, no matter what terrible things they had have done before
    - a. Has a personal encounter with the living Christ
- A. We aren't told how Ananias knew what happened out there on the road
  - 1. Whether God revealed it to him, or whether, in the three days since it happened
    - a. The story has spread around town
  - 2. Either way, I can imagine being pretty skeptical of such a story
    - a. And Ananias is only being human when he questions God
      - (1) About his assignment to go look for this man, Saul
      - b. Who has been causing such problems for the followers of Jesus
- A. But when God assures him that there's a place for Saul in the kingdom, too
  - 1. Ananias is able to see a whole new world of possibility

- A. And so he goes to the house where Saul is staying
    - 1. He addresses Saul as a brother - Can you imagine yourself being that friendly
      - a. The first time you meet someone who's been such a trouble-maker
  - A. But Ananias seems to have no reservations at that point
    - 1. Brother Saul, the same Jesus that met you on the road
      - a. Has sent me here so that your eyesight can be restored
    - 2. And – get this – so that you can be filled with the Holy Spirit!
      - a. What? This scoundrel who has so recently been persecuting Christians
        - (1) Can become “one of us” that quickly, that easily?
    - 3. Not humanly possible, it's true. But if God says so...
  - A. And that is the power of seeing things from God's perspective
    - 1. The healing of Saul's eyes, described as something like scales falling off
      - a. Is symbolical of the new vision both Saul and Ananias receive
    - 2. When God is doing it, anything is possible
  - A. And that part of the story would play itself out over and over again
    - 1. Throughout Saul's, or Paul's lifetime of ministry
      - a. If I, who was the worst sinner, he would say, could become a believer
    - 2. Simply by coming face-to-face with Jesus, then there is hope for you, too
- III. There is hope to be found in this story for you and for me, too
- A. First of all, that there is nothing we can do that is so bad God can't forgive it
    - 1. The only unforgiveable sin is when we don't believe God can forgive it
  - A. As a fellow by the name of Patrick Morley says - The turning point in our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking the God who is.
    - 1. That's a new way of seeking, and a new way of seeing
  - A. And second, there's no one out there who is beyond forgiveness either
    - 1. No one bad enough that God can't use as a powerful witness to the truth
  - A. The worst sinner we can think of, ourselves included
    - 1. May be the person in whom God sees the potential to become a great evangelist
      - a. Or the person with the vision to see that potential, even in an enemy
  - A. It's all in our willingness to see ourselves and others from God's perspective
    - 1. And the openness to letting God take full and complete control of our lives
  - A. As one preacher said at the end of his sermon - "Let's bow our heads, close our eyes, and sing 'Open Our Eyes, Lord.'"

A. May God open our eyes to a new way of seeing today

1. Are we only cutting stones? Or is God using us to build a cathedral?