

## Encountering God – Part 18 – Getting knocked off your high horse.

### 1. Opening Illustration:

- a. There was a family from a very remote area that visited a very large city for the first time. They checked into a 4 star Hotel, and they stood amazed at the beautiful and impressive sights. As they left the reception desk the mans wife stopped at the restroom. Then they stopped and stared at the elevator. They had never seen an elevator and didn't have any idea what they were looking at!!! About that time an elderly lady hobbled toward the elevator and went inside. The door closed. A couple minutes later, the door opened and out came a stunningly good looking young woman. Dad couldn't stop staring, without turning his head he patted his son on the arm and said, Son go get your Mother!!
- b. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says; *“Therefore if any man be in Christ He is a new creature ; Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*
  - i. **What happens to a person who encounters God. They are changed.**
  - ii. Have you encountered God? Were you changed by Him? Maybe you are in the midst of an encounter with God, where He is revealing His supernatural power and control over your life. You have been running, hiding, resisting, pushing back...and yet there is no mistaking the fact that God is encountering you. You are running into Him. Everywhere you go. Everything you do. God is there, calling you by name.
  - iii. What will you do?

### 2. Final Sermon about Encountering God

- a. My sermon today is about one such person who was running his own life, he thought he was a pretty good guy. He lived right, he gave to the poor, he obeyed the laws, and he thought that all of that counted for something with God. But he had never encountered God. He had never met or run into God. He was living for his “idea” of God and not for the real thing.
- b. Historical Background: After Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the little group of 120 people assembled in an upper room. Within a very short time, this group of 120 multiplies into the thousands, possibly the tens of thousands. Most all of the new believers in Jesus Christ are Jews, who are discovering that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The religious establishment becomes jealous, because they are losing their power base as well as they view this movement as heretical. In Acts chapter 7, there is the description of the first Christian put to death for his faith. His name was Stephen.

### 3. **Acts 8:1-3** *Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.*

- a. Who is this person named Saul? He is a Jew from the strictest sect of Jews, from the city of Tarsus. He could claim to be from pure Jewish lineage. His father, and therefore himself was a Roman citizen. According to Jewish custom, however, he learned a trade before entering on the more direct preparation for the sacred profession. The trade he acquired was the making of tents from goats' hair cloth, a trade which was one of the commonest in Tarsus. Saul was sent, when about thirteen years of age probably, to the great Jewish school of sacred learning at Jerusalem as a student of the law. He became a pupil of the celebrated rabbi Gamaliel, and here he spent many years in an elaborate study of the Scriptures.
- b. Here was a guy who knew his bible inside and out, could recite it with his eyes closed, and understood how to exegete any passage. He lived up to the letter of the law, not just the requirements, but BEYOND the requirements, so that he would be a shining light of what righteousness should look like.

c. He is in Jerusalem very soon after the death of our Lord. Here he now learned the particulars regarding the crucifixion, and the rise of the new sect of the "Nazarenes." By the time of Stephen's death, Saul was probably a member of the great Sanhedrin, and became the active leader in the furious persecution by which the rulers then sought to exterminate Christianity. The persecution ended up scattering the Christians, many of them fled to Damascus, Syria. This is where our story picks up:

4. *Acts 9:1-9 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." 7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

a. I would like you to try to put yourself in Saul's shoes. Here is a fellow who is sure he has the right religion. He believes he has the right to arrest everyone who disagrees with his religion

i. He is passionate for his religion. But therein lies his problem. Saul has religion.

1. Religion consists of rules, regulations, definitions, do's, don'ts, and beliefs about God. Much of what we can call religion consists of man-made ideas that are an attempt to reach God. The goal of religion is to make a person acceptable to God.

2. If religion could help you know God, we wouldn't have zillions of them. Maybe that is why so many people are fed up with religion. Maybe that is why some people turn to atheism.

3. But **religion will not make you right with God**. Religion will not lead you to know God.

a. Personally, I don't want the "Jewish" religion, or even the "Christian" religion.

b. In fact, I don't even want the "Baptist religion" if there is one.

c. Just give me Jesus!

4. One of the distinctives of our faith in Jesus Christ is that it is about how God reached down to man.

5. Religion will make you proud. But Jesus will show you who you are and what you need.

6. Religion will make you think you are good enough, know enough, or can do enough. But Jesus will show you that only He is good enough and that **Jesus is all you need**.

b. Saul had religion. He was so proud of his religious heritage that he couldn't see the truth. That is something that pride does to you. It blinds you.

i. So God had to close his eyes so he could see!

5. Saul's encounter

a. Saul has a close encounter with God...such a close one that literally he must wonder if he has been struck by lightning.

i. A bright light flashed from heaven. This light was not lightning. It most likely was the **glory** of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ii. This was a glory experience...not just a presence experience. (remember the difference – presence is subjective, glory is objective) Everyone saw or heard the same thing.

- iii. I believe this is the glory of God. How do I know? *“The men with him heard the voice but saw no one.”* It was an objective experience, they all experienced the same thing.
  - 1. I guarantee on the rest of the journey they were talking about what happened. Saul is shaken, being struck blind is probably beside himself.
  - 2. The others heard the same words. I wonder, did they become Christians too?
- 6. Knocked off His High Horse:
  - a. It’s a very humiliating thing to be knocked down to the ground, and especially, in front of others.
    - i. ILLUSTRATE WITH PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.
  - b. Flat on the ground, blinded and flung down, it is time for him to listen.
    - i. And Saul hears the voice, “Why are you persecuting me?”
    - ii. Saul can only reply, “who are you, Lord?”
      - 1. Saul knows it has to be God, yet he admits his ignorance because he asks “who are you, Lord?”
      - 2. Doesn’t that sound just strange? But it is the truth. Saul had all sorts of religion but he really didn’t know the God he was seeking.
      - 3. And hears a stunning revelation.
      - 4. He finds out that the Lord of heaven and earth, is Jesus, the very one he does not believe in. He has been pursuing and persecuting the followers of Jesus, who personally identifies with His persecuted followers when He says, *“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”* He is the One whose followers he has been chasing.
  - c. I would have to imagine that at that moment he was confronted by what had to seem like an awful truth, that what he thought to be wrong was right, that which he thought false was true.
    - i. It meant that everything he had done and lived for up to this point had been pointless and senseless, that all he had built his life upon was wasted and valueless. Imagine the feeling he was experiencing.
      - 1. Some of you here may be in that place today. You have built your life on success in business, dreams of what you will someday own or drive. And these things have not satisfied you. They have not met your deepest need. You have wasted years, maybe even your lifetime looking for something and it wasn’t the real deal.
        - a. Jesus is the real deal. Like Saul, you can meet Him today!
    - ii. When Saul lost his sight for three days, more was going on than a physical reaction to a really bright light.
      - 1. The Lord was letting Saul know just how blind he had been...that his rejection of Jesus was the result of blindness...that his zealousness in persecuting the church was the result of blindness...that even his devotion to the Law was a blind devotion.
      - 2. Saul had three dark days to ponder his actions and the consequences they deserve. The passage describes his hopelessness, his brokenness and his attitude. *And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*
      - 3. You see, you and I know the end of the story. But Saul had no clue.
        - a. As far as he is concerned, he is going to spend the rest of his life in darkness, blind for life.
        - b. He is facing hopelessness not only for his physical future, but hopelessness for his spiritual future as well, because he is now painfully aware that he has been fighting against God, the very God that he had been seeking to serve with all of his energy and life.

- c. To stop eating and drinking for three days isn't just a fast, it is the act of a man who has been broken
  - d. God had to do something dramatic to knock him off of his feet. God is like that sometimes. God tends to knock us down so that He can pick us back up, dust us off and send us on the right way.
  - e. In an article about Asian men who train eagles for hunting, Stephen Kinzer writes:
  - f. The capture, taming, training, and keeping of eagles is highly ritualized. Most of the birds, which have a life span of about 40 years, are caught when very young—either snatched from a nest or trapped in a baited net. Once captured, the eagle is hooded and placed in a cage with a perch that sways constantly, so it cannot rest or sleep. For two or three days it is also deprived of food. During this time, the berkutchi, as an eagle hunter is called, talks, sings and chants to it for hours on end. Finally he begins to feed and stroke it. Slowly the weakened creature comes to rely on its master. When the berkutchi decides that their relationship has become strong enough, the training begins.... Not all eagles can be trained, but those who take to life with a master display intense loyalty.
  - g. Sometimes, oftentimes, God works the same way. He knocks us down – so that He can pick us up again. Often, we see being knocked down as harsh, brutal and unloving. In reality, if we could step back and look at it with a different perspective – we would see that we are really in the Grip of Grace.
7. But, fortunately for him, the Lord Jesus was not yet done with Saul. And for you, God isn't finished with you yet either. God sends a disciple named Ananias (you gotta read the story for yourself) to lay hands on Saul and to tell him what to do next.
- a. So when Ananias laid his hands upon Saul, the bible says that scales fell from his eyes and he could see again. More was going on than a physical healing of damaged eyes. The Lord was signaling to Saul the dramatic changes that would happen in his life now that he could see Jesus clearly.
  - b. Saul's (Paul's) own words describe what happened and what Ananias told him in Acts 22:14-16 *"Then he (Ananias) told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. You are to take his message everywhere, telling the whole world what you have seen and heard. And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on the name of the Lord.'*
    - i. Saul was focused on a purpose of his own. He never expected the Lord to encounter him on the road to Damascus.
    - ii. He never expected to have his life turned upside-down. He never expected to become an evangelist for Jesus Christ. But the Lord called, and nothing was ever the same again.
    - iii. God got a hold of Saul. He may be trying to get a hold of you. Don't wait until you get knocked of your high horse. Or maybe you are here today because you have been.
    - iv. What else does God have to do to convince you that He loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?
8. Illustration for closing:
- a. For four years Emperor Theodore III of Ethiopia had held a group of 53 European captives (30 adults and 23 children), including some missionaries and a British consul, in a remote 9,000-foot-high bastion deep in the interior. By letter, Queen Victoria pleaded in vain with Theodore to release the captives. Finally, the government ordered a full-scale military expedition from India

to march into Ethiopia—not to conquer the country and make it a British colony, but simply to rescue a tiny band of civilians.

- b. The invasion force included 32,000 men, heavy artillery, and 44 elephants to carry the guns. Provisions included 50,000 tons of beef and pork and 30,000 gallons of rum. Engineers built landing piers, water treatment plants, a railroad, and telegraph line to the interior, plus many bridges. All of this to fight one decisive battle, after which the prisoners were released, and everyone packed up and went home. The British expended millions of pounds to rescue a handful of captives. Jim Reapsome, *Current Thoughts and Trends* (May 1999)
- i. Do you know how much expense God has gone to go through to get to you?
  - ii. Jesus went through agony of Roman torture and execution, he bore your sins on Calvary and took the punishment that you deserved to bring you to God.
  - iii. What else does he need to do to get your attention?
  - iv. Saul did something very important. He surrendered everything, every want, every need, every desire, to Jesus because he realized that ONLY Jesus could meet those needs, wants and desires.
    1. He was willing to let Jesus lead. He was ready to surrender. (Broken leg of lamb?)
    2. What about you today are you ready to surrender your willful pride to Jesus?
    3. Will you allow Him to remove the scales from your eyes?
    4. Are you ready to serve the Lord?
    5. If you are listen quit groping in the dark turn to Jesus and let Him lead you? He is calling your name! How long will you hold back.
    6. Let's pray.