

OPEN BIBLE CHURCH

Phil O. Waldo
Lead Pastor



1224 Hancock Drive
Boone, Iowa 50036

Phone: 515 432-3329

Website: www.booneopenbible.com
E-mail: office@booneopenbible.com
pastor@booneopenbible.com

SERMON TITLE Close Encounters of the God Kind – Saul’s Story

SERIES

DATE 4/30/2023

KEY SCRIPTURE Acts 9:1-22

SYNOPSIS A close encounter with God can radically change your course in life.

HIGHLIGHTS



☞ Close Encounters of the God Kind – Saul’s Story

Acts 9:1-22

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest **2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Background: Saul was a rising star amongst the Pharisees and likely, a member of the Sanhedrin. He was actually a leader of the mob that rose against Stephen, stoning him to death. Saul relished attacking and persecuting the early believers, and had a significant role in causing the Christians to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria. Acts 8:3 tells us that he went from house to house arresting Christians, putting them in prison. Now, here in chapter 9, it appears he is wanting to expand his territory and imprison even more believers. He apparently had a hatred for Christians and didn't mind if they were killed for their beliefs. He wanted to destroy the church.

Even people who are enemies of God can have a God-encounter. I've been hearing about Muslims coming to the Christian faith after having encounters with Jesus in visions and dreams. God is real and he can meet anyone, anywhere. And, no one is beyond God's reach.

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

We find out later in Acts that this happened around noon, but still the light was brighter than the sun. And, this happened suddenly, unexpectedly, and quickly. Obviously, Saul was not expecting an encounter with Jesus – he was out to destroy his followers.


There are a number of places in the bible where something happened “suddenly.” Elijah and Elisha were walking along when *suddenly* they were separated and Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. In Isaiah, the Lord speaks about his promises from long ago, then *suddenly* he acted and they came to pass. Malachi says that God sends messengers ahead and then he, himself *suddenly* comes to his people.

In God's kingdom, things may seem a long way off; it may seem like it will never happen, but ☞ then suddenly, **God can instantly, unexpectedly change the circumstances.**

4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" **5** "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

This falling to the ground was not out of reverence since Saul didn't even know what was going on at first. It was likely so startling that he dropped down instinctively trying to survive. But then the Lord spoke. In Saul's day the rabbis mostly believed that God no longer spoke to man directly, as He did in the days of the prophets. Yet, here the Lord spoke very directly to Saul.



Many in our day no longer believe that God speaks to people, but that is simply not true. We've seen how he has spoken in dreams, visions, and personal encounters – and there's no reason to  believe he doesn't do that anymore. **God still speaks today.**

The Lord asks an important question: why do you persecute me? Saul thought he was serving God by attacking the church, but in reality, he was working against the Lord. It's still true today that people can think they are serving God, but in reality, are not.

Also, note that Jesus asks, "why do you persecute *me*? Saul was attacking the church, but Jesus saw it as a personal attack. The church is the bride of Christ, and flawed as she may be, you better be careful how you treat her. Jesus has a personal stake in his church. We also need to **be careful how we treat each other**. As believers, we are each part of the bride of Christ, and he defends his bride. So, watch yourself when dealing with thoughts and feelings regarding the church or fellow believers. This reminds me of all the "one anothers" in the Bible...

Do not lie to one another (Colossians 3:9)

Stop passing judgment on one another (Romans 14:13)

Do not slander one another (James 4:11)

Don't grumble against each other (James 5:9)

Love one another (John 13:34)

Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10)

Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)

Build up one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)

Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:2, 32; Colossians 3:13)

Be patient with one another (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13)

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32)

Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21, 1 Peter 5:5)

Look to the interests of one another (Philippians 2:4)

Bear with one another (Colossians 3:13)

Comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)

Pray for one another (James 5:16)

6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."


This is very often God's way: he says "go" before he says "what" and "how." Abraham was commended for his faith because he went when God told him to go, even though he didn't know where he was going.

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So




they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Here, we see that you can have a personal encounter with the Lord, and yet people right there with you may not understand what is happening. I've been there – in a meeting where I felt a strong presence of the Lord, but at least one right there next to me had no clue.

This encounter with the Lord was so powerful that it physically affected Saul. I've known some who got weak in the knees in the presence of the Lord. Some even fall down. God's presence is powerful. In Saul's case, it was so stunning that it affected his sight and his appetite. It rocked his  world, and we will see how it **changed his course in life**. One encounter with the Lord can have a profound effect on you.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

We know very little about Ananias. Apparently, he was not a significant leader amongst the believers, but rather was just an ordinary person who loved the Lord. Yet, God called him to go and minister to the man who would eventually become one of the greatest Apostles and the writer of most of the New Testament.

God doesn't only use those with status and significance to accomplish his purposes. He can use  anyone that is willing. **Don't underestimate your role in the Kingdom.** Don't misjudge the affect you might have on another person. Your "small" contribution may have a significant impact on God's ultimate plan.

The influence of just one...

Have you ever heard of Edward Kimball? Most have not. Kimball was a Sunday school teacher who not only prayed for the hyper boys in his class but also sought to win each one to the Lord personally.

One young man, in particular, didn't seem to understand what the gospel was about so Kimball went to the shoe store where he was stocking shelves and confronted him in the stock room with the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That young man was Dwight L. Moody. In the stockroom on that Saturday, he believed the gospel and received Jesus Christ as his Savior. In his lifetime, Moody touched two continents for God, with thousands professing Christ through his ministry.

But the story doesn't end there. Actually, that's where it begins. Under Moody, another man's heart was touched for God, Wilbur Chapman. Chapman became the evangelist who preached to thousands. One day, a professional ball player had a day off and attended one of Chapman's meetings, and thus, Billy Sunday was converted. Sunday quit baseball and became part of



Chapman's team. Then, Chapman accepted the pastorate of a large church and Billy Sunday began his own evangelistic crusades.

Another young man was converted whose name was Mordecai Ham. He was a scholarly, dignified gentleman who wasn't above renting a hearse and parading it through the streets advertising his meetings. When Ham came to Charlotte, North Carolina, a sandy-haired, lanky young man, then in high school, vowed that he wouldn't go hear him preach, but Billy Frank, as he was called by his family, did eventually go.

The night Billy Frank went he was intrigued by what he heard. Returning another night, he responded to the invitation and was converted. Billy Frank eventually became known as Billy Graham, the evangelist who preached to more people than any other person who ever lived, including the Apostle Paul.

This fascinating chain of events was triggered by a Sunday school teacher's concern for his boys. If you are like most people, you have served in some capacity and wondered at times if you were making a real difference or not. Maybe you've thought about quitting because you didn't think you were making any difference.

Next time you are tempted to give up, please remember Edward Kimball, whose persistence and faithfulness was tremendously honored by the Lord. The story would have looked very differently if Edward Kimball did not take his Saturday to seek out young Dwight Moody.

You can count the apples on a tree, but only God knows how many apples are in a single seed.
☞ Do your part today in the Kingdom and trust God for the results.

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."


So, Ananias tried to talk God out of it, but that was a losing proposition. **God doesn't want your excuses; he wants your obedience.**

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19a and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Not only did Ananias have a part in starting off the Apostle Paul, but God used him to heal Saul and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Any believer can be effective in evangelism and spiritual gifts when they are being led by the Lord.





19b Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

Since Saul was a Pharisee, he had every right to speak in the synagogues. And, he used his  position to spread the Gospel of Christ. **Whatever your place of influence is, use it to tell about Jesus.** You may never be a Billy Graham, but you can still talk about Jesus.

Now, to be sure, Saul was a skilled communicator, but what stands out here is that the people were astonished at his transformation – the guy who was adamantly opposed to Christianity is suddenly, now an ardent advocate for Jesus. A transformed life speaks volumes. You don't have to be a scholar or skilled communicator; just live your life and tell your story about how Jesus changed you.

John 9:24-25

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

 **Your personal testimony is the best tool you have for leading others to salvation in Christ.** Let others see Jesus in you and tell them about the Lord. Even the person that seems like the least likely candidate can be saved. God can suddenly, unexpectedly change them. God can speak and change the course of their life. Don't underestimate your role in the Kingdom. You could be  the start of a series of events that will change history. **Let your light shine and tell your story.**