

... any who belonged to the Way. Acts 9.2.

When we looked last week in Acts 9 at the familiar account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we were reminded of a great truth. Just when you think your situation is beyond help, God pulls the rabbit out of the hat. Those poor Christians in Damascus didn't stand a chance once they heard that Saul was on his way to arrest them. But that was when the impossible happened. God dramatically changed Saul from fierce enemy to friend. So Acts 9 speaks to you. Never underestimate God. He's an amazing God. Trust him.

God is on the throne! It's a great message of hope and encouragement. But there was something in that passage which I passed over last week. In Acts 9.2 on p1102 you'll see that the Christians Saul was going to arrest in Damascus were not called Christians. (They are first called that in *Antioch* at 11.26, possibly as a nickname). And, as I've said before, the word 'Christianity' never occurs in the Bible. The word 'Christianity' sounds too much like an ideology, an 'ism', an 'ology'. We've seen the terrible effects of these abstract ideologies and 'isms' like nationalism, fascism, consumerism, Marxism. The word Acts uses is 'The Way'. Why 'The Way'?

It's the right word, isn't it, when you remember Jesus' simple call, 'Follow me', 'Come, walk this way with me'. He doesn't ask us to be good enough, just to follow him. The fishermen like Simon and Andrew left their nets. They were now on a different path in life. As they listened to Jesus and watched the way he lived, their minds were now being filled with very different things from before. What is it that is

filling *your* mind? What is shaping *your* values and priorities? Most of us are shaped more by TV than God's Word, aren't we? We need to leave our nets behind and follow Jesus.

A lot of the Junior Soldiers I speak to come from dreadful home backgrounds. The way of *their* lives is not good, and so often it's not their fault. Their parents, if they still have two parents, aren't always much of an example. Home life is often chaotic, violent, dishonest, drunken and drug-ridden. They each get a book from me, *From Civvie to Soldier*. We don't always succeed with these youngsters, but for the first time many of them are learning a *new* way, which is about belonging, purpose, discipline. Not all of them, but many of them respond to this better way. Do you know, last week after one class, I had six, yes, six, 16-year old lads asking to be baptised. We teach them the 6 Core Values of the British Army: Courage, Discipline, Respect for Others, Integrity, Loyalty, Selfless Commitment. This is new to many of them. They've never had *any* core values! Teachers can say the same as me.

Our society has a rotten inner core, which is drunken, drug ridden, selfish and greedy. There's a lack of personal discipline and respect. And it's not just lads from poor backgrounds joining the Army. It's right up there at the top. Somehow celebs doing drugs is OK. They get let off. It's cool. What does *that* tell us about our society's 'core values'?

It's a poor way to live your life and it's leading to destruction. Our people desperately need to see that there's *another* way, a *better* way. And they are looking. Only on Tuesday *six* rough lads in one class asked to be baptised.

Well, if they are looking for a better way, how are they going to see it, if their role models are terrible, and the only thing filling their minds is TV trash? They must see us Christians walking along that better way. So much of what passes for Christian life-style is just middle-class respectability. *That* isn't going to inspire some teenager or a heroine-junkie mother on a sink-estate. We Christians have to get among people. They need to see that we *don't* steal from others; we *don't* cheat on our partners; we *don't need* to get drunk or take drugs to be happy. They need to see that we have an inner peace. We're not frightened. We *don't* just do stuff for what we can get out of it. Last Thursday I was delighted to hear on *Question Time* from Hackney, one of the poorest areas in GB, a young Christian talk about her work as a Street Pastor. Though Hackney is riddled with knife-crime, she said she isn't afraid. She walks in faith. And there are people on those streets who just can't understand why people like her are bothered about them. This is a new experience to them. They are meeting people who walk another, a better way. Some are saying, 'I want what you've got'.

People should notice Christians also because we *don't* just do things for what's in it for us. We care for the environment, not just because it spells global disaster, but because it's right in itself. We should live more simply, not just to avert environmental calamity, but because it's right. Why do I bother about Junior Soldiers? What's in it for me? What's in it for Street Pastors? We Christians take our beat from a different drum. We do things, *not* for what we can get

out of it, but because it's right, it's caring, and it pleases the Lord Jesus Christ. If we don't live out this generous way of grace, people certainly won't learn it from the world.

At Harvest, we at St Paul's try to shew our thanks to God by giving to our 'Commitment For Life' programme which helps the 3<sup>rd</sup> World. You will have received a flyer about the projects in Bangladesh, Jamaica, the Palestinian Territories, and Zimbabwe. Friends, it's bad for us in the credit crunch, but it's infinitely worse for them. Don't cut your giving. Increase it! What's in it for you? Nothing! Shew the world that you walk on a different path from the selfish, greedy world. The way you spend your money reveals your priorities. Caring for the poorest by giving sacrificially even in a credit crunch shews you walk a different way from those who can only ask, 'What's in it for me?'

Jesus *never* said that he was just a Way. He said that he is *the* Way. Only *his* way of living works. Let the world notice you. Let them see your generosity which asks for nothing in return. Let others see your caring. Let them see you have peace; you're not afraid, because each day you walk in faith.

Only the way of Jesus works, and only the way of Jesus is actually *going* anywhere worthwhile. For the repentant, Jesus who paid the price for us sinners on the Cross, is the way back to God. In every way he is *The* Way. He's the only way to peace, happiness, stability and dignity. So by walking his way let's shew the world a *better* way. Jesus calls those who follow him 'salt' and 'light' in the world. He said:

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, which is in heaven.