

Saul becomes Paul – Acts 9: 1 – 19



If there had been a selection panel for the Apostle to the Gentiles, Saul of Tarsus would not even have been on the shortlist. A convinced and fervent Pharisee, who regarded the believers in Jesus Christ as dangerous heretics, he was the last man anyone would have invited to apply for the job. And it was the last job for which Saul of Tarsus would have dreamed of applying!

The Lord, however, had different ideas. He judges the human heart (Proverbs 17:3), and He knew what was in the heart of Saul. In fact, He knew Saul better than Saul knew himself. So He met with him on the road to Damascus, and the ardent persecutor of the followers of Christ became His eager evangelist. The fire of hatred for the Church that had burned in Saul's heart became a fire of love for Jesus.

Read on in Acts chapter 9, and it is clear that the followers of Jesus took a lot of convincing that Saul had really changed. I think I, too, would have found it hard to accept that this man had been so radically converted. Today, though, we have cause for deep gratitude for Saul, whose mission to the Gentiles was the beginning of a movement which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was eventually to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to our own land.

Saul, whose name means “asked” in Hebrew, was to become better known among the Gentile believers as Paul, which means “little” in Greek. Presumably this refers to his small

stature. Perhaps it is an indication of his character that he was happy to abandon the grand name of Israel's first king and let everyone call him "Shorty" instead. Paul certainly regarded himself as the least of the apostles (I Corinthians 15: 9), but that did not prevent him from being used mightily by God.

A prayer:

*Almighty God, who caused the light of the gospel to shine throughout the world through the preaching of your servant Saint Paul: grant that we who celebrate his wonderful conversion may follow him in bearing witness to your truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN.
(The Church of England Collect for 25 January, the Conversion of Saint Paul)*

- Rev John Barnett

Image: Hans Speckaert (c1540-1577): Conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus.