

Introduction

Father Myke hanging with the Petros Gang after work—quite unexpected

1. Have you ever been in a situation where someone shocked or surprised you? Did something unexpected?
2. What about God? Does He ever do anything unexpected?
3. I would suggest that sending His Son to die in our place is a pretty unexpected thing for a perfectly Holy God to do—we should expect judgment but got grace and mercy
4. How about in everyday things?
5. We have two examples in our passage today where Jesus did something unexpected

A. The first unexpected encounter involves Saul (9:1-9)

1. Saul was on a mission to destroy the Church:
 - a. We were first introduced to Saul in Acts 7 & 8:
 - 1) He participated in the murder of Stephen (7:58; 8:1)
 - 2) He ravaged the Church in Jerusalem to where all that was left there were the apostles; the rest of the believers had either been arrested and thrown into prison or driven from their homes and scattered into the diaspora (8:2, 3)
 - b. We learn in our passage today that Saul wasn't satisfied with what he accomplished in Jerusalem (READ 9:1-2):
 - 1) You notice here that Luke says that Saul was "**still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord**"—Jerusalem had been practically emptied of Christians but Saul wasn't done
 - 2) We don't just have to take Luke's word for it; listen to Paul's own description of how he persecuted Christians (Acts 26:9-11): "**So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.**"
 - 3) Saul's mission at this point in his life was to destroy the Church wherever he could find it:
 - a) He had arrest warrants in hand from the high priests and Sanhedrin
 - b) We went from city to city looking for believers
 - c) When he found them, he dragged them back to Jerusalem to be tried, convicted and put to death
2. This all changed on his trip to one of those cities, Damascus, when he had an unexpected encounter (READ 3-9):
 - a. It began with a blinding flash of light and a voice from heaven (READ 3-5):

- 1) Around noon (Acts 22:6) as Saul neared Damascus, a blinding light from heaven flashed around him:
 - a) Acts 26:13 he describes it as brighter than the sun
 - b) We learn later that it was so bright it actually blinded Saul
 - c) It must have been an awesomely frightening experience because Paul and all of his traveling companions immediately fell to the ground

- 2) At the same time, Paul hears the voice of Jesus: **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”**
 - a) Unsure of the source of the voice, Saul asks a simple question and no doubt receives a reply he wasn’t expecting (5): **“And he said, ‘Who are you Lord?’ and He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’”**
 - Can you imagine what must have gone through Saul’s mind at that point?
 - Jesus had been crucified and buried; He should have been dead!
 - In spite of all that Saul had heard about Jesus rising from the dead, and seeing Jews by the thousands believing and getting baptized, he not only refused to believe himself but made it his mission in life to arrest, convict and put to death those who did
 - And now, this supposedly dead Jesus is talking to him from heaven!
 - b) Jesus calls out Saul for two things:
 - The first was that Saul wasn’t simply persecuting Jesus’ followers but Him personally (twice)—since the Church is the body of Christ, to persecute us is to persecute Christ
 - The second was that Saul’s efforts to destroy the Church were futile—this is found in Paul’s personal account in Acts 26:14: **“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”**—Goads were pointed sticks used to direct stubborn animals and when resisting the shepherd would use the stick to prod the animal into obedience

- 3) What a picture this must have been—here’s the mighty Pharisee Saul, protector of Judaism, great persecutor of Christians, cowering face down on the ground blind

- b. What began with a flash of light ended with a new mission, and in fact a new life, for Saul (READ 6-9):
 - 1) Jesus commands Saul to go into Damascus and await further instructions (6)
 - 2) Paul reveals what these instructions were in Acts 26:16-18 (READ):
 - a) Christ appointed him a **“minister (e.g. servant) and witness”** of not just all the events leading up to this moment, but to new things Jesus would reveal to him
 - b) Christ was sending him to both Jews and Gentiles to open their eyes so that through faith in Jesus Christ they might receive forgiveness for sins and an inheritance among God’s people
 - 3) This even had such a profound effect on Saul that he obeyed immediately, beginning right there in Damascus (READ Acts 26:19-20):
 - a) We see this reflected in over half the book of Acts which focuses on the missionary activity of Paul

b) We see it reflected in Paul's letters

3. Takeaways:

- a. We should not be shocked or surprised that Jesus would choose to save Saul—isn't He in the business of saving sinners:
 - 1) 1 Timothy 1:15: **"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."**
 - 2) Romans 5:8: **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."**
- b. We cannot escape the role that God's sovereignty played in the calling of Saul:
 - 1) The Lord's sovereignty is reflected throughout the encounter:
 - a) Jesus initiated the encounter
 - b) He commanded Paul's to go into Damascus and wait until He tells him what to do
 - c) In v. 15 He told Ananias that Paul is His **"chosen instrument"** to bear His name before Gentiles, Jews, and kings
 - d) In Acts 26:16 He told Paul that He appeared to him **"to appoint"** him as a **"servant and witness"**
 - e) This doesn't mean, however, that Paul didn't have a choice—he did and he chose to obey
 - 2) The same can be said of us, and the role the Lord's sovereignty plays:
 - a) Ephesians 1:3-5 (READ)
 - b) Romans 8:29-30 (READ)
 - c) But yet, Romans 10:9-13 speaks of the need for a personal choice
- c. Something else we cannot escape here is the tremendous nature of God's grace:
 - 1) Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"**
 - 2) He also wrote in Romans 5:8: **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**
 - 3) Rhetorical question: Do you think Paul understood the significance of those statements? Consider what he wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15: **"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."**
 - 4) If Jesus could save Saul, a murderous thug who persecuted and killed Christians, then He can save anyone because as Peter wrote, He doesn't wish for anyone to perish but wants all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)

B. The second unexpected encounter involves a man named Ananias (9:10-19a)

1. Luke introduces us to a believer named Ananias and the Lord appears to him in a vision (READ 10-12):
 - a. Ananias lived in Damascus, the very city to which Saul was headed
 - b. He was a devoted Jew and Christian, and according to Paul in Acts 22:12 was well spoken of by others
 - c. When Jesus appears to him, he calls on him to go to the house where Paul is staying and lay hands on him to heal him from his blindness

2. Ananias responds with hesitation because of Saul's reputation for persecuting the Church (READ 13-14):
 - a. He knew about all the **"harm he did to your saints at Jerusalem"**
 - b. He knew Saul had been given authority to hunt down Christians in Damascus, arrest them (**"bind"**), and take them back to Jerusalem for trial
 - c. We can empathize with Ananias; after all, Why would Jesus want to send Ananias directly into harm's way? What purpose could that serve? Ananias is about to find out.

3. Jesus reveals His purpose to Ananias (READ 15-16):
 - a. Jesus reveals to Ananias that Paul was His **"chosen instrument (lit. vessel) to bear [His] name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel"**—the imagery of a vessel in which to carry something
 - b. He also revealed that Paul would suffer for the sake of Jesus' name—we get a picture of this in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30 (READ)—this comment is interesting in light of Paul's zealousness to destroy the Church and protect Judaism (e.g. Galatians 1:13-16)
4. What most people remember about Ananias is that he was the one that laid hands on Saul to heal his blindness (READ 9:17-19a)
5. What is often overlooked, however, is the significant role Ananias played in Saul's salvation (READ Acts 22:12-16)

6. Takeaway:
 - a. Much like Ananias, we don't often think of Jesus saving our enemies:
 - 1) When we think of our enemies today, those who persecute us and wish us harm because of our faith in Jesus and the values we hold dear, how often do we think of their need for salvation?
 - 2) How often to we do what Jesus said in Matthew 5:44: **"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."**
 - 3) And like Ananias, how many of us are hesitant or cynical to think that God might actually extend to them the same grace He did to us and save them?

 - b. God wants to use us to witness to and save those who oppose Him:
 - 1) This is the pattern we see in the Old Testament as God sent prophet after prophet to those who constantly opposed him
 - 2) We also see this pattern in the book of Acts
 - a) Pentecost was a witness to the Jewish masses who had rejected Jesus during His earthly ministry—and many were saved
 - b) The Lord sent Peter, James, John and Stephen to witness to the very men who falsely accused Jesus, condemned and put Him to death—and some of them were saved
 - c) In upcoming chapters in Acts we will see how Paul will witness time and time again before his enemies—and some will get saved

 - 3) It shouldn't surprise us that the Lord would send a man like Ananias to lead an enemy of the Church like Saul to saving faith in Jesus Christ
 - 4) Which of our enemies is He calling us to witness to?