

Important Lessons from Acts – “Ugly Houses”– Acts 9:1-31; Philippians 3:1-16

Have you ever seen those signs on the side of the road or seen an advertisement that says, “We Buy Ugly Houses”? I forgot where I was at, but I recently noticed one of these signs while I was waiting at a stop sign and didn’t really give it any thought; at least until I was preparing for today’s message. The people who buy old ugly houses and flip them do so for profit. They are willing to buy shabby, run down, delapidated homes for pennies on the dollar. What most people see as useless or something that needs to be bulldozed, these money makers see different. Do they see the ruin? Yes, but they also see the potential these places have. And when they get one that has a good foundation with solid “bones,” they can turn something seen as a loss into something fresh, new, and for them, profitable. Unfortunately, we sometimes see people in the same manner as we see “ugly houses.” We see them as too far gone. No longer useful. Surely there is no hope for some people. Perhaps you have even had similar thoughts about yourself at some point. Aren’t you glad though that God sees the potential? God sees every person as restorable and useful for His kingdom. God can take what we sometimes see as ugly and useless and turn it into something new and fresh. Today, we are going to look at a story where God rescued a broken person. Where God divinely intervened and took, not just a person too far gone, but a person many Jews labeled as evil, and set him on a course that would change church history.

Take note of the information Luke gives us in the first few verses of this chapter about Saul. **Read Acts 9:1-3.** First, we see that Saul was as angry man. He was filled with nothing but hatred and rage, especially towards the Jews who had become a part of this new religion where its participants followed Jesus of Nazareth. Luke refers to them appropriately as “*The Way*.” In this instance, Saul was concerned about the Hellenists, the Greek speaking Jews, who had escaped previous persecution by fleeing to the city of Damascus. Saul of Tarsus, a man who was born a Jew, one who studied under Gamaliel, one who also had Roman citizenship and was trained as a Roman soldier, one who served as a Pharisee, who was determined to destroy this new movement. One person at a time, if that is what it took. Acts 8:3 says this about Saul, “Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.” It is safe to conclude that Saul had become a man consumed by the evil that existed in his heart. He was a raging mad man, mean-spirited, and determined to do as much harm as he could to these members of “*The Way*.” Saul was an “ugly house”!

But God had a different plan, a better plan for Saul. God saw his potential. God viewed him as useful for the Kingdom. God was not yet ready to give up on this one. Look what God did. **Read Acts 9:4-9.** I absolutely love what God did to this evil man. Saul, for many of the Hellenists, was too far gone, he was consumed by the passions associated with the job he was doing for Rome. God, however, did not see him this way. God looked at Saul and said, I can use that. I can turn this evil passion into a good passion and set this man on fire for my Kingdom. At some point in our lives, we all find ourselves in places and patterns of behavior that may be harmful to ourselves and others... and deep down we know that we are in serious need of being

transformed from what we are into what we may be, and in every instance, it requires the grace of God. For Saul, it required God doing something supernatural and divine to get his attention and begin the flipping process. I hope you know that God can turn any old “ugly house” into the most spectacular one on the block.

As Paul Harvey would say, “now, the rest of the story.” Let’s look at what God does next and then I want to share with you a few more lessons from Chapter 9. **Read Acts 9:10-31.** Saul’s encounter with Jesus was a divine appointment on the side of the road. Often God orchestrates events in our lives for the fulfillment of His purposes. Ananias, one of the people Paul was after in Damascus, was part of this plan. The Lord said to him, “*Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*” The lesson for us here is this: As a Christian, we need to be open to God’s leading. He may have a special role for us in His grand design. He may have a role that is much larger than we expect. Saul did not know this at the time, but God knew the person he would become in Christ.

There is also a lesson for us about obedience in this passage. The lesson: Obedience to God can lead us to some spectacular moments. Ananias’ obedience allowed him to experience, along with Saul, a miraculous outcome. Ananias was initially hesitant to meet Saul. Why? He knew of his reputation. However, he obeyed God’s command, demonstrating the importance of remaining obedient even when it seems like a bad idea. His obedience played a crucial role in Saul’s conversion.

This story reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God’s transformative power. No one is beyond usefulness. God sees the potential and beauty in every person. To us, they may look to far gone, but God sees Kingdom value in everyone. Look at what happened in **verse 18**. This transformation is a testament that God can change any heart, no matter how hardened. If you’re sitting here this morning with a hard heart, will you consider letting God do His work?

I’ve spent a lot of time recently focused on “community.” We need to stop looking at each other as church members and see each other as family, as a group of people who are living in community together. Our Scripture today says that Saul spent some time with the disciples in Damascus. These disciples taught him the correct things about Jesus and helped him grow in his new faith. Being part of a community of believers provides support, encouragement, and accountability, which helps us to grow in our faith.

By the time we get to verse 20, we see that Saul had become confident in his new faith. His boldness is a powerful example for us to share the gospel without fear. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we can speak with courage and conviction, knowing that God is with us.

Another valuable lesson from this passage is: Perseverance is essential in our walk with God. It helps us remain steadfast in our faith and our Kingdom purpose, even in the face of adversity.

The final lesson, like last week's message revolves around prayer. Verse 31 teaches us the early church was a praying church, and their prayers were powerful and effective. Prayer is a vital tool for spiritual growth and community strength, inviting God's presence and guidance into our lives.

Conclusion

Let me share one more thing with you about Saul. God changed him so dramatically that he even changed his name to Paul. And Paul, as you know, did some spectacular things for the Kingdom. Let me just let Paul tell you how God changed him. **Read Philippians 3:1-16.**

God needs to be the one we put our faith in. He loves you enough to have sent His Son Jesus to the cross on your behalf. If you came into church this morning feeling a bit run down, beat up because of life, dilapidated maybe, useless in your own mind, filled with anger and hatred, etc., etc., etc. God does not want you to stay this way. He has a plan. A perfect plan for your life. Will you trust that He knows best? Will you trust Him? Will you trust that he sees the "good bones" and is ready to make something fresh and new of your life? Will you let Him purchase the "ugly house" and turn it into a Godly mansion?