

INSPIRED REVERSALS

Our look at the Spirit's work in the 1st century continues as Luke focuses our attention on some unlikely reversals. Institutions and individuals experience extraordinary change when the Holy Spirit goes to work.

In chapter 9, Luke brings us back to Saul, who will become known as Paul. More than a name change, Paul goes from fierce persecutor to fearless preacher after he encounters Jesus along the road to Damascus, then receives the gift of the Holy Spirit from Ananias. This Damascus Road experience is sudden, but Paul's transformation is gradual.

He stays in Damascus for awhile, growing as a preacher of the gospel, carrying the good news of Jesus, transformed from enemy to friend. Forced to escape an attempt on his life, he returned to Jerusalem, and though the apostles were reluctant to accept him at first, Barnabas helped them to eventually welcome him and affirm his status as a man appointed and anointed by the Spirit for a divine purpose.

Consider this: Saul set out for Damascus with a letter granting him authority to destroy the church. Transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, as Paul he will write inspired letters representing 13 of the 27 books in our New Testament that help grow the church to this day. What an inspired reversal!

Saul to Paul represents an extraordinary reversal, but it's not the only one Luke wants us to appreciate. Aeneas, sharing the name of a mighty hero of Greek history and the Aeneid, looked nothing like a man of great strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit he moves from a man bedridden to a man capable of carrying his bed.

Tabitha experiences an even greater reversal, moving from death to life. What's remarkable about her resuscitation is the striking similarity it bears to a miracle Jesus performed with a little girl in Mark 5. Jesus arrived on the scene, like Peter, too late to prevent her from dying. But the Holy Spirit reversed reality.

Jesus knelt, prayed, and spoke to the little girl, "Talitha koum!"
Peter knelt, prayed, and spoke "Tabitha koum"
Inspired reversal continued to be the hallmark of Jesus's followers, just as it marked his ministry.

The Spirit continued the work begun with Jesus:

Reversing history for Gentiles

Redefining purity for all people.

A people once prevented from access to God at the Temple are anointed by the Spirit

Cornelius and his family are baptized in the name of Jesus

And it's impossible to overstate the importance of this moment for us.

We have life in Christ because of this inspired reversal.

Next, the epicenter for Luke's unfolding drama began to shift from Jerusalem to Antioch (3rd largest city in the Roman Empire)
A city with a reputation for immoral behavior would become a city with a reputation for sending the missionaries Paul and Barnabas.

And before Luke's narrative takes an adventurous turn following Paul in his missionary journeys, he writes to relay one last stunning reversal:
The powerful and wealthy King Herod has James martyred, then puts Peter and the gospel in chains to await his execution. But God. He sends an angel to rescue Peter, unchained and set free. Before you can turn the page, Luke recounts Herod's demise, struck dead in his pride and eaten by worms, so the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Can you point to an inspired reversal you or someone close to you experienced because the Holy Spirit worked powerfully?

What do you think Paul's Damascus Road experience suggests about God's power to completely reverse our life's direction?

What do you think God's decision to involve Ananias in this remarkable reversal suggests about His preferred process for life change in us?

As we read Scripture, sometimes we lose track of time. How long did it take Paul to become mission-ready to leave Damascus and take the gospel on the road?
What does that extended period of growth suggest about our development as people of mission?

As Peter's miraculous way with Tabitha mimics Jesus's way with Jairus's daughter, what conclusions can we draw about living a life bringing inspired reversals?

How can we, like Peter, follow in Jesus's footsteps to bring inspired reversals?

Can you think of someone in your life who seems hopelessly beyond help?

Can you believe for an inspired reversal?

How can we support one another as a Holy people, bonded together to bring inspired reversal to those we know who desperately need it?