**Unstoppable - wk 14 – Even that Guy?**

**Acts is Jesus: The Sequel. Luke Vol 2 – The “what now?”**

**Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

**They began to experience supernatural growth and intense persecution. Yet they are unstoppable.**

**GUESS WHO GOD IS INVITED TO CHURCH? God's Surprise Guest List**

**5 people you might not have over for dinner – Jesus says come!**

**1. Samaritans – Lost causes - people you avoid at all cost (Acts 8)**

**Problems racially, beliefs, view of God and traditions. But God says there are no lost causes – If I have called them to come.**

**2. Simon - local drug dealer/ cult leader, people who hurt people (Acts 8)**

**A person deceiving, using and abusing people. The dealer on the corner who hurts others - God says - they are invited…**

**3. A Eunuch from Ethiopia – abused, confused and counted out (Acts 8)**

**A person gender altered - Deut 23:1 - could never be right w/ God. God is inviting them- only then will they know who they truly are.**

**Now the shock of all shocks walks in – a murderer / archenemy.**

**The most significant NT conversion for us and possibly the 2nd most important figure in Christendom other than Jesus.**

**Mentioned in - Acts 8:3 But Saul (powerful Pharisee) began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.**

**Acts 9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. (sought to destroy them - hard to find anyone who brought this much pain and hatred at the time – he was a terrorist) He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, (modern Syria) so that if he found any there who belonged to The Way (called this for 1st decade – referring to words of Jesus – John 14:6) whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (You would expect Jesus to wipe him out - but instead he is an invite to dinner) 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. (the light of heaven invaded his dark life) 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Sometimes God needs to get you in the gutter before we can see up) 5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. (He did not say why do you persecute my people – but me? Jesus hurts when his people hurt.) 6 “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (4th surprise guest)**

**4. Saul - a murderer and arch-enemy – the terrorist**

**Absolute last person you want saved. He hurt and killed so many people. He was zealous to end Christianity at all costs. Violent.**

**God is inviting them to come to the table.**

**Let’s dive into this amazing and important testimony.**

**We love the before and after shows and photos – this is one of the greatest! Meeting Jesus is all about the makeover. Life transformation!**

**Saul is Paul. A hater of Christ turned follower of Christ - His testimony is found 4 diff places: 3X Acts (Ch 9, 22, 26) / and mentioned by Paul dozens of times in his letters.**

**Acts 9:5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. 6 “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. (inaudible sounds) 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything. (He was about to have a personal resurrection on the third day)**

**God knocked him blind. Praying, soul searching, thinking what just happened? What was going on in his head?**

**10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. 11 The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. (Straight street still exists today – they all know who this is)**

**12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias (means – gift of the Lord) come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”13 “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.**

**Him? Really? God you might want to Google him - he is not Jesus material. Ananias did not want to and for good reason. Saul is a horrible person - not trusted - was it a trick?**

**15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.**

**He is to be a preacher to both Jewish and Gentile people – all the way up to kings and powerful people.**

**16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”**

**His role is so big, it will come with a price. A reference to trials and persecution he will endure as a minister of the gospel.**

**(He is cautious but obedient) 17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. (His blind eyes opened - Salvation – what do you have blinding you from Jesus? What are your scales?) He got up and was baptized, (outward sign of the inward work) 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. (Once hunting them – he now relies on them)**

**Acts 9:20 At once (few days recouping) he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” (Was sent to get rid of them – now he is talking like them?) 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful (influential) and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. (Through scriptures)**

**23 After many days (3 yrs) had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, (contract on his life) 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. (He could not leave through a gate – they were monitored) 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.**

**His influence grew, Jewish leaders (old friends) plot to kill him, so the believers (his new friends) snuck him out in a basket down the wall at night.**

**Acts 9:26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. (Did not trust him) 27But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. (Love Barnabas he took Saul under his wing – one of my fav NT people – more later)**

**Gal 1:18 Then after three years, (in Damascus) I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas (Peter) (1st time to meet) and stayed with him fifteen days. (2wks) 19 I saw none of the other apostles - only James, the Lord’s brother. (Barnabas introduced him to Peter & James)**

**Acts 9:27b He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.**

**28 So Saul stayed with them (with Peter) and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. (His old crew and followers now hated him and wanted him dead – they thought he was blaspheming God)**

**30 When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. (We got to get him out of there – they sent him home)**

**4 silent yrs. Reunites with family, works his trade - most likely shares the good news in his daily life with family and friends.**

**Growing and learning how to be a follower of Jesus Christ!**

**1 Cor 7:8-9 / 1 Cor 9:5 - implies he is a widower. He might have been married during this time. He definitely was not later.**

**(Chap 9 ends with a great breather) 31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.**

**4 yrs later while in Tarsus (7 yrs since salvation) Barnabas invites Saul to help with new Christians in Antioch. (Later…)**

**What can this unexpected dinner guest teach us?**

* **God chooses who he saves**

**They would not have chosen Paul - I would not have chosen Paul – But God did! God chooses who he chooses.**

**John 1:13 - …born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God…**

**He was not seeking Jesus – did not have questions about Jesus – was not interested in Jesus – was not reading books about Jesus – did not go to a Livingway service… but God chose him.**

**I heard it said, “The HS is a gentleman – he won’t make you do what you don’t want to do?” Really ask Paul.**

**Galatians 1:15 But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb (God had his eye on Paul since before he was born – elected and chosen – Paul didn’t know it until he met Christ) and called me by his grace, (God's favor) was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles… (Phil 3:12 – Christ took hold of me… (took possession)**

**God did not ring his doorbell. Salvation starts with God – not us – Paul was able to look back and see the hand of God.**

* **We all need time to grow and learn**

**Acts 9:23 After many days had gone by (was forced to leave Damascus)**

**This was several years after his salvation.**

**Gal 1:17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. (There, the HS taught him thru the scriptures – No BS – that is no Bible School) Later I returned to Damascus. 18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem…**

**3 years total in Arabia & Damascus. In Galatians 1, Paul stresses.**

**He didn’t go to JCC (Jerusalem Christian College) to be trained by apostles, didn’t start TV, radio, or social media ministry, didn’t go on tour, or write a book.**

**What did he do? He dropped out of sight to grow, serve, be discipled, and tell others of Jesus in Damascus. He had a lot of baggage to work through. (Btw – 3yrs like the other apostles)**

**Some of you need a Barnabas – to walk with you, help you, and open spiritual doors for you. I pray for more Barnabas among us.**

* **Following Jesus means you will be misunderstood**

**His old friends and associates wanted him dead. Christians did not trust him. Your old friends may disown you - family may not believe it.**

**(Pastor Ramiro Cantu story)**

**But know this for sure - Jesus is still changing lives –**

**God is still doing surprise extreme makeovers**

**This fundamental truth is at the core of who we are - Your life can be radically changed by Jesus – you will never the same again.**

**Maybe you can relate… if you knew my life, where I came from, what Jesus did - church is full of us – that is the work of Jesus.**

* **The greater the calling the greater the cost**

**Paul understood making a difference in the world means absorbing substantial pain - Acts 9:16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.**

**And Paul did: assignation attempts, stoned, beaten, ship wreaked, imprisoned, abandoned, hungry- part of his daily life.**

**Paul’s accomplishments and his suffering went together.**

**It’s not because God had some kind of a secret vendetta against Paul - make him drink a little of his own medicine… It’s because for Paul to be used greatly, he had to be wounded deeply.**

**God often has to bruise you before He can use you**

**So, you’ll be sensitive to his touch and reliant on Him**

**If you really want to be used greatly by God, accept this now: You’re going to be tired / You’re going to be betrayed / You’re going to suffer**

**2 Corinthians 4:17 - Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all**

**Paul's impact on Christianity is ENORMOUS - During his ministry he writes 14 Bible letters, carries out 5 missionary journeys. Taking the gospel to unreached people across the Empire.**

**He paid a high price, for his strong devotion to God and the truth - 5 of his ministry yrs are in prison. He remains faithful right to the moment of his beheading.**

* **There are seasons of blessing and seasons of trials – expect both**

**Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time (season) of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. (But it did not last)**

**God gives seasons of refreshing and peace. These are times to be strengthen and encouraged. There does not always have to be chaos.**

**If you are in a season of peace - thank God - enjoy the season of refreshing and peace. They are given to prepare you for the days ahead. Be ready…**

* **No one is beyond the reach of God**

**God can touch and change anybody - The worst sinners often make the best saints.**

**Paul to - 1 Timothy 1:15 - This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.**

**Galatians 1:11-24 – Saul / Paul gives his testimony – I was a persecutor and destroyer of Christians, Pharisees of Pharisees, advancing and zealous in Judaism and tradition – 1:15 But when God… called me…**

**But - they are really far from God - “But when God…”**

**But - I don’t really want them touched – “But when God…”**

**But - they don’t serve it (you’re right none of us do) - “But when God…”**

**God help us to be like Ananias**

**They are not too far off – and neither are you…**