

The Story, chapter 29 **(excerpts from Acts 1,9,15; 1 Corinthians 15; Romans 1)**

After Jesus' resurrection, he appeared many times to the disciples. Before he ascended into heaven he gave them this commission:

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.” (Acts 1:8)

The church held a council in Jerusalem around the year 50 AD. The apostle Peter argued,

⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? (Act 15:8-10)

The Jerusalem Council settled that salvation was for all people and was by faith alone, not by any act of righteousness. The road was now clear to tell all people everywhere – Gentiles and Jews, to the ends of the earth! – the Good News. No one was more effective at this than an unlikely apostle: Saul, a zealous Jewish leader who violently persecuted the Christians until he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus around 35 AD. Saul's conversion was total and powerful:

²⁰ At once 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?” ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. (Act 9:20-22)

He was amazed that he was chosen to be an apostle. In a letter to the church at Corinth, Greece, he said, ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

Over the next thirty years, Saul (now known as Paul) took at least three mission trips across the Roman Empire and planted ten churches. His letters to these churches comprise almost half of the New Testament books!

Paul and the apostles carried the Good News of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Here is how Paul described his enthusiasm in one of his letters:

¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,^[a] just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

(Romans 1:15-17)