

The Road to Damascus

What **is** it, that is fascinating about roads?? and why do we take them to our hearts so much?? We even sing about roads... Some of my favourites include:

- ✚ Take me Home Country Road by John Denver
- ✚ Thunder Road by Bruce Springsteen and
- ✚ The Long and Winding Road by the Beatles recorded in the famous 'Abbey Road' studios!

A road is not just a thoroughfare or route or way on a piece of land leading from one place to another we also have the metaphorical road and so I introduce:

- ✚ The Road to Recovery a series of events that I recognise both personally and in my work as a chaplain. We also have:
- ✚ The Low Road (my husband, Tom, talks a lot about that after his 1st wife, Barbara died)
- ✚ The High Road
- ✚ The Narrow Road
- ✚ The Easy Road (or not as the case may be)
- ✚ The Heavenly Road

Our bible is partial to roads too; to name but a few, we have:

- ✚ The Desert Road
- ✚ The Road to Emmaus

- ✚ The Road to Jericho where we find the Good Samaritan
- ✚ The Road to the Cross - The **Via Dolorosa**, the narrow, stone path Jesus took to His Crucifixion.

And of course, today's famous road! **The Road to Damascus.**

So, we will join the story on that road. Damascus was around 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem a 6-day journey, in those days. We find Saul breathing threats and murder against the disciples he was the violent persecutor of Christians. Saul was by birth Jewish a Pharisee and a citizen of Rome he was highly educated a scholar of Greek. But...On **that** road on **that** day he fell to the ground, dazzled by the divine light and today he is a universal figure the Apostle of the Gentiles who preached Jesus Christ to those of us who were not Jewish.

The Damascus Road Encounter seems to be a sort of shorthand for a **dramatic experience** so let's take a look back to what exactly did happen.

V 3: As he journeyed suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

10 minutes before this event it would have been considered impossible for Saul to meet Jesus. 5 minutes before (just impossible) in **V2** Saul was his normal self-full of self-righteousness threats of murder and plans to bind the Christians and drag them back to Jerusalem. Even 10 seconds earlier who would have thought it? **BUT** then it happens. **V5** the light breaks through and Saul meets Jesus.

When God met Saul, Saul was certainly **not** looking for Jesus!

The drama of it all is demonstrated in Jesus's repetition we have heard Jesus speak like this before: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Martha, Martha, and now Saul, Saul.

In response to this light, Saul undoubtedly protected his eyes as best he could; yet, Jesus still appeared before him.

I wonder how often we also cover our eyes to the presence of Jesus.

My conversion was not exciting and dramatic like this; it was more of a subtle gradual dawning of light. But my late husband Martyn had a different story, he certainly had a light bulb moment.

Martyn often accompanied me to church for high days and holidays! but he didn't really believe it! His words, not mine.

Over the years different friends and ministers would talk to him with no real reaction. All my friends prayed for him, probably on and off for over 25 years!

When we moved from Dorset my church said that they would put it on their overhead projector (we don't have those anymore!) when he saw the light! It was a bit of an 'in joke' as Martyn often said **"I haven't seen the light yet"**.

When we moved, we went to church in Abingdon the pattern was repeated. For 3 years he was asked to go to Alpha, he finally agreed the last week was looming, but nothing!

Martyn travelled to London on the train once a week for work and always moaned he had to stand until Reading as the train was so full. On the day it happened, there was one seat, next to a lady who was reading a magazine. Martyn was looking at the magazine over her shoulder... she put it down, took out a notebook and started to write down bible references. He never knew what they were, or what she was doing, but suddenly in Big Bold Capital Letters she wrote **'Make Your Decision Today'**.

The train arrived at Reading station and she got off. Martyn travelled on to Paddington, sat on a bench and gave his life to Jesus.

When he rang me from the station platform he said “are you sitting down? I’ve seen the light” I replied “What light”

The rest of course is history.....

Back to Saul-

It was the **Road of Challenge** “why are you persecuting me”

Is Jesus challenging us today?

It was the **Road to Change** The change even included a new name and we meet Paul. The author of 13 New Testament Books and among them my favourite the letter to the Philippians. These books shape our theology today, but I think if I met Paul, we may not get on.....

I find it challenging to warm to him. He is a powerful character and captivating preacher, but for me he lacks diplomacy and sensitivity.

His attitude to women and slavery was well! was!! but maybe: **“just a man of his time”!** On a lighter note he had also been known to preach all night!

However, he travelled in the Middle East and Europe bringing a faith that would reach the world following his unique and personal experience he changed sides and followed Jesus without second thoughts. He lived and worked for Christ, and for him he died.

Experience changes us and prayer changes us. At the stoning of Stephen in an earlier chapter of Acts he prays for those stoning and persecuting him the leader of course being Saul.

Is Jesus changing me today? Is Jesus changing you today?

On the **Road of Conviction** Paul began to preach in favour of the ideas that up until then he had condemned. He had a new character translating the whole teaching of Jesus into an entirely different language and culture throughout the Roman empire.

For me it's not about what Paul did even though it is astonishing. It's all about what **JESUS** did. Like Paul, we are also changed on our own roads by our encounter with Jesus by **our** experience of being loved by Jesus and for most of us it will be a gradual process and not a blinding light.

We all walk our own road to Damascus pilgrims on a journey that is not infinite but has a beginning and an end.

Is Jesus challenging you?

Is Jesus changing you?

Is Jesus convincing you? to change your views or to start again or to do something specific for Him.

May each one of us today wherever we are and in whatever circumstances meet Jesus on the road.

May we all have an experience of God and when he stops you will you answer his call?