



BIBLE STORIES EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW

Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ ^ Adult Bible Studies ^ Winter-Spring 2010

April 25, 2010

The Mission of the Church: Acts 9, 15

Getting Started

The story of Saul's conversion is one of dramatic change. The aggressive persecutor of those who follow "The Way" encounters the risen Lord and becomes the chosen instrument of God to the Gentiles. His ministry leads to confrontations between those who want to spread the story of Jesus to the Gentiles and those that want believers to become Jews first. A pivotal and decisive point in defining the mission of the church has arrived.

What's the story?

Even before Saul becomes a believer, God uses his actions to spread the gospel. After Stephen dies, Saul goes from house to house in search of Christians and drags them off to prison. This causes the believers to scatter. Everywhere they go they continue to tell the story of Jesus. As the number of believers increases, Saul decides to take his persecution outside of Jerusalem to Damascus. As he and his companions near Damascus, Saul has an encounter with the risen Lord. The physical effects upon Saul last for three days; the spiritual effects last a lifetime. This is for Saul a life-changing encounter.

After three days, the Lord sends Ananias to Saul. At first, Ananias is reluctant to approach Saul, but the Lord reveals to Ananias that Saul is his chosen instrument to the Gentiles. When Ananias places his hands upon Saul, scales fall from Saul's eyes. Ananias baptizes Saul and the one who was formerly a persecutor becomes a member of the persecuted Way. Those in Damascus are not convinced that Saul has really changed and is a believer. They remember his past actions and suspect this is an elaborate plan to destroy more believers.

Saul's actions demonstrate his genuine faith. He preaches the message of the risen Lord and is so effective that the Jews conspire to kill him. Saul escapes by night and goes to Jerusalem. The believers there want nothing to do with him until Barnabas speaks up for him and shares what he knows about Saul's preaching and actions in Damascus. Saul continues to preach in Jerusalem and once again, the Jews attempt to kill him.

The brothers send Saul away from Jerusalem and he continues to spread the message of Jesus' death and resurrection wherever he goes. Many of the new believers are Gentiles. When Saul and Barnabas are in Antioch, some Jews arrive from Judea and insist that circumcision is necessary for salvation. Paul and Barnabas sharply disagree with this message and travel to Jerusalem along with others to confer with the apostles and elders about this issue.

After much discussion, Peter reminds the group that God had sent him to preach to the Gentiles (at the house of Cornelius). God showed Peter that there was "no distinction". Peter's

final words remind those assembled that both Jews and Gentiles find salvation by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The group quietly listens as Barnabas and Paul share the miraculous signs and wonders done by God among the Gentiles and then James speaks up. It is his judgment that they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles to turn to God. Instead, they should write to them telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood. The Gentile believers gladly receive this encouraging message. This loving compromise brought former opponents into unity and in no way changed the truth of the Gospel.

So, what does this story say about God?

Is anything too hard for God? God is able to turn his fiercest opponent into his most willing laborer. He is able to unify a diverse population. When we come to God's message, we realize just how alike we really are. All of us have sinned. All of us are in need of God's forgiving grace (Romans 3:22-23). The good news is that God's grace is open to all of us who are in need.

Now, what about our faith?

James' proposal is still valid today. We must not make it difficult for others to come to Christ. We must respect our differences and live in the harmony of Christ based upon a higher unity, our identity in Christ. God has a wonderful message for us to share with a condemned world and like Saul; those in need of this message surround us. Let us be careful not to preach another gospel. Let us find our unity in Christ.

Monday: Please read Acts 8:1-4 and 9:1-19

1. What symbolism do you see in the fact that Paul becomes blind?
2. Why is Ananias reluctant to approach Paul? With whom are we reluctant to share Christ's message?

Tuesday: Please read Acts 9:10-31

1. God calls Paul his chosen instrument. What do you think that means?
2. What qualities and experiences in your life has God used to make you a chosen instrument?
3. Describe the role of Barnabas in Paul's ministry. To whom can you be a Barnabas?
4. How can the story of Paul answer the suggestion that it does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere?

Wednesday: Please read Acts 15

1. Why is question of circumcision so divisive?
2. Why did Paul and Barnabas react so strongly to this subject?

Thursday: Please read Acts 15

1. Why are James' suggestions pleasing to everyone?
2. Notice the role of listening and silence in the discussions. What does this say to us today?

Friday: Please read Ephesians 4

1. What issues can be divisive today?
2. How can the church avoid or handle conflict?