



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH" THE BOOK OF ACTS - LESSON 9

We ended last week's lesson rejoicing over the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch. This week we read about the most famous conversion in the history of the church. Luke thought it was so important that he recorded it 3 times in the book of Acts (chapters 9, 22 and 26).

The Jewish name Saul is from the word "Shaul" and means "asked." His name later changes to Paul in chapter 13, which means "little." The Scripture doesn't give us an exact time of the change or a specific occasion. Rather, it took place as a matter of course as he walked with the Lord.

First Day

1. Read Acts chapter 9 in one sitting. **What does the text say?** Title each section and list the facts you find in each:
 - a. Section 1: (verses 1-9)
 - b. Section 2: (verses 10-19)
 - c. Section 3: (verses 20-22)
 - d. Section 4: (verses 23-31)
 - e. Section 5: (verses 32-35)
 - f. Section 6: (verses 36-43)
2. What did Saul ask the high priest for, and why? (vs 1-2)

Saul received official credentials from the high priest to go to Damascus and round up any Christians who had fled following the persecution. The Romans allowed the Sanhedrin to control Jewish affairs even outside of Palestine.

3. What did Saul call the Christians in verse 2? Why? Could the words of Jesus in John 14:6 have anything to do with it?

Believers were not called by the name of "**Christian**" until some time later (Acts 11:26). They were referred to as "**The Way**" in Acts 19:9, 23, 22:4, 24:14, 22.

We need to remember that Saul was a very zealous Pharisee, and all the while he was persecuting the believers, he believed he was doing it "for God." He believed "**The Way**" was a cult. The Law said that any man who was hung on a tree was accursed (Deuteronomy 21:22-23, Galatians 3:13). He believed that this accursed man, Jesus, was preaching heresy, and if the Christians were allowed to continue spreading this message, it would undermine the authority of the temple and the law. He believed they were perverting the Scriptures and leading gullible people astray.

"Saul had great intellect, fierce emotions and passions, and an iron will all fused together to hate Jesus!" (author of quote unknown)

4. On what road was Saul traveling?

Damascus is thought to be one of the oldest cities in the world. It was said to be a "lovely white city in a green plain." The road leading from Jerusalem to Damascus is about 150 miles. This would take about six to eight days of normal travel.

It was thought that Saul was probably traveling with some of the officers of the Sanhedrin, similar to a type of police force. Pharisees could have nothing to do with them, so he probably traveled pretty much alone. What was he thinking about? Did he think about Stephen's shining face as he was being stoned? Did he wonder why such a supposedly "evil" man could die with such peace? Or was he anticipating the killing of more just like him?

5. Describe Saul's conversion. (vs 3-6) What did Saul discover about Jesus on the Road to Damascus?

6. What two questions did Saul ask Jesus? (vs 5-6) How are these questions important for us to ask today?

7. Remember back on your conversion. The Holy Spirit chose the words "trembled" and "astonished" to describe how Saul felt. What words would you use to describe how you felt when you met God face to face?

Can you just imagine what was going through Saul's mind at that instant? He realized that he had been persecuting God Himself by torturing these Christians. Talk about guilt!

8. Do you ever feel like you've done something that's too bad to be forgiven? Read Psalm 103:11-12. How does Saul's life remind us of the depth of God's forgiveness? Do you believe that He can forgive you also?

Many times we struggle with feeling guilty because of our past, or we feel unworthy of God's love. Isn't it great to know that we don't depend on our own righteousness to save us, but we need the righteousness of Jesus Christ, available to us through faith? (Philippians 3:9)

9. How was Saul's reaction similar to Daniel's reaction when he received a vision from the Lord in Daniel 10:8?

We'll end here for today. There's so much to learn in this chapter. And we've only covered 6 verses! We will read about Saul's conversion tomorrow. Are you "rejoicing" in His incredible forgiveness? I am! If He can forgive Saul and use him for His Kingdom ... He can use you and me too!

Memory verse for the Week: "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." Acts 9:15

Second Day

Review your memory verse. Are you a chosen vessel?

Some "Modernists" try to explain away the miracle of this conversion. They say that Saul probably had an epileptic fit or that he fell because he was suffering

from sunstroke. I like what good ol' Charles Spurgeon said: "O Blessed epilepsy, if it effects a conversion like this!"

1. Read Acts 9:1-19.
2. What did Saul call Jesus in verse 5?

Jesus makes an interesting statement to Saul in verse 5. He says "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." The word "**goad**" or "**prick**" is a sharp piece of iron that is stuck into the end of a stick, used to urge oxen on. It was commonly very large. This phrase was familiar to the Hebrews. Barnes, in his commentary on the New Testament, says this: "It is derived from the action of a stubborn and unyielding ox, pushing against the goad. When an ox did this, he would hurt himself, gain absolutely nothing, show an obstinate disposition, oppose any motives to good conduct, and be in rebellion, but get into greater difficulty by attempting to oppose commands."

3. After reading this, why do you think Jesus made that statement to Saul?
(Interesting to note that back in Acts 8:3, the word used to describe the havoc that Saul was making in people's lives was that of a wild beast.)
 4. What about you? Are you "kicking against the goads" in any area in your life?
Are you opposing His commands? Do you have an obstinate disposition?
 5. Read Acts 9:7-9. Did those who were with him see the light from Heaven?
(Acts 22:9)
 6. Did they understand what Jesus said? (Acts 9:7 and 22:9)
 7. What happened to Saul's eyes? (vs 8)
- God called a disciple in Damascus to welcome Saul. Let's meet Ananias. Also read the account in Acts 22:11-21.
8. What did God tell Ananias to do? (Acts 9:11-12)

9. What was Ananias' response? (Acts 9:13-14) Do you detect any fear in his voice? Why?
10. How did God respond when Ananias shared his "concerns"? (Acts 9:15-16)
11. Did Ananias obey God? What did he say? (Acts 9:17-19 and 22:12-16)

William Barclay calls Ananias a "forgotten hero." Acts 22:12 calls him a devout man who had a good testimony with all the Jews. God asked Ananias to do something that was not only frightening, but possibly life threatening! (Or so he thought!) At first it seems as if Ananias tries his best to "remind" God of who Saul was, and the danger that could be involved. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? How often we try to "help" God with the work He's doing in our life, because, after all, we know so much more than He does.

Ananias obeys God's command and even calls him "Brother Saul." By doing this, Ananias welcomes Saul into the family of believers, forgiving him of his past. Ananias was only able to do this through the power of the Holy Spirit.

12. Has God ever asked you to do what seemed to be impossible? What was your response? What should be our response? (Luke 1:37 and Matthew 19:26)
13. Have you ever been asked to forgive someone who has severely wronged you? Is God calling you to do that today? Will you obey by asking the Holy Spirit to give you the ability to do it, just like Ananias did?

I found this story in a commentary written by Ironside. It so touched my heart I had to share it with you. He writes about a young man in New Guinea who gets saved and then goes away to school to get an education. When he finished, he went back to his own village to minister to the people. On Sundays, the missionaries and believers would get together to celebrate the Lord's Day. One Sunday, there was an older man sitting next to this young man. He noticed that a sudden tremor, a violent shudder, passed through this young man's body. The man grabbed his arm

and held it tight. After a short time, the young man visibly relaxed, so he let go of his arm. The older missionary reached over and asked, "What's troubling you?"

"Ah", he said, "It's all right. The man who just came in was the man who killed my father, and ate his body. And now he comes in to remember the Lord, together with us. At first I was so shocked to see the murderer of my own father sitting down with us at the table of the Lord, I didn't know whether I could endure it. But it's all right now. He is washed in the same precious blood as I." And so they had communion together.

**Again, I ask you, is there anyone whom you cannot forgive?
Are they not washed in the same blood as you?**

After Ananias prayed, Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit, and the scales fell off his eyes. He gets baptized immediately as proof of his conversion. By his baptism, Saul is identifying himself with Jesus Christ and separating himself from unbelieving Israel.

That's it for today. Heavy, huh? What's your "**Reason to Rejoice**" today?

Third Day

Review your memory verse.

The zeal that Saul had for Christ was equal to the fervor with which he persecuted the Christians. Let's continue learning more about Saul.

1. Read Acts 9:20-31 and Galatians 1:15-24.

We can piece together the events of Saul's life following his conversion. From the above two Scriptures, it seems that he immediately went to the desert of Arabia to be alone with the Lord (Galatians 1:16-17). He returns to Damascus and immediately begins preaching in the synagogues (Acts 9:20) and remains there for three years. The Jews plot to kill him, so he goes to Jerusalem and stays there for 15 days (Galatians 1:18). The Jews again plot to kill him (Acts 9:29), and the disciples brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus (Acts 9:30).

2. When Saul returned to Damascus, what did he immediately do? (Acts 9:20)

3. How did the Jews react? (Acts 9:21-22)

It's awesome to me that Saul immediately preached in the synagogues. It took a lot of courage to face the people he once was a part of. He was not ashamed to stand up for Christ. The "mantel" of Stephen, so to speak, now fell on Saul. Acts 9:22 says that he increased in strength. The power that he received when he was filled with the Spirit is evident the rest of his life.

4. After remaining in Damascus for awhile, what did the Jews plot to do?
(Acts 9:23-24)

5. How did Saul escape? (Acts 9:25)

6. When Saul tried to join up with the apostles in Jerusalem, how did they respond?
(Acts 9:26)

7. Who convinced the apostles that Saul's conversion was real?

8. Galatians 1:18 tells us that he stayed in Jerusalem for 15 days. What did he do?
(Acts 9:29)

Saul spent time alone with God before he began his ministry. He needed to learn more about who Jesus was, and he needed to be taught by God Himself. He wanted God's guidance and strength. Charles Swindoll says, "He had to graduate from God's desert school of character development." This was probably the same university that Moses was enrolled in, don't you think?

9. Where did God send you to learn about Him after you were saved? Did He send you to some sort of desert?

10. Do you still get alone with God daily to find out who He is? Do you spend time just sitting at His feet, learning all about His character? What has He been teaching you lately?

I wonder if Saul was discouraged those first years. The Jews wanted to kill him, and the apostles were scared of him. Talk about depressing! But Saul continued to press on, like he encourages us to do in Philippians 3:14. He didn't allow anything to stand in the way of what he knew he was called to do.

11. Are you discouraged today? Do you feel like you keep coming up against obstacles? What does Hebrews 12:1-3 tell us to do?

After the apostles accepted him, the Jews still wanted to kill him.

12. How did the brethren help Saul, and what was the result? (Acts 9:30-31)

Saul's life dramatically changed. God totally forgave him of his past and prepared him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." He really did believe that.

13. Do you believe that? Do you allow who you were, or the guilt of your past, to hinder you from serving Jesus? Paul moved forward, leaving his old life behind. Have you?

This ends our lesson for today. Keep your eyes on the Lord -- His eyes are on you!

Fourth Day

Do you know your memory verse?

Saul now drops out of sight for about 7-10 years. We meet up with him again in Acts 11:25, when Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find him.

Peter again finds himself center-stage. He was certainly a man on the move, ministering both to large groups, as well as to individuals.

1. Read Acts 9:32-35
2. Describe the miracle that happened in Lydda. What facts do we KNOW about it?

3. In whose name was Aeneas healed? (Acts 9:34)

Lydda is the present city of Lod, one of Israel's leading airports (Homer Kent, Jerusalem to Rome). It was largely a Gentile city about 25 miles from Jerusalem. Sharon was the plain that stretched up the coast from Lydda to Mt. Carmel.

Was Aeneas a believer? Our text doesn't say. It is interesting to note that he is referred to as "a certain man," as compared to Dorcas, in verse 36, who was called "a disciple."

We know that there were some believers who lived in Lydda. How did they get there? They could have settled there after fleeing the persecution in Jerusalem. They could also have been there since the time of Jesus' ministry. It is also possible that Philip preached there as he passed through the city on his way to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). There was a direct road that led from Azotus to Lydda.

4. What do we notice about the miracle?
 - a. Whose name was glorified?
 - b. Was there any hype or hysteria?
 - c. Were Biblical principles contradicted?
 - d. Were there salvations as a result?

These are great guidelines given to us by Chuck Swindoll, to test all the so-called healing ministries of today. God is still in the business of healing, but He wants all the glory! He is the Great Physician (Deuteronomy 32:39).

5. Does God heal everyone, all the time? (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

6. Is sickness always a result of sin in your life? Read John 9:1-5.

Joni Eareckson Tada says this regarding healing: "God certainly can, and sometimes does, heal people in miraculous ways today. But the Bible does not teach that He will always heal those who come to Him in faith. He sovereignly reserves the right to heal or not to heal as He sees fit."

Some day we will be completely free of all disease and suffering. Why doesn't He heal it all now? Only God knows that answer. But will we trust Him while we wait? Let's Rejoice with Paul that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Fifth Day

Write out your memory verse. How is Acts 9:15 a good summary of Paul's life and ministry?

Today we travel to the city of Joppa, which is known today as Jaffa. This seaport is about 10 miles from Lydda. Peter now does an even greater miracle by raising someone from the dead. Let's meet Dorcas, who is the second woman mentioned in Acts after Pentecost.

1. Read Acts 9:36-43. Describe Dorcas.

Tabitha is her Hebrew name, while it translates as Dorcas in the Greek. They both mean gazelle, which was a popular term in the Orient for beauty.

2. What does verse 36 say about her? Did her name reflect her character?

The verb tense of the phrase "**which she did**" suggests a habitual practice. She was in the practice of doing charitable deeds and good things.

3. What about you? Are good works and deeds a part of your lifestyle? If not, what changes need to be made?

4. We know that we aren't saved by works (Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5) What place DO works have in our life? Read and comment on the following verses:

- a. Titus 2:14
- b. Matthew 5:16
- c. 1 Timothy 6:17-19
- d. Titus 3:8
- e. James 2:14-26

5. What good works did she do? (Acts 9:39)

Joppa was a very dangerous seaport. Many a man lost his life because of the perils of the sea. Because of this, there were many widows who lived there. Dorcas had compassion on these widows, and helped them as best she could. Maybe she was a widow herself.

6. Why did they go and get Peter? (Acts 9:38)

7. Read the account of Jesus healing Jairus's daughter in Mark 5:35-42 and Luke 8:49-56. How are they similar?

8. Whose authority did Peter acknowledge in Acts 9:40?

Dorcas is a great example of a woman who used the gift that God gave her to minister to others. She simply offered herself for His service. No gift or talent is too small for God to use.

Dorcas was loved by the people. I believe that the widows were honoring her love for them as they showed the tunics to Peter. She loved them too. Today, there is a group of women called the "Dorcas Society" that comes together to help the poor and the needy. Wow! What a neat way to be remembered.

9. How would people remember you? (Ask someone!) How would you like to be remembered?

10. Dorcas had a needle and thread, and she offered it to the Lord to use for His glory. What simple thing do you have to offer Him? Read Colossians 3:17.

11. Whom did Peter stay with in Joppa? (Acts 9:43) Why was this a big deal? Read Leviticus 11:35-40.

12. What was the greatest lesson you learned from Acts 9? How were you encouraged in your walk with the Lord?

God is definitely preparing Peter to go into the house of Cornelius in Acts 10. This was a step towards bridging the gap between the Jews and the Gentiles.

This week we studied Saul's conversion, the healing of the paralyzed man, and Dorcas coming back to life. What a chapter! It's one of my favorites. (Actually, every chapter becomes my favorite as we study it.) What was your biggest "**Reason to Rejoice**"? See you next week!