

# Monday - Week Thirty-four

## Acts Nine: Paul's Conversion

**Summary:** The day Paul was converted ranks among the most important in the history of the world. God used Paul in powerful ways to advance His kingdom.

### Background and Comments

- When Paul was knocked off his horse by the bright light a voice asked him why Paul was persecuting Him. Paul immediately asked, "Who are you, Lord?" Can you imagine how Paul must have felt when the voice replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Paul's goal in life had been to destroy the followers of this man named Jesus. In an instant Paul knew that Jesus was the Son of God; he had been persecuting children of God.
- There is some humor in the story of Ananias. After God told him to go to Straight Street to talk to Paul, Ananias reminded God that Paul was an enemy. It's almost like Ananias was saying, "God, are you sure you want me to go there. Haven't you heard that he has been killing people?" As if God didn't know!
- Verses 15-16 give us a glimpse into God's mind: *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."* Paul's ministry would be directed toward the Gentiles. Paul would suffer for the very Name he once tried to destroy.

### Lessons for Today

- Paul was blind for three days; we can only imagine what went through Paul's mind during those days. No doubt God used these three days to teach Paul about humility and repentance. Have you ever had a period of forced rest (a hospital stay, an illness that kept you in bed for a few days, etc.). What was the spiritual value of that time?
- Paul began suffering for Jesus almost immediately after his conversion. When is the last time that you suffered because you are a Christian?
- Peter stayed with a tanner named Simon (v 43) in Joppa. This is noteworthy because tanners came into contact with dead animals; contact with Simon would have made Peter ceremonially unclean. Peter was saying that God had put an end to these ceremonial laws.

**Read:** Psalm 145; Revelation 1.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, use me as You used Paul. In Jesus' name; Amen.

# Tuesday - Week Thirty-four

## Acts Ten: Peter and Cornelius

**Summary:** The early Christian church struggled with the question of ceremonial laws because non-Jews were joining the church. These Gentiles had never kept the Jewish ceremonial laws. Many influential Jews thought that these new believers should be forced to keep these laws. God taught the church that ceremonial laws had been fulfilled (and ended) by Jesus.

### Background and Comments

- God sometimes used visions to communicate with the early Christians.
- The Holy Spirit proved to everyone that the Gentiles had a part in God's kingdom when He gave them the ability to speak in tongues. Today such proof is not needed because we have the Word of God.
- Peter strikes us as a person who was flexible, flexible enough to listen to God's voice and change his own presuppositions.

### Lessons for Today

- God loves our good works. God told Cornelius that his prayers and gifts to the poor had come up to Him as a memorial offering. Good works obviously don't get us to heaven but they do please God greatly. What a great chance for us to say thank You to God for everything He has done for us. The next time you put your faith into action smile a little because you made God smile!
- God's use of visions shows us what kind of a teacher He is. God wanted his message to be visual and memorable. Peter would not quickly forget a giant sheet full of animals! When you tell others (adults or children) about the Lord do you present it in visual, memorable and exciting ways? How can you encourage your pastor or Sunday school teachers in this area?
- Why was it so difficult for the Jews to accept the Gentiles? For thousands of years God had kept the Jews separated from the Gentiles through the ceremonial laws. The Jews were God's people, the people of the covenant. When Jesus did His work God began to get the Good News to all people instead of to one people. This was radically different for the Jews. We also struggle with favoritism and elitism.

**Read:** Psalm 146; Revelation 2.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, bless our missionaries as they share the Gospel with all people. In Jesus' name I pray; Amen.

# Wednesday - Week Thirty-four

## Catechism Review

Read Questions 275-278.

1. Someone once said that baptism is like a wet Bible. Explain.  

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2. When someone is baptized the Holy Spirit is working to create or strengthen faith. When you see someone baptized in church you simply see water being poured or sprinkled on the person and hear the pastor speaking words. What is happening “behind the scenes”?  

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3. What would you say to someone who taught that baptism is valid only if a pastor performed it?  

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4. Baptism is something to be celebrated! God is powerfully at work to bring faith into someone’s heart. How do you celebrate your baptism?  

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How do you celebrate baptisms in your church? [If there were ever a reason to cheer in church it would be after a baby is baptized!] What church customs could you start to heighten the joy your congregation feels when someone is baptized?  

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**Read:** Psalm 147; Revelation 3.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the power of baptism. Amen.

## Thursday - Week Thirty-four

### Acts Eleven: Peter, Paul and Barnabas

**Summary:** In this chapter we see scenes from the early church that help us see how things were done in the first years of the church's history.

#### Background and Comments

- Verse 19 tells us that the persecutions of the Jewish leaders had exactly opposite the effect than they had planned. The church grew rapidly because Christians spread the Good News wherever they went.
- When the Christians in Antioch heard that there would be a famine they decided to send help to the Christians in Jerusalem. Not only would this help these Christians physically it would also draw them closer together spiritually as well.

#### Lessons for Today

- Criticism has always been a problem in the church. When Peter arrived in Jerusalem it appears that some people didn't even let him explain what happened but immediately started to criticize him. Watching out for errors is an important job God has given to all Christians ... yet we must first get the whole story and even put the best construction on everything. How critical is your congregation? Are you flexible enough to try new things? Do you try to understand before you respond? Are you encouraging ... even of people who do things a bit differently than you do? How can you help your congregation grow in these areas?
- Barnabas went to Troas to get Paul. Troas was far from the center of action in the early church. Some might even think that Paul's talents were being wasted way up in Troas. God was training Paul in Troas for the incredible missionary journeys he was about to take. God has a way of putting His future leaders in out of the way places to train them. Moses spent 40 years in the desert before he led the Israelites out of Egypt. David spent time running away from King Saul before he became king. Has God given you this kind of period in your life?
- The believers were called Christians first in Antioch. How proud are you of being a Christian?

**Read:** Psalm 148; Revelation 4.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, guide the leaders of today's church just as You guided the leaders of the early church. In Jesus' name; Amen.

## Friday - Week Thirty-Four

### John - Lesson Five: Water into Wine (John 2:1-11)

1. Jesus' disciples might have been surprised that Jesus was taking them to a wedding feast. They had been disciples of John the Baptist, who was not exactly known for going to parties! Comment: By going to this wedding Jesus showed us that going to a party is perfectly fine.

Comment: If we want to make a difference in the world we had better spend time in the world.

2. Jesus was (still is) a real person. He went to a wedding feast, held little children, and loved to spend time with people. The Bible tells us that Jesus was like us in every way. (Hebrews 2:17). What does that mean for you?
3. John calls Mary "The mother of Jesus". The most important thing about Mary was that she was Jesus' mom. How can we identify ourselves in terms of Jesus?
4. Read verses 7-10 from the servant's viewpoint. What must have gone through their minds as this developed?
5. John introduces us to a significant word in his Gospel: sign. The word "sign" shows us that Jesus was pointing to things when He did miracles. His miracles above all proved that He is the Son of God. (After all, who else can change water into wine?) These signs backed up what Jesus said. Verse 11 says that Jesus thus (in the miracle) displayed His glory and the disciples put their faith in Him. How could a miracle strengthen someone's faith? (the Word & sacraments strengthen faith).

**Read:** Psalm 149, Revelation 5.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the signs of Your love that You have put in my life. Especially keep my eyes on the sure Word of God. Amen.