

Saul Becomes A Believer

(Acts 9:1-22)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, have an adult dressed like Saul and carrying scrolls come storming into the class room saying, *"My name is Saul, and I have letters giving me permission to arrest those who believe in Jesus. I can't imagine how anybody could believe that He is really the Son of God and that He actually came back to life from the dead. These believers are causing nothing but trouble. They must be stopped!"* Saul continues grumbling as he leaves the class room.]

How frightening it must have been for the believers in the early church to have to face someone like Saul!

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You that we live in a free country where we can freely worship You and study Your word. So, many Christians in the world today have to meet in secret, fearing for their lives! But we can walk down the street with our Bibles; we can talk about You openly; we can have Christian concerts in public parks. Help us never to take this privilege for granted, Lord. Help us to be bold witnesses for You and take advantage of our freedom to tell people about You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Lesson

Last week we learned that Peter and John were persecuted and thrown into prison for telling others about Jesus. Jesus' followers in Jerusalem suffered dreadful persecution. One of the chief persecutors was a man named Saul. Saul had stood by and

watched men stone Stephen to death. Stephen was the first Christian to be killed for his faith in Jesus.

Wherever Saul went he uttered murderous threats against the followers of Jesus. How he hated them! From house to house he went, dragging out the believers and having them thrown into jail and put to death without good cause.

Hundreds of Christians fled from the city, but Saul was determined to track them down. When he heard that some of them had traveled 150 miles away to Damascus, he set off with troops to drag them back in chains. He was determined to wipe out Jesus' followers there, too. But God had other plans for him!

Open your Bibles to Acts 9 where we pick up the account right after Stephen had been stoned to death.

Acts 9:1-2

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. (2) He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

Saul went to the high priest for letters that would grant him authority to arrest believers in Damascus and have them taken back to Jerusalem to be put in prison.

Saul was a Pharisee. He knew the teachings of the Old Testament well. He thought he was pleasing God by trying to eliminate Christians! He did not believe that Jesus is God or that He had risen from the dead. He punished Jesus' followers because he thought they were teaching things against what he understood the Bible to teach. He was being zealous for righteousness, but he didn't know the truth about God.

As Saul traveled along the road to Damascus, something incredible happened.

Acts 9:3-4

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. (4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

Saul and his men had nearly reached Damascus when suddenly, at about midday, there was a blinding flash of light in the sky and the Lord spoke to him and he fell to the ground.

Acts 9:5

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!"

In this dramatic moment, Saul believed that Jesus is the Christ, the One God had promised in the scriptures to send to save everyone from their sins. God wanted Saul to see that Jesus had truly risen from the dead and met him on the road in this spectacular way!

Even though Saul had persecuted and even ordered Christians to be put to death, because of God's great love for Saul, God showed him that Jesus really is alive! God wants to do that for every human being that ever lived. God is full of mercy and grace. He doesn't want any to perish and go to hell. He wants all people to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus! And, he goes to great lengths to get everybody's attention! No one is without excuse for not coming to believe in Jesus!

Acts 9:6-7

Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (7) The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one!

Saul was blinded by the light.

Acts 9:8-9

Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. (9) He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

Saul's soldiers probably saw him stagger to his feet. They had to lead him like a blind man to Damascus. After three days, God sent help.

Acts 9:10-12

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. (11) The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. (12) I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."

What do you think was going through Ananias' mind at this point? He was probably awe struck by having a vision of the Lord speaking to him; it's not every day we have an actual conversation with the Creator of the universe! Also, he was probably afraid to face Saul because he had a bad reputation for persecuting the believers. Ananias was probably terrified.

Acts 9:13-16

"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! (14) And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." (15) But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. (16) And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

What would you have done if you had been Ananias? It must have been hard, but Ananias was obedient to the Lord and went to Saul. We must obey and follow God's leading, even when he leads us to difficult people and places.

Acts 9:17-19

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (18) Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. (19) Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days.

That day, Saul's body received a healing and his mind received a healing as well. As the scales fell from his eyes, Saul was able to see both physically and spiritually. As a sign of his conversion, Saul was baptized and began his new life as God's chosen apostle.

God had sent Ananias to encourage Saul and give him exciting news. Ananias told this new believer about the special plans that God had for his life.

God has special plans for your life, too. God promises to lead us and guide us every day. He will direct our steps if we just ask Him to show us the way and trust that His way is the best for us.

Saul, now a believer, is full of the Holy Spirit and begins to boldly preach the good news about Jesus, how He came and died for our sins, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

Acts 9:20-22

And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" (21) All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?" (22) Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

People knew that what Saul taught was real because they could see it in the way he lived. He had a changed life.

What a strange twist of fate for Saul, who set out to destroy Christianity, to suddenly become the most well-known of all God's apostles. Did you know that most of the New Testament was written by this same man, whose name was changed from Saul to Paul?

In His sovereignty, God can take even the most hateful of all people and turn him around for His own good purposes! [Teacher, review today's memory verse.]

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, You are so good and so full of mercy and grace. You took this man, Saul, who was persecuting and even killing people who believed in You, and you changed him from the inside out. You loved him, even when he was a murderer and a hater, and you used him in a mighty way to teach people about your grace. Help us to be as loving and forgiving of others as You are with us! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES**CRAFT CORNER****GAME CENTER**

Opposition to the Faith game

Preparation: You'll need several colors of sidewalk chalk, marbles, two basketballs, and Bibles.

In your church parking lot, use the sidewalk chalk to draw two large targets with at least four rings. Make the targets 10 to 20 feet in diameter and label each bull's eye "Jerusalem." Then label each circle outside of Jerusalem with a point value, increasing as they go farther out (10 points between Jerusalem and the first ring, 20 points between the first and second rings, and so on).

Note: Scale this game down for play indoors!

Play: Form two teams and have them each stand near a target. Give each team a basketball and 20 marbles to place on its bull's eye. Team members will take turns throwing the basketball on Jerusalem, scattering the marbles throughout the target. After each turn, add points up based on where in the target the marbles are have rolled. Then the marbles are gathered and returned to the center of the target for the next person to scatter.

Tell the kids that the object is to have as many marbles as possible land outside of Jerusalem. Add up the points for each person on a team. Marbles landing outside the target count for 50 points each. After tallying the scores, declare the winning team.

Next have kids each choose a partner from the opposing team to form pairs. Have one partner in each pair read aloud Acts 8:1-4 and the other summarize it in one sentence. Then ask:

1. How was the persecution of the early church like this game?
2. In what way did the persecution help to spread the news of Jesus to remote areas of the earth?
3. How do you think the early Christians felt about their persecution? Explain.
4. What can we learn about how God works from this example of the early church?