

The road to Damascus

Sunday 28th June

Acts 9:1-25/31

¹ Saul kept on threatening to kill the Lord's followers. He even went to the high priest ² and asked for letters to the Jewish leaders in Damascus. He did this because he wanted to arrest and take to Jerusalem any man or woman who had accepted the Lord's Way. ³ When Saul had almost reached Damascus, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice that said, 'Saul! Saul! Why are you so cruel to me?'

⁵ 'Who are you?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus,' the Lord answered.

'I am the one you are so cruel to.'

⁶ Now get up and go into the city, where you will be told what to do.'

⁷ The men with Saul stood there speechless. They had heard the voice, but they had not seen anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and when he opened his eyes, he could not see a thing. Someone then led him by the hand to Damascus, ⁹ and for three

days he was blind and did not eat or drink.

¹⁰ A follower named Ananias lived in Damascus, and the Lord spoke to him in a vision. Ananias answered, 'Lord, here I am.'

¹¹ The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. When you get there, you will find a man named Saul from the city of Tarsus. Saul is praying, ¹² and he has seen a vision. He saw a man named Ananias coming to him and putting his hands on him, so that he could see again.'

Acts 9:1-12

Commentary

After Stephen's murder, it became much harder in Jerusalem to be a follower of the way of Jesus. The Jewish authorities had threatened the disciples several times. Saul, a leading Pharisee, was particularly determined to stop their lies and dangerous teaching. He was given authority to hunt down believers wherever they could be found, including up at Damascus in Syria, but Jesus quite literally stopped him in his tracks with a blinding light. He heard Jesus speak to him and was forced to rethink everything that he believed.

Ananias knew Saul's reputation as a persecutor of Christians, so it took great courage for him to go and bring healing to Saul, but his obedience opened the door to a brand new chapter not only in Saul's life but in the story of the Christian church. Saul went on, under his Roman name Paul, to be one of the most effective

and influential disciples of Jesus. Through his ministry, churches began to spring up all over the Roman Empire. Saul never forgot what happened to him on the Damascus road, and he often told his story to others to help them to believe in Jesus too.

Visual aid

Arrange for a camera flash to go off once or twice. This can often leave us blinking and having difficulty in refocusing our sight. God's flashlight blinded Saul, but it was because he needed to see everything in a new way.

Activity idea

The Christians now had to watch their backs. Anyone might be a spy for the Pharisees. Challenge each other to put the message 'Saul is on his way' into some sort of code. Maybe you could rewrite it, turning every letter into the next but one letter in the alphabet, or perhaps turn it into a message with a double meaning, such as 'The vulture is flying north'. Who can come up with the best ideas?

Questions

- ▶ What was it that kept people believing in Jesus even when it was so dangerous?
- ▶ Why was Saul so opposed to what the Christians were saying about Jesus?
- ▶ Why did Jesus need to appear to Saul so dramatically?
- ▶ What must have been going through Ananias' mind when he set off for Straight Street?
- ▶ What was the biggest change for Saul?

Prayer idea

By changing one letter at a time, the word 'hate' can become 'love' in five simple moves: hate—gate—gave—give—live—love. Try to use each of these separate words in five simple prayers to God. For example: 'Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are our gate into heaven'; 'Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you gave your life for us on the cross', and so on.

Key verse

"'Who are you?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus,' the Lord answered' (Acts 9:5).

Old Testament story link

Daniel 4:28-37: This is the story of how King Nebuchadnezzar came to believe in the one true God after a very strange experience.

Taken from **The Barnabas Family Bible**

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