

Acts 9 - John Karmelich

Ever wonder how does God actually works in our lives? Of course I'm not God and I don't claim that I all He's capable of doing. I just know when it comes to the significant things He does in our world, He explains all that we need to know to deal with life in the scripture (See Amos 3:7). That leads us to the story of this chapter. It tells us of Paul's Christian conversion. Then it suddenly shifts to describe some miracles Peter did at a different location. Why? I believe it's because the author Luke wants to teach us how God works through those He's called to be a witness for Him (that's us)! What these stories do is remind us God's in charge, and He decides who gets saved and how people are used by Him. With that said, let me explain further:

The first story here is about Paul's conversion to Christianity. Remember he was a leader in an effort to destroy the church after Stephen was martyred in Chapter 7. Here in Chapter 9, he's still a nonbeliever arresting Christians in Israel. The Jewish authorities gave him permission to travel to Damascus. That city is in Syria today, and is a 6-day walk from Jerusalem. It had a significant Jewish population. With Saul "out for blood", he had the authority to arrest any Christian-Jews living there.

While traveling there, let's just say God interrupted the process. Why here? Why not before Stephen's death or other Christians arrested? A big reason is to show "God decides who gets saved and when". I obviously believe Christians should be a witness to nonbelievers. However, when the actual moment of conversion comes is up to God and not us. That's why I pray for people's hearts to be open, but I know I'm not in charge of who gets saved and when. My job is just to be a good witness for Jesus!

What also dawned on me is no other disciples led Saul (i.e., Paul) to conversion. We don't read anyone who prayed for Paul before this event! If anything, Christians were afraid of him. Yet God decided, at this specific moment to say in effect, "Now's the proper time for Paul to give his life to Me!" What also occurred to me is God uses aspects of our personality for His glory. For example even before Paul was converted, he wanted to prove his love for God as he was making efforts (even though wrongly placed) for His glory. The point is when we get saved God uses us just as we are, and lets us use our God given gifts and abilities for His glory!

Anyway while traveling to Damascus (again in Syria, northeast of Israel), Paul was literally blinded by Jesus as he was approaching the city. Other men were traveling with Paul and experienced much of it and said in effect, "Whatever's happening, Paul's now blind. Let's finish the journey to help him!" He didn't eat or drink for three days as he contemplated what happened to him. Imagine living where one knew one was violating what God requires of us! (Paul was putting His people to death!) Now imagine an encounter with God on judgment day without pleading Jesus' blood! For a man like Paul, he needed three days just to contemplate all of this! Bottom line is we read of his conversion here in this chapter. Yes there's more as there always is.

The story jumps to a Christian (not the men traveling with Paul) who led Paul closer to Jesus through a miracle. This man did a miracle so Paul could see again. He (Ananias) didn't lecture Paul about all the things he did wrong, but he just trusted God to work through him. He effectively told Paul, "I don't get why God's doing this, but if He says you're saved, who am I to argue?" The point for us is we've got to accept His will even if we're not crazy about how He's working right at that moment! How do we know what is His will? That's why we study our bible and watch life unfold!

The rest of Saul's story here is about how he preached Jesus right where he was and was now hated for doing that in Damascus. The other Christians had to sneak him out of that city. The text also mentions he went to Jerusalem to talk to the other disciples. We learn in Paul's letter to the Galatians, his visit to Jerusalem didn't happen until three years later. (See Galatians 1:18). A small point to remember here is that the book of Acts covers decades and while it generally covers a straight line in time, will jump a bit to tell us facts God wants us to learn about the lives of the disciples as they use them for His glory!

That of course, made me wonder, why did the text suddenly jump back to Peter at this point? We won't read of Paul again until Chapter 13, where essentially the rest of Acts focuses on him. The text focuses on Peter again, and other miracles he did in Israel. Why? Part of it is to show that God is still working through others besides Paul at this point. Don't get me wrong. I'm positive Paul did more to change the course of Western Civilization than anyone in history other than Jesus Himself. The Roman Empire is at their power peak was when Paul traveled around that empire to spread the Gospel. At their peak all of the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea was part of that empire. That's when Paul traveled in to spread the Gospel around much of the known world.

OK jumped off topic. My point is just because God was using Paul in a mighty way doesn't mean God stopped using other people to make a difference for Him. That's another reason why the text gets back to Peter and other disciples. It's to say in effect it's not the scale of the ministry that's important. What is important is our willingness to be used by God for His glory! We read Paul's conversion is as if "it's just another miracle" mixed with other miracle stories in this chapter! I know the chapter breaks were not added until over a 1,000 years later. Paul's conversion is told between other miracle stories as if to remind us God's working on a large and small scale at the same time! He's still working that way as He continues to use people to make a difference for Him. His desire is to work through our lives to glorify Him. The "how" is up to Him. All He asks is a willingness to be used by Him and realize that we were created to glorify Him and not vice-versa.

OK then, let me finish the chapter! After the story of Paul's conversion mixed in with the story of the Christian man who did the miracle of Paul regaining his sight and saying in effect, "If God wants you to be His instrument to lead people to Him, I'll get out of the way!" The text spends some time telling us of the church's reaction to Paul. It was tough as it's hard for us to accept something that dramatic a change in life without well, watching them for awhile!

Then the focus goes back to Peter as I said earlier. Again it shows that God is still working through the disciples He trained during those three years as well as others God picked (like Paul) because well He's in charge so we must accept that. Anyway, we read of two miracles Peter did to finish the chapter. The first was he healed a man who was paralyzed for many years. Peter didn't make a big deal about it. All he said was, "OK buddy, time to get up, start walking and make your bed (as in you're no longer stuck in that condition!)" Most likely Luke interviewed either this man or Peter and was told about it. Again Luke wanted to include the story to show that God's still working through the disciples.

The final story was about a woman who died. People were buried almost immediately back then as the embalming process was rare and only for the wealthy! Anyway, the dead woman's friends heard Peter was in the area and they figured, "He was with Jesus and Jesus raised people from the dead, so let's ask him and see what happens!" I'm sure Peter was nervous about doing that. He probably figured he had nothing to lose by trying. So he prayed and next thing everyone knew, this woman was alive again.

To sum it up as it applies to us, what we must realize is that God wants to use anyone willing to make a difference for Him. How do we start? God uses those who are willing to be used that way. I'd start by

finding ways to make a difference. God uses those who are already "moving" for Him. Hopefully you and I can be used that way as I can't imagine a greater reason for living than to be used by the God who created us in the first place!

On the same page where you downloaded this summary is a detailed lesson on Chapter 9. That is on a verse-by-verse basis. To read that, click on one of the other two links on this chapter. You're always welcome to e-mail me and I hope you like this. Thanks, John