



RADICAL CONVERSION

ACTS 9:19B-31

HEART OF THE MATTER

A WORD FROM KEN

When we travel internationally, one primary, sometimes complicated chore is to exchange our currency. The U.S. Dollars in our wallets don't work anymore - once we pass through Customs. They

need to be converted. They had value back home, but here they don't do much, unless a rare vendor is willing to take them. (If he does, you can be sure it will be at a premium.)

When we surrender one currency for another at the going rate, we receive equal value. Now we have what we need to negotiate our way through this new land. We can eat, shop and lodge. Our business is greeted with a smile and a nod. The doors are open. Our money has been *converted*. What was useless becomes useful.

Up until now, Luke constructs his historic case with dramatic stories of a different kind of conversion. He wants Theophilus to grasp the power of the gospel message as it spread throughout the known world. Hundreds, no thousands respond to the news that Jesus is alive, and that belief transforms hearts - bringing forgiveness and wholeness and purpose. These conversions open up a whole new world of opportunity. The old life is exchanged for the new. Believers can now negotiate freely in a new world of fellowship and connectedness and partnership. New doors are open. Old doubts are exchanged for affirmations. Despair becomes hope. Cynicism is turned to joy.

Luke builds the drama to a great crescendo. In the aftermath of Stephen's execution, there is a stunning conversion that will bring transformation on a colossal scale. Saul led the charge against Jesus' followers, until he met Jesus on the Damascus road. That changed everything. Followers of The Way were skeptical at first. Was this a ploy? A trap? Was this evidence of Saul's cunning? Believers approached him with caution... until Barnabas (later called "the son of encouragement") came on the scene. He validated the authenticity of Saul's turn-about.

Saul emerged from his stay with Ananias a completely changed man. His ambitions melted away. His determination to build a name for himself on the suffering and prosecution of Jesus' disciples disappeared. He now possessed a new kind of currency. It was the knowledge of the power of the resurrection. He understood the transforming, universal relevance of the gospel. His enemies became his friends. His old friends turned on him. The Sanhedrin, who commissioned him to lead the charge and eliminate believers, now wanted *him* killed.

Saul would spend the rest of his life spending and investing that new currency. His conversion was real. And complete.

To this very day, God is still in the business of conversion.

Review ACTS 9:19B-31

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

AUTHENTIC INTERACTION · COMPELLING CONNECTION · IRRESISTIBLE EXPERIENCE
LOVING ACCEPTANCE · EVANGELISTIC INFLUENCE

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BACKGROUND: Saul's life took an about-face on the Damascus Road. Last week, thanks to Luke, we became witnesses to that powerful encounter with the risen Lord. This week, Paul goes to Damascus. Now he is making the case; not that Christians should be imprisoned, but that Jesus lives. Disciples had difficulty believing this change of heart was genuine. The Jewish community, who had expected him lead the charge against Jesus' followers, turned on him. They wanted him killed. The disciples knew it - this radical conversion was for real.

THINK IT OVER....

1. Review the story of Ananias. Describe Saul's physical recovery. What did it take?
2. Saul went to the synagogues in Damascus. What did he teach? How did the people there respond?
3. What did the disciples do when word came that there was a conspiracy to eliminate Saul?
4. Who was Barnabas? How did he help the disciples work through their doubts and fears?
5. What happened in Jerusalem? Where did Saul travel after that?

BRING IT HOME... HOW DOES IT APPLY?

1. Saul recovered spiritually... and physically. Why, according to Dr. Luke, was Saul's physical restoration central to the story? How is rest, nourishment and encouragement essential to our spiritual health?
2. Saul's effectiveness grew, according to Luke. He made his case based on the written word of God. How does knowledge of God's word strengthen out witness?
3. Barnabas is (4:36) called "the son of encouragement." He traveled with Saul for years following this encounter. What must Barnabas have meant to Saul on a personal level? Do you have a Barnabas in your life? Are you a Barnabas to others?
4. Turn the four characteristics (vs 31) of the church at peace into a prayer for today. Let's ask God for: strength, encouragement in the Holy Spirit, an increase in numbers* and living in the fear of the Lord.

**NOTE: an increase in numbers is never a goal in itself - it is instead, evidence of irresistible experience, loving acceptance and evangelistic influence.*

SHARE. SUPPORT. AFFIRM. PRAY.

