

FROM SAUL TO PAUL**Acts 9:1-31**

Intro: I plan to continue this series since there are other helpful rebooting stories in the Bible. Next we will look at Job, and we'll see where we go from there. I also received the suggestion that perhaps we could have a Sunday where ABCers fill this preaching time with their own account of how God rebooted them. I'd love that! It would be encouraging to hear from several of you. Be thinking about that and contact me if you are interested.

Now, on to our talk:

Wouldn't it be cool if Vladimir Putin suddenly called all his troops home, apologized for all the murder and destruction that he had done, totally compensated and rebuilt Ukraine, returned Crimea which he stole eight years ago in another wanton military action?

Wouldn't it be cool if Mr. Putin then left the government of Russia completely and surrendered to face any and all charges that would be leveled? Most of all, wouldn't it be cool if he did all this because God had spoken to him on the road to Kiev, and told him that he needed to repent?

Repentance for Vladimir Putin would be a prime example of rebooting. And in the case of Vladimir Putin, (and truly, anyone else) the only one who can do such rebooting is God himself. So if you think it's impossible you're wrong. God could and does do that. We know he can because he did it with Saul who later became Paul, who is the latest in our series that is entitled, REBOOTING.

Let's look at the rebooting of Saul, the persecutor of the church. Our text is from Acts 9, but we first read about the passionate Jewish leader in Acts 7 when Stephen, the first martyr, was being stoned to death for the high crime of believing in, serving, and preaching about, Jesus Christ. He didn't get his hands dirty at that cruel execution, instead he watched over the coats of those who were casting the rocks (Acts 7:58), and Acts 8:1, tells us *And Saul approved of his execution.*

He went on the warpath to prove it. Christians who were teaching about Jesus made his blood boil and he was determined to eradicate them. The next time we read about him in the Book of Acts in our text in chapter 9. Let me read that to you.

(Read Acts 9:1-31)

Saul should have known better

- With the exception of Rahab, who was a heathen Canaanite woman and who, with her family, were the only survivors of the destruction of Jericho by the Israelites, all of the rebooting subjects we have looked at for the past two months have been active servants of God. We have looked at Habakkuk, Elijah, David, and Peter, and every one of them should have known better to be in the situation they were in.
 - Habakkuk was a prophet who knew God as well as any, yet God had to do extensive convincing to bring him around.
 - Elijah was fresh out of a huge victory for God and yet he sunk into a deep melancholy that required 40 days of God therapy to realize his life was not over.
 - David was a man after God's own heart who had experienced and witnessed God at work through his life, but when faced with temptation he fell into sin like a ton of bricks.
 - Peter was one of Jesus's inner circle within his inner circle, but in a moment of fear denied his friend in the blink of an eye.

Every one of them should have known better, but God patiently wooed them back into right thinking, right actions, and right relationship with himself. That is the very meaning of rebooting, God's way.

- Saul was in the same boat, he should have known better. In Philippians 3 he described himself before he knew Christ as . . . *circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.* Philippians 3:5-6. So with his level of knowledge of scripture and learning from the best teachers Judaism had to offer, he should have known what God was up to. But he didn't.
- Saul needed to see the light – and BOY, did he ever see it by the time God was done with him!
- Nevertheless he was a case in point that . . .

Sometimes good people miss the point

- This is an important thing to remember: people can have sincerely held beliefs and be completely wrong. A Muslim can be fervently dedicated to the teachings of Mohammad believe the Koran is holy scripture – but he is wrong and he’s lost. A person who practices Buddhism can meditate and help others and do yoga and whatever other things Buddhists do and believe she is on her way to the highest state of consciousness, but she is still wrong and she is lost. A Mormon can do his two years of mission work, walking through sometimes hostile neighborhoods; get married in the temple, be baptized for ancestors, and faithfully give to the church all his life, but he is still wrong and he’s lost. Even people who consider themselves Christians can be wrong and lost. All these and a myriad other examples can be made of good people who sincerely believe, but they are wrong.
- This is why we must be patient with, and show the love of Jesus to, those we disagree with. As we patiently do this, they just may see the truth. But I digress... Sometimes good people miss the point.
- Saul was a case in point. Charles Erdman writes, *“Saul was a striking example of the truth that a man may be sincere and moral, even intensely religious, and yet be stained with guilt. His outward life had been blameless; so zealous was he of the faith of his fathers, and so certain that he was doing God’s service, that with no qualm of conscience he arrested, tortured, and caused to blaspheme, all who had accepted the new faith; he gave his vote as a ruler to have them put to death.”*
- Sometimes such sincerity and zeal needs to be knocked down a peg and that’s what God did with Saul. He literally knocked him to the ground and blasted him with the light of truth. Even Saul couldn’t miss that point – and he didn’t.
- And right away we see that . . .

A key part of rebooting is encouragement and support from the people of God

- This man who had been angrily marching toward Damascus with warrants for the arrest of any and all Christ Followers he could find, suddenly had to be led the remainder of the way by his puzzled assistants because he was blind and helpless. He stayed at the home of Judas for three days and fasted from food and water all that time.
- All the while a Christ Follower in Damascus was being prepared by the Lord to go and commission Saul for Christian ministry. Understandably, this man, who we only know as Ananias in his only appearance in scripture, is concerned. He questions God with, *“Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.”* Acts 9:13-14 and the Lord assures him with, *“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. Acts 9:15. And that is all Ananias needed, so he went, laid hands on Paul and said *“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”* Acts 9:17. He called him Brother!!!! This man had persecuted and murdered his friends and the natural response would have been slap him up the side of the head or, at the very least rearrange the furniture in the room. Saul didn’t deserve brotherhood. But Ananias, who we never hear from again, becomes a hero of the faith and welcomes Saul into the ministry.*
- Later, when Saul went to Jerusalem, the Christ Followers there thought he was on undercover assignment to infiltrate them. They couldn’t comprehend that the one they had seen at the coat check station at Stephen’s execution was now a Christ Follower. And who can blame them? But Barnabas, who’s very name means “Son of Encouragement” was the one who stepped through all the fear and mistrust and opened his arms and heart and welcomed Saul into fellowship. Later they were commissioned to go out in mission ministry together.
- Thinking back to my suggestion at the beginning of this talk that perhaps we can share about our own rebooting process; maybe you can jog your thinking by remembering who you can point to as the person, or one of the persons, who opened their arms and heart to you and welcomed you into the Kingdom? Think about that. These are unsung heroes of the faith, who step past fear and hurt and rejection and even violence, and envelope new believers with love and acceptance. One commentator, I forget who, wrote this about Saul, *“His acceptance of Christ as a personal Savior was due, in the case of Saul, to the guidance of an*

obscure Jewish convert in Damascus named Ananias. When he was summoned to this task which was to result in a blessing to the whole world, Ananias at first hesitated to go; he feared to approach the cruel persecutor who had come to the city for the express purpose of arresting all who professed to follow Christ. His reluctance was overcome by the divine assurance of the great work which Paul was destined to achieve. This consideration of the possible issue of their testimony has overcome the fears of countless messengers when facing difficult tasks in all ages. As is usual in such cases, the messenger found the way prepared before him.” (End quote)

- In other words, if you are reluctant or if you are worried or even terrified, to share about Jesus, go ahead. Share Jesus and you will discover that God has gone ahead of you and prepared the way. Ananias and Barnabas both accepted Saul’s word of what had happened on the Damascus Road and the world has never been the same since. . .

Saul became the most unlikely evangelist

- F B. Meyer, writes, “*When God needs captains for his army, he not unseldom takes them from the ranks of the enemy. The foremost persecutor became the foremost leader of the church. The conversion of Saul was due to the personal position of the living Christ. It was the pierced hand that arrested and apprehended him.*”
- It was Saul’s nature to be passionate about his beliefs, so he could not be silent. So he immediately began preaching about his new life in Jesus Christ. Prior to that he had been trying to snuff out the lives of people who were preaching about new life in Christ, now he was proclaiming new life in Christ! True to form he was not at all concerned about what people thought about it either. Erdman points out that sometimes new believers are afraid to share about their new commitment because they will be perceived as hypocrites. But, he powerfully points out, “*The truth is, secret believers are hypocrites.*”

Conclusion: A little aside as I wrap up, since it’s in my title, from Saul to Paul. Somewhere along the line Saul became Paul. He is first referred to as Paul in Acts 13:9 and there is no explanation given. F. F. Bruce suggests, as a Roman citizen, Paul would have had three names of which Paulus, a Greek name, was one. Here is what I believe: Saul was a very Jewish name, but since he was called to minister to the Gentiles, he began using his Gentile name as one of the ways he employed when he said, *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.* 1 Corinthians 9:22b. That, and the fact that his incredible transformation warranted a new name, is reason enough to go from Saul to Paul.

Paul was rebooted!!!! He thought he had it all wrapped up as an extremely religious man who knew the Law inside and out. He thought he was doing God’s work by pursuing and persecuting the followers of Jesus Christ. But Jesus met him personally on the road to Damascus and changed that all around. He went from a hopeless case to an overwhelming case of hope. He went from the old way of offering up sacrifices of slaughtered lambs and bulls to, in view of God’s mercy, offering up his body, that is, his entire being, as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—because it is true and proper worship. (Romans 12:1) and urging all Christ Followers to do the same.

So, even when we think there can be no hope or repair, God has a plan to reboot us. My suggestion concerning Vladimir Putin or any other seemingly hopeless case isn’t an attempt at being cute or exploiting current events for a sermon illustration – it’s a solid fact, **GOD IS IN THE REBOOTING BUSINESS!** Amen.