

BIBLE TIMELINE ASSEMBLIES

69. SAUL'S CONVERSION

Bible Base: Acts 9: 1-19

Key Christian Belief: We are saved by grace.

Aim: To help children understand that it is only because of what Jesus has done for us that we can be friends of God.

You will need

- a glass of clean water
- a glass of dirty water (as if it has come from the loo before you flushed it...)
- a means of dressing up as Saul (a robe and head dress?)

NB: If it is possible, this assembly could be delivered by two people - one as the presenter and one to act as Saul (Paul). Otherwise, you could go behind a screen, do a quick change and come out the other side as Saul...and vice versa at the end.

INTRODUCTION

Show the glass of clean water and ask if anyone would like a drink? If so, invite someone to come and take a sip - or take a sip yourself.

Now show the glass of dirty water - saying that you took this from the loo before you flushed it this morning. Would anyone like a drink? No way!

Now ask what would happen if you poured a tiny amount of water from the dirty glass into the clean glass. Would anyone want a drink from the 'clean' glass now?

It doesn't matter whether there is a lot of toilet water in the glass or only a little - you still wouldn't want to drink it!

The Bible tells us that all of us say, do and think things that are wrong - and that these things spoil our lives and keep us from being God's friends. Most of us in this room are probably like the glass of water that only has a tiny amount of toilet water in it. Most of the time we are kind, thoughtful, helpful and good. We don't rob banks, plant bombs, kill or steal like some people do. So, compared to them, we are actually pretty good.

Every now and then, though, we say or do something we know is not right. It just seems to slip out. It may not seem like very much, but the problem is that it doesn't matter whether there are lots of wrong things in our lives (hold up the glass of dirty water) or only a few (hold up the glass of 'clean' water) - the Bible tells us that none of us deserve to be friends of a God who hates all wrong things.

Today we are going to meet someone who knew all God's rules and had always done his best to keep them. He thought he deserved to be a friend of God. But God had something important to teach him. Here he comes now...

BIBLE STORY: PART ONE

NB: Dress up and act this out as if you are Saul.

Those followers of Jesus make my blood boil. How dare they say that Jesus has come back from the dead when they know it can't be true? How dare they say that God wants

us all to follow Jesus? Why would anyone need to follow Jesus when we have God's rules to show us how to be His friends? It makes me so angry!

Oh, hello there. My name is Saul. I come from a place called Tarsus and I am from a very strict Jewish family. My father was a Jew, and his father before him was a Jew and so on going right back to the time of Moses. Back then, God chose us, the Jewish people, or the children of Israel as we were known at that time, to be His special people. So as a Jew I'm one of God's people all right - no doubt about it.

What's more, I know the Books of the Law and the writings of the Prophets inside out - they are all part of what we call the Scriptures, God's special book. I've been studying these and learning them off by heart since I was a child. And I've been very careful to obey all the rules and do everything our religion says we should do if we want to be friends of God.

So how dare these people - the followers of Jesus say that I'm not good enough to be a friend of God? I come from a Jewish family, I keep the law, don't I? What more do I need?

And the things they say about Jesus are just ridiculous. They say He is the Son Of God. Nonsense - I say. If He was the Son of God He wouldn't have hung around like He did with people who have no respect for God's law. And telling people like that that God loved them and wanted them to be His friends - I've never heard anything like it in all my life.

We thought we'd got rid of Jesus - our leaders had Him put to death on a cross - but now His followers are going around telling everyone that He's come back from the dead. They just won't give up, will they? How on earth do they expect anyone to believe that?

We've got to put a stop to this. We got rid of Stephen - now it's time to get rid of the others as well. Have you heard about that? Stephen was one of the so-called followers of Jesus - but some of our leaders made sure everyone knew he was saying things about God that weren't true. We got a big crowd together, tied him up and threw stones at him for hours until he was dead. Serves him right, I say. I'd do the same to the lot of them if I could.

I'm on my way right now to the city of Damascus with permission from our leaders to arrest all the followers of Jesus and lock them up in jail. That'll teach them.

Jesus? Son of God? Risen from the dead? Nonsense. The sooner we put a stop to all this nonsense the better...oh it makes me so ANGRY!

If possible, leave the room. Have the words: SOME DAYS LATER displayed on the screen or have them written on a card and have someone carry this from one side of the stage to the other.

BIBLE STORY: PART TWO

Enter the room again and continue acting as Saul - much more sober this time.

I can hardly believe it...it's incredible. I never thought for one moment that it could be true, what they were saying about Jesus, but it turns out they were right all along. It is true - He is alive; He is the Son of God - and He has made a way for people everywhere

to be friends of God. Not just Jewish people and not just really good people - but everyone!

I was on my way to Damascus when all of a sudden, a bright light shone down from heaven. It blinded me, and I fell to the ground, terrified. Then I heard a voice saying: 'Saul, Saul 'Why are you so determined to fight against me?' I knew at once it was Jesus. He was alive, just as His followers said He was, and now He was speaking to me from heaven. 'What do you want me to do, Lord?' I asked.

He told me to go into Damascus. There I met a follower of Jesus called Ananias. He had heard of me and knew that I was coming to Damascus to arrest people like him, but he came to see me anyway because somehow or other he knew it was what God wanted him to do.

'Brother Saul' he said. A few days ago, I was his worst enemy - but now he was talking to me like I was his brother, showing me that he had accepted me as if I was one of the family, as if I'd never said or done anything to hurt them. I certainly didn't deserve that!

'God has sent me to tell you' Ananias continued, 'that you are the one He has chosen to take the Good News about Jesus to the countries outside of Israel where people have not heard about Him yet.'

I could hardly believe it. After all I have said and done to hurt Jesus and His followers, God has forgiven me and welcomed me into His family as if it never happened. And now He has given me an important job to do as well. I don't deserve any of that!

If there is one thing I've learned it is that it is only because of God's grace that we can be His friends. Grace is when someone does something really kind and good for you even though you don't deserve it. For example, when you have insulted someone and said all kinds of terrible things about them and next day they come around to your house with a big packet of sweets they have bought for you and offer to help you with the homework you have been struggling with. That's grace!

And God has been incredibly kind and good to us. Even though often we ignore Him and try to live our lives without Him, even though sometimes we disobey Him and deliberately hurt others by the things we say and do - God still sent His Son Jesus to take the blame for the wrong things in our lives so that we could be His friends and one day live with Him forever.

Everything has changed for me now. Now I know that being a friend of God isn't about trying to be as good as you possibly can in the hope that one day, if you have been good enough, God will accept you as His friend. No - the truth is that even though none of us deserve it, God offers us His love and friendship through Jesus. If we trust and follow Him, God says we can be His friends forever. I've got to tell everyone this Good News!

Leave the room or go behind the screen again and come out from the other side as the presenter.

CONCLUSION

Saul made an important discovery that day. Christians believe that no one is good enough to be a friend of God. But the good news is that you don't have to be! The Bible

says that God in His grace - kindness that we don't deserve - sent His Son Jesus to die for us. And because of what Jesus has done for us, Christians believe that anyone can be a friend of God! All we have to do is to believe this good news and put our trust in Him to forgive us and to help us live God's way. And then God says we can be His friends for ever. It's all because of God's grace; isn't it amazing?

SONG

'Grace Is' by Paul Crouch and David Mudie would be a great song to finish off the assembly. It is available from iTunes on the album 'The Best Of Spring Harvest Kids Praise'.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer thanking God for His grace - that He sent Jesus to die for us so that even though we don't deserve it, we can still be His friends forever. Ask Him also to help the children show the same kindness to others as He has shown to them - even when they don't deserve it!