

2-28-21 The Gospel Changes Everything

Acts 9:19-31.

How many had a Damascus road conversion? You were living contrary to God and whom, the Holy Spirit knocked you off your high horse. For the first time, you experienced a love and forgiveness like nothing you ever experienced.

How many didn't have or remember having a Damascus road conversion? You know you are a follower of Jesus, but you can't point to a moment or experience to hang your hat on.

This made me ponder...it shouldn't be just about the salvation moment experience; it should be about the life changing consistency that resulted from the salvation. Too often when we speak with someone about the gospel, we will hear, "oh I said this prayer back in 2010, or I was moved to tears at this sermon I heard the other day." Our gospel experience should be more than a moment in time, it is something we carry forward every day, consistently perfecting, examining, working out.

Saul who later God would change to Paul, was never the same. He continued to sin and fall short, but he never went back to where he was before. If he was out on the golf course, in the garage, with old friends, on the job, or at school, Paul wasn't blending in or going with the flow. Paul was living different because he was different. He was born again, and his number one goal was to be obedient to Christ.

Over the last two weeks I found myself drawn back to **Acts 9**, so I kept rereading it. After I would finish rereading it, I was led to read in **Galatians and 1 & 2 Timothy**. As I was reading, I kept thinking, there is no confusion here, Paul was a new creature. He was stumbling but stumbling forward. You don't find him belly up to the bar or continuously rolling around in his sin.

Reminder of who Saul, later Paul was.

Acts 8:1-3, Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

Acts 9:1-2, Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Paul's own testimony:

Galatians 1:13-14, "For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers."

Acts 26:9-11, "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

The gospel changed everything in Paul's life; his purpose, passion, practices, and priorities all changed.

Let's read the scriptures:

Acts 9:10-19.

Is it true his purposes, passion, practices, and priorities seem to have changed since **verse 3**?

His purpose, passion, practices, and priorities were to arrest, beat, and even kill followers of Jesus. In **verse 11** he is found praying and waiting for God to reveal his next step. While waiting for a follower of Jesus to come and minister to him.

Acts 9:20-22.

Look again at how his purpose, passion, practice, and priorities have changed. Saul went from praying to preaching! From storming the synagogues for follower of Jesus to preaching Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.

Verse 21, "all who heard were amazed," Imagine for a moment. Saul would have been welcomed and expected in the Synagogues in Damascus. It would probably be safe to say that there was probably a posse of supporters there waiting for his battle cry. Saul steps up to the microphone and preaches Jesus is the Messiah that they have all been looking for. He is the Son of God. Jesus is the very spitting image of God.

Have you ever been invited somewhere thinking one thing and find out it's a totally opposite thing than what you were thinking? Like get cheap tickets to Disney but go listen to our sales pitch, oh and don't worry it won't be high pressure sales. That is a poor example of what the audience in the synagogues were feeling. **"Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"**

Verse 22, "But Saul increased in all the more strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus..." Saul was sold out to Jesus and his new purpose, passion, practice, and priorities. He lets us into his heart and mind set in **2 Timothy 1:11-12.**

2 Timothy 1:11-12, And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News. 12 That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.
NLT

Acts 9:23-25.

I am sure it took days for the shock of Saul's new message to take root. I can only imagine all the emergency meetings that were going on.

The Jews sought to kill him. The governor of Damascus was helping in this plot.

2 Corinthians 11:32-33, In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

❖ Where God gives great grace, he commonly exercises it with great trials.

Saul's purpose and passion were to come in and bind up believers and take them back to Jerusalem and now he is escaping Damascus in a basket. Let the persecution begin.

Between **verse 22 and 23** is where Saul/Paul enters a 3-year bible school and his professor I believe was Jesus.

Galatians 1:15-19, But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

Read Acts 9:26-31

By the time he returned to Jerusalem 3 years had gone by and the disciples were still afraid of him. That is quite the reputation. But remember Paul's own testimony was that he was a bad man, he would drive some to blaspheme God.

Verse 27, "But Barnabas took him and brought him" we all need a Barnabas in our lives. We all need to be a Barnabas to others. Someone to build us up and stand up for us. I praise God for all the Barnabas' God has put in my life.

Verse 29, "he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, and they attempted to kill him." Who were the Hellenist? Greek speaking Jews, which Saul was. He was born in Tarsus, part of Rome. Could some of these Hellenist Jews been involved with the death of Stephan in Acts 6? Could some of them been elbowed to elbow with Saul when he dragged Christians out in the streets?

Verse 30, his Christian brothers got him out of harms way. Saul/Paul's passion was for everyone to be saved but his purpose, set forth by Jesus wasn't to stay in Jerusalem preaching to the Jews. His purpose was to carry the name of Jesus before "Gentiles, Kings and the children of Israel."

Jesus had to step in and send him out. **Acts 22:17-21, "Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance 18 and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' 19 So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting [b]to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' 21 Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'"**

Verse 31. With Paul's departure things calmed down for the church. But also, his conversion testimony was bringing God the glory. If God could change a man like Saul, wow! The church had peace, built up, believers were walking (conduct of their lives) in the fear of the Lord. The Holy Spirit was moving and salvations were happening.

Application

1. We must double, triple check our salvation conversion.

- A salvation conversion that starts with fireworks and leads to a life that is a dud needs some closer inspection.

- When we look at the life of Saul everything changed. His whole life was flipped upside down, everything he had lived for was no longer relevant. His purpose, passion, practice, and priorities changed on that road.

2. Remind ourselves multiple times a day of our purpose.

- If we are born-again, it is to be used by and to bring God honor, to be Ambassadors of God. We are living in times where we can no longer hide, ignore, or avoid our purpose.

3. Seek out and ask God to renew, change, and fuel our passions.

- We American's have a lot of passions. Our families, hobbies, we like our entertainment. Tune into any news or social media platform. We are passionate people. But often we are passionate about the wrong things or we can get lost in the minutia (minor details) of things.
- What are you passionate about? How passionate is the gospel in your life?

4. What does our daily practices say about our Christian walk?

- Paul continued to live a sin ridden life. But as I stated earlier in the message, his practice was to fall forward. He didn't dabble, play, or habitually go back to the sins that were made known in his life.
- If most of us were often we really don't mind serving God and serving ourselves. Sins of commission and omission.
- A sin of commission is defined as something we do that we're not supposed to do. Sins of commission are overt, sinful acts (murder, lying, stealing, adultery, addictions). These sins constitute a violation of God's moral law in the Ten Commandments (**Exodus 20:3-17**).
- A sin of omission is defined as something we don't do that we're supposed to do. It is rather easy to commit a sin of omission without others discovering it. Some people feel that they're basically righteous simply because they abstain from obviously unrighteous acts such as murder, theft, lying and gossiping. But righteousness is equally demonstrated through active obedience to commandments that demand action.
- The most fundamental sins of omission are the failure to forsake sins, confess faith in Christ, and join God's church in baptism for the remission of sins (**Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38**). Also, the neglect to worship the Lord in His church (**Hebrews 10:23-25**), to speak the truth (**Ephesians 4:15**), to reverence Him (**Hebrews 12:28-29**), and to preach the gospel (**1 Peter 3:15-16**), are sins of omission (**Romans 12:1-2**).
- I found in my life its easy to justify that God will forgive me and continue in my practices. But Paul's example was to be obedient to God more than his desires to sin. I must look at my daily practices and reject the lies my flesh sells me. I must make obedience to Jesus my daily desired practice.
- How many times have you said, I just keep falling back into fill in the blank? Or I just keep ignoring God's prompting to stop neglecting his church. We must make the conscience decision to be obedient over sinning. It will be the hard at first, the flesh and Satan will fight hard. But if we chose to be obedient the Holy Spirit will do the heavy lifting.

5. All this hinges on God setting our priorities.

- I know, I hear the excuses, justifying, going on in your hearts. We are quick to say God is number one in our lives and yet our purpose, passion, and our practices show us to be liars. How can I say that? Because I can out excuse and justify with the best of them.
- I am writing a paper about the church in America and how differently it looks from God's desire of it to look. In this dissertation I discuss how God allows/sends things into the church to test its mettle, and I use Covid-19 as an example and how it exposed the cracks in the Americanized church. Covid-19, like any other life altering issue calls us out on our faith. In many cases it caused us to show our cards, our priorities. It put us in the perfect place for self-preservation. Put us on the shelf, gave us the ok not pursue or serve God, to take a break. Endorsed our fears of the unknown, pit brother against brother, father against son. Made us stop assembling, which many of us cried out, then lulled us to being comfortable separated. Replaced our cries with comments of how convenient not physically coming is.
- Like all other tribulations and troubles that come our way, Covid-19 revealed whether our hearts were flesh or spirit led.
- I have real concern to where we are headed, as the church. Not because of the government, or conspiracies that will come against us. I want to challenge and caution us, check, and test your priorities. Will you allow God to be the director of them? Allow him to assign where and what should be on the list.
- We all should be living lives after the examples set by Jesus, Paul, Peggy, Chet, Isabel. We need to repent of the words, I wished I could be as faithful as so and so was or is. It's time for God's people to stand up and stop believing the lies that Satan and our flesh is selling.
- We are on the winning team, our power is found in prayer, surrendered, obedient, God fearing, humble, sold-out, all-in, Jesus preaching lives. And the more we chase after Jesus through obedience, the more the Holy Spirit will move in our lives, victories will be won, lives will be changed, and this place will shake the gates of hell.

Conclusion

Let's Go!

Stand up! Give up! Live up! Pray up! Read up! Look up!