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“A Transformed Life”

Acts 8:1-3 & 9:1-22

Pastor Gary Hamrick

One of the most dramatic conversion stories is recorded in Acts 9 when Saul (Paul) met Jesus on the road to Damascus. This encounter would forever transform his life. Paul would go from being a persecutor and murderer of Christians to becoming a Believer himself who would, next to Jesus, have the most profound impact on the world for Jesus. It is a testament to the transforming power of Jesus and how He can radically change a person from the inside.

1. [Acts 8:1-3 & 9:1-9](#) - *“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. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. ... Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”*
2. Paul
 - a. Paul’s given name was Saul, which means, “prayed for,” or “asked of God”

- i. His name changed to Paul in Acts 13; God would eventually call him to preach to the Gentiles, and he may have decided to adopt a Roman name to better connect with his audience
 - b. Paul was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin
 - i. He was likely a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council
 - 1. In Acts 23:1, he refers to members of the Sanhedrin as “brothers” rather than “fathers,” as though they were his peers
 - ii. He was a Pharisee and strictly adhered to the letter of the law
 - c. Paul was first mentioned in Acts 7:58 at the stoning of Stephen
 - i. He was emotionally engaged in the persecution and execution of Christians
 - 1. He believed he was acting righteously

3. Paul’s encounter with Jesus

- a. Paul was granted special permission to bound and imprison Christians in Damascus, Syria
 - i. Damascus was about 150 miles from Jerusalem
 - ii. While on the road to Damascus, a bright light enveloped Paul and his traveling companions, and Jesus spoke to Paul
 - 1. **Acts 9:4-5** - *“Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”*
 - a. Jesus takes it personally when people mistreat both Christians and Jews
 - i. **Matthew 25:40b & 45b** - *“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. ... Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.”*
 - b. A goad was a tool that a farmer would use to prod oxen— if the oxen kicked back against it, they would injure themselves
 - iii. The other men could hear but not see Jesus
 - iv. God then blinded Paul for three days
 - 1. Paul fasted and prayed during this time
 - a. You cannot simply put Jesus “over” an old life; Paul had to die to himself
 - i. **Mark 2:21** - *“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.”*
- b. **Acts 9:10-16** - *“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’”*

So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.' Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.'"

- i. Ananias was hesitant to believe that Paul's conversion was genuine, but God assured him that He had chosen Paul for His purposes

- 1. Paul would later suffer much for Jesus

- a. **2 Corinthians 11:23b-28** - *"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."* (1984 NIV)

- 4. The transforming grace of Jesus Christ

- a. **Acts 9:17-22** - *"And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, '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?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and*

confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”

- i. Ananias went and laid hands on Paul, and Paul received his sight back
 1. Paul was baptized
 2. He spent a few days with the disciples
 3. He immediately began to preach about Jesus
- b. God would eventually inspire Paul to write one-third of the New Testament, and Paul would travel the known world sharing the good news of Jesus Christ
 - i. **1 Timothy 1:13-14** - *“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”*(1984 NIV)
- c. In AD 67, when he was soon to be beheaded by Emperor Nero, Paul stated,
 - i. **2 Timothy 4:6b-8** - *“...the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*
- d. God transformed Paul’s life, and He is still transforming lives today

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 8:1-3 & 9:1-22** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Who was the apostle Paul? What was his background? (See #2 above)
3. What happened to Paul on the road to Damascus? (See #3a-ii-1 above)
4. Why did Jesus accuse Paul of persecuting Him personally? (See #3a-ii-1-a above)
5. Why did Jesus use a “goat” as an analogy? Have you ever experienced this principle in your own life? (See #3a-ii-1-b above)
6. Read **Mark 2:21**. Why did God blind Paul for three days? (See #3a-iv-1-a & #3a-iv-1-a-i above)
7. Read **Acts 9:10-16**. Why was Ananias hesitant to go see Paul? (See #3b & #3b-i above)
8. Read **2 Corinthians 11:23b-28**. How do we know that Paul’s conversion was genuine? (See #3b-i-1-a above)
9. Read **Acts 9:17-22**. How did Paul respond after receiving his sight back? (See, #4a-i-1 through #4a-i-3 above)

10. Read [1 Timothy 1:13-14](#) & [2 Timothy 4:6b-8](#). How did God use Paul after his conversion? What does this tell us about God's ability to transform lives? (See #4b-#4d above)
11. How has the transforming work of Christ changed your life?
12. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)