

42. A Changed Life

Paul Follows Jesus, Acts 9

Introduction

- My testimony: A selfish obsession w/ a video game? Seriously? Yes.
 - Like any other addiction, I didn't care about anything but it. Family, friends, my body → none of it mattered.
 - The root of it is an idolatry of pleasure... approval (virtual when reality was disappointing)... success (maybe I can be something important here...)
- I don't know your story... Maybe it's addiction, religion, anger, depression, normalcy
- Today = Paul, a terrorist turned follower of Jesus who wrote half of the NT
 - God can do incredible things in Saul (Paul), me, and you as we are transformed by his great grace.

[Acts 9:1] But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest [2] and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus (136 miles), so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

- **Who was Saul?** Tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews (pure), regarding the law - pharisee, regarding zeal for God - persecuting the church
 - Acts 7 - Saul stands around and approves as Stephen is stoned to death
- Saul is either a really good Pharisee or a really bad person depending on perspective
 - C.f. A member of ISIS who thinks they are doing God's will by killing people
- We all have our junk. I have mine, you have yours.
- The stuff in your life you THINK is really good, might be incredibly dishonoring to God

[3] Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. [4] And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" [5] And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. [6] But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." [7] The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. [8] Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. [9] And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

- **How does Paul meet Jesus?** On his way to go capture and kill Jesus' followers
 - Probably praying for God's guidance as a good Pharisee
- The light of the world shines in his face and knocks him off his horse
 - This light is also a person, so he speaks and asks a simple question
- "I am Jesus." → Perhaps Saul gives an audible gulp here...
- Jesus says, "I am Jesus..."

- whom you are persecuting... When Saul (or you) hurt Jesus' body, you persecute Jesus. Think about that the next time you harm a bro/sis in Christ
- Rise, go to the city, wait for my command
- Jesus doesn't ream him out, beat him up, make him feel bad. Why?
 - Saul has three days of darkness to think and process while the HS chews on him
 - What do you think his thoughts were like during this time?
- Imagine a series of bad decisions and then being left alone, in solitary to think for days
 - Just you, your thoughts. Most of us can't imagine three days to think.
 - Some of you are terrified of having 30 minutes to think let alone three days
 - Just you. Your thoughts. The Holy Spirit. No cell, no facebook. Terrifying!
- What would God show you if you were in Saul's situation during those three days?
 - Nothing to see to distract you. Nothing to eat or drink to give you pleasure. Sleepless nights as you wonder what will happen to you. q`lkqew
- Well, just like Jesus after three days in the dark before his resurrection, Saul is about to be reborn

[10] Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." [11] And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, [12] and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." [13] But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. [14] And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." [15] But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. [16] For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." [17] So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he 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." [18] And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; [19] and taking food, he was strengthened.

- God tells Ananias to go, pray over Saul and tell him the gospel
- What is going through Ananias' head? What would go through mine?
 - I know that I THINK that was a vision, but maybe it was just bad falafel
 - What if this isn't God talking and it's Satan trying to trick me
 - God, this is a bad idea. He's going to kill me.
- Remember, Jesus has all authority and when he says go, you listen. Jesus could just make Ananias go, but he explains why he wants Saul.
 - He is my chosen instrument to carry my name to the world
 - Chosen → God chose Saul... not b/c of merit, b/c he is God
 - Instrument → We are HIS workmanship to do works
 - Carry his name (fame, glory)
 - He will suffer for my name
 - Not suffer for his sins (this isn't retribution...)

- Not suffer for his stupidity (not Saul reaping what he sows)
- Suffer for God's glory
 - As you grow in Christ, you aren't swayed by the reality that you might/will suffer for his glory b/c suffering comes before glory
- So Ananias went, obeyed. Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and "scales fall off his eyes"
 - Physically... Spiritually...
- He is baptized, identifying with this new movement of Jesus the Messiah
 - What are his co-travelers thinking right now?!

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. [20] And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." [21] And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" [22] But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. [23] When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, [24] but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, [25] but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

[26] And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. [27] But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. [28] So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. [29] And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. [30] And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. [31] So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

- **What happens to Saul after he follows Jesus?**
- Immediately he proclaimed what he had come to trust: "He is the Son of God!"
- People were amazed at the change in his life → Would they say the same about you? Do your friends even know?
- V25 HIS disciples → the dude already made disciples!
- The church grows

What does this teach about God?

- **Jesus wants, loves, died for sinners like Saul. Even Saul.**
 - Paul considered himself the chief of sinners → the boss!
 - Even in his "righteousness" he was sinful
 - Would you still marry your bride if you knew she would cheat on you every day of your marriage? Such is the love of God for sinners like us.
- **God is calling sinners to forgive them, give them purpose and to glorify them.**

- Forgive them... Purpose... Glorification...
- *Philippians 1:6, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

What does this teach about you and me?

- **You're not too bad to be forgiven. Neither is that other guy.**
 - Saul = modern day ISIS leadership
 - Even Saul can be forgiven... God calls Ananias to share w/ him. Even Saul!
- **God wants to redeem the worst things in you and use them for his glory.**
 - Drug smuggler → Bible smuggler
 - My desires to be a part of something bigger than myself, from selfish to outward

What should you do?

- *Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved (Romans 10:9)* → What does this mean?
- **Trust in Jesus** who he says he is, what he says he has done, and what he says he will do and you will be saved from the eternal consequences of your sin
 - No amount of sin is too much for the loving grace of our God → Jesus' blood is more than enough to cover it, wash it away and make you white as snow
- Invitation to follow Jesus → **Repent and be baptized**

Who should you tell?

- Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord = **Carry his name** (e.g. Saul)
- Starting at home and until the whole world hears.
- Who in your life needs to hear that even a murderer, a terrorist like Saul can be forgiven and used for incredible purposes?
- From whom are you withholding the good news of his grace?
- Who in your life needs to hear YOUR story? Where you were, how you met Jesus, what he did in your life (don't hide it, carry his name...)