

Encounters With Jesus

Sermon Series

Paul's Conversion

Acts 9:1-20

Preface

When I think of the apostle Paul, I think of the 1957 song by Jerry Lee Lewis; "Great Balls of Fire." Paul was full of energy and enthusiasm. His accomplishments were amazing.

Paul must have been someone with whom you are energized from just being around him.

Today, as we continue our series on Encounters with Jesus, let us take a closer look at the conversion of this remarkable man Saul as he encounters Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.

Scripture – Read

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God *Acts 9:1-20 NIV*

Introduction

The Bible teaches us that when we accept Christ as our savior, we become a new creature. The things of old are thrown away and we take on a new spirit and become a different person.

There are some important things we can learn from the conversion of Paul.

Content

1. Zealously Wrong

Saul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin and was born in the Cilician town of Tarsus. Tarsus was renowned for its Greek academy and scholarly citizens.

Paul had all the rights of a Roman citizen. He received his initial education in Tarsus and his final education in Jerusalem at the acclaimed rabbinical school under a famed teacher.

Paul was highly educated and probably considered an expert on the law and an admirer of Greek wisdom. In Jerusalem, he learned the art of tent-making. Paul was a model example of a young man being groomed for leadership in Judaism.

As a young man, it was Paul who stood there and watched as they stoned Stephen to death. The dying words of Stephen only sparked his anger and gave him a cause.

Paul began to hunt down Christians with zeal, with a sort of blood thirsty vengeance. One wonders what threat, what jealousy could have caused Paul to be so resentful of Christians.

Paul's fervor for persecuting Christians led him to seek and obtain written permission to hunt them down (men and women) and drag them back to prison.

What was it about the Christian faith, these followers of Jesus Christ that threatened and angered Paul so drastically that he hunted them down with passion?

I believe the answer rests in Paul's own heart. I believe the answer was within his doubts and misgivings. It must have been very threatening to think that all of his training could have led him wrong about the messiah? Was it possible that his religious associates were all wrong about the Christ?

The fact is that they were wrong and Saul was wrong about Christ.

Sometimes when deep down inside we know we are wrong, we fight the hardest to keep the lie alive. Is God calling you to receive him as savior? Is God speaking to you about something eternal in your life? **Are you running in the opposite direction?**

Illus: Going on inside? Man with tumor was a 25 year old towel.

Are you responding to his call or fighting zealously to have it your way? Before his conversion, Paul zealously wrong about Christ.

2. Uniquely Equipped

When Jesus appeared before Paul on the road to Damascus, he wasn't just intending to make Paul a believer. **He had big plans for Paul. God has plans for you too.**

The text tells us that Jesus told Ananias Paul was his chosen instrument to carry his name to the Gentiles and their kings and the people of Israel. God chose Paul to fulfill a mission.

The first thing we think is "Why Paul?" Paul seemed the most unlikely candidate to be the missionary to carry the gospel to the Gentiles or anyone else.

Paul was richly steeped in the training of Judaism. He was part of the elite of the synagogue. Paul was upper crust. How could he relate to the second class Gentiles?

In addition, Paul was on the front line of the opposing team. He was the very one persecuting Christians and hunting them down. How would he ever be trusted?

When God wants to use you, he will take all of the reasons you are not suitable and make them the very assets that equip you. With Christ, all of the cons can become the pros.

As it turns out, Paul was uniquely qualified once he received the spirit of Christ. He was trained and skilled in Jewish theology, knew the Jewish culture as well as the Greek culture and philosophies.

He was a Roman citizen which saved his neck several times. And, he knew the trade of tent making which helped him sustain himself on numerous occasions.

Whatever you do, do not miss this important lesson. **God has a way of taking you just as you are and using you for his service.**

Illus: Thomas Graves working for me with tattoos, long hair, etc. Today he is studying Hebrew at a seminary.

Too many Christians are convincing themselves of things they cannot do when God is prepared to enable them to do great things. **The biggest lie you will ever tell yourself is that "God can't use me."**

Is God calling you to serve him? He may be calling you to be a missionary. Then again, he may be calling you to serve him in the church. **Whatever the call, with Christ you are uniquely equipped for the plans He has for you.**

3. Dramatically Changed

Paul was immediately baptized.

Paul went from Saul the persecutor of Christians to Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ. He went from attacking men and women to introducing them the Grace of God.

When Paul met Jesus Christ, he was truly changed.

How amazing it is that the one who persecuted Christians so violently, became transformed into a dynamic apostle.

Fourteen epistles of the New Testament are attributed to the authorship of the Apostle Paul. His writings are encouraging, inspirational and educational. No other writer or apostle has contributed more to understanding Christianity.

The Apostle Paul embarked on three major missionary journeys and he is attributed with starting countless churches. Every step of the way, he suffered and was met with challenges.

Paul said of himself in 2nd Corinthians: ²⁴Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵Three 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, ²⁶I 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. ²⁷I 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. ²⁸Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"

When Paul encountered Jesus Christ, everything changed.

When Paul became a believer, he zealously devoted all of the energy and strength of his spirit into preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ.

Without God's grace and without God's power, no ordinary man could have achieved the accomplishments of Paul.

True salvation brings about dramatic change.

Conclusion

Paul's salvation changed his life.

What change has taken place in your life?

Illus: My cousin the clown. God has changed her life through salvation into Jesus Christ.

God wants to dramatically change your life if you will allow him. God can take all of your cons and turn them into pros through the power of his grace.

God can take the ugly baggage of your life and turn it into tools to serve him.

Let God show you how uniquely qualified you are to serve him. He has a place for you. He calls you to be his instrument.

Will you follow him?