

“Radical Transformation”

September 3, 2017

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

CORE: One of the most amazing transformations in the Bible is that of Saul of Tarsus→ Paul, an apostle. Yet, it is an outward picture of the inward transformation everyone who comes to Jesus receives!

1. SAUL, OF TARSUS.

- Tarsus—major city in what is now Syria
- “Of the tribe of Benjamin” (Philippians 3:5)- same as King Saul
- Devout in Jewish faith, trained by Gamaliel (SEE Acts 5:39)—Pharisee of the Pharisees & member of the Sanhedrin (from 23 to 71 of top leaders)
- (Acts 8:1-3)- Zealous persecutor of followers of Jesus—saw them as a threat to the Jewish faith
 - He made “havoc”- *“to dishonor & devastate”*
 - He went in “every house”—thorough in his mission; total disregard for its ramifications in families
 - He persecuted “**both** men and women”—saw both as threats
- (Acts 9)- Zealous obsession to annihilate “the people of the Way”
 - “Breathing threats and murder”—desired to see every believer in Damascus either intimidated, silenced, dead, or in prison (NOTE: *“murder”—“to utterly destroy”*)
 - “Letters from the high priest”—given both authority to destroy & roster of every member of the synagogues in Damascus
 - Oversaw & participated in the execution of Stephen—“garments at his feet” sign of his acknowledged leadership of the movement
 - NOTE: Sharp contrast between Saul’s heartless cruelty—and Stephen’s friends’ honor in his burial; in his final moments—Stephen sowed seeds in Saul’s heart—reaped later (*“God is not mocked—we reap what we sow! Galatians 6:7*)

2. AMAZING ENCOUNTER

- “Light”—the outshining of Jesus’ glory, revealing His divine identity
- “Voice”—repeated names express tender concern (*i.e., “Martha; Simon; Jerusalem”*)—calling Saul to consider his actions
- **Conviction & deep grief** arrested Saul—blinded, unable to eat or drink
- **Radical transformation:**
 - Willing to obey the Lord’s commands to enter the city (broken, no longer brazen) Once “breathing murderous threats”—now “astonished” and “trembling”!)

- He had been “kicking against the goads” (*sharp prods*)—revelation & conviction had preceded this experience (*i.e., Stephen & unknown others*)
- NOTE: We can’t fight Him!!! He will outlast us and out-love us—resisting us with His irresistible love!
- “Persecuting Me?”—WE are the “apple of His eye” (Zechariah 2:8)—cherished as priceless; referring to the pupil—the most sensitive part of the eye. (Matthew 25:40- “Done to the least of these—done to Me”—no one is insignificant to Me)

3. PAUL, AN APOSTLE

- NEW NAME- from a Hebrew name (“Saul”) to a Gentile name (“Paul”)—new identity & purpose
- FULFILLMENT- He became even more Jewish—receiving Jesus as the Messiah promised to the Jews—fulfilling all of the Law and the prophets
- RELEASE- Immediately began sharing in the synagogues (Acts 9:19) (*i.e., the Gerasene demoniac; Peter on Pentecost*) *no Miranda rights!!!*
- TRANSFORMED- Moved from destroyer to builder (1 Corinthians 3:10-17) establishing solid foundations and strong connections

CLOSING THOUGHTS:

1. Anyone can be radically transformed!
2. How we see God—radically impacts how we live our lives.
3. We can destroy or build—by the way we live our lives.

How Paul describes his transformation: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”

1 Timothy 1:15-16 NIV