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On this week's Chosen and Cherished podcast, we talked about the incredible blessing of God's power in our lives. It's called, "Don't Steal the Miracle." (I stole that from Tim. hahaha) If you'd like to listen to the episode, here's the link... <https://summitpoint.org/chosen-and-cherished/>

*Blessings,
Jonna*

Acts 9:1-20

Paul's conversion to Christianity gives me so much hope. No matter how far from God someone is, they are not beyond the reach of His gospel. Paul was a proud, highly respected religious leader, called a Pharisee. People literally laid down their garments at his feet when he approved of the execution of the first martyr after Jesus' resurrection, Stephen. Paul (called by his Jewish name Saul at that point) HATED Christians. He wanted them canceled... imprisoned and even killed. But I know Paul became an awesome apostle for the Lord. What brought the change??? Act 9 tells me.

Acts 9 begins by saying that Paul spewed hatred from his mouth as he breathed threats against Jesus' disciples. He should have known that such hatred was not from God who said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself... and even love your enemies." But he wrongly thought he was doing the will of God.

He went to the high priest and asked for written permission to go to Damascus and root out any believers of "the Way" so that he could bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

He was so blind to what he was doing, walking in spiritual darkness, that God allowed him to experience physical darkness when He spoke from heaven and blinded Paul so that he could experience the truth... he was actually persecuting Jesus.

A voice from heaven said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME?" Does God take it

personally when His children are persecuted? Absolutely.

I'm sure Saul was scared and confused in that moment. He said, "Who are You, Lord?" The Greek he used for "Lord" is kyrie, which means "supreme authority, master."

JESUS answered. Jesus did not say, "Oh, I'm not the supreme authority. I'm just a good prophet and teacher who you're persecuting." He didn't correct Paul, because there was nothing to correct. He affirmed Paul's address to Him as Lord when He responded, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Clear enough.

Then Jesus changed Paul's agenda. Yes, still go to Damascus... but not for the reason you had. Go there and I'll tell you what to do." When God speaks, things change.

Paul didn't question the voice of God. The men who were with him led him to Damascus where he waited without sight for 3 days. Why did God let him wait for 3 days in blindness? Maybe it was symbolic of the fact that Jesus was in the grave for 3 days? Maybe because God wanted him to feel his blindness so he would celebrate his sight when it was restored both physically and more importantly, spiritually. Maybe because God was preparing someone else to be the one who would help restore his sight. Maybe all of the above. Probably even more reasons that I don't see.

So, while Paul (whose name was the Greek version of Saul) was waiting in blindness for three days, contemplating that Jesus really IS the Messiah and praying to God, God was at work. God spoke to a guy named Ananias and said, "Go to Straight Street, to Judas' house and look for Saul of Tarsus. He's praying and he's seen a vision of YOU coming to lay hands on him so that he can see again." Whoa! That is VERY specific. Everybody say, "God has a plan!"

Ananias did not say, "God has a plan." He kind of said, "God, do You know what You're doing? This guy has done A LOT of evil to YOUR believers in Jerusalem. And now he wants to do it here!!! Are You aware of this?"

I appreciate Ananias' hesitation. In all honesty, I would probably be hesitant, too. And if you ask me on any given day if I trust that God has a plan, I would say, "Of course He does! Absolutely." But when His plan doesn't make sense to my finite mind, if I'm being honest, I question it. Some people question His power in what He's doing. Some people question His love. Some people question His wisdom. I imagine in that moment, Ananias was questioning all three.

I think it's kind of funny how God settled Ananias' heart. He said, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name." Ohhhh... he's gonna suffer for You? Okay, I'll go. Hahaha.

This was actually a really important message... Paul was CHOSEN by God to carry out a purpose. ALL of God's people are chosen for a purpose. Paul's purpose was to carry the name of Jesus to

Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. And Paul's purpose was going to bring him suffering. That's a lot to take in.

God spoke His purpose for Paul, and God fulfilled His purpose in Paul. Paul DID preach the gospel to Gentiles. That's why he was called by his Greek name (Paul) instead of his Hebrew name (Saul). He said in Ephesians 3:8 that he was given the honor of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles. Paul DID carry the gospel to kings... from prison. And Paul never stopped trying to reach Israelites with the gospel until the Lord took him home. Finally, Paul suffered for Christ throughout his entire ministry, and he considered it a privilege.

How did Paul consider it a privilege rather than a punishment to suffer for Christ? I think the bottom line is that he clearly understood where he would be if Jesus had not suffered for him... and Jesus suffered for him WHILE he celebrated His death.

Paul did not pursue Jesus. Jesus pursued Paul. It blows my mind that Jesus has reached out from heaven to me as He did for Paul. He saved me, and He gave me a whole new purpose. And He teaches me how to see suffering as a privilege rather than as punishment. That takes supernatural power to accomplish. My God is supernatural.

Ananias obeyed the Lord. He went to Paul, laid his hands on him, and said, "God sent me to you so that you may receive your physical sight and so that you might be filled with the Holy Spirit (your spiritual sight). As soon as Ananias spoke, something like scales fell from Paul's eyes and he could see.

Paul believed... and then Paul was baptized... and then Paul went into the synagogues proclaiming, "JESUS IS LORD!"

If we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved.

O Lord, I have believed. I have been baptized. I pray that I will unashamedly speak the truth of the gospel even if it costs me. I pray that I will go where You tell me to go and do what You tell me to do. Please help me to wholeheartedly trust that You KNOW what You're doing. You have the POWER to do it. You have the WISDOM to know how to do it. You do it all in LOVE. I was blind but now I see. Praise Your name.