

Epic Church - A Transformed Life

4.8.18

How many saw movie I can only imagine? Bart statement about his dad -

“My Dad was a monster and I saw God transform Him”

For those that saw the movie - what was the turning point that led Bart’s dad to be open to the gospel?

one thing that makes the church epic is the people that are the church have experienced true conversion

True conversion - involves repentance - sorrow for sin and sin nature - Its realizing and confessing that I need a savior

Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ

Faith to walk this new life out daily

This morning we are going to talk about one such conversion

A life that went from murderer to missionary

A life that went from religious zealot to redeemed lover of souls

A life that went from blind ambition to living in divine revelation

Referring to the life of the apostle Paul

Paul was born to a Jewish family in Tarsus, capital of the Roman province of Cilicia (in modern-day Turkey).

The family traced its descent from the tribe of Benjamin they named their son after the most illustrious member in their family’s history: Saul, the first king of Israel.

His Roman citizenship implied that his family owned property. It also carried with it privileges—the right to a fair trial, exemption from degrading punishments like whipping, and the right of appeal.

Though born in a center of Greek culture, Saul was sent to school in Jerusalem, Saul studied the Jewish scriptures and religious law under renowned rabbi Gamaliel

Gamaliel was a member of the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin)

Gamaliel was gracious.

When the Sanhedrin raged against believers who taught that Jesus of Nazareth, recently executed, was Messiah, he counseled forbearance.

The council demanded the death penalty; Gamaliel convinced them to enforce a lesser punishment and let the cult members go.

Saul did not adopt his teacher’s moderation, especially toward members of what he believed to be a cult.

Saul joined the growing number of Jewish leaders who steadily harassed and even killed followers of “The Way,” as it was called.

We learned back in chapter 8 about this terrorist killing God’s people

Acts 8:3 “Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”

Acts chapter 8 is an account of Philip preaching the gospel in all the towns of Azotus

We pick up Luke’s account

Acts 9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples.

If you remember Acts 8:1. And Saul approved of their killing him.(stoning of Steven)

Why do you think Paul hated the disciples of the Lord?

Some kill out of fear losing power

Some kill for power

Some kill out of self righteous indignation

Saul know as ...

A Hebrew of Hebrews

A Pharisee of Pharisees

Though he approved of the barbarous stoning of Stephen, it is entirely possible that Saul’s heart was pricked when he heard him say, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”

Came face to face with something supernatural - love that forgives as one is being stoned to death

This morning we are looking deep into Paul’s early years

Acts 9:1. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, (Name of Christianity here referred to as The Way (of salvation/life) 7 more times in acts) whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Paul was under the authority of the High Priest and the president of the Sanhedrin actually commissioned Saul to round up Christians

(his authority was upheld by Roman power)

In this next passage of scripture Paul reflects back before his conversion

Acts 26:9-11 “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison (I had no idea they were God’s people), and whenever it came to a vote, I voted for their execution. 11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to curse Jesus. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

Saul believed he was doing God’s work

When word came that these followers of Jesus had spread into Syria, Saul requested permission to go to Damascus. With great delight the High Priest granted him letters to take to the synagogues of Syria.

Acts 9:3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

God now identifies Himself as us - it’s me you are hurting, it is I Jesus you are killing

Based on this scripture - What does this say about how God views us?

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.”

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

The Lord had a different plan for Saul in Damascus. What was it?

9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

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

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

11 The 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. 12 In 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 holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to

proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

How do you think Ananias overcame his understanding of Paul’s persecution?

17 Then 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.”

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Ananias addressed Paul in terms of brotherly friendship. What would have happened in his heart to make that possible?

18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

God uses this Pharisaical convert to help birth the Christian Church

Paul wrote about a quarter of the NT
Paul went from full bore Jewish law enforcer to proclaiming the Grace of God everywhere and to everyone he could

Persecutor transformed into proclaimer

this former Pharisee so embraced his calling to minister the Gospel to the Gentiles that he forsook his Jewish name, Saul, and forever adopted the Greek name for which he is remembered ... Paul.

True conversion led to this thesis for Paul

1 Cor. 15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas,[b] and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an

apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (Tried to eradicate the church).
10 But by the grace of God I am what I am.

What does vs 10 reveal about how Paul views his conversion?

Paul illustrates that No one is beyond the grace, salvation and calling of God

Galatians 1:11 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

13 For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. 17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

Paul went to Arabia following his commissioning - 3 years there -
A time for Relationship with Christ to grow and revelation to flow.

This is a radical salvation experience.

Paul was a zealot for religion and became a passionate follower and proclaimer of Jesus Christ

Following our conversion ALL that we are that reflects His Glory is through God’s GRACE