**The Chief of Sinners Saved for You**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 9.27-28.14 | MHC | Acts 9:1-19 | God used the transformation of Saul as a megaphone for His mercy and grace. | 35 min |

**Introduction:**

Attn: What is a megaphone? to communicate something to someone. Let’s try it.

Theme: God communicate his grace so we get it. He uses people or circ. to speak his love

Struct: Today we will look at one of the greatest conversion stories in Christianity.

Relv: God used the transformation of Saul as a megaphone for His mercy and grace

**The Chief of all sinners** (READ vv. 1-3a)

* **Only quickly mentioned in Acts 8:1&3** – He approved of Stephen’s death and was “Ravaging the church”. He was feared, destroying family, hurting fam of God
* This far, Luke is recounting what is happening in the Hellenistic Christians in Jer. Now we will meet the man that once was their largest opposition and soon will be turned to their greatest advocate. **Murder to missionary**—God used the least likely

**What Luke wants us to see—a Christian hater, opposed to Christ**

* **Breathing threats** – The very air that he breathed was hate and death toward Cs
* **Adamantly opposed to “The Way” —** his goal: as many in jail as possible.
  + Ironic: **He himself would spend many years in prison for his work for JC.**
  + **The Way:** (Gk. *hodos*, “road, highway, way of life”), meaning either the way of salvation (16:17; cf. Jesus’ teachings in Matt. 7:14; John 14:6) or the true way of life in relation to God. Also occurs at Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22**.**
* V. 3 **Saul was on “his way”** — He had his own goals and he thought he was offering a sacrifice to God by killing the Christians (Rf. John 16:2).
  + **He asked for a letter/authority to go get the Christians in Damascus.** Most likely C’s had fled there for their safety, perhaps after Stephen’s death.
  + **Damascus:** 135 miles northeast of Jer. Is the modern capital of Syria.

**What God wanted us to see: A transformed life (Megaphone for hope)**

* **No one is beyond His reach of Grace**: The very one that was killing His people could have been wiped out by the wrath of God, yet is welcomed into Love of God
  + **To make this as modernly contextual as possible** – imagine if you flipped on the news tonight and saw that the 40k+ Isis militants and terrorist became Christ followers. You wouldn’t believe it. You’d be slightly upset about it.
  + **You say, “that could never happen” –** this is a small view of God. He can change anyone He wants to change. While there is human choice, there is clearly divine sovereignty that is involved in God calling a heart to Him. Saul was called
* **This is for our hope:** when evangelizing other souls and when rebuking our own.
  + **We labor hard, leaving the results to God**. We don’t know who God will call to Himself, so we go after every man with a passion to rip them from the grips of hell with a belief that God’s sovereign ability to save in His was and His time.
  + **We encourage our hearts with the hope of Christ and stop condemning them with the guilt of our flesh**. He can save Saul, he can forgive us.

**His life was a megaphone for to comm. the Grace of God**(READ vv. 3b-5)

1. **The grace of God is surprising**: When it grasps our soul, we can’t help but feel the joy that comes with being astonished by the unmerited gift of joy. This is true if you were saved from a background of sin or saved at a young age. (think on it for a min)

* My story of getting God’s grace at the age of 13 – I tried to make my story more, then saw his grace astonishing no matter my past. Always amazing.
* **“Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him”** –nothing subtle about it. As they walked the road in mid-day, clear sky, it came out of nowhere.

1. **The grace of God is consuming**: When we are given God’s grace, it is never given partially; has no strings attached except to repent (Do life Differently) and believe. If you feel like you’re getting away with something “to good to be true” probably grace.

* **“It was all around him”** – There was no escaping that moment.
* **“He fell to the ground”** – the right response; brokenness in his own strength.

1. **The grace of God is life altering**: 2 Tim 1:9 (Paul Wrote), “God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began”

* **“Why are you persecuting me?” –** Change is not based on behavior that affects people, but deep change that affects our relationship with God (and then plays out in behavior). The offense of Saul was personal to Christ; not just his ppl.
* Saul called him **“Lord”** – This could be a phrase of reverence or a true acknowledgement of the presence that was before him as the God of redemption
* **“Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?” –** Romans 2:4. Paul understood that God’s grace demanded total transformation.

**v. 6-7 “Rise and go to the city, and you will be told what to do.”** – no clear direction except to wait. App: Some of you are called to wait. Never more desperate for God.

**Vs. 8-9 – Many people live with their eyes wide open, but are spiritually blind**. Saul’s physical sight had been taken, he saw God more clearly than he ever had before.

**The blessing of brokenness in the dark.** Imagine what it was like there in the house of Judas: Vivid recall of Christ before him. Images of faithful C’s he persecuted, now flash in his mind w/ their faith making sense, and his sin grieving.  **He prayed** longing for more.

**No longer was Paul thirsty for the blood of Christians, but he longed for the blood of Christ in His life.** The grace stood before him: **JC is God’s forgiveness and grace.**

**What would it look like for you to have desperation for God?**

* **What perspective of God needs to be changed:** Are you working hard to do right in God’s eye when all you should be doing is relying on His grace?
* **What must be added to your life?** For most of us, it is not what we are doing but what we are missing that keeps us from a true desperation for God. We have replaced our affections for God with trivial things.
* **Gypsy Smith A-1 –** this kind of personal revival brings corporate glory to God.

**The life and story of Saul, specif. this story, megaphone for obedience**

* V. 10 - **God appeared 2 times in two different ways**: God can do whatever he wants to do. Here is called “Ananias” – a man only seen here, never before or again.
  + You have to love this guy: immediate obedience “Here I am Lord” – available.
* **vv. 11-14 – God’s direction was straight and specific**. Though Ananias questioned, he did not disobey. He sought truth and God willingly clarified:
  + **“The street called Straight”** still there today – right down the middle of Damascus, an E to W street with the East Gate and monumental arch.
  + **God didn’t speak in vague terms; His ways were mysterious but His instructions were not.** He asked for faith from A. Told him what to go find.
  + V. 13 – An evil reputation preceded Saul but this was no obstacle for God.
* **vv. 15-16: God knew what he calling and what he would do with Him.** 
  + **“He is my chosen instrument”** and an unlikely one, but God knew His past – “Why do you persecute ME?” – and forgave and would use Him.
  + **“I will show him how much he must suffer for my name sake.”** This sounds like a threat; rather it is a promise of redemption. Paul got this:
    - **2 Cor 1:7 - As we share in his suffering, we share in his comfort**
    - **Phil 3:10 - That I may share in the fellowship of his suffering…**
    - **2 Cor 4:11, “For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh”** He soon understood: suffering for Christ brought life
* **Notice the two chosen instruments of God:** A willing Ananias and an obstinate Saul. APP: God uses whomever He desires to use, for His namesake.
  + **Never underestimate the power of God to use you for something grater than you could ever imagine:** three long missionary journeys planting churches, preaching the gospel, and giving strength and encouragement to early Christians. Of the 27 books in the New Testament, Paul author of 13 of them.
  + **Ananias:** never seen before or after, but used by God for a vital task: to bring the HS to Saul, and baptize him. God didn’t need A, but chose to use him.
    - **Reminds me of the man used to bring Spurgeon to Christ A-2**
    - I could tell similar stories about someone used one time in Billy Graham’s life, D.L.Moody or Wesley. God may use you one time to reach millions.

**Total transformation demands total obedience (vv 17-19)**

* V. 17 – Obedience to God resulted in bold faith (as it always should):
  + **He threw off the covers and ‘departed’** to go find Saul – with fear and faith
  + **He called him “Brother” right away** – [imagine the creek of the door, the peace and anticipation of Saul] with a warm touch, “Brother.” A’s beating heart
  + **He spoke what he was told like he believed God WOULD and COULD**.
  + **He did it all in the name of Jesus**:
    - **V. 18 - I am here to give you physical and spiritual sight:** the scales and the physical sight was just a outward sign of a new ability to See God.
* **Baptized** – Where? The fountain? OR ½ mile walk to Abana River outside N. wall? Who was there? Didn’t matter to Saul–He was broken by the grip grace had on Him

**I believe this Chief of Sinners was saved for you:**

* Saul himself wrote in 1 Tim 1:15-16, **“I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost [chief of sinners], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”**
* **Saul was a Megaphone** for God’s Mercy, grace, long-suffering and forgiveness.

**If he can be changed, we can be changed.** Let the story of Saul lead you to a place of peace for your own soul, a passion to pursue everyone you know far from God

**I love the way that he starts his first sermon to the Jewish leaders after his conversion…** but that is for next week ☺ Let’s pray.

**A-1 Gypsy Smith:**

He never received a formal education, yet he lectured at Harvard.  Born in a gypsy tent, of humble origins outside London, and yet ended up being invited to the White House by two presidents. Rodney ‘Gypsy’ Smith came into the world in 1860 in Epping Forest, just outside London. Gypsy Smith was powerfully used of God preaching to millions as he crisscrossed the Atlantic Ocean forty-five times. Everywhere he went it seemed like revival was on his heels. His passion was almost unparalleled, and there was great fruit in what he did. What was his secret? Private prayer. His praying was even more powerful than his preaching.

A delegation once came to him to enquire how they might experience personal and mass revival as he had. They wanted to be used the way Gypsy was. Without hesitating, he said:

“Go home. Lock yourself in your room. Kneel down in the middle of the floor, and with a piece of chalk, draw a circle around yourself. There, on your knees, pray fervently and brokenly that God would start a revival within that chalk circle.”

**A-2 Spurgeon’s personal Story of Salvation:**

“I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now, had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place of worship. I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Church. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people’s heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved....

The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now it is well that preachers be instructed, but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was—**"LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH" (Isa. 45:22)**

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimmer of hope for me in that text.

The preacher began thus: "This is a very simple text indeed. It says ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pain. It aint liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is **just ‘Look.’** Well, a man needn’t go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look.

"But then the text says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Ay!" he said in broad Essex, "many on ye are lookin’ to yourselves, but it’s no use lookin’ there. You’ll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some say look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Some on ye say ‘We must wait for the Spirit’s workin.’ You have no business with that just now. **Look to Christ**. The text says, ‘Look unto Me.’ "

Then the good man followed up his text in this way: "Look unto Me; I am sweatin’ great drops of blood. **Look unto Me; I am hangin’ on the cross. Look unto Me, I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again.** Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sitting at the Father’s right hand. **O poor sinner, look unto Me! look unto Me!"**

When he had . . . . managed to spin out about ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger.

Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, "And you will always be miserable—miserable in life and miserable in death—if you don’t obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, **"Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live!"**

I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said—I did not take much notice of it—I was so possessed with that one thought . . . . I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me. Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away.

There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, **of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him.** **Oh, that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved."**