

88. Paul Told How He Became a Christian

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the transformation that happened in the life of Paul when he became a Christian. We saw in our last topic that Paul described the rage that he had toward the followers of Jesus before he met Christ on the road to Damascus. In this topic, we are going to see how Paul described what happened as he traveled toward Damascus to arrest and imprison the followers of Christ in that city. We will see the transformation that happened in the life of Paul when Jesus spoke to him on that road.

Acts 26:12-15 says, ““While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’” So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’” And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”” Here, we see that Paul described how Jesus changed his life. Paul was traveling to the city of Damascus. As we mentioned in our last topic, he had been given permission and authority from the chief priests to arrest and imprison any followers of Jesus that he found in the synagogues in the city of Damascus.

However, something happened that changed the life of Paul forever as he approached the city of Damascus. Suddenly, about noon, he saw a very bright light that came directly from heaven. In fact, that light was brighter than the light of the sun at noontime. This light was shining like a searchlight on Paul and on all those traveling with him. That light was so bright that no one could continue to stand and Paul and the men with him all fell to the ground. Then, a voice began to speak to Paul in the Hebrew language.

Acts 9:4-5 says, “Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’” And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’” Here, we see that Paul could still remember the exact words that the voice had spoken to him many years earlier. Paul could also remember the exact words that he answered. However, the thing that Paul remembered the most was when the voice said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Paul had thought that he was serving God by arresting and imprisoning the followers of Jesus. Suddenly, he realized that Jesus is God and that he was fighting against God.

The desire of Paul was to see Agrippa and all those gathered there that day also recognize that Jesus is God and receive Jesus. A short time later, when Festus accused Paul of being insane, Paul made a personal appeal to Agrippa. Acts 26:26-28 says, ““For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.’” Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’” We see that Agrippa had to face his own choice that day and he made the choice not to believe.

Acts 26:16-18 says, ““But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose,

to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”” Here, we see that Paul went on to tell Agrippa what else Jesus had said to him.

Jesus told Paul to get up and stand on his feet. Jesus said that he had appeared to Paul for a very important purpose. Jesus told Paul that he had stopped him to make Paul a minister and a witness. He was to become a servant of Jesus. In addition, Jesus told Paul that he would be an official witness of Jesus. He would be an official witness of the things that he had already seen. Jesus told him that he would also be an official witness of the things that would be revealed to him at a later time. The time when those things would be revealed is described in Galatians 1:15-17, which says, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” Jesus revealed many things personally to Paul while he was in the desert of Arabia.

Paul also said that Jesus gave him both a promise and a commission. Jesus promised Paul that he would deliver him from both the Jews and the Gentiles. In addition, Jesus gave him a commission to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Jesus also revealed that commission to Ananias when Jesus told Ananias, in Acts 9:15-16, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.’” Jesus told Paul what his message would be to the Gentiles.

Jesus told Paul that He would use him to do five things as he went to the Gentiles. First, Paul would tell the Gentiles how to have their spiritual eyes opened so that they could understand spiritual truth. Second, Paul would turn the Gentiles from darkness to light. John 3:19 says, ““And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”” Jesus promised to use Paul to turn many Gentiles to this light. Third, Paul would turn Gentiles from Satan to God. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Jesus did use Paul to turn Gentiles from Satan and his idols to serve the living and true God. Fourth, Paul told many Gentiles how to have forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Fifth, Paul told many Gentiles how to receive an eternal inheritance through faith in Jesus.

Paul went on to tell Agrippa how he had responded to that heavenly vision. Acts 26:19-23 says, ““Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill *me*. Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this

day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come--that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles.” Paul said that he had been obedient to that heavenly vision.

He had declared the message of the death and resurrection in Jerusalem. Acts 9:19-20 says, “So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Later, Paul preached that Jesus is the Christ in Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Judea. Then, the Lord provided Paul with the opportunity to share that message among the Gentiles. He said that wherever he went that he preached three things to the people with whom he spoke.

First, Paul preached that people should repent. The word translated “repent” means *to change one’s mind for the better*. As we saw in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, three paragraphs ago, this meant turning from the sin of unbelief that caused people to worship idols. Second, Paul preached that they should turn to God. The way that they came to God was by believing in Jesus. John 14:6 says, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” Here, we are reminded that the only way that a person can come to the Father is through Christ. Third, Paul preached that they should do works befitting of repentance. Philippians 2:12-13 says, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” When God changes a person at the time of true repentance, every new Christian is also given a new nature that has a desire to please God by being obedient to Him.

Paul said that it was due to the fact that he preached that message to both Jews and Gentiles that the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to kill him. Paul said he was still able to stand before King Agrippa that day, because God had helped him. Paul was able to stand that day as he had done many times before sharing with every person, whether that person was well known or unknown, the things that both the prophets and Moses had written in the Old Testament. Both Moses and the prophets wrote that Christ would suffer, that he would be the first to rise permanently from the dead and that God wanted this message preached to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

This is also the message that we want to help both our physical children and spiritual children learn to share with others. The message of the death and resurrection of Christ is the only message that will provide salvation to any person whether that person is a Jew or a Gentile. We show our children how to share that message with others as we take them with us and share that message with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.