



Sermon Series Notes

“A Radical Transformation” (Acts 9:1-31)

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Intro: Rick Reilly F-14 story.

Our text today is about one man who was tested, put through the ringer, and most definitely purged.

Purge: To rid of whatever is impure or undesirable; cleanse; purify

vv.1-2 It was 150 miles to Damascus (about a week’s travel), but that was nothing for Saul. He had a zeal for God that was driving him like a madman, and he thought that persecuting the church of Jesus Christ was pleasing to God.

John 16:2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.

vv.3-6 What a shock this would have been for Saul! He was convinced that Jesus was not the Messiah.

Acts 26: 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

I have mentioned before and now say again that I believe Stephen’s message, his countenance before the Sanhedrin (face like an angel), and how he died (praying for those who killed him), was the key witness the Lord used to goad Saul.

vv.7-9 This is interesting in light of what Jesus had said to the Pharisees, of which Saul was one.

John 9:39-40 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

The Pharisees were blind to the truth, but they claimed they could see just fine. See Rom.10:1-4

vv.10-12 What do you think he was praying? “I’ve been so wrong Lord, I’m so sorry Lord, I had no idea how blind I was Lord.”

vv.13-14 Ananias is hesitant. He feels the need to inform the Lord about the man he is being told to go to!

vv.15-16 The Lord basically says to Ananias, "Shut up and do what I told you!"

vv.17-19a This is wild! Something like scales literally falling off of Saul's eyes. And the world looked totally different to Saul now! He was blind but now he can see, and not just physically, but spiritually.

II Cor.5: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Somewhere during all of this, Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit. He probably received the gift of tongues as a sign of this filling (I Cor.14: 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.).

vv.19b-22 Astonishing! Amazing!

v.26 Think how hard this would have been for these disciples. It would be like welcoming Adolf Hitler as a brother in the Lord!

Don't ever give up on people that seem unlikely to ever be saved.

vv.27-31 Saul was initially rejected by the saints of Jerusalem, experienced life threatening opposition to his public ministry in Jerusalem, & is shipped back home to Tarsus, where he remains for years, with no word of how or what he's doing. The next time he appears on the pages of the NT is when Barnabas leaves a revival in Antioch & goes to Tarsus, inviting Saul to return with him to Antioch. Saul does, and for a whole year Barnabas and Saul taught the new believers at Antioch the Word of God. See Acts 11:19-26

Jesus' prophetic word to Saul through Ananias would come true. He would suffer greatly for the name of Jesus. See II Cor.11:23-29a; 12:7b-9a.

But our focus today is on a period of time in Saul's life that we are not told about in our text, but that happened between verses 25 & 26. Though not mentioned here, he does refer to it in Gal.1:11-19.

For an undisclosed period of time, Saul was in Arabia, then for three years he was back in Damascus. What was happening during this time? Certainly he continued to testify about Jesus as he had opportunity. But something vital happened during this time, especially during the time spent in Arabia. What is in Arabia that is biblically significant? See Gal.4:25. Mt Sinai is called "the mountain of God" because that's where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and the Law. When Moses came down from the mountain, his face shown with the glory of God. I believe Saul went to the mountain of God and met with God, and during that time the Lord continued to transform his life into the image of Christ, and what a transformation it was!

That is God's intention with every one of us who know Jesus as Savior & Lord.

Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...

Saul of Tarsus was an extremely knowledgeable man. He had studied under the greatest teacher of the day, Gamaliel. He had an impressive pedigree, and he was proud of it (see Phil. 3:4-6). Some might have advised Saul to immediately start "Saul of Tarsus Ministries." All too often, notable/famous people who are saved are immediately shoved into the limelight, without them having time to grow and mature.

This time in Arabia was critical for Saul. What were some of the things that radically changed in Saul's life during his time in Arabia?

He was humbled

No doubt Saul was humbled when he first met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Blinded, led like a child into Damascus. So shaken up he does not eat or drink anything for three days.

But the time in Arabia humbled him even more. After Moses had spent forty years in the desert, he was the most humble man on the face of the earth (Num.12:3). Moses, like Saul, had a lot to be proud of, and pride had to be crushed in their lives in order for them to become the men of God they did. Saul would later change his name to Paul ("small" or "little").

Righteousness is only by faith, not works

Saul had spent a lifetime working feverishly to earn his righteousness, eating kosher foods, tithing right down to a tenth of the salt and pepper, fasting twice per week, giving to the poor (and blowing trumpets so everyone could witness how good he was), keeping to the religious traditions of the elders, which included all kinds of ceremonial "baptisms" (hands before every meal, cooking & drinking utensils). To read some of what Paul would not write in his NT letters reveals the degree to which the Lord had been able to change him. See Phil.3:7-9; Roam.3:9ff.

Eph.2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one boast.

The former boastful Pharisee now realized that all of his efforts to be righteous were futile, worthless. He realized that there was nothing he could do to earn righteousness, that it could only be imparted to him through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, who had now become his Messiah.

II Cor.5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Rom.6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The depth of his sin, and the height of God's love and grace

I Tim.1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. See I Tim.1:12-14.

Eph.3:17b-19

How Kosher Wasn't Always Cool

Matt.15: 10 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand.

11 What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'" 12 Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" 13 He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not

planted will be pulled up by the roots. 14 Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

I Tim.4:1-6

Col.2:16-17 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Saul was freed from his former extremely legalist ways. I still think it may have been hard the first time he ate something that wasn't Kosher. Peter had a hard time with this too, remember (Acts 10)?

Now freed from legalism, Saul/Paul would become a chameleon for the sake of the gospel. See I Cor.9:20-23.

Freed from the love of money

Luke 16:13-15

I Tim.6

Philippians 4: 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

God is in the business of transforming lives.

Saul of the OT was also transformed into a different man. See I Samuel 10:6, 9-11. But the transformation did not continue. Saul became jealous of David after he defeated Goliath, jealousy turned into bitterness and hatred. He also did not remain a humble. I Samuel 15:12 tells us he set up a monument in his own honor. When confronted with his sin he made excuse after excuse. OT Saul failed to let the Lord continue to transform his life after he had initially changed him into a different person.

How's your transformation going?

We cannot transform ourselves.

II Cor.3:18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Though we cannot transform ourselves, we can either hinder or prevent the Lord from being able to transform us. Like OT King Saul, an attitude of the heart, pride, and an unwillingness to confess and repent of sin will prevent the Lord from continuing to change us after our initial conversion.

And the Word of God is an essential ingredient in the Lord being able to mold us into the image of Christ,

Rom.12:2 Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Read from “The Changed Life”

CONCLUSION

Song – “Change My Heart O God”