

Radical Transformation

Acts 9:17-30

When someone accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are given a new identity, and their journey of spiritual growth begins.

Some people have a radical transformation take place in a short amount of time, demonstrating a fundamental shift in beliefs, values, and behavior, and growth in Christ.

Radical transformation often begins with the Holy Spirit working on a person's heart, convicting, convincing, and drawing them to the LORD.

Once the person responds to the Spirit, that person repents by turning away from sin and heading towards the LORD, as the blood of Christ cleanses all of their sin.

A Christian's transformation is not a one-time event but a lifelong journey following Jesus, learning from scripture and becoming more like Him every day.

Please open your Bibles to ***Acts 9***

Last week, we talked about Saul being a picture of the Old Man.

During the persecution against the early church, Saul consented to the murder of Stephen.

Then Saul went to the High Priest for permission to bring Christians from Damascus to Jerusalem to stand trial.

As Saul was traveling the road towards Damascus, a great light shone on him. Jesus asked Saul a very telling question in *Acts 9:4*, "***Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?***"

Saul asked, "***Who are You, Lord?***" Jesus answered Saul. "***I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.***"

Then Saul asked, "***What do You want me to do?***"

Jesus told Saul that a man named Ananias was going to help him, and Ananias became the bridge of Evangelism to connect Saul with his new life in Christ!

After hearing the LORD's message about Saul, Ananias **questioned** God's call.

Today, we will hear how Ananias obeyed the LORD and went, and then Saul demonstrated a radical transformation in his life.

I. Ananias went to find Saul.

Read *Acts 9:17-19*

Ananias showed courage and went to meet Saul. He went on the basis of nothing except what Jesus said. This is called faith, trusting what the LORD has said and responding!

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. NKJV

Warren Wiersbe said, "*Based on James 1:22, true blessing comes not just from hearing God's Word, but from actively doing it.*" (Wiersbe)

The LORD blesses our obedience. Hearing a great sermon does not change someone unless they apply God's Word to their life!

Ananias took the LORD at His word that Saul was a changed person. Notice, Ananias referred to Saul as "**Brother Saul**".

Even though Ananias had heard all the rumors about Saul's terrible past, he accepted the fact that Saul had repented and was now a brother in the LORD.

Laying hands on him and calling Saul a **brother** powerfully communicated the love of Christ, as he was blind and could not identify who was speaking.

Some argue whether Saul was saved at this point because of verses found later in this chapter, but Ananias recognized Saul as a Christ follower as he called him brother Saul.

Are we willing to accept people for who they are in Christ and not hold their past sins against them?

Also, notice, the LORD did not require any of Ananias' natural ability to do His will, only Ananias' willingness to "**Go**".

The LORD sets up Divine appointments for us every day of our lives; the key for us is to listen to the voice of God and **obey**.

The old hymn had it right when it said, Trust and Obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Just like Phillip and the Eunuch from last week, the LORD sets up the appointments, and we are to simply enjoy following Him.

The LORD still does things like this today, as we encounter someone and discover they need a listening ear something else we are able to do for them.

Godcidences are where the LORD leads us to see other people's needs, loneliness, and hurts, not as interruptions, but opportunities to be His hands and feet.

Ananias said to Saul, “***Receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit***”. Here is one of the questions about Saul's salvation.

Did Saul not receive the Holy Spirit the moment he got saved out on the road?

We have learned in the past that to ***be filled with the Spirit*** means to be controlled by the Spirit.

Notice the difference between Ananias and Saul before his conversion...

In *vs. 5*, Saul asked, “***Who are you, Lord?*** In *vs. 10*, Ananias replied, “***Yes, Lord***”.

Ananias must have spent a great deal of time **listening** to the LORD to be able to recognize His voice so quickly.

If you are struggling to discern the voice of God, it is a clear indication that you need to spend more time with Him to be able to recognize it.

He received his sight at once, and he arose and was baptized.

Once Saul could physically and spiritually see, he immediately wanted to identify with Jesus by being Water **baptized**.

We can use Saul's conversion as a pattern to recognize radical transformations in the lives of Christians.

Jesus sends His Holy Spirit to confront us, revealing who He is to us, revealing our sin issue. We place our faith in Him by repenting and receiving His forgiveness.

Paul later wrote in ***Romans 10:17, So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. NKJV***

Then, as we put our faith in Him, the first step of obedience is to be baptized, publicly demonstrating our New Life in Christ.

The LORD was concerned with Saul's physical and spiritual needs as we read, "***When he had received food, he was strengthened***".

II. Saul's powerful sermon on transformation.

Read ***Acts 9:20-22***

The dramatic conversion of Saul from persecuting Christians to becoming a devoted follower of Christ is a powerful **example** of radical transformation.

Notice where Saul began preaching, "***Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues.***"

Remember, Saul was one of the most educated men in the Jewish religion at this time in history.

The custom of synagogues back then was to invite any able Jewish man to speak from the Scriptures at synagogue meetings.

Notice, “*He preached the Christ.*”

Saul, made it clear that the Old Testament was written about Jesus, and transformation only happens through Him.

Jesus said in *Luke 24:44*, "*all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.*" NKJV

Saul’s sermon was all about Jesus being *the Son of God*.

At that time in history, if someone called you the “*son of*” somebody, it meant that you were identified with that person, and their identity was your identity.

When Jesus called Himself *the Son of God*, and when others called Him that, it was understood as a clear claim to His deity.

The High Priest plainly asked Jesus if He was the Son of God.

Matthew 26:64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said.

Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Matthew 26:65 Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! NKJV

The Jewish culture understood the term “***Son of God***”, made Jesus **equal** with God, and that is why the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus.

John 5:18 Therefore, the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. NKJV

This teaching amazed those who heard it. Notice they said, “***Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name?***”

The radical transformation in the life of Saul was evident. When we see a radical transformation in someone’s life caused by their conversion to Christ, we should praise the LORD!

I have heard some people who do not have a radical transformation like the murderer, terrorist Saul, and they are sad because they don’t have a cool story.

In ***John 3***, Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus emphasized the need to be “***born again***,” highlighting the spiritual rebirth that accompanies transformation.

Not all transformations are as radical as Saul’s, but if you have not been born again, you are not saved!

Radical transformations should be **evident** in the lives of ordinary believers who experience changes in their minds, attitudes, and relationships, as they mature in their faith.

Notice, Saul ***increased all the more in strength***.

One of the best parts about sharing Christ with others is that it increases our faith.

And again, Saul was *proving that this Jesus is the Christ*.

Saul, as an Old Testament Theologian, now filled with the Holy Spirit, could easily prove Jesus was God the Son, the Promised Messiah who could be found within their own Torah.

III. Trouble in Damascus.

Read *Acts 9:23-25*

Saul spent a lot of time in Damascus, but notice the passage says, “*Now, after many days had passed.*”

Galatians and *2 Corinthians* describe how Saul left Damascus, traveled to Arabia for 3 years, many believe to spend time meditating on Christ.

Saul then returned to Damascus before going to Jerusalem, so *verse 23* picks up after Saul went to Arabia.

How ironic, Saul was part of the Jewish leadership before his conversion, who would have been right in the middle of these men seeking to kill a member of the Way.

The persecutor became the **persecuted**. But this trial was not a surprise to the LORD; remember what the LORD told Ananias about Saul’s ministry.

Acts 9:15 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.

Acts 9:16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." NKJV

The Jewish leadership plotted to kill Saul because he was preaching Christ.

The cities back then were mostly walled off with gates.

At this time in history, Aratus (r uh twos) was king, and he had appointed a Jew as governor. The Jewish governor was part of the conspiracy to kill Saul, so he gave orders to watch the gates.

The plot to kill Saul was known to the Christians in Damascus, so they decided to lower Saul down the wall at night rather than risking his capture by either staying or leaving through the gate.

They used a large food basket to lower Saul down the wall.

Sometimes the LORD calls us to stay and trust Him for our protection, other times, the LORD leads us to leave a situation.

These are times we must consult the Holy Spirit for **discernment** because if we leave a situation when we should wait and see God move, we can miss His best for our lives.

If we remain in a situation, the LORD has told us to flee, we can end up in a mess of our own making. This is true for our relationships, jobs, or any other situation in life!

Stay where you are planted until the LORD tells you to leave.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;

Proverbs 3:6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. NKJV

IV. Saul in Jerusalem.

Read ***Acts 9:26-30***

The Christians who were not dispersed and stayed in Jerusalem were so suspicious of Saul, even three years after his conversion to Christianity.

Maybe they believed Saul was simply trying to trick them to see who were followers of the Way so he could have them arrested.

Notice the passage said they ***did not believe that he was a disciple.***

If you were treated this way by other believers, would you turn your back on Christ? I hear from people a lot who say they were hurt by Christians, so they won't go to church.

Staying away from Church because of people's **behavior** is like staying away from the gym because of out-of-shape people.

Saul could have said, *"I've served the Lord for over three years, preaching Jesus Christ, enduring trials and tribulations, and you won't want to accept me as a Christian?"*

But not Saul, he did not flinch at what anybody thought, because he loved Jesus, who saved him and transformed him.

Later, Paul said in ***Galatians 1:10***, “***For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.***” NKJV

As the disciples in Jerusalem lacked a little in love, Saul added a little grace and more love to make up for it.

Notice, “***But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.***”

Barnabas was led by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the love of Christ to this former persecutor/murderer.

Paul wrote about love in ***1 Corinthians 13:7*** ***bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*** NKJV

Later, Paul wrote about his first trip to Jerusalem in ***Galatians***, where he stayed with Peter for fifteen days. He did not visit with *all* the apostles, only Peter and James, Jesus’ brother.

Notice, “***He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus... but they attempted to kill him.***”

Throughout the rest of Saul’s life, he endured persecution and assassination attempts.

Some say the Hellenist Jews here in ***Acts 9*** were not believers.

These Hellenists were Jews, and some believe they could have been the same ones who had seized Stephen in ***Acts 6:8***.

Remember, they stoned Stephen to death, and here they were seeking to kill Saul.

What a radical transformation as Saul's conversion began with leaving Jerusalem to persecute followers of Christ, and it ended with him leaving Jerusalem as a persecuted follower of Christ.

Then the Apostles *brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus* for his own protection.

Then, after many years had passed since the Road to Damascus experience, Saul was sent out as a missionary from the church at Antioch with the help of **Barnabas**.

Saul of Tarsus went from a young, successful rabbi to a persecutor of Christians. He had a real encounter with Jesus on the Road to Damascus, and he became Paul the Apostle.

Before he became Paul the Apostle, he spent 8 to 12 years as Saul the unknown, but those were not wasted years; they were necessary years of trials preparing him for ministry.

Tarsus was one of the great cities of the ancient world, known for trade and its university and education centers.

David Williams said **Tarsus** was especially important as a center of Stoic philosophy.

Everything that Saul learned in **Tarsus** would be valuable to him later in ministry. Don't get ahead of God when He has a plan for you to learn something along life's path.

V. Practical Application.

The radical transformation in the life of Saul was evident. When we see a radical transformation in someone's life caused by their conversion to Christ, we should praise the LORD!

I have heard some people who do not have a radical transformation like the murderer, terrorist Saul, and they are sad because they don't have a cool story.

In *John 3*, Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus emphasized the need to be "*born again*". Rebirth accompanies transformation.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John 3:4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

John 3:7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' NKJV

Not all transformations are as radical as Saul's, but if you have not been born again, you are not saved!

Radical transformations should be evident in the lives of ordinary believers who experience changes in their minds, attitudes, and relationships, as they mature in their faith.

If you have received Christ, He has come to live within you by His Spirit, and He wants to **radically** change you.

We are not saved by works of righteousness, however, if we are saved, our lives should demonstrate characteristics of transformation.

Let's end with some characteristics that prove we have had a Transformed Life.

One evidence of transformation in a Christian is a sincere love for the LORD and others, demonstrated by extending grace and forgiveness.

Evidence of transformation in a Christian is demonstrated through experiences of a peace that passes human understanding, coupled with joy that transcends circumstances.

Evidence of transformation in a Christian is demonstrated through the "fruit of the Spirit" – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Evidence of transformation in a Christian is demonstrated through our relationships and our interactions with the world, desiring to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

The LORD saved and transformed us for eternal life and to have a **relationship** with Him.

He also saved and transformed us so we would become witnesses for Christ.

And finally, Evidence of transformation in a Christian is demonstrated through a desire to live according to God's will and a love for His Word.

As we mature in Christ, we become more Christ-like every day.

As Paul said later in *1 Corinthians 11:1, Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. NKJV*

A radical transformation in Christ is a process of becoming more like Jesus, **empowered** by the Holy Spirit, resulting in a life that reflects God's love, grace, and truth.