

How God Changes Us

Acts 9:1-19

Key Verse : Acts 9:17 “You may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Purpose: To urge openness to God’s work in us.

Introduction:

I read a statement that fastened onto my memory: “God is preparing us for what He has prepared for us.”

1. God delights in building great people to accomplish great purposes.
2. We are apt to react to the processes or ignore His subtle workings.
3. So let’s view how one of the severest opponents of Christianity became the greatest exponent—God changed Saul, the legalist, into Paul, the apostle.

I. God interrupts our journey (3)

A. He alters our purpose (2).

1. Saul was a bigoted fanatic and a merciless persecutor.
2. He had concluded that Christians were not harmless; he decided to exterminate the Nazarenes.
3. Saul changed objectives, from persecuting the Church, he became a proclaimer of Christ.
4. How does a man change so radically?
 - a. How can a murderer suddenly become a missionary?
 - b. We have been trained in the idea of gradual growth and change.
 - c. It is hard for us to think in terms of the miraculous and immediate.
5. We know what it is to have our minds made up and to be unwilling to change.
 - a. Saul had some preconceived notions about Jesus.

#Some secular minds relate to Jesus only in the context of shepherds, angels, a doll in the straw, and Santa Claus.

- b. People hold tightly to undigested theology which drapes black plastic over the real Christ.
- c. They pick up ill-considered judgments about Jesus.
- d. Stray comments about God are woven into the fabric of life as though they were biblically-based.
- e. People can come face to face with Jesus and not recognize Him.
6. God had been gradually working in Saul’s life.
 - a. Saul desired to make the most of his life.
 - b. Saul saw Christ reflected in the lives of Christians.

#Stephen's death and his mind as incisive as Saul's. The life of a Christ-possessed man is unanswerable.

- c. Saul was torn between the demands of the law and his own conscience.
- d. Saul compared the stern religion of his fathers with the winsome, liberating relationship with Jesus.
- e. The potential for change reached back into the recesses of Saul's interior life.
- 7. God altered the purposes by which Saul's life was driven.
- B. God calls us (4).
 - 1. Some people resist the idea of supernatural visions and hearing voices.
 - 2. Both were major experiences in the life of Saul and they offered clues to why he did what he did.

The New Testament records the story in part four different times because of its impact on Paul.

- 3. The way by which God interrupts our journey doesn't matter; what is important is the meaning it has for us.

Marvin French told of how he saw a picture of Jesus appear in a doorway as though it were on a television screen. This happened twice in a four-month period. God interrupted his journey.

- 4. Twice-born men possess a dividing line in their lives.
 - a. A before and after picture can be seen.
 - b. Guilt is exchanged for glory.
 - c. The direction of life does not change if the center of life remains the same.

Life centered on self-will meander back and forth from good to evil.

- 5. It is one thing to see and another to believe.
 - a. To see requires only that we stand back and look.
 - b. To believe demands we surrender ourselves to our faith.

It is one thing to watch a man swim and even imitate his movement, but quite another to submit our bodies to the water.

- 6. God's call was accompanied by a vision and a voice, but it marked a turning point in his life.

A man described his bitterness against God. He was a blatant Christ-rejecter, a man in the world with no use for the church, for Christ, for the people of the Lord, for the preacher and for religion. At the same time, he was a prospering young man, a man whom God seemingly blessed. He had a wife and a son who was a teenager. Then a baby girl was born into the home. One can imagine the love the father lavished upon that little girl. She grew up to be five years of age--the darling of the home.

One day the little girl became ill and died suddenly. In the mortuary while the father was cursing God his teenage boy came to him and said, "Dad, let's go into the next room so I can look at my little sister one more time." So they walked together into the room and stood there, looking down into the sweet, sleeping face of that little girl. The boy began to cry, and putting his arm around his father, he said: "Dad, let's pray." The father in his heart said, "Pray? Pray! I hate God!" But the boy stood by his side with his arm around him saying, "Dad, let's pray." And the man said: "I never intended to kneel. My knees just bent. I found myself down on my knees by the side of that casket and I began to think, 'Dear God in heaven, what about this boy with his arm around me, his head on my shoulder, and his tears falling like rain, who has asked his dad to pray. What shall I do?'" And there came to his memory the prayer he had learned from his mother, and so he began, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy..." and he stopped. How could he say, "Thy will be done"? Then the big man said, "In a burst of tears and confession I prayed, "O God, thy will be done.'" The father said: "When I rose to my feet I was a changed man. I was a saved man. I had found the Lord."

II. God connects us with the church (11).

A. God uses fearful people (13).

1. To Ananias God said, "Go" (11).
2. God said, "Go" again (15).
3. The blockage? Fear.
4. This was not unreasonable fear, for Saul's reputation as a killer was known.
5. Ananias was a willing servant, but not fear-free, for God had to work with him.
6. Ananias was a lesser man whom God used to launch a greater man's influence.

Many a school teacher recites the joy of pouring learning into a student who became a professor.

B. God's people are His assistants in making great persons (17).

1. The act of placing hands on another person is a sign of tremendous authority, power, and responsibility.
2. We are to become God's vital links in the chain of achieving His purposes.
3. God used Ananias, the church, to interpret the events for Saul.
4. The church hooks us up with the people of God.
5. The church can aid us in mapping out an action plan for our spiritual development.

III. God fills us with His Holy Spirit (17).

A. The Holy Spirit enables us to see (18).

1. The work of the Holy Spirit has always been to explain, to teach, to counsel, and to encourage us.

2. When we break through to a new insight, we often exclaim, "Now I see!"

We've heard those described as "Ah ha moments."

3. God has some "Ah ha" moments for you.
4. If we are to reach our potential for God, some scales must fall from our eyes.
5. We will be able to see what we have not seen before.
- B. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to change (18).
 1. Saul was baptized.
 2. Now he was introduced into the church that preached Christ as Savior.
 3. That was a radical change.
 4. The Holy Spirit placed a love in his heart for the people he hated.
 5. The Holy Spirit provided him with the power to face the opposition and suffering he knew would come his way.
 6. Change is not made without affecting people.

Conclusion:

In this story are two men. God spoke to both. One said, "Who are you, Lord?" The other replied, "Yes, Lord."

1. Which one are you?
2. The one who knows and obeys the voice or the one who needs to know and obey?
3. Perhaps you are a Christian and God wants you to do something for Him.
4. Or you are away from God and He is calling you to become His.
5. Will you allow God to change you?
6. You may need to put aside some tightly held opinions in order to advance.
7. You may want to let go of some strong feelings in order to become free.
8. You may look back and see God has been interrupting your journey, so He could take you to a higher plane of living.
9. If God is calling you, will you respond to Him?