

Upside Down Part 4

An Encounter with God Changes Everything

- Last week we talked about the life of Stephen who became the first martyr. Stephen's death unleashed an all-out attack on the early church.
- The guy leading the attack was Saul. Saul of Tarsus. Tarsus was an influential city of the Roman Empire and one of the greatest learning centers of the ancient world.
- Saul was born a Jew, so he followed the law of Moses and the ways of Israel. He was a Pharisee, a religious leader, put in charge of hunting down Christians, putting them in prison and sometimes killing them.

Acts 7:57b-58 (NLT)

They rushed at him ⁵⁸ and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

- We see that Saul was present, giving his approval of the killing of Stephen.
- After this, Saul heads to Damascus to hunt down more Christians.

Acts 9:1-8 (NLT)

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. ² He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. ³ As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!" ⁶ Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." ⁷ The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! ⁸ Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus.

- What happened on this road changed everything for Saul, for the early church, and for all of Christianity and the world.
- Saul thought he was fighting a dead man whose words could easily be dismissed but through one revelation, he realizes he's wrong.

Spoiler Alert: Murderer to Missionary!

Saul of Tarsus became The Apostle Paul. The greatest persecutor of Christians became the greatest champion of Christians and preachers of the Gospel...and wrote 2/3 of the New Testament. His whole world was turned upside down!

- The Lord sends Saul to a house on Straight Street. At the same time, the Lord sends a man named Ananias to Saul to pray that his sight be restored.
- Ananias questions God, "This guy is crazy and kills people like me."

Acts 9:12 (NLT)

¹⁵ But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel."

- This is exactly who Paul becomes.... spreading the message of Jesus all over the world, opening the Gospel to Gentiles, planting over a dozen churches, and is credited with writing 13 books of the bible. Has had the most significant impact on Christianity.

This tells us... God can change and use anyone.

- It reminds us that God is more focused on your destiny than your history.
- If anyone should have felt unworthy or disqualified for this call, it would have been Saul.
- Sometimes the thing that you think disqualifies you, qualifies you. (He takes the broken things and uses them for glorious things, He creates beauty from ashes, He'll interrupt a life of wrong turns to lead you to a street called Straight) Don't count yourself out, just start counting on Him!

3 Truths Paul discovered on the road that day that led to him turning the world upside down. The same truths can be discovered on whatever road you are on today.

3 Truths from Paul's Encounter with Jesus

Power of Revelation

- The lights turned on, an ah-ha moment, sudden clarity. This was that on steroids. Paul thought the complete opposite before he encountered Jesus. He committed his life to destroying Christianity. That day, his spiritual eyes were opened.
- He lost sight but vision was restored. This is what God does for you and me. He opens the eyes of our spirits to see His truth.

Proverbs 29:18 (CSB) Without revelation, people run wild...

Message: If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves.

- Without revelation, we get wild, go stupid, stumble instead of stand, and find ourselves fighting a cause opposite to the Kingdom.
- But one encounter with Jesus changes everything.

Acts 26:9 (NLT) "I used to think I should work hard against the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

- Revelation causes us to see things differently than we used to. This is such a gift because we can see things the way God sees them.

What fresh revelation is God wanting to give you? Who or what does He want you to see differently? What one thought are you holding onto that's taking your life in one direction and Jesus wants to interrupt your path, change your direction, and fill you will divine purpose? One divine revelation can change everything!

Illust: *Eye injury in December, first time to the eye doctor, read the different lines on the eye chart until I just started guessing on the lines that were blurry. Then they started changing the lenses until everything came into focus. This is what God's revelation does for us. It brings life into focus. We don't have to be left guessing or making stuff up.*

The Great Advantage (over Paul): The Bible and the Spirit!

- The Bible is God's divine revelation, God-breathed to you and me.
- Everything we need is found in His living Word. It speaks to every season and situation of my life. It's a lamp unto my feet and light to my path. It's refreshing to my soul.
- Every time we open it, revelation is available...one encounter with Him changes everything.

Power of Repentance

REPENTANCE: *Headed one direction and God shows you revelation through the Holy Spirit and you turn a different direction (180-degree turn).*

- CHANGE is found in the power of repentance: if Saul had only experienced the power of revelation but never followed it up with the power of repentance then nothing would have changed.
- Many people come to church and experience a powerful revelation, but it stops there. God opens their eyes to see truth, but they never do anything with it.

3 Shifts of Repentance (syncs us with God)

1. Change of Mind

- An awareness of our sin and need for a Savior (Isaiah: "woe is me, I'm unclean..." Peter: "Depart from me because I'm a sinner", Paul: "chief of sinners")

2. Change of Heart

- There's a change emotionally...we feel it. Our response is godly sorrow.

2 Corinthians 7:10

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation...

3. Change of Will

- This is where we yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- It's more than a prayer at the end of a service and going back the way you came. It's submitting your will and way to the will and way of God.
- "Not my will, but your will be done." "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back."

- If Paul received this great revelation and even felt sorry for how he treated Christians but went back the way he came, nothing would have changed, and he would have missed out on all that God had for him. He would have never turned the world upside down.

Power of Redemption

REDEMPTION: *to be brought back or restored to original design. The opposite is slavery, chained, and burdened.*

- Revelation and Repentance lead to Saul's redemption story.
- Remember he approved the stoning of Stephen? The church kept turning the world upside down!

Acts 11:19-20 (NIV)

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

Acts 13:1-3 (NIV)

¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

- Saul is now attending a worship service with the people he was trying to kill. Talk about redemption!!
- The very place that the persecuted church was driven became the place Paul's ministry was launched.
- **What Paul tried to destroy; God used to deploy!** The Gospel spread to Asia, Africa, Europe, and America....2000 years later there would be a church in Villa Rica declaring the goodness of God!

Redemption Words from Paul's Mouth:

Romans 8:28 (NLT)

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Redemption is the mark of God.

- "To bring about good" is the work of redemption that is active in the life of every believer.
- Paul could say this because he experienced it.

1 Timothy 1:12-16(NIV)

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service.¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 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. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

A Person, not our performance redeems us.

Ephesians 1:7 (Message)

Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free!

- Jesus redeems us from the curse of sin and shame! Paul could have hidden in the shame of his past. But he understood...

God doesn't redeem us to shelf us but to send us!

- Jesus has revealed Himself to us not just so we will repent but that we will live redeemed, carrying His goodness and love everywhere we go.

Acts 26:16-18 (NLT)

¹⁶ Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. Tell people that you have seen me and tell them what I will show you in the future. ¹⁷ And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

- If God can redeem Paul, He can redeem you. You are not too far gone. Your story can be a redemption story.

Psalms 107:2 (NLT)

Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.

Prayer/Response to the Holy Spirit: Write these down.

1. *When did you have that revelation moment of Jesus?*
2. *Is there an area in your life where you need to repent? A change of mind, heart, or will?*
3. *Is there an area that God wants to redeem in your life?*