

Series: Encounter

Sermon Title: Encounter Transformation

Scripture: Acts 9

Big Idea: When you encounter Christ transformation follows.

Introduction:

Throughout this series, we have been learning how an encounter with Jesus can change everything in your life. And the story we will read today could not demonstrate that truth more clearly.

[Transition:] Let's take a look at that encounter now in Acts 9:1-2

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem- Acts 9:1-2

We see in these verses Saul's life trajectory. This new faith became a rising threat to Judaism... a growing fire that he needed to put out at all costs. So, he killed... he killed those who were followers and influencers of Christianity. Saul was a fanatic... he devoted his life to stopping this new threat and he was good at it. Looking back in chapter 7 you see that he led the charge in the stoning of Stephen a great preacher and proponent of the Christian faith. Stephen wasn't his only target he was like Dog the bounty hunter seeking out all Jewish believers and killing them. The followers and influencers of Jesus reflected Jesus. They reflected his teachings, his values, they were offered a different way of living and viewing the world than "*halacha*" which was the way of walking within Judaism. Saul wanted to erase Jesus from history.

We all know those people who want to erase Jesus from their world. In the Middle East in many Asian countries, we see a full-frontal attack to wipe Christianity from this planet. For centuries back to Saul's time people have continued in the effort to erase Christianity. Yet it is fascinating to me that despite the effort to eradicate.... Christianity continues to rise. You may not be aware... the fastest growing church is not in North America but it is in those heavily persecuted

areas of the world. Christianity is a movement empowered by God... The harder you try to extinguish it the stronger it comes back.

I would submit to you this morning that it isn't just nations and governments that try to eradicate Jesus but individuals. People are on a murder spree within the U.S. as they try to kill off Jesus' teachings and values within this nation and also their individual lives. People use weapons of "intolerance" or "discrimination" to kill off Jesus' message of "exclusivity." He is "the way!" People use weapons of "relativism" to slice the throat of absolute truth. He is "the truth!" People bring death to life and they try to find "life" in their gender, title, salary or sex. He is Life. People try to replace "the Way, the Truth, the Life" not with the Person of Christ but with the religion or bible belt culture. Daily, people wake up every morning waging war against Jesus' values and teachings in their own lives as they allow sin to be the thing that guides and fuels them. This isn't far from Saul's worldview.

[Transition] Saul is Hell-bent on killing Jesus and his followers. What I find fascinating is that it is when Saul is in pursuit and 100% focused on killing Jesus that is when Jesus chooses to reveal himself to Saul. Take a look

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." - Acts 9:3-6

Transforming encounters begin with getting knocked on your butt.

Immediately in a taste of his Glory Jesus reveals himself to Paul. This encounter knocks Paul on His butt. Is that part of your story? You're heading face first as fast as you can in one direction and you run into Jesus and it knocks you on your butt. These "knock you on your butt" encounters can come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Sometimes we can be riding high on our horse of health and boom the cancer diagnosis hits. We can be riding high on our horse of wealth and boom we lose our job. We can be riding high on our horse of comfort and bam God calls you to pick up and move your family. Friends, God has a way of knocking us on our butt

so that we can encounter him. **Our greatest trials often set the scene for our greatest encounters.**

Paul is struck in the face with Jesus' presence and Jesus asks him "Why are you persecuting me?" This right here affirms the truth that Paul wasn't just killing Jesus' followers and influencers but Him. We are the body of Christ and let me tell you don't mess with the Church. People will try and push down the church... persecute the church but eventually Jesus shows up and nothing is ever the same. I also like the statement that Jesus says, "I'm going to tell you what to do." Notice Saul immediately calls him Lord... When you call someone Lord that means you are letting them make the decisions. That means you're not the leader but Jesus is. This was a statement of repentance and a statement of submission. It was a split-second encounter and Saul was on a 180-degree heart transition.

I'll never forget the hospital visit I made to visit a good friend. He was riding his bike when a truck did not see him and plowed into my friend. Miraculously, he survived, but he looked different. I remember seeing him for the first time all bruised and beaten. Till this day he has never walked the same. When I saw him, I said, "Man you look like you have been hit by a truck."

[Transition:] When you encounter Jesus it's like getting hit by a truck. Don't believe me... just ask Saul. He got messed up. Continue reading.

When you encounter Jesus, it leaves a mark.

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. – Acts 9:7-9

Encountering Jesus leaves a mark friends. While sanctification is an ongoing process some immediate effects take place when you encounter Jesus. For Paul, physically, he was blinded for three days. The beauty about this that it provided time for him to sit and reflect about the last

thing he saw. It also prevented him from going back into his old mission of life as he couldn't see. I love how Moody puts it. "He remained blinded for three days during which time he fasted and undoubtedly reflected thoughtfully on his condition. Saul's blindness was designed to demonstrate his own spiritual condition—he was spiritually blind."¹

Friends an encounter with Jesus will leave a mark. If you say that you have encountered and follow Christ but your prideful disposition is still there you might need to check yourself. If you say you encountered and follow Jesus but you still view the world the same way you may need to check yourself. If you don't look different my guess, is you encountered and follow a denomination or a culture. You probably encountered and follow a religion. I don't know what you encountered but it wasn't Jesus. Because if you encounter and follow Jesus it will leave a mark.

[Transition:] What happens next is the narrative as the scene shifts to a man named Ananias. What we learn here is that God can use the church to help people transform.

God can use the church to help life transformation.

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened. - Acts 9:10-19

¹ Barbieri et al., *The Moody Bible Commentary*.

God appears to Ananias to go and find Saul to pray for him and to help him out. Notice the encounter with Jesus probably was sufficient to change Saul's heart posture towards God, but you see that God utilizes his church to help restore people into who He wants them to become. So when God calls, CCH has to step up.

You see from Ananias's response it took courage for him to do what Jesus told him to do. Jesus' request of Ananias was like jumping in the Lion's den. From Ananias's perspective he was walking to death or to jail time. But Ananias's courage made it so that he had kingdom glasses on. He allows courage to drive his actions and ministry even though he is probably still fearful as to what would happen to him when he encounters Saul.

However, in Jesus' call to Ananias he is made aware of God's plans for Saul. It is here that Ananias gets a front-row seat to Saul's transformation. "Instead of persecutor he would become instrument; instead of concern for Israel alone his mission would be both Gentiles and Jews; instead of personal prominence and glory, he would experience the same kind of suffering he had inflicted on others."² Do you guys have a story where you witnessed a close friend transform before your eyes? It has got to be one of the biggest thrills of life when you witness someone encounter Christ and be transformed because of it. Because of Anania's courage to follow the call that Jesus gave him, he got to witness Saul transform to Paul.

Transition: Let's continue reading.

18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened. Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. – Acts 9:17-22

² Barbieri et al.

We can see in this text that Saul has experienced transformation. Scales falling from his eyes are symbols of the reality that Paul now sees the world differently. Saul was immediately baptized. He was preaching and became a witness of Jesus and was strengthened in that mission. Saul has been transformed from one of the greatest enemies of Jesus to one of his strongest warriors.

Transition: Transformation like what Saul endured can happen today. This is partly why I am so passionate about the ministry of preaching. The ministry of preaching is an encounter ministry. In other words, through the preaching of God's word, people can encounter Jesus. See, I preach not to inform but to transform. In my doctoral work, one of the items that I studied and researched was exactly how transformation takes place within an individual. What I learned was that there are 4 key steps to transformation.

Transformational Process: Comprehension

The first step is comprehension. There is a passage in scripture when Paul writes,

“2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”- Romans 12:2

This clues us into the reality that transformation begins with comprehension. Within transformation, there is an element of informing and understanding. After all, it is hard to apply a biblical principle to your life unless you understand it. From comprehension, the transforming process moves to conflict. Paul comprehended that the one standing in front of him was the Person of Christ. The Resurrected Jesus. When he finally comprehended that he entered a state of conflict.

Transformational Process: Comprehension → Conflict

Conflict is critical. After all, people don't change unless they are uncomfortable. Conflict happens when the Holy Spirit illumines within us a misalignment of our hearts to Christ. You see this so clearly within the transformation of Paul as he encounters Christ on the road to Damascus. He is in conflict as he realizes just how out of alignment his life is with Jesus. So

much so that he was pursuing a way of life that actively killed Jesus. This conflict is what we would call conviction. And conviction is uncomfortable and many times people run away from it or they numb themselves. Friends throughout this series you might have encountered Christ and have experienced conviction. You begin to get uncomfortable as the Holy Spirit begins to shine light on your sin. Do not dismiss it, but rather lean into it because that means you are continuing down the road of transformation. When we lean into conflict it is there when we begin to experience a change of our affections or attitudes.

Transformational Process: Comprehension → Conflict → Affections

I hope that there will be some Sundays where it clicks... you'll say to your spouse "I never thought of it that way before." "Now that makes sense." You know this is what happened with Paul as Ananias was helping him out. Paul's affections and attitude towards Jesus began to change. Not only that the things that Jesus taught Paul saw differently. This is why it is so important to daily read scripture and encounter Christ in his word as you listen to it preached. Constant exposure can nudge you towards an affection change. My prayer for you as a preacher is that as you encounter Jesus and His truths your affections towards him and his truths might change. It is here that we discover the key to behavioral change.

Transformational Process: Comprehension → Conflict → Affections → Behavior

Behavior change is fueled by impulses of the heart or attitudes and affections of the heart. The behavior of buying your spouse flowers is driven by an affection towards your spouse. The same is true with God and His Word. When your attitude towards God changes so does your behavior which is the last part of the process "behavior." I mean Paul's letters to the church, the sermons he preached, the ministry he had is behavioral fruit of the internal transformation he had because of that encounter on the Damascus Road.

Transformational Process: Comprehension of Jesus → Conflict with Jesus → Affections towards Jesus → Behavior like Jesus

The person intertwined with all four-step transformation is Jesus. Take a look at Paul's words again in his letter to the Corinthians that he had to of drawn from his own encounter experience he writes.

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. – 2 Corinthians 3:18

To contemplate means to have your sole focus on Jesus. When we do that, we can comprehend who Jesus is and as we comprehend Him we begin to understand how out of alignment our life is in comparison to his, and in that conviction, our attitude towards Christ begins to shift off of ourselves which then drives behavior change in our life. But the thing that begins and ends this process is an "Encounter."

Conclusion:

An encounter with Jesus can knock you on your butt. It can be painful and cause all sorts of internal conflict. It can leave a mark. But man, an encounter with Christ can turn your life around as you begin to view Christ differently. As you begin to love what he loves and hate what he hates. It is then that your life begins to produce fruit that helps you kick those hurts habits and hang-ups and you begin to be used by God for his purposes.