

Remnant Life Church

February 10, 2019

Core-Life Change: The Anatomy of Change

Acts 9:1-19

We have been talking about change

- This is not easy to do, and most people don't particularly like it
- Change almost always requires something that we would not freely give or give up
 - New Years resolutions
 - Quickly abandoned
- How do the changes of our lives stick?

We have already identified a couple of things that prevent change from lasting

- Hypocrisy
- Unrealistic expectations on ourselves and others

And it begins with what we talked about last week – knowing who you are

- Companies identify themselves with a logo
- What is your logo?

This morning look at the account of a man who underwent a drastic change, and he lived as that changed man for the rest of his life

READ: Acts 9:1-19

This is the first of 3 accounts of the conversion story of Saul in Acts – the 9th, 22nd, and 26th chapters

Saul's conversion experience is one of the most powerful shared in the Bible

- He goes from the greatest enemy of the church to the first and greatest missionary to advance the name of Jesus
- The English biblical scholar F.F. Bruce said, and this has been echoed by many that no single event except for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has had more impact for the cause of Christianity than the conversion and commissioning of Paul.

And that change was a drastic one

- Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen giving his approval to what was happening (Acts 7:58)
- We just read that he breathed, or spoke, murderous threats against anyone who was embracing this new religion that was called The Way (Acts 9:1)
- He was working with and on behalf of the oppressive Jewish leaders to secure arrest warrants for any of these he came across (Acts 9:2)

What is the context surrounding Saul's life at this time?

- Jesus was crucified in the year 30 AD (born in 3 BC) – there are some who hold to 0-33
- After Jesus is dead, buried, and resurrected the Jewish leaders realize what they were expecting and hoping for did not happen

- The movement did not die with the death of Jesus; it got stronger!
- More were preaching about Jesus – Stephen is one
- The events of **Acts 3-7** are within a year or so of Jesus' ascension and the commissioning of the disciples (**Matt 28:16-20**)
- It is likely another year or so that Saul is headed to Damascus to round up as many believers (he would call them blasphemers) as he can

Who is Saul?

- I find it difficult to label him an evil man
 - He believed in his heart that he was serving God by trying to stop this new teaching that did not conform with what they had believed and been taught for generations
 - Pharisees were not seen as the empty and hypocritical leaders they were until Jesus
 - He was the first to say there outside was clean, but inside they were dead (**Matt 23:27**)
- Saul's family is of the tribe of Benjamin, who was the youngest of Jacob's children and Joseph's favorite brother
 - The most famous Benjamite was the first monarch of Israel, King Saul
 - Likely who he was named for
- He is born a Jewish Roman citizen in the town of Tarsus (located in modern-day south-central Turkey approximately 12 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea)
- Raised within this Roman-ruled/Greek-speaking land but sent to Jerusalem in his formative years to study at the feet of the greatest religious minds of the day – a Pharisee descended of Pharisees (**Acts 23:6**)
- As he goes about now as an adult, we read that he (Paul, a Pharisee) goes to the High Priest (a Sadducee most likely Caiaphas) to get letters of authority to arrest Christians he found
 - The alliance formed by these two opposing groups was continuing even after they were successful in their efforts to have Jesus killed
 - Even after all they had witnessed at His death and then resurrection
 - Reminded of the nation of Israel throughout the OT
 - Time after time returned to idolatry in spite of God's power shown again and again
 - I often ask, "How can they continue to do the same th..."
 - Well, don't we do the same thing...unless there is change?
- Paul was also a Zealot
 - A fanatical group dedicated to the freedom of the nation of Israel from the rule of the Roman government
 - Josephus listed the ruling religious groups – Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and then the Zealots
 - When Rome introduced imperial cult worship, the Zealots led a revolt against them.
 - It was called The Great Jewish Revolt or the first Jewish-Roman War - began in AD 66.
 - The Zealots successfully overtook Jerusalem for a time

- But in A.D. 70, led by General Titus who would go on to become Emperor, the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

What is the Anatomy of Change?

1. Passion (9:1-2)

- a. Even though his energies were being focused in the wrong direction, there was a zealotness (from the word for Zealot) for his cause
- b. His whole life was committed to obliterating this religious revolution started by that crazy rabbi they were finally able to silence
- c. What are your passions?
 - i. You might say, "I don't know."
 - ii. I can tell you the answer if you tell me where you spend your free time and let me see your bank statement
 1. Not to see how much money you have but what you spend it on
 - iii. Your time, energy, and money spent will reveal your passions
- d. God can take a passions that are misdirected and point them in the right direction

2. Willingness to Listen (9:4-5)

- a. Listening is a primary element of bringing about change
 - i. What do I need to do differently?
 - ii. What must be removed or added to my life
 - iii. Rarely will that come from within
- b. Wait a minute...he got blinded on a road shouldn't that get his attention?
- c. What has it taken in the past to get your attention?
 - i. We said last week that the more resistant an artist's material is, the greater the force that must be used to mold and shape it
 - ii. So too it is with our lives
- d. Yes, it took a blinding light, but Saul listened

3. Obedience (9:6-9)

- a. Saul had a choice!
 - i. He could have turned around and gone back to Jerusalem - the place where he had authority and power
 - ii. He could have demanded his traveling companions take him to someone who might heal his eyes
 - iii. He could have gotten angry or indignant ("Do you know who I am?") and argued with the voice
 1. He actually did better than Ananias
 2. Ananias felt he needed to update God on who Saul was (9:13-14)
 - iv. Instead, he went into the city without instructions
 1. Abraham (Gen 12:1) – leave your home
 2. Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22:2) – to sacrifice his son
 3. Samuel (I Sam 16:3) – the anointing of the next king
- b. He obeyed even in the face of a hardship

- i. Saul was blind from the moment of his encounter on the road for 3 days (9:9)
- ii. Don't miss the significance of 3 days
 1. Abraham traveled 3 days with Isaac (Gen 22:4)
 2. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days (Jonah 1:17)
 3. Jesus was in the tomb for 3 days (Matt 16:21)
 4. 49 times in the OT and NT, an event or circumstance took place at or after the third day
- iii. After 3 days Jonah changed from a man who wanted to run from God in disobedience to one who would take a message of God's love and repentance to the most evil nation and people of that day
- iv. Saul did not know what was to come during his 3 days of blindness, but he obeyed God

The change was so thorough and complete that they had to change his name

The anatomy of change for your life...

- Will target your passions
 - What are they?
 - Do they honor God?
- Will require you to listen
 - But that can only happen if you stop talking
 - Open your ears and your heart
 - Psalm 46:10 - *Be still and know that I am God.*
- Will require your obedience
 - If you are not willing to obey God then don't expect to see change in your life
 - If you cannot surrender your will
 - ...give up your life
 - ...pick up your cross and follow Jesus (leave the comfort of the world)

...then you can expect to always struggle with what you want to change but cannot... BUT...It does not need to be that way!

The presence of Jesus Christ in your heart and the Holy Spirit in your life allows you to choose change that can last.

- Surrender your passions
- Stop talking and constantly being active to know God's presence
- Be obedient to His Word