

Jesus Changes Everything

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we confess, we confess this faith that your word is true. That your word is able to make us wise on salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

So that's what we see this morning. We want to be made wise on salvation. We want to behold Jesus in all of his glory.

To speak to us. Move among us by the power of Holy Spirit. That we might see the face of Jesus. We might hear his voice. Your word is true. In Jesus' name we say.

Amen. Acts chapter 21. When the seven days were all created, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him.

[1 : 16] Paul. Crying out. Men of Israel. Help. This is the man who was teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place.

Moreover, he even brought Greeks into his temple. And as he filed this holy place, they had previously seen children. He issued with him the city. And he supposed that Paul had brought Greeks into his temple.

Then all the city was stirred up and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple. And at once the gates were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cult that all Jerusalem was in the tribune.

He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down from them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.

He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

[2 : 27] And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd. For the mob of the people followed cried out, away with him. As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, May I say something to you?

And he said, Do you know Greek? Are you not Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the assassins out into the wilderness? Paul replied, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Solis, a citizen of no obscure city.

I beg you, permit me to speak to you. And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hands to the people. And when there was a Greek hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying, Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.

And when they heard that he was addressed to them in the Hebrew language, they became even more part. And he said, I am a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers.

Being zealous for God, as all of you are this day, I persecuted this way to the dead, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness.

[3 : 47] From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who are there and bring them in Jerusalem to be punished. As I was on my way and too near to Damascus, about noon, a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.

And I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And I answered, Who are you? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuted.

Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, What shall I do? And the Lord said to me, Rise and go into Damascus,

and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.

And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the truth who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight.

And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the righteous one, and to hear a voice from his mouth.

[5 : 10] For you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now, why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.

And I said, Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue, after another, I imprisoned them Jesus to believe in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving, and watching over the garments of those who killed him.

And he said to me, Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. This is God's holy word. People who oppose Christ in the gospel have a tendency to frame Christians with the phrase, Against this. Christians are against that. Against this. And they try to define believers in those terms. And that's exactly what the Jews here do to Paul.

[6 : 32] Here is a man who is against the people, against the law, against the temple. But this is here is a good example for us of how we identify, how we witness to people in that kind of hostile context environment.

Paul definitely kind of shifts away from their accusations, and then he keeps the focus on Jesus. He tells about who Jesus is, that he is your risen Lord.

And he keeps saying to them, But Jesus met me. Jesus said this to me. Jesus sent me to proclaim him to the Gentiles. And that's why I'm doing the thing that I'm doing.

And so this is a good passage for us to learn about how Jesus changes really everything and how we can bear witness to him faithfully.

The main point of this passage is that God appoints his people to see the light and hear the voice of the Lord Jesus so that they might be washed of their sins and sent out as witnesses.

[7 : 38] And we're going to first see how Jesus changed the Jewish religion, and then we're going to see how Jesus changed Paul and how he changed us. If you were with us last week, you saw that Paul arrived in Jerusalem, and he was warned that the Jewish believers, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had been hearing a rumor about Paul, a slander about him, that he is against the Jewish law, that he counsels the Jews to not follow the Jewish law.

And that was a false rumor because even though Paul did teach that you no longer need to become a Jew and observe all the Jewish law and how to be saved, but that he had no problem with Jews themselves following their incestful customs as long as he had it clear in their mind that salvation is through Jesus alone, by faith in Jesus alone.

And so in order to dispel the rumors, Paul went into the temple with four Jewish men under his wings to go through kind of the Nazarite vow and the men who were under the Nazarite vow and to go through the ritual purification process with them for such a reason.

And this was to show them that he is in fact not against the law. But before Paul can even complete the seven days of purification, he says that some Jews from Asia spotted Paul inside the temple and then began to disturb the crowd and to seize them.

And they say in verse 28, the man of Israel, no, this is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and against the law and against the surplates. Moreover, he brought Greeks into the temple and had defiled his holy place.

[9 : 11] So they claim that Paul is against three things, the Jewish people, the Mosaic law, and this place, which is the breakfast of the temple. And there is a sliver of truth, a moniker of truth in these false accusations that make them believe them.

So I'm going to address all three of them in turn. First, Paul was never against the Jewish people. Paul answers this charge in chapter 22, verse 3, when he says, I am a Jew, born in Tarsus and Cilicia, but brought up in this city.

Paul was himself a Jew. How can he be against his own people? In fact, in Romans 9, 3, he says that he could wish that he himself were cursed and cut off from Christ if that meant that his people, the Jewish people, could be saved.

Paul loved the Jewish people. And not only that, he says he was brought up in this city, Jerusalem, the Jewish capital. And later, addresses God as God of our fathers.

When Ananias addresses God, he acknowledged that God, the fathers of, the God of the Jews is also the God of all. In chapter 22, verse 14. And even during his missionary journey, Paul made it a habit in each city he visited to first visit the Jewish synagogue and preach to the Jews there.

[10 : 35] And then only after the Jews rejected his message, he turned to go to the Gentiles in that city to preach the gospel to them. However, even though Paul was not against the Jewish people, he did teach that Jews, like Gentiles, are sinners who need to be saved by Jesus.

He also taught that Jesus broke down the divide and all the hostility between Jews and Gentiles and made them one in him. That's why Paul writes in Galatians chapter 3, verse 28, there is neither Jew nor Greek.

There is neither slain nor free. There is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Salvation is from the Jews since Jesus, our Savior, was Jewish, he is the Jewish Messiah.

But salvation is not only for the Jews, it is for all people who repent of their sins and put their faith in him. Gentiles can be saved as Gentiles without becoming Jewish.

It's no longer those who are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are God's people, but those who are united with Jesus like faith. Only a few of us have any Jewish background, so this is great news for us that we too who are formerly not God's people, who are not part of the covenant of God, we now can be his people.

[12 : 04] And this teaching, if misrepresented, can be portrayed to be against the Jewish people and that's what these Jews are accusing of. You're against the Jewish people.

Secondly, Paul is not also not against the Mosaic law. As long as the Jews understood that it's not keeping the Mosaic law that saved them, but Jesus who by his life, death, and resurrection that saved them, Paul is fine with Jews observing the Mosaic law and continuing the Jewish customs handed down to them by their poor fathers.

In fact, Paul's Jewish upbringing and training in Jewish law were impeccable. Paul says later in chapter 22, verse 3, in his defense that he was educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

earlier in chapter 21, verse 20, the elders of the Jerusalem church described the Jewish believers there as being zealous for the law, and Paul here used the same word to describe his own upbringing.

I too was raised that way. I was zealous for the law. Gamaliel was a notable Jewish rabbi who served as the president of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and he was a grandson, Gamaliel was a grandson of an even more famous rabbi named Hillel, and Paul was trained in the Jewish law by Gamaliel.

[13 : 31] In other words, Paul had a Jewish Ivy League education. He belonged to the strictest sect of the Jewish teaching. So Paul was not against the Mosaic law, and he takes care to emphasize that even Ananias, the man who restored his sight and told him about Jesus, was a devout man according to the law.

However, even though Paul wasn't against the law, he did teach that Jesus fulfilled and completed the law. So he says in Romans 10 verse 4, Christ is the end.

He's the end of the law for righteousness for those who believe. Paul taught in Romans 3, 21-24, but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

That means that we can't be declared righteous before God by observing the law. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's standards. By our own moral living or good deeds, no one can make the cut.

[14 : 59] No one can save themselves. Our only hope of having right standing with God is to put our faith in Jesus who died to make atonement for our sins so that we might be forgiven.

Jesus is the one who fulfills all righteousness. So even though Mosaic law more written to Jesus, it pointed to Jesus and so Paul didn't oppose or he wasn't against the Mosaic law because Paul taught that the law was fulfilled by Jesus.

In observance of the law, it's not what saved them. He's being portrayed by the Jews as being against the law. Third, Paul was also not against the temple. The Jews had seen Paul with Trothimus, a Gentile believer from Ephesus and he was with him in the city of Jerusalem and so they assumed wrongly that Paul had taken him into the temple, thereby defiled the temple which Paul in fact had never done.

Archaeologists have discovered the temple warning inscription that used to hang right outside the sanctuary of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and it says this in Greek quote, no stranger is to enter within the Belgrade out round the temple and in closure whoever is caught will be himself responsible for his ensuing death.

So that's how important to enter the temple as a Gentile to areas we are not supposed to enter. But Paul didn't do that. He didn't take Trothimus inside the temple. In fact, Paul was just reading four Jewish men through their purification rites inside the temple to show that he actually observes these Jewish customs.

[16:44] And later he mentions in chapter 22 verse 17 that even after his conversion he went to the temple to pray to God and there he saw the vision of Jesus telling him to go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

So Paul was decidedly not against the temple. However, Paul knew that Jesus taught in John 2 that his body is the ultimate temple of God, the new temple of God.

He knew that Jesus taught in John 4 that true worshippers would no longer worship in the temple in Jerusalem but that they would worship God everywhere where the people of God are gathered in spirit and in truth.

So following Jesus' teaching, Paul did teach that sacrifices in the temple are no longer necessary because Jesus has offered up his body once and for all as the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

This is why we as Christians don't need to make pilgrimages to the western wall in Jerusalem or make animal sacrifices because Jesus is the new temple of God.

[17:47] Because Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice of God. So wherever the people of God are gathered in his name, like here, we can worship him truly. And because of this teaching, even though Paul was not against the temple, he was represented as being against the temple.

So these three charges that the Jews brought against Paul reveal how the Jews were grappling with the profound changes that Jesus brought about in their faith. Jesus changed the Jewish religion forever, not by abolishing it or opposing it, but by fulfilling it.

It's what he called the righteous one in chapter 22 verse 4. Jesus is the one who lives righteously, who fulfills all the righteous requirements of the law. But many of the Jews misunderstood Jesus, and because of that, they misunderstood Paul.

And after the Jews from Asia stirred up the crowd, the total chaos and confusion ensued. There's a lot of running around and a lot of shouting, and it says in chapter 21, verses 30 to 31, the people seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple.

And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all the Christian ones had confused. They dragged Paul out of the inner part of the temple because they were not allowed to stone anybody in the inner part of the temple because that would be fire.

[19:12] So they had to take him out to the outer part, and the mob tries to kill him there. This is an attempt of winching.

It's not an official execution because the Jewish people did not have the right under the Roman Empire to meet out capital punishment. So this is they're just going against the law and they're trying to kill Paul out of their zeal for the law.

And when the Roman Tribune intervenes, he asks the crowd what Paul had done, who he is, what he had done. But he says that in verse 34, some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another, and as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the palace.

And as they're escorting Paul to the barracks, he says that he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the process. It's quite a volatile situation. Paul could bear or be killed. And given such a violent reaction from the crowd, the Roman Tribune assumes that Paul is some kind of violent, dangerous revolutionary and he asks Paul in verse 38, are you not the Egyptian men

who recently stirred up a revolt and led the 4,000 men of the assassin down into the wilderness?
[20 : 24] So this, the existence of this Egyptian pretender, the false Egyptian Messiah is recorded also independently by a Jewish Roman historian named Persephone from the first century.

And he records that this man from Egypt who was a Jew claimed to be the Messiah. He deceived thousands of Jews and led the knowledge of wilderness and then to the Mount of Olives. Jerusalem to take over, reclaim Jerusalem from the Romans. But then the Romans promptly crushed him, captured 200 of his followers, killed 400 of his followers, and that was the end of that. But this man, the pretender himself, did escape the Roman grip. And so this tribune thinks that he's found, he's caught this man that had escaped.

He thinks he has a great fine in his hand and he's going to get some kind of reward for taking him in. But Paul speaks to him in Greek which shows that he's not an Egyptian and shows that Tobin was very confused.

[21 : 37] Paul was not a political revolutionary but he was turning the world upside down simply by teaching the good news of Jesus Christ. And in this volatile situation, even while narrowly escaping his own death from the mentioned mob, Paul asked the tribune for the permission to address the Jewish people so that he might bear witness to Jesus and tell them about how he changed his life.

That brings me to my second point beginning in chapter 22, how Jesus changed Paul and how he changed us. The Roman tribune, hoping that Paul will clarify what is going on, gives him permission to speak and Paul addresses his own people in the Hebrew language, the Hebrew dialect, likely, the most likely Aramae, which was the Jews at the time spoke.

And as people hear him speaking in their own language, they quiet down and they start to listen. And this is what he tells them in verse 45, he tells them that he was formally persecuted, he formally persecuted this way to the dead, binding and delivering to prison both men and women.

Paul is trying to convince the Jews that he's not some Romanized Jew who is foreign and who is against and doesn't care anything about Israel and about the law and the temple, but he was once a zealous proponent of the law, was trained in the law, and he was a fierce opponent of Christians. And just as the Jews are now trying to kill Paul, Paul once tried to kill Christians as well. In fact, Paul mentions in verse 20 that when the blood of Stephen was being shed, he himself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.

[23 : 29] Stephen was the first Christian martyr, and we saw him get stoned to death by Jewish mob in Acts chapter 7. And when Stephen was being stoned, it was Paul who was providing the cold check service to people who were throwing the stone at Stephen.

And interestingly enough, and ironically, what the Jews charged Stephen of in Acts 6.13 is exactly what the Jews charged Paul of here.

He is against this holy place and the law. This shows just how thoroughly Paul has been transformed by the grace of God. The man who used to persecute the followers of Jesus is now being persecuted for following Jesus.

I hope this is a comfort to some of you. It's possible that some of you have strayed far away from God. Maybe you have doubted that you can ever become a follower of God.

With all that I have done, I could never be a follower of Jesus. Perhaps you have even mocked Christians have slandered the church in the past.

[24 : 44] But if Paul can be saved, you can still be saved. By his own admission in 1 Timothy 1.13, Paul was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent of the church.

And yet now he was the apostle. He was an apostle of the church. No matter where you have been, and what you have done, you are not too far gone.

And this passage teaches us that there is still time to repent and believe in Jesus. In verses 6-16, Paul recounts how Jesus graciously appeared in him.

He says, as I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon, a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And I answered, who are you? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking.

[25 : 49] This is the second time that Luke is now telling us the story of Paul's conversion. In the first account that Luke gave us in chapter 9, verse 7, he noted that the men who were traveling with

Paul stood speechless.

They were hearing the voice but seeing no one, which seems to contradict verse 9, which says here that the man saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to.

But this is not a contradiction. Chapter 9 tells Paul's conversion story from the perspective of Luke as a missionary. And chapter 22 tells the story from Paul's perspective as it unfolded.

And both accounts are actually highlighting the fact that the revelation of Jesus Christ to Paul was personal and private and was reserved for him alone.

Paul's companions saw the heavenly light, but they did not see the person of Jesus. Paul's companions also heard a sound, but they did not hear the voice of Jesus.

[27 : 01] They could not understand him. They didn't recognize him. Only Paul understood what he saw and what he heard.

heard. So while this encounter with Jesus was very public, and the witnesses can't corroborate what happened, the meeting with Jesus was very personal and private.

I think that's the wonderful truth, that God who created the hospitals by the word of his mouth is not too preoccupied, not too important to attend individually to us and speak to us and save us.

This was the case where each of us came to know and believe in Jesus for the first time. You may have heard a sermon delivered to a room full of people. You may have been reading a book that was written for thousands of people.

But in that moment, when you encountered Jesus, Jesus spoke personally to you, and you came to see him and behold him in his room. This is because only those whom God has appointed for salvation can be saved.

[28 : 21] Jesus says to Paul in verse 10, rise and go into the masochist, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do. Here the word appointed refers to Paul's divine assignment.

Paul used to take letters from the Jewish ruling council, authorizing him to persecute Christians and to imprison them. But now he is following orders from another place.

He takes orders on the Lord Jesus. He does what he's appointed to by him. Instead of prosecuting those who believe in Jesus, now Paul proclaims Jesus and calls people to believe in him.

And then when Paul obeys Jesus' voice he goes to Ananias. And then Ananias helps him to see, or lies again to see, and then talking about Jesus.

He says in verses 14 to 15, Ananias says to Paul, the God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the righteous one, and to hear a voice from his mouth, for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

[29 : 26] it's because God had appointed Paul to know his will, it's because God had appointed Paul to see Jesus, the righteous one, and to hear his voice, that Paul was able to recognize Jesus and hear him and understand what he was saying.

Paul's blindness immediately after he became kind of a Jesus is a metaphor for a spiritual blindness. Paul could not see the truth. Paul was blind to spiritual realities, and it is on the day of his conversion that he is able to see again, we see in fact his sight.

Every single one of us is also spiritually blind apart from God's special revelation to Jesus. Unless God shows us Jesus, we cannot see him.

We cannot understand the spiritual reality. But when God appoints us to know his will, he enables us to see his face here in voice. Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians 4, 3, 6, he says, even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as his servants for Jesus' sake.

[30 : 52] For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the faith of Jesus Christ.

Do you hear the voice of Jesus calling on people? Do you see the light of Jesus shining into your own heart?

God? If yes, then the only appropriate response is found in Ananias invitation to Paul in verse 16. And now, why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on you. The Greek word for baptized literally means to reverse.

For Jews, immersion in water for the purpose of purification from ritual and purity was a habitual thing. They did it often. They had public pools dedicated solely for that purpose.

[31 : 56] But for Christians, baptism is a one-time initial sacrament. Because we only need to be committed to the ones of our sins once and for all by the blood of Jesus.

For those who have repented and come to faith in Jesus Christ, baptism signifies the washing away of guilt and the purifying of our own conscience.

If you're baptized, you can be assured that you have indeed been cleansed of your sins by the blood of Jesus. You have indeed been pure conscience before that. Christian baptism also represents the believer's union with Jesus through faith, through his witness, death, and resurrection.

being submerged under the water signifies the Christian's death, death to self. We are no longer living for ourselves, I have died to myself, I no longer live to promote myself, but I now live to proclaim Christ.

That's what that death signifies, we are submerged under the water. And then when the believer emerges out of the water, that signifies you like in Christ. Christian now lives for Jesus.

[33 : 14] That's what all of us who follow Jesus now have done, baptized to follow Jesus. And this morning we have the privilege of baptizing two new followers of Jesus.