

The Transformed Life, Part 2

Scripture: Acts 9:10-17

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In Acts Chapter 9 we study really the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. We're going to follow the subject the transformed life from verse 10 through verse 31. Now we'll never be able to cover all of that. We'll get to about verse 17, but it really is one unit and we see in it the characteristics of a transformed life. Now that's a very interesting subject, the subject of transforming people. And that's really what this world is endeavoring to do. Recently Phyllis Diller, whom you all know, the comedian had a very expensive facelift. And at the particular interview that I happened to watch, she said that it transformed her life. I don't know about that. I do know it transformed her face. I don't know what it did for her life or what it will do in the long-run.

Once in a while I hear people say well, you know I got a new job and I'm a new man. Or you know I had a financial problem and it's answered and I got a windfall from a great aunt who passed on or whatever and boy it's a new life. And you hear this very frequently. Somebody who was sick and they're healthy and it's a new life. They've been transformed. Television says if I use certain products I'll be a new man with a transformed life. Some people think that when they fall in love that transforms them. It does for a while. And you know, Madison Avenue is forever selling products that are geared to transform us. And we aren't stupid, we all know that these are hopelessly superficial all of this that we've talked about is.

And that brings us to the real question and the real question is can anybody be really transformed. Is it even possible? Can you actually take a bad man and make him a good one? Can you take a sinful woman and turn her into something lovely? Can a shattered broken relationship be put back together as good as new or even better. Can the incurable be cured? That's the question. And psychologists and psychiatrists and counselors have in our society been given the assignment of transforming people. And they're doing frankly a miserable job, hopeless. And even in their textbooks, it's interesting if you ever get a chance to look at a psychology textbook or some kind of an advanced textbook along that line, you'll find in many of them an introductory statement to the effect that this is only a so-called science and none of the cures which are connected to it can honestly be connected to it on a positive basis any more than they could be connected just to the passing of time and the changing of circumstances, which is quite an admission.

In fact, changing human behavior is a seemingly impossible task. And most psychological problems are chronic. You get them over one neurosis and they'll get another one, it's inevitable in most cases. Somebody else comes along and says well, it's education that transforms. If we could educate people we can change our society. We can get rid of crime. We can get rid of this and this. And so we educated people and now we have smarter criminals and psychotics with BA's.

You know? And yet everybody still is pressing the issue of transforming people. We have everything from shock treatment, which is stark and risky and ultimate and desperate to the kind of positive gentle urgings of Norman Vincent Peale and the power of positive thinking, all the way down to the children's version, which is the little train that keeps saying, "I think I can. I think I can." And guess what? He does. Everybody wants to change behavior.

I had a friend, I think I might have told you about this some time back, we wanted to change a...get into a seminar on changing behavior and so we went to this particular seminar and he paid \$500.00 and when he got there they gave him a coin. They said this coin will change your behavior. It was one they had particularly designed and it had a kind of a relief thing that you could rub it in your fingers. And they told him to find everything he didn't like about himself and write a reverse positive statement. Like if he was unorganized, he was to say I am amazingly organized and then every time he touched the coin in his pocket, two or 300 times a day he'd repeat that statement and pretty soon, he'd convince himself that he was organized.

Now, they told people who didn't love their wives that all they had to do was say I'm madly in love with my wife. Write that statement, memorize every time you touch the coin. I'm madly in love with my wife. I'm madly in love with my wife. And if you did that long enough, guess what? You'd throw the coin away. No, you'd be madly...you'd be madly in love with your wife. And you know what? It doesn't work. It's fine and dandy as an approach, but it doesn't change anybody's behavior. And then somebody came along and said well society needs to reform people so we have a sophisticated prison system which is not just incarceration, but it's reform. And we talk about reformatories. And we talk about rehabilitation, but the majority of them go back. And of the ones who don't go back, we wonder whether it's real reform or whether it's only a fear of having to go back into a place that they don't want to go back into so that they restrict what is...what would be their normal behavior.

And we're promised if people were economically better off that we would be able to change them and so we moved in with the affluent 60's and 70's and we reached the apex of riots, revolutions, killing, and everything else. And then B.F. Skinner comes along and he says, we can only transform men by controlling them like an animal, genetically controlling the children they produce, brain control and then the movie Clockwork Orange comes along, it says it won't work. And so everybody's worrying about how we're going to transform people. How are we going to change them into what they have to be to preserve themselves. Is the world really doomed? Are we sentenced to a full existence of hate, lust, murder, rape, violence, robbery, war, psychological disease, and psychosomatic illness? I mean,

is this it? Just because this man can't change, you can't resist the flow of his nature, the bent of his person.

I mean, can't we transform man somehow? God has something to say about it and if you want to go to the book of Jeremiah and kind of linger there for a minute, we're going to see some verses there that are important. Jeremiah 13:23, very interesting verse listen. This is what God says about people being transformed. "Can the Ethiopian," Jeremiah 13:23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" Here's a better one. "Or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil. God says that it is against your very nature to change. A leopard by sitting in a corner and thinking about removing his spots doesn't do it. An Ethiopian by determining that he would rather have a different kind of skin doesn't accomplish it.

And a man doing anything and everything to try to alter what he is, is unsuccessful. Listen to it again. "Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." Only if the leopard can change his spots and the Ethiopian his skin. And that can't be done. And so man cannot really change what he is says God. Will a new deodorant soap do it? Will a new deodorant soap transform us like they say? Listen to Jeremiah, he knew all about deodorant soaps. You didn't know that did you? Jeremiah 2:22, listen to what he said. "For though thou wash thee with lye and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me saith the Lord God."

Soap doesn't do it. Very superficial. You say I know what will change the world, love. Love baby, that's the little phrase, right? What the world needs now is love. Saw a little film deal on that last night. The answer is love. That such a superficial answer at that point. It's like one guy said it's...you know, I love you humanity, it's people I can't stand. And that's a very common reaction, but Jeremiah said something about whether we can just really count on all of us loving our neighbors and all of this brotherhood of man thing. Jeremiah 9:4, listen to this. "Take heed every one of his neighbor." You know what he says? Watch out for your neighbor. "And trust not in any brother for every brother will utterly supplant and every neighbor will walk with slanders and they will deceive everyone his neighbor and will not speak the truth. They have taught their tongue to speak lies and they wear themselves out committing iniquity."

You know how to really get bilked every time you turn around? Just start loving everybody with complete blissful trust. You'll get wiped out. Believe me, this world is full of con men. Everybody that talks about love doesn't do it and it's very cheap to talk about it. You say well, if you can't really love everybody and have all this brotherhood thing, if you're going to go around watching your brother because he's going to try to supplant you, move in and take what you have, maybe then what we need to do is have firmer laws and correction methods and we've got to strengthen our prison system and discipline. That's fine, that's all right, but Jeremiah had something to say about that. Back in Jeremiah Chapter 2, verse 30, he said this and here God is actually doing the talking.

Verse 30 of Jeremiah 2, "In vain have I smitten your children, they received no correction." God said, I tried correction and that didn't do it. Soap doesn't transform you. Love isn't really a commodity that you can even use. It's foreign to human kind in its real honest depth. And even rules and discipline and chastisement and punishment doesn't seem to do a whole lot. You say I guess B. F. Skinner's right. I guess the only way to transform people is to smash them. Is to just crush them, you know. Crush out all their personality and all...you make them a nut in the cosmic machine and nothing more. Solomon had something to say about that.

Listen to what he said in Proverbs 27:22. This is a great verse. Listen to it. "Though thou shouldest crush a fool in mortar among grain with a pestle," have you ever seen a mortar and a pestle? It's used to crush things, a little stone thing and today if you go into a chemistry lab or something you'll find one out of steel, metal. Listen to what he said. "Though you crush a fool in a mortar among grain with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." You're not going to get rid of a fool, you're just going to have a crushed one. You can't press upon man a crushing debilitating experience and expect to turn him into something wonderful.

There is no outside force that can change man. None. You know why? Man doesn't have an outside problem. What kind of problem does he got? An inside problem. And if you're going to get at transformation, you're going to get at it from the inside. It isn't facelift. It isn't soap. It isn't superficial lovey dovey brotherhood. It isn't any of these things. It's not prison. It's not genetic controls. It's got to be inside. And that's exactly what Jeremiah hit on in Chapter 9, verse 1.

Listen to what he said. "Oh that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears." He's really sad about the state of people. "That I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people. Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men that I might leave my people and go from them. I'd like to go out to a cabin in the woods and just cry. He was so broken. Here's why. "For they are all adulterers and assembly of treacherous men. They bend their tongues like their bow for lies, but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth for they proceed from evil to evil and they know not Me saith the Lord."

That's the problem. Jeremiah went on to say in Chapter 17, verse 9 "The heart of a man is deceitful above all things and," what, "desperately wicked." Now Isaiah really hit it on the head in Isaiah 1:5. "Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more." Listen, here's the problem. The whole head is sick and the whole heart weak. You see that's the problem. We cannot transform people on the outside. It's got to be something again on the inside. You say well, is there anybody that can do that? There is. God can do it can't He.

And you see this is where the Word of God moves in in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and says "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things pass away behold all things become new." God is in the

business of transforming people. God is in the business of doing that. And we come in Acts Chapter 9 to just one of those people that God has done this for and his name is Saul. Now, Saul, just let me give you what kind of a guy he was. Just let your imagination run over these thoughts. First of all, he claimed to be the world's worst sinner, right? Now we know we sin, but I doubt whether any of us would announce to our friends that is the characterization of us.

But he claimed to be the world's worst sinner, and he really had a lot of things to support that claim. He lived his life to hurt, to injure and if need be, to kill people who disagreed with him. In fact, by his life he blasphemed God and he made good people who loved God suffer torture. He was a bad man, very bad. He as a man who was the hireling, to make it worse, of dirty politicians. He worked for the crooks in Jerusalem. He was very, very evil. His name was Saul of Tarsus, but you know something? That man was absolutely, totally transformed, totally transformed. And it wasn't superficial, it was deep.

Listen to what the same man said to a group of Christians in a little city called Thessalonica. The 1st letter, the 2nd Chapter, verse 1. "For yourselves brethren know our entrance in unto you." Now can you imagine this fire-breathing Christian hater arriving what you're going to be like? "You know how we came unto you? It was not in vain, but even after we had suffered before and were shamefully treated and as you know at Philippi we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit or uncleanness or guile. We were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel. Even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words as you know, nor cloak of covetousness. God is witness. Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you nor yet of others when we might have been burdensome as the apostles of Christ, but we were gentle among you as a nursing mother cherishes her children."

You say how did he get tender all of a sudden? Listen to this. "So being affectionately desirous of you." He used to hate them. He used to want to kill them, now he loves them. "We were willing to have imparted unto you not the gospel of God only but our...also our own souls because you were dear unto. We just love all you wonderful Christians." Same ones he was killing if need be not too long before. I love this. It says in verse 11, "As you know, how we exhorted and encouraged and charged everyone of you as a father does his children." You see, here's a change. This man is a whole new man. Something drastic has happened in his life. At the end of the first...well, in the middle of the 1st Chapter of Philippians, verse 18, he says, "Notwithstanding every way whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached and in that I do rejoice ye and will rejoice."

Now all of a sudden this person who hated Jesus Christ is rejoicing when He's preached. He was absolutely and totally transformed. In fact, the Christians fell in love with him. When he left Ephesus they fell all over him and cried like babies because they loved him so much. Now what in the world could change a man like that? Only Jesus Christ, only God, because God gets at the heart of the

issue. Now, as we look at Chapter 9 of Acts, we're going to see the characteristics of this man's transformed life. And I think really what is a pattern for all transformed lives, this is one of those chapters that gives for us some great insights into the basics of the Christian experience. It's not a...it's not a far out kind of thing or an obscure doctrine that you're going to be finding here. It's just some basic root, first floor, bottom shelf kind of stuff. But it's so important.

There are seven ideal characteristics of a transformed life. The first one is faith in the Savior, faith in the Savior. Now that is in the first nine verses and we covered that last week. We're not going to go into except to just bring it back to our attention. We know that this transformation in the life of this man came when he put his faith in Jesus Christ. We know that. We know the apostle Paul was on his way to Damascus to kill Christians. That's exactly what he had in mind. And on the way, the Lord Jesus Christ stopped him in the middle of the road to Damascus just prior to coming to the city. He fell on his face. At that point Christ revealed Himself to him. He saw Jesus Christ in blazing glory. At that point, he believed that Jesus was who He claimed to be. The Messiah who had died and risen and was alive and he put his faith in Jesus Christ and the transformation took place on the Damascus Road.

And Paul said to Timothy, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who hath enabled me in that He counted me faithful," full of faith. "I believed, putting me into the ministry who was before a blasphemer, persecutor, injurious, but I obtained mercy," verse 14, "and the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." He said, I was changed because of Christ Jesus. It was the grace and the mercy and the hope and the love and the faith all wrapped up in Jesus Christ that changed my life. Transformation then comes by faith in the Savior. There never will be a transformed life apart from Jesus Christ. You can fiddle around with the superficialities but you're never going to get at the issue unless you change a man's heart and his heart is only changed by Christ Himself.

Only God could say to the prophet Ezekiel, "I'll take out the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." I'll put my Spirit within you. Only Jesus could say Nicodemus, here's how to be born all over again. I can change you. I can create a metamorphosis. You hear about the word in the New Testament regeneration, new creation. That's all it means. The new birth, only in Jesus Christ. And this man Saul of Tarsus was changed in that moment. He became a new creation. He who was dead in sin became alive to God. He who was insensitive to divine truth began to taste that God is good. He who was blind began to see. He who was in darkness stepped into blazing light. He who did only evil continually began to do and have a desire to do good. He who wasn't sure what the questions were now had all the answers. The hell bound became the heaven bound, the rebel became the son.

And it all happened in an instant on a Damascus Road. Some people say salvation is a process. I say that's wrong. Salvation is an instantaneous miracle. The process of conviction only leads up to the instant miracle. So if you're looking for a changed life, the only place you'll ever find it is by personal

faith in Jesus Christ. Now that's where Paul began, the transformation took place. That was the positional transformation. He was a new man. Then there became some practical things that needed to be adjusted as he went and the transformation continued.

Because you see, the transformation then is a process of being conformed to Jesus Christ and that'll finally be complete when we see Him face to face. All right, we won't say any more about that because that's very familiar and very basic. The transformed life begins with faith in the Savior.

The second point, fervor in supplication. Fervor just means energy, passion, drive. Supplication means prayer. I believe that one of the characteristics of a truly born again saved individual is prayer. I don't think prayer is just a requirement. I think prayer is a response to salvation. Do you get the difference. I don't think that prayer is something you have to beg Christians to do. I think that if you're really born again, you do it. Now, I think you need to encourage Christians to do it more than they do it. But I believe that a true Christian can be determined on the basis of fervor in supplication.

Now the narrative here leads up to this and it's so beautiful. Saul is now blind. He was blinded by the sight of Jesus Christ. He was going to go into Damascus breathing fire. He goes in there blind and all he can see is the blazing sight of Jesus Christ before him like a man who stared at the sun and can't see anything but the sun no matter where he looks. And he sees only Jesus Christ and somebody's leading him by the hand he's stumbling around and he goes into Damascus and he finds his way to the house of a man by the name of Judas not Iscariot, but some Judas we don't know anything about at all, so there's no point in speculating and he goes to that place and the Bible says in verse 9 that he stayed there for three days and he didn't eat and he didn't drink. For three days he just stays there. The Lord told him to go there and wait and that's exactly what he does and he exists in a solitary blindness without food, without drink.

And I really know what was happening in those days. Those were days when he concentrated on Jesus Christ. Those were days when the shock of the transformation began to settle in his brain. He began to understand what had happened so rapidly and so dynamically. Now as he's sitting somewhere in this house of Judas on Straight Street, meanwhile God is beginning to move on the heart of another man who is going to go to him and pick up the ministry that needs to be accomplished in his life and that's where we begin in verse 10.

As God is dealing with another man on the other side of town. "And there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias." That's different than the Ananias who was executed by God in Chapter 5 for lying to the Holy Spirit. "And to him said the Lord in a vision," now Ananias, God gave him a vision. And the Lord just said this, "Ananias," isn't that interesting. And listen to what he said. "And he said behold I am here Lord." I mean, he obviously knew that was not the voice of Mrs. Ananias or of any of the little Ananiases running around. He knew it was God.

God moved and maybe...and maybe in a dream situation, maybe God just brought it across his attention. Maybe there was something with physical eyes that he was able to see. We don't know. But nevertheless, God said, "Ananias." And he knew who was talking. You know, I love somebody who's listening for the voice of the Lord. You know, some Christians God could say John. Huh? Who's that? Because the last person they expect is God. Ananias lived in communion with God apparently to the point when God spoke he was ready. Some Christians are listening to the myriad voices of the world and when the still small voice of God comes they're not ready to hear it. But Ananias apparently walked with God and so when God talked Ananias knew who was speaking.

Anyway, He said, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold I am here Lord." Now here's Ananias and we don't know anything about him except in Chapter 22, verse 12, it tells us that he was a devout Jew and he had good reputation. He was a devout Jew who had now believed in Jesus as Messiah. And I just think, and I may be wrong, but this is a risky guess, but it may well be that Ananias was a leader, if not the leader of the church in Damascus. That he was a primary kind of person there. And in fact, when all the records are done and we get to heaven it may be that if we chat with Ananias we'll find out that it was really him that Saul was after. That he was the head guy that Saul wanted to get at.

Which then brings an interesting flavor to this whole thing. Ananias appears very suddenly and he disappears very suddenly, but it's a beautiful thing to see how God just picks his chosen instrument. He just had Ananias created, saved, and living in Damascus just to go over there and minister to the infant Saul when he was born into the kingdom. Ananias was the right guy. God determined that and eternity passed. Set it all up, moved on Ananias, put the whole thing together. I love the sovereignty of God. I like to see God doing things from His end. That's a securing doctrine people. That's a securing doctrine.

God is very selective in choosing His people to do His tasks. Everyone of you, listen to this, everyone of you as a Christian has a specific, what should I say, specific gifts, specific ministries that the Spirit of God has designed for you to carry out within the framework of God's master plan. And you know, it's only as you're available that those things come to fruition. The willing people are the used ones. And Ananias was willing and he got used.

So Ananias is one of the forgotten heroes if we...we always say we owe the conversion of Paul to the prayer and the testimony of Stephen, I think we also owe the conversion of him to, let's put it this way, the service and brotherliness of Ananias. He fits in there. Well, listen to the command that came to him. "Lord here I am. What have You got?" The Lord said unto him, just get what his reaction must have been. "Arise, go into the street which is called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas, for one called Saul of Tarsus." And you can imagine what Ananias thought at that point. Is He kidding? This isn't really God is it? Who is this?

You sure you know who you're talking about? Saul of Tarsus. This man's reputation followed him everywhere. He didn't even...and there was no statement about Saul had become a believer, which may not have changed the situation anyway, because that would have been so incredulous he likely would never have believed that either at that first contact. He didn't know Saul. He didn't know Saul had been blinded on the Damascus Road. He didn't know that his life was transformed. He didn't know he was now a Christian, didn't know anything.

Told him to go to the street called Straight. Just a historical note, Damascus is ancient city. It had a street that ran right straight through the middle of it from the eastern gate to the western gate, straight about three miles long. It's still existing today. The street's called Straight there, it's called Darbal Mospakeem, different name of course. But it's still there and the street called Straight, at one end of it was the house of Judas. Today some people say that there's a spot where that house was and supposedly a closet where Saul was praying for those three days, but that's conjecture.

Nevertheless, told him where to go. We don't know anything about that Judas as I said. The end of verse 11, he has a footnote. "For behold he prayeth." He's over there in Judas' house praying. Now Judas was probably another Christian and God had set that thing up, which we don't know about. The text says nothing about that. But Saul is over there praying in Judas' house. Well, this is too much. I mean, you know, this vagers your faith. Have you ever thought of the worst enemy to Christianity in your life and then just written him off? That's one guy God will never get. That's terrible to do that. I'm sure that these Christians hadn't even thought to pray for Saul of Tarsus. And here he is over there, God's got a hold of him. He's down at Judas' house and he's praying. What a shock.

You say, what's he doing there again? He's praying. That's why I say the second thing in the transformed life is fervor in supplication. Do you know what Saul spent three days doing? What? Praying. You know what prayer is? Prayer is just communication with Jesus Christ isn't it? Communication with God and all alone for three days. The only thing he could see in front of him very likely was Jesus Christ. The shock of what happened on the Damascus Road preoccupied his thoughts with the things of Christ. He just spent three days in communion with Christ, that's prayer.

And I believe this people. I believe that somebody who is really born again, somebody who really comes to Jesus Christ finds himself lost in communion with Him. Now it's not just going around mumbling prayers. And it's not formally getting on your knees or folding your hands or saying grace at the table. It's just this constant kind of life flow and communion with Christ. Now this isn't the first time Saul prayed. It's just the first time he got through. He used to pray like a Pharisee depending on his own self-righteousness. Now he prays like a broken contrite sinner depending on the mercy of God. But he's praying, he's talking to God. The transformed life people is the life in constant contact with God.

If somebody says to me, oh yeah, I'm Christian, but they have no desire to commune with God then I don't think their Christianity is legitimate. I've illustrated it this way before. For the Christian, prayer is like breathing. You don't come to the end of the day and say boy I'm all tired out, I've been breathing all day. It's easy to breathe. Very easy to breathe. Why? Because the atmosphere around you exerts pressure on your lungs. And it's just...all you got to do is relax to breathe. You don't go to sleep at night saying boy I hope I remember to breathe while I'm asleep. You breathe better when you're asleep than you do any other time, because your body relaxes and the pressure of the air just moves right in.

Now it's hard to hold your breath. Very difficult to hold your breath. Now in terms of prayer, that's exactly what it is. Prayer is just breathing. It's harder not to pray for a Christian than it is to pray. Because when you're not praying, you're holding your spiritual breath. If you're really born again, the easiest thing to do is just let God flood your life. That's just a normal kind of thing. The transformed life lives amid the atmosphere of God. We live in the atmosphere of God. It's normal to just relax and let God get involved with us, you see. I've defined it this way. This is MacArthur, take it for what it's worth. Prayer is simply this, the soul of the Christian moving in the presence of God. That's what it is. Prayer is not formal little things. Prayer is the soul of a Christian moving in the sphere of the presence of God.

Then again, on another angle, prayer is the same to a new creature that's in Christ as crying is to a baby. When your baby comes into the world, you don't teach it how to cry. It comes in crying. Just cry. You say why do babies cry? Now, I'm not a doctor and I don't know all the secrets of why babies cry, but I have a good idea. They cry, in my experience, because they want something. Would you buy that? Of course, they come into the world and they want something. And when they get it, guess what? They stop crying, which is a pretty good indication why they cry. A baby comes into the world and a baby needs something and he wants the supplier to be aware that he needs it, but since he can't articulate it, God has just supplied for babies the knowledge and whatever it takes to yell and the supplier usually responds.

For the Christian it's much the same thing. Prayer for a new Christian is not learned by a manual, nor is it learned by someone giving you a lecture on prayer. It's like crying. You come into the world and you have needs. As a Christian you have needs and the very normal thing for a Christian to do is just to start saying Supplier I have needs. And so we cry a lot. And I wonder sometimes if you're not crying whether you've ever been born. I believe Saul was crying for milk, for clean clothes, do the whole transformation. For somebody to teach him how to crawl and then how to walk and to give him all the things he needed. And so he just spent three days just crying.

And I think that's proof of the transformation and incidentally friends, prayer is not one-sided conversation. God answers it doesn't He? Now God may take three days to do it, but He always

answers. And it's beautiful to realize this, that all the time he's over there crying, God's working on the answer somewhere else. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever just had some kind of thing in your life and you get down and you say I've got to pray about this. You start praying and you think God's a million miles away. It just seems very remote and you wonder if God...you've got such a little silly thing here and you just...you think God's got all these things to do and He's got to make sure Venus stays on course and He's got to take care of all that. It's just really too much for Him to ever get involved in your little piddly deal, and then all of a sudden you forget that God is somewhere and He's got to throw the whole universe into a different gear to get back down to you, you see. Because all kinds of things are tied into you.

Well, that's what He's doing. In the case of Saul, He had to be working with Ananias. Get Ananias all in shape, get that thing going. Get him down the street there and care for all those details. Don't ever assume that when it doesn't happen now, it isn't happening with God. It is. It is. God works in His own way and in His own time. So Saul's over there and he's crying a lot. And he hasn't gotten his milk yet, but God's getting it ready and Ananias is going to deliver it.

That's exciting. Believe me people, watch this one. The work of God is just that. The work of God. Did you get that? God is in control. In Ephesians 2:10, it says, "We are His," what, "workmanship." The word in the Greek is masterpiece. "Created by Him in Christ Jesus unto good works which He has ordained." You see, God is in control of our lives by design. And so God's ordering the circumstances. A pair of corresponding visions at two ends of town are going to meet head on. Verse 12, "Saul has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight." God gave Saul a vision. You say why did He do that? Because He wanted him to have something to hang on to. He wanted to have something to trust in.

What are the two things that prove to us God answers prayer? Number one, the Bible, right? Did Saul have a Bible? No. What's the second thing that proves to us God answers prayer? Past performance. Right? Did Saul have any of that to bank on? He didn't have anything. And so the Lord just said here I'll give you preliminary vision. He gave Saul a vision and in his vision, he saw a man name Ananias coming along and touching him and receiving sight.

So Saul's had a vision. Ananias had a vision, God's got two corresponding visions, two men who not three days before were at the other end of the world from each other are now on a dead course to hit head on. Now that's God's control. So God ordered the events. For three days, Saul prayed and God moved to answer his prayer. Believe me people, part of the transformed life is fervor and supplication. When you're really transformed you spend your time communing with God.

You know, there's nothing sweeter than to talk to Him. That's part of the transformed life. There's a third thing and you can add a lot to that. But let me quickly go to this so we'll finish this, at least this third one, faithfulness in service. Another thing that comes, I think, right on the heels of the new birth

is faithfulness in service. Now Ananias had lived in Damascus and I'm sure since the time of his salvation he'd been faithful to the Lord. It's very apparent to me that he was a servant of the Lord from his sensitivity to the voice of the Lord when the Lord said Ananias, and bang he jumped. Kind of reminds you of Isaiah when the Lord spoke and Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me." He was ready. And so was Saul at the moment Saul was saved, what's the next thing he said? "Lord what wilt Thou," what, "have me to do?" What am I going to do? Now I'm ready.

Talked to a kid last night, he said to me, you know, he said, "I've been a Christian a long time, but he said for ten years, my Christian life never amounted to anything. Only in the last eight months have I really begun to live for the Lord." And he said, "Is that a common experience for Christians?" And I said, "That's a common experience for most Christians to go like this." Maybe they get saved and they're young and they just don't ever really amount to much until sometime later and they begin to move for the Lord. But I said something else to him, I said, "That's no excuse." Because I said, "There are also Christians who from the moment of their salvation live the life of full service til the day they died." And a classic example is a man named Saul.

That man committed his life to Jesus Christ at the very instant of salvation and he never took back claim to his life until the day his head was laid on block and an ax head severed it off. He never took it back. Faithfulness in service. Now let's pick that up as we look at verse 12...verse 13. "Then Ananias answered Lord," now I hear Your request Lord, but let me just give You a little thought on this, "I've heard by many of this many how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem." This is the guy who's after the Christians. "And here," that is here in Damascus, evidently the word that he was coming preceded him. "And here hath authority from the chief priest to bind all that call on Thy name." He says, I heard about this guy Lord. This is a guy who's got authority to come to Damascus and do what he's been doing in Jerusalem. Do you know what You're asking Lord?

But our gracious Lord didn't rebuke Ananias, because it was a little hard to handle. I mean, let's face it. You can think of the worst possible enemy conceivable and that's Saul and to hear in a word that he's on his way to Damascus to capture Christians when he gets there he's already turned into one. A little hard to believe. And so the Lord accepts the lingering doubt in Ananias' mind. Secures him in verse 15. "But the Lord said unto him, go thy way." I like that. Don't you like that? Get going Ananias. Get going, don't argue with Me. "For he is a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." Ananias, get on, get going.

I like the fact that God demands immediate service. I like that. You know, I really think that we can branch off of that thought and think about a lot of things, but I like the fact that God wants us to move for him now. You know, God must have a monstrous file up in heaven somewhere full of quotes under the category someday. Can't you imagine how He hears, someday Lord once I get the fence painted and the garage fixed, I'm going to go witness that neighbor. God says okay, some day, put that one in there. File that one.

Somebody else is going, Lord, I'd like to teach a class of people. I'd like to start a Bible study, but you know as soon as I get over the hump on this new job, and somebody...some day, I'll put that one right over there, some day. I imagine that thing could fill all eternity that someday file. God isn't interested in some day. I've always said this; God doesn't care about your future. Did you know that? You say oh that's heresy. No, it isn't, because you'll never live in your future. Why should He care about it? You'll live right now. Don't go to God and say some day God I'm going to do this, someday, someday, some day. That never happened.

You never get there. God wants your love and the investment of your life now. And what does He say in verse 15? "He is my chosen vessel to bear my name and God said he's saved and now his job is settled." There wasn't any difference between his salvation and his call. It happened bang, just like that. Faithfulness and service is just...if you go down to verse 20, in the same passage it says, "and immediately he preached Christ." Now that guy really responded immediately.

Saul's only been a believer a little while and he's already preaching. He didn't postpone his service. He did it when God called him. Now there were times, of course, when there was a postponement. He went to the Arabian Desert for several years while God refined him, but he began immediately to do what God wanted him to do. He set his sight there. Sure there was preparation, there was education, there was time to grow. But nevertheless, he pursued the call immediately.

You know, there are needs that we have here in this church. There are needs around the body of Christ everywhere and they're not being fulfilled because everybody's going to do it in the future. That's no good. If I go to my wife and I say, "Honey, do you love me?" I don't want her to say "oh hit me in a couple of weeks." I don't want to be loved in a couple of weeks. I want to be loved now. That's all that matters to me is now. I don't want to be loved in the future. When I got married, long time ago, nine, ten years. Remember standing in the little room there thinking now these vows I'm going to say, I promise to love you til death do us part. See? That's hard to say that. I mean, if you really...I'll love you til death...you don't know that. You have no idea. You haven't even lived with this woman. I mean, she's lovely and she's the object of your love at that point. But how are you going to say I'll live with you and love you clear on out. I just said I'm not going to love her for 60 years. Not a chance. I decided, I'm not even going to love her for 20 years. I decided I wouldn't even love her for one year. In fact, I decided I wouldn't even love her for a month. I decided, I'd just love her right now. And you know what? I still love her right now, more than I ever did. And you know when she wants to be loved? Ask her. Right now.

God doesn't want your service tomorrow. Because He's not interested in it. There's nothing to do for tomorrow. Tomorrow will take care of itself the Bible says. He wants you today. You're sitting around making spiritual plans, they're not spiritual. Ananias' protest was overruled. The risen Lord said, You go, I've selected Saul and there's no dichotomy between his salvation and his service. "He is a

chosen vessel." Paul himself picked that phrase up and used it at least four times in the New Testament, Romans 9, vessels of honor, vessels of mercy, 2 Corinthians 4, vessels of earth or earthen vessels, 2 Timothy 2, he talked about being a vessel sanctified and fit for the Master's use.

The term vessel means an instrument to convey the grace of God to men. He is to be My instrument to convey the grace of God to men. Incidentally, the Greek here where it says chosen vessel is literally a vessel of election. God elected him for service. Now I say this as a footnote. The call to the ministry people is not a whim or a will on the part of man, it is of God. It is of God. In Galatians 1:1, the apostle Paul simply says this, "Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father." I was called by God Himself. And it says he was called to reach the Gentiles first of all. And you remember in Romans 11:13 and also in Romans 15:16, he specifically says "I am the apostle to the Gentiles."

And so he knew his part. Incidentally, he preached to kings as well, Agrippa and very likely Nero and also to the children of Israel. Verse 16, He goes on, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." He says to Ananias, Saul's going to suffer, which must have been a comfort of some measure to Ananias that he didn't have to fear, because it was going to be the other way around for a while. And Saul did suffer, 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 is the list of the things that he suffered.

Well, Ananias was obedient, discipleship means risks, he was expendable. Verse 17, "And Ananias went his way entered into the house." So Ananias went to commission Saul and he putting his hands on him said, "Brother Saul." He commissioned him. As God's instrument, he just went to help Saul to understand what God had called him to do. And that really was his commission. Ananias said in Chapter 22, verse 14-15 when he arrived, you have his words. He said this, "The God of Father has chosen thee that thou shouldest know His will and see that Just One," that's Jesus, "and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth for thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." Ananias said God chose you to be His witness and he put his hands on him.

People the transformed life, the man's service to Christ. Remember the old statement "saved to," what, "serve." "Saved to serve," that's true. When you become a Christian, immediately whatever your vocation was it becomes your avocation. Whereas a Christian the thing that you are to be known for is just that your Christianity. That's the key. Let me close with a verse. 1 Corinthians, don't look it up, just listen, 4:1. If you're a Christian, you ought to be known by your service to Christ. If you have none, you're a contradiction in terms. 1 Corinthians 4, listen, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ." When somebody points to you, they should say oh there's John, he works over at Lockheed. Well, look at that, that's Suzie and she is a...she's a waitress. No, no. Oh that's John, he's a minister of Christ. Oh look at...that's that minister of Christ Suzie. See, that's what we should be known as.

"Let a man so account of us, as of," what, "the ministers of Christ, stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it's required in stewards that man be found," what, "faithful." The world ought to know us by our service to Jesus Christ, by that we should be identified. What are you doing for Him? What kind of service do you have? How are you using your spiritual gifts? Where are you using your abilities? If you're not you're a contradiction in terms. The transformed life, faith in the Savior, fervor in supplication, faithfulness in service. Let's pray.

Father, we've just begun to study these things, but how our hearts have been enriched and blessed and reminded again of that which is our responsibility before You. Father, we know there's so many things that our Lord would accomplish in this world and so many times limitations are placed because of the inavailability of Your people. God we thank You for the transformation of salvation and we pray further for a transformed prayer life and for a transformed service that we might be diligent and faithful to give our very best to You.

Father, we would ask that every one of us would take inventory in our own hearts to see whether or not we really have been transformed and give You the praise for what You want to do in our lives if we let You. In Christ's name. Amen.

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