

Scandalous Part 4

Murderer To Missionary

Acts 26

Memory Verses: 2 Corinthians 5:17

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle):

Over the past three weeks, over the Easter season, we've been discussing scandals. Scandals are all over the place in our day and time... but if you want the juiciest scandals all you need to do is open up your Bible. Just here in the Bible account of Easter we have conspiracy, plots, false testimonies, phony trials, illegal beatings, middle of the night meetings, spies, alien appearances, missing bodies, unexplained phenomena, paranormal activity, tongues of fire, human flight, and coverups galore. When it comes to the the mistrial and murder of Jesus, the missing body and the resurrection, and the ascension and baptism of the Holy Spirit... well let's just say... you can't make this stuff up.

But... I want to remind you of something very important. All of this conspiracy and scandal has taken place with great planning and for a grand purpose. The death of Jesus has paid for the payment of our sin which is death. We were condemned to Hell for the sins of our hearts, but Christ has taken that condemnation in our place on the cross. The resurrection has provided us with newness of life. Just as Christ was risen from the dead, so also we are risen from our old lives of sinfulness to a new life of purpose and promise in Jesus. The ascension empowers us to the impossible. Because Jesus ascended to the right hand of God we now have an intercessor who speaks to God on our behalf and pleads the blood and our case before the accuser. Because of the ascension the Holy Spirit has come to live inside of us, empowering us to share the Gospel message with the world. Now we are transformed and changed to the likeness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and together we become a unified church that the gates of Hell cannot stand against.

This morning we are going to focus on the aspect of your personal transformation a little more in depth. The scandal of Easter is that Jesus would die, rise, and ascend for sinful men and women to be completely transformed. If the end result of Easter is personal transformation then we need to give it some attention this morning as we wrap up this series.

And I want to ask you a simple question... can people really change? Can they be something at one point and then be transformed into something else? In your personal experience... have you seen people change for the better? Cause, the world says they can't. They say people don't really change... not really.

This morning I want us to look at perhaps one of the greatest transformation stories in the entire Bible, the story of Paul. And hopefully by looking at it his story... how God took a murderous militant and made him a missionary... we can find an answer to this question. Can someone be transformed? And if so, how? The point is this... **Your Transformation Story Completes The Easter Story**. Let's begin in the book of Acts chapter 7 as we look at the story of Paul.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing I want us to see is... **Like Paul, We Were All Murderous Enemies of God**. Let's read **Acts 7:54 – 8:3, 9:1-2**. Paul or Saul as he was called, approves of the execution of Steven and holds the coats of the men stoning him. He was an accomplice to murder standing over the dead with a grin on his face. The murder of Steven only increased his lust for the destruction of Christianity. Because from that day on Saul helped lead a great persecution against the church. Look at the words used to describe his crusade. He ravaged the church. He entered their houses and dragged them off (husbands from wives, parents from children). This is the type of thing we think of when we think of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Ultimately he threw christians into prison where they would possibly be killed.

When he wasn't actually dragging Christians out of their homes and throwing them onto death row he was talking about it. It says that he was constantly breathing out murderous threats. You see... this was who he was... this was his persona. Think of a militant white supremacist – that was Saul towards Christians. The obvious next step was to go after those in neighboring towns... so he became a bounty hunter, deputized by the High Priest to hunt Christians in Damascus. You must understand... Paul was known by the church as the grim reaper. He was the boogie man. He was John Wick, Boba Fett, and Jason all wrapped into one.

Now... did he actually ever kill anyone? Probably not. The Bible gives us no evidence that he actually pulled the trigger... but we can be assured that he was willing to. And even if he never murdered anyone in cold blood... he was an accomplice to murder, he threatened murder, and he hated Christians. And according to the Bible... hatred is murder. Look with me at **1 John 3:15**. Pretty simple, if you hate you murder. Just think about it... what is the link between hatred and murder. Well, hate is the main ingredient for physical murder and the vehicle by which spiritual/emotional murder takes place. If you are willing to murder someone you most likely hate them, you have no regard for their lives. And if you are willing to slander, gossip against, speak hateful degrading things, and destroy someone with your words... you can sometimes cause more damage than a bullet to the head. You can murder someones soul with hate. Regardless, sin-wise, before God we are guilty of our hatred just as we would be guilty of

murder.

So, have you ever hated? Have you ever turned your back on a brother, a sister, a friend. Have you ever wished someone ill will. Have you ever held a grudge. Have you ever told someone you hate them or wished they were dead. We are all guilty of murder... and that means we are all in the same boat with Saul. Even if you claim to have never hated... i've got bad news for you... you aren't in the clear. Why? Because we've all sinned in some way. We've all lied, stolen, coveted, or idolized. It doesn't really matter whether we are guilty of hatred and murder (which all of us probably are)... we are still all guilty of sin and under the same penalty of death that all sinners are.

So... you may think you are better than Saul was... but that doesn't matter... does God? Does God think you are better than Saul? Nope. Look with me at **Colossians 1:21**. You see... we've all sinned and our sin makes us an enemy of God. The point is this... **The law abiding citizen and a the murderous outlaw are on equal footing before the throne of God... they both need the salvation that only Christ can give.**

The next thing I want us to see through the story of Paul is this... **Like Paul, We Need An Encounter With Jesus.** Look at **Read Acts 9:3-10, 17-18**. Alright, this is weird, this is another incident of unexplainable phenomena, paranormal activity, but we should be getting used to it at this point right? A light from heaven shines on Saul and his posse, his posse checks out, Jesus speaks to Saul telling him that it's time to change sides, and then Saul is blinded. Seems like one of our scandals alright.

But what's more scandalous is what Jesus says to Saul. Saul, why are you persecuting me? Interesting to note that Saul has only persecuted believers, but here Jesus says that Saul has been persecuting him. Why, because clearly an attack on the church is an attack on Jesus Christ himself.

Another scandalous thing to notice is that Jesus just shows up in his own time and manner. Saul isn't seeking Christ... he isn't trying to find Christ... in fact it's the exact opposite. Listen to what **Romans 3:11** says. No one is righteous, no one seeks God. Look... **we often think that people find Jesus when they seek him - the truth is Jesus finds us.** The only reason Saul found Jesus is because Jesus found Saul.

After Saul's encounter with Jesus he is sent to find Ananias who helps him regain his sight. Here Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and something like scales fall from his eyes. Here Saul's conversion is complete. The scales falling from his eyes and his regained sight (blind but now I see) represent that he has been unable to see the spiritual reality of Jesus all this time... but now he can. Look at what **John 3:3**

says, "unless one is born again they cannot see the kingdom of God." **1 Cor 2:10-12** tells us that we can comprehend the things of God because we have the spirit of God and the mind of God, without the spirit of God in us we cannot have a Christ centered perspective. You see... **Transformation happens when Jesus opens our blinded eyes, puts his Spirit inside us, and reveals what we couldn't ever comprehend before.** The entire chapter of **1 Cor 1** tells us that the things of God is foolishness to the world because they can't comprehend it... it seems pretty dumb until God opens your eyes. Saul thought Christianity was pretty dumb... so dumb in fact that it needed to be eradicated... that was until Christ transformed him. From this point forward Saul is so transformed that he goes by another name... Paul.

Which leads us to the last thing we need to see this morning... **Like Paul, Jesus Has Completely Exchanged Our Mission.** **Read Acts 26:12-23**. Here we see Paul's defense before King Agrippa where Paul basically shares his life story. Some sounds familiar to what we just read in chapter 9... but what's more important is what Paul shares happened after his conversion. You see Paul was given a new mission. He tells Agrippa that from the point of his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus that he was called to the Gentiles to open their eyes as his were opened. He was to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, to receive forgiveness of sins, and a place among the sanctified by faith. His mission was to see people converted for Jesus. The man who once wanted to kill Christians now wanted to see everyone become one. This is a radical exchange. So radical it seems scandalous.

Paul was also given a new course. Where once he was obedient to the High Priest and the Pharisees, now he was only obedient to Jesus. He tells Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to what Christ called me to do." So he preached Jesus in Damascus & Jerusalem & the whole region of Judea & then beyond to the Gentiles. This included three separate missionary journeys spanning 30 years. The result? Paul planted 14+ churches and led a mass spiritual awakening that transformed the entire world. Through Paul's missions, parts of Asia, Europe, and Africa were evangelized... the ripple effects we are still experiencing today.

And we see here that his mission hasn't finished... because even as he pleads his case to escape prison, he still tries to lead Festus and Agrippa to Christ **vs24-29**. And where did his mission eventually lead him? To death. Eventually Paul was martyred for Christ. He suffered the same type of execution that the ones he threw in prison suffered. Is this irony? No. This is what happens when God transforms someone and gives them a new mission.

You must see it... Paul wasn't partially changed, or somewhat rehabilitated. No, he was completely transformed. And his transformation is proof that Christ can change anyone. **Paul's life is an example of the**

power of Christ to completely transform us; the worst to the first, enemy number 1 to the leader of the church, a murderer to a missionary . And this is the very reason we exist as a church at Stone Creek. Our vision as a church says, "Depending on Christ we will reach our world with the Gospel to see lives completely transformed." More than anything we want to see broken people made new, damaged people remade, lonely people embraced, the lost found, and the dead brought back to life. We want to see marriages reforged, we want to see addictions broken, and we want to see atheists find faith. And, only the power of the Gospel of Jesus can do this!

Some people believe that people don't really ever change... but they can! Not through manipulation, not through therapy, not through rehabilitation. Only through Jesus.

Application

And that brings us to where you are this morning! The scandal ends here! We were just like Barabbas, just like Paul, we were murderers... and we would never change on our own. So Jesus, an innocent man died in the place of us murderers. Then he rose again proving that new life is possible. Then he ascended to send his Holy Spirit to live in us and change us from the inside out. And now he is revealing himself to us on our path... just as he did to Saul. And he is asking... why are you against me? Your life can be different if you want it to be. All we have to do is believe in the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to set us free of who we used to be!

We can be changed... we must be changed. We can be completely transformed from who we used to be... but only if we put our trust in Jesus to do the work that we cannot do! Look at **2 Corinthians 5:17**, one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. It says, that in Christ, we are a new creation, the old has passed away, the new has come. I don't know about you but I want that change! I don't want to be who I used to be. I don't want to be who the world tells me to be. I want to be something else. And here's the good news this morning... Jesus died, rose, and ascended to transform you completely. So get this... Easter ends with your transformation. **Your Transformation Story Completes The Easter Story** .

Conclusion

So have you been transformed? Or are you the same? Listen, If you've never asked Jesus to transform you from who you were to who you can be... it's as simple as praying "Jesus would you forgive me of all the wrong I've done and would you transform me? I accept you as my salvation and place all of my faith in you to do the work I cannot do."

Perhaps you've said that prayer before but nothing changed.

Well, then it's time to pray it again. You pray it everyday if you have to... when Christ is ready to change you... he will! If you truly believe he will do it!

Words are cheap... change is real!

Have you been transformed? Then go tell your story. Tell it to your family, tell it to your co-workers, tell it to your neighbors. Tell everyone you can that you were destined for hell, a murderer who was against God, but now you've been set free from sin and hell and your mission in life is to tell everyone who will listen that Jesus Transforms. Your transformation story is what Christ died to tell! So tell it! **Your Transformation Story Completes The Easter Story**