

Today we have the story of Paul's Mission. Actually, we had the first part of Paul's Mission with the story of "Saul the Persecutor" two weeks ago. It was the story of Paul's Mission before his conversion. Today is about Paul's Mission after his conversion.

Christianity is a religion of conversion. Everything we say and believe is built upon one fundamental and revolutionary premise: We don't have to stay the way we are. Our lives can be radically changed by God. Conversion is a miracle that happens when the life of God intersects with human personality. Once God enters the picture, our lives will never be the same again. Until then, we may be religious. We may be very good people. We may obey all the rules of the church, but we have not been converted and have not experienced the new life in Christ. We can attend church and participate in church activities for a long time without conversion, without having new life in Christ Jesus.

Religion is one thing; conversion is something else entirely. It is the conviction that long-held prejudices can be overcome, lifetime habits can be broken, and deeply ingrained patterns of sin can be erased over time. Conversion is the certainty that who we "were" does not determine who we "are" now, and who we "are" right now does not determine who we will be. We can be changed. We can be different. Our lives can move in an entirely new direction.

If we take this truth away from Christianity, it ceases to be a supernatural religion. If the possibility of real change is gone, then we have nothing to offer but a set of rules. Can the zebra change his lines? In himself and by himself, the zebra can never change the lines on his body, but with God, all things are possible. Zebra without lines...ummm... It sounds weird 😊. Anyway, you got my point, right?

Of all the conversion stories in the Bible, none is greater or more profound than the conversion of the man called Saul of Tarsus. Raised a Jew and trained as a rabbi, he became a "passionate" persecutor of the early Christian church to protect and preserve "pure" Judaism. He hated Jesus and His followers so much that he did his best to eradicate the new religion as if it were some sort of dreaded virus. Protecting Judaism was his mission, even if that meant putting Christians to death.

One day he met Jesus, and his life was permanently transformed. So bad was his reputation that, at first, almost no one believed that the change was real. Word quickly spread that "Saul the Persecutor" became "Paul the Apostle." Over time he proved to be genuine in his faith. What happened to him impacted the early Christian community enough to contain his dramatic conversion story in three different places in the New Testament. The first is in the Book of Acts, chapter 9, the second in the Book of Acts, chapter 26, and the third is in our text—Galatians 1:13-24.

If you go to an evangelism class, you will be taught to use a three-point outline in giving your testimony: Point 1- Share your life story before conversion. Point 2- Tell how you came to Christ. And Point 3- Share your life story since coming to Christ. That's the outline Paul precisely follows in our text. From verses 13 to 14, Paul tells the story about his life before conversion. From verses 15 to 16a, then he tells his conversion story. From verses 16b to 24, he shares the story of his life after conversion. Today, we are focusing on the story from after his conversion.

Paul's emphasis in verses 16b to 24 is "what he didn't do." He didn't immediately go to Jerusalem to be trained by the apostles. And he didn't start an evangelistic ministry right away. What did he do? He dropped out of sight for three years by going to Arabia. We would have put him on Christian radio and TV. We would have had him write a book and hit the Christian talk-show circuit. But that wasn't God's plan.

He spent three years in Arabia—evidently in personal study and meditation. After that, he went back to Damascus. He made a brief trip to Jerusalem to meet Peter. He went north to Syria and Cilicia to preach the gospel. In all of this, we see three new attitudes emerging. First, he had a new attitude toward other believers. He went to Jerusalem to meet Peter. Second, he had a new attitude toward the truth. He declares in verse 20 that he is not lying. And third, he had a new attitude toward the gospel. He now preaches what he once tried to destroy.

Once, he hated believers. Now, he seeks their fellowship. Once, he hated the truth. Now, he lives by the truth. Once, he hated the gospel. Now, he preaches the gospel. Once, he was called Saul; now, he is called Paul. Everything is different now. Once he was a persecutor; now, he is an evangelist, an apostle. Paul's mission before the conversion was to protect Judaism. After conversion and meeting God, his mission is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Christ has made all the difference.

Today's passage ends on a beautiful note as Paul says that the churches in Judea, which he once terrorized in his pre-conversion days, recognized the amazing change in his life. And they glorified God because of him. His life pointed people toward God.

That leads me to a simple and profound question. Is anyone glorifying God because of you? Because of me? Because of what we do as the followers of Jesus Christ? Is your life pointing people toward God or against God? The answer is yours. Amen.