

Introduction

I want to share with you a message about purpose, destiny, forgiveness, courage, and transformation. Have you ever experienced an awakening to the fact that that you were not who you thought you were? For some people that's a great experience. You don't believe the lies anymore of what the enemy has been saying to you about you, and why you will never be who God says you are.

For others not so great. For others, it's the experience of coming to the reality that you are not who you believed yourself to be. An identity crisis begins to loom when the experience becomes a revelation that everything you thought you were doing may not be the plan and purpose that God has designed for your life. And the only remedy is a true encounter with Jesus.

Like the college student who finds out the major they've chosen isn't what they are passionate about at all. But what if everything you have been through has everything to do with your purpose and destiny? What if all your mistakes were used to design the best version of yourself, the worse parts you want to forget about. It's written in **Jeremiah 29:11** "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Even after you've been changed, restored, free, delivered and filled with Holy Spirit, your greatest challenge to hinder you from going forward can be your history. Well, the Apostle Paul knew exactly what that was like. An undeniable encounter with Jesus began a transformation in his life that would change the world.

I. Saul

- A. The Book of Acts chapters 8 and 9 give us the beginning of a course traveled by a man named Saul. Saul of Tarsus was a Jew born in Roman occupied Tarsus which gave him Roman citizenship.
 1. He was proud of his Jewish heritage, as he describes in **Philippians 3:5**:
"Circumcised on the eighth day of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee."
 2. He was so zealous and devout that he believed persecuting Christians was the natural way for him to show his devotion. He chose to use his Hebrew name, Saul, until sometime after he began to preach Christ. After that time, as "the apostle to the Gentiles" (**Romans 11:13**), he used his Roman name, Paul.
 3. It would make sense for Paul to use his Roman name as he traveled farther and farther into the Gentile world. In **Acts 22:3** Paul claims to have been educated by Gamaliel, one of the premier teachers of the Law in the first century.

Acts 8:1-3 *"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison."*

II. Acts 9 1-18 KJV - Show me The Way.

A. Saul was looking for the Way. That's what they called believers or Christians during that time. Acts Chapter 9 begins this way:

*"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the **Way**, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."*

B. Its assumed, the early followers of Christ referred to themselves as followers of the Way because of Jesus' statement in **John 14:6** that He is "the way and the truth and the life." Luke says that Aquila and Priscilla explained to Apollos "the way of God" more fully (**Acts 18:26**). Peter refers to Christianity as "the way of truth" (**2 Peter 2:2**). And the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus' broken body is the "new and living way" for us to enter the Most Holy Place (**Hebrews 10:19-20**).

- a. Show me "the way of truth".
 1. That is what Saul was in pursuit of. The Truth.
- b. It's ironic how when pursuing truth,
 1. We can ignore the arrows that are pointing us to the truth, because it doesn't look like or sound like what we've imagined.
- c. Some of the greatest minds in biblical history have missed it sometimes. Saul, a brilliant scholar and Pharisee, did not recognize the truth of the law of Moses when the Law of Moses Himself showed up.

III. We need a fresh Encounter with Jesus every day.

A. The word 'encounter' simply means to 'run into'.

B. A God encounter is not about a one-time dramatic experience but an ongoing leading of the Holy Spirit for our lives. Its practicing the presence of God.

C. **There are several benefits to practicing His presence.**

1. Practicing His presence keeps you in tune of what God is saying and what God is doing.
2. Practicing Gods presence makes you God conscience.
3. Becoming God conscience keeps behaviors and attitudes in check

4. Agendas and motives are purged.
 5. It grows the appetite for God and kingdom culture.
 6. We become sharper at discerning a God experience.
 7. Our lives eventually become positioned in a way where we wouldn't be surprised when God shows up.
- D. Pastor Tim, would share with us how he would walk about the church when no one is present expecting an encounter with the Lord.
- E. An encounter with Jesus may happen in different ways as recorded in Romans Chapter 9.
1. It may manifest as a vision or a dream.
 2. It may be a prophetic word or a word of knowledge.
 3. It may be a supernatural experience in the form of a miracle.
 4. It may be an all-out supernatural appearance like what Paul experienced.

IV. Saul's Transformation.

- A. **ACTS 9 3-5** *"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, **Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?** And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, **I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.**"*
- a. This expression derives from the pricks or **spurs used to urge on and drive animals**.
 - b. For example, a horse that kicks against the pricks is one that refuses to respond to the spurs of the rider and is therefore or disobedient.
 - c. Jesus took control of Paul and let him know his rebellion against God was a losing battle. Paul's actions were as senseless as an ox kicking "against the goads."
 8. In other words, you're making this task harder than it needs to be.
 9. Paul had passion and sincerity in his fight against Christianity, but he was not heading in the direction God wanted him to go.
 - d. Jesus was going to goad ("direct" or "steer") Paul in the right direction.
 1. There are times when we are going in the wrong direction and Holy Spirit is trying to redirect us. And sometimes we have challenges understanding we are going the wrong way.
 2. And He is trying to get our attention. And if that doesn't work...God will set up a divine appointment.
 3. Have you ever hungered and thirst after what you believed was of God and then came to realize that God wasn't in it at all?
 4. We must be careful not to take on a cause that isn't ours to take.

V. Jesus reveals Himself.

- A.** Some of us here have had experiences when you:
- Were on your daily routine and you heard your name called. And no one is around.
 - Or, you saw something that was so cool, and you didn't have time to get your phone out to capture it. And everyone missed what you were talking about.
 - Have you ever had someone tell you look, "Look over there! Can't you see it? It's right there!

Saul had an encounter, and no one saw it but Him. No one heard anything. But they did see Saul reacting and speaking to someone who wasn't there.

Acts 9:7-16 *⁷ And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. ⁸ And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. ¹⁰ And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. ¹¹ And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, ¹² And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. ¹³ Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: ¹⁴ And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. ¹⁵ But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: ¹⁶ For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*

- B.** In verse 16, "suffering for My name's sake", simply means that the call on Paul's life is so great that the equity of suffering will have to match the calling of God on his life.
- Suffering such as weariness, pain, and watchings, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold, and nakedness, perils on various accounts, and from different quarters, stripes, scourges, imprisonment, shipwreck, stoning, and death, of which he himself describes in **2 Corinthians 11:23**, so that Ananias had no reason to be afraid to go to him, and converse with him, and do unto him as he was directed.
 - The divine encounter with Jesus had to be one He will never forget because the transformation process to becoming an Apostle will be a very difficult journey. Paul will need to remind himself that although what was happening in 2 Corinthians was real:
 - What happened to him was not a dream.
 - I did see Him. I saw the Lord Jesus and He did speak to me.

3. I did see a blinding light around me, and I became blind.
 4. I did receive instructions to pray and wait for a man I saw in a vision named Ananias.
 5. He prayed *for me and I received my sight immediately*.
- C.** Remembering that he saw and spoke to Jesus will be the anchor of his purpose.
- a. The transformation of his identity in Jesus that absolves or forgives his past, while at the same time, inserted Romans 8:28!
 - b. Look at how Jesus transforms Paul's history of persecuting the church from a mess into a message.
 - c. He used all that: zeal, passion, strong intentions, and disposition to all work together for the good of them who are called according to His purpose.

VI. The Encounter with Jesus

Divine encounters with Jesus forces you to grow stronger in your purpose. Encounters with Jesus are still happening and available to us. Bill Johnson, the senior leader of Bethel, said, "The next outpouring of God will be focused on the manifest presence of Jesus upon His people." I believe that.

- A. How do you know you have had a real encounter with Jesus?
 - b. When Holy Spirit begins to show you all that will happen to you and how you will suffer, and you still decide to go where He sends you to go.
 - c. You still choose to obey God.
 - d. Because the encounter with Jesus transforms your life into a life of obedience to His Lordship.
- B. **Acts 20:22-24** ²² *And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: ²³ Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. ²⁴ But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

That's how you know that you are all in with Jesus. I have had an experience with God that I cannot deny. And none of these things move me. Not all of us have had a dramatic conversion experience like Paul had, and by God's **covenantal grace**, many of us may not even remember a time when we did not know Christ.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, all who have turned from darkness into light have done so only because of the transforming grace of God. Like many of you, the Lord has blessed me with encounters with Him that strengthened my faith just when I needed him the most.