

About Face: Paul - “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

Acts 7:51-60; 9:1-19; 23:11; Galatians 1:13-18; Philippians 3:4-11; 1 Timothy 1:12-16

Series Recap:

The first week, we discussed Pharaoh...the man who would not bow. He was confronted by God, but would not receive Grace. Instead, he chose his own pride, becoming an illustration of the choice between justice and mercy. If you won't accept God's mercy, which separates you from your sin, then you must accept His justice which will deal with you and your sin in one go.

The second week, we learned about Nebuchadnezzar...the dude who just needed a good whoopin'. When confronted with God, he recognized the threat, puffed up with pride again, then was finally brought around after a significant reckoning. He became an illustration of God's sovereignty.

Last week, we studied the thief on the cross...the man who caught grace's attention. When confronted with God while looking at his whole life, he humbled himself without hope, and just asked to be remembered. He became an illustration of God's generous heart, where grace is offered, not earned.

This week, our 'villain' illustrates the pride of Pharaoh, the shocking humbling of Nebuchadnezzar, and the fact that grace is offered, not earned. But this time...we get to see what happens when you have all 3, **plus** the opportunity to obey. The full 'About Face.'

Stephen: Who Saul was...

The backstory: Christianity was new. Stephen was preaching it. The Pharisees didn't like it and made an example of Stephen. Claiming blasphemy, they brought him to the Sanhedrin for trial.

Stephen's defense: Stephen recites the entire Biblical story from Abraham, to Isaac, to Joseph, to Moses, to Exodus. He then digresses because after that, the ancestors of the Sanhedrin began persecuting all of God's prophets while telling the Kings, "of course the laws of God are only suggestions." He then calls the Sanhedrin on this hypocrisy.

Read Acts 7:51-60. Saul's background...He studied under Rabbi Gamaliel and was a highly respected doctor of theology who specialized in theology, torah interpretation, and linguistics. Saul was familiar with Roman and Greek general knowledge and arts. He was a Roman citizen, and loved to flash his ID. This dude was smart, and if he holds the coats at a stoning, it's because the executioners respect him.

The Road: What happened to Paul...

Read Acts 9:1-19. Paul hangs out with Damascus disciples for a few days after his conversion. He wastes no time and immediately goes to synagogues and picks fights. The Pharisees plot to kill him so he escapes and goes to Jerusalem. The disciples in Jerusalem won't see him because they believe it is a trap!

Paul then hides in Arabia for 3 years spending time with God. He was also probably thinking about Stephen....can't help but think that Paul's willingness to be persecuted came from a place of guilt. Like, "I did it to them. Now I'll take the hit for them."

Scoreboard: Paul's reaction to God. The Road to Rome...

What does it look like when someone surrenders the first time? See the 'mission brief' at the end of the document for a summary of Paul's accomplishments for Christ.

How did he do all of this? Read Acts 23:11. God told Paul he was going to Rome. Which meant he would make it to Rome and, between here and there, he was basically untouchable. When Jesus guarantees you, go with gusto!

How Paul viewed his Conversion...

Read Galatians 1:13-18. Paul's perspective was that God planned this. God knew his heart. He was zealous and proud, but also interested in doing God's will. This zealotry went with Paul into his missionary journeys because he was willing to accept correction, not being totally proud of himself, but zealous for God. Paul was originally mistaken and hateful, but He was genuinely worried about God's opinion...thus Paul turned where Pharaoh would not.

Read Philippians 3:4-11. Paul looked at all the pride, status, and privilege he had had as a persecutor as rubbish compared to actually knowing his God. Paul establishes here that the previous life was all a waste. Wasted time. Paul believes it's better to suffer in righteousness than to flourish in ignorance. Suffering with Jesus is better than enjoying the world.

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16. Message received. "If he can forgive me, he can forgive anyone." "Why not choose mercy and become a new creation rather than hate the old you to no avail?"

How Paul viewed himself...

Paul was honored among men, when he was against God. He was better than all his contemporaries, when he was a sinner. Of the flesh, Paul said he had reason to brag.

However, once he was redeemed: He saw himself as...the chief of sinners, a former Blasphemer (big deal for a Pharisee to call themselves that), a former violent aggressor, a former opposition of the truth, Stephen's murderer, and blessed to suffer. Paul was an equal to all the brethren and not to be preferred over other teachers (see letters concerning people choosing teachers in the early church).

When Paul was against God, he saw himself as a mighty man who **had it made**. When Paul walked with God, he saw himself as an unworthy servant who **had it right**. The later status brought him the most joy.

Compare to Pharaoh...

Pharaoh was confronted 10 times vs. Paul was confronted once. Pharaoh hardened his own heart vs. Paul, where God knew that his heart would be receptive the first time. Pharaoh was

refusing a simple request vs. Paul was being asked to lay his life down. Pharaoh was unwilling to change his view and accept reality vs. Paul who immediately went to a synagogue to correct them after adjusting his own reality. Both Pharaoh and Paul were confronted by God. One (Pharaoh) burned his father's kingdom for the sake of his own pride while the other (Paul) burned his pride for the sake of his Father's kingdom.

What did we learn from Paul...

Paul was imprisoned in Rome for 2 years where he would work with house churches. Rome persecuted Christians terribly but 300 years later Christianity became Rome's official religion. Historically, the first modern missions to Europe came from the remnants of this Christian Roman Empire.

Jewish Christians spread the Way to North Africa. It's not inaccurate to say that a large majority of the Northern Hemisphere, and us, know about Jesus thanks to Paul softening his own heart the first time. The message of the savior reaches half the earth because a few people, including Paul, softened their heart and doomed their own pride.

And Jesus knew he would. Just like Jesus knows your response to my next question. When God reaches out to you, what state will He find your heart in? What attitude will you have toward Him? Will you regard Him as a staple of your life that you turn a blind eye to because you are used to hearing about Him? Will you regard Him as an inconvenience because He will have you stop that sin you like? Will you regard Him in fear because you think, "I'm too sinful and too dirty for Him to use me or even to talk to me"?

He needs to find your heart willing. You can be afraid and be willing. You can be angry and be willing. You could even be ambivalent and still be willing. All because you are committed to the mission and not just your feelings.

If anyone can say he 'doesn't feel like it today' it would be Paul...especially on the days he was chained to a wall, was beaten, or had a viper hanging from his hand because he decided to build a fire for others. But instead, God found his heart willing...despite his circumstances.

Reflection Questions:

- When God reaches out to you, what state will He find your heart in?
- What if the thing God wants to redeem you is the very thing you thought disqualified you? How can you use past experiences or even failures to minister to and help others?
- How willing are you to serve God...despite your circumstances?



SPECIAL OPERATIONS
FAITH DIVISION
INTEL / MISSION BRIEF
FIELD REPORT

MISSION BRIEF

SUBJECT: THE APOSTLE PAUL

CONVERT / PLANT / BUILD / ENDURE

FILE: PAUL-01
CLASS: LEGENDARY
STATUS: COMPLETED
IMPACT: ETERNAL



*"The
power of God
for salvation
to everyone
who believes..."*
Romans 1:16



1. CHURCH PLANTER

- Started 14 churches at 30 to 60 members a piece.
- Grew into multiple thousands worshipping underground.
- Including a massive Church in Ephesus under Paul's mentee Timothy.



SMALL BEGINNINGS



UNDERGROUND GROWTH



THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS



2. MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

- 3 main missionary journeys.
- Totaling 15,000 miles.
- 8,000 of those were, for certain, on foot.



3. SURVIVED 6 ASSASSINATION PLOTS

- 6 actual attempts on his life.
- One attempt succeeded – they stoned him. He then gets up and walks 30 miles.
- Lystra to Derbe.



STONED.
GETS UP.
WALKS 30 MILES.
THAT'S NOT LUCK.
THAT'S PURPOSE.

THE MISSION

What does it look like when someone surrenders the first time...

It looks like a man who goes from hunting Christians to becoming the greatest missionary in history. Saul of Tarsus met Jesus on the road to Damascus, surrendered, and never looked back. His life became a living example of what happens when you give up your agenda and take up His.

ONE CONVERSION. A LIFETIME OF IMPACT.



4. IMPRISONED 4 TIMES

- 4 times, with the last one being his execution.



5. INFLUENCED THE ROMAN MILITARY

- Converted an unknown number of Roman soldiers.
- A chunk of the Praetorian Guard favored him.
- The most elite soldiers in Rome had a number of conversions.
- Paul spent a huge amount of time under Roman Guard, and they always wind up respecting him.



THE MOST
ELITE SOLDIERS
IN ROME...
RESPECTED
HIM.



6. CONVERTED THE ENTIRE ISLAND OF MALTA

- That is still 80% Christian today, which they attribute to Paul.
- They have bouncy houses where it is believed that Paul shipwrecked.



7. SHIPWRECKED 4 TIMES

- When God says pull over, you pull over.



8. BIT BY A VIPER

- Didn't die.



9. 6 MIRACLES (KNOWN)

- Including healing the dad of the chief of Malta.
- More are implied.



SOME MEN GIVE THEIR LIVES FOR A MISSION. PAUL GAVE HIS LIFE FOR THE MISSION.