The Transformed Life (Part 2)

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[0:00] If you have your Bible, turn to Acts chapter 9, where we were last week.

We went through verses 1-5, and tonight we will cover verses 6-17. Again, if you recall, here we are seeing, we're going through the conversion of Saul, who became the Apostle Paul, a man who hated the church and whose life was dedicated to putting an end to the church.
And then as he's going to Damascus to do this very thing, to find Christians there, to arrest them, to drag them back to Jerusalem, where they'll undergo trial and potentially execution, Jesus, the resurrected Jesus Christ, stops him in his path, literally stops him in his path, and calls out to him and asks him, why are you persecuting me?
And so in this moment, Saul meets Jesus, and through this meeting with Jesus, he is saved. And so we'll recap a little bit as we go along over where we've been before we moved on with this Bible study about the transformed life.
Many of you have probably heard of Augustine, Saint Augustine of Hippo. He was a young man whose life was characterized by loose living as he searched for answers to find life's basic meaning.
[1:44] And so he would pursue all different kinds of things that people still pursue today in order to find happiness, in order to find purpose for his life.

And so as part of that, you know, he partied a lot and did a lot of those things. He also followed various philosophers and their philosophies. But the more he did so, the more he pursued these things, the more disillusioned he was with that lifestyle and even with the teachings that he was following.
And so for nine years, he associated himself with the Manichaean sect of philosophy. But he gradually became aware that Manichaeanism was unable to, again, provide the satisfactory answers that he was looking for about meaning and purpose in life.
At this time, Augustine was a teacher. He's a very brilliant man. He was a teacher of rhetoric in Milan. And there he went to listen to a very well-known preacher at the time whose name was Ambrose, who was St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan.
And again, at first he went there because he's a teacher in rhetoric. And so he heard that Ambrose was a very gifted speaker. And so he went there to listen and to learn and to view Ambrose's style of speaking for himself.
[3:14] But while he was there, he was listening to this great and powerful preaching. And so then a seed began to be planted in the life of Augustine as he was beginning to at least mentally understand more about what Christians believe and what the Bible has to say.

And then sometime in the year 386 A.D., Augustine and his friend were spending time in Milan. And while they were outdoors, many of you have probably heard this story, Augustine heard the voice of children and they were singing a song.
And the words that they were singing in English, it was pick up and read. And so he kept hearing them singing the song, pick up and read, pick up and read. And he thought at first that they were just singing a song that related to some kind of game that they were probably playing.
But the more he thought about it, the more he realized, I've never heard a song like this. And I don't remember a game ever being played like this. Then he realized that this song might be a command from God to him to open up his word and to read the scriptures.
And so as he was walking, he came across a Bible and he picked it up and he opened it and he read it. And the first passage he saw was the letter of Paul, again, who was Saul, who was saved, as we're talking about.

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[4:39] And he read in Romans. And there he read Romans 13, 13 through 14. And so this is what he heard.

And then reading that scripture, Augustine said that he felt in that moment as if his heart was suddenly flooded and filled with light. And he turned totally from his life of sin.
Now, soon he was baptized by Ambrose, whom he had gone to hear preaching. And that happened on April 24th in the year 387. And his friend as well, who was with him, was saved also and was baptized alongside of him.
Later reflecting on this experience, Augustine wrote his famous prayer. He said, Have you ever experienced that?
And I'm certain you've seen others. Our hearts are restless until they rest in you. And then from there, he went on to become one of the great teachers and theologians in the church and had an influence that continues to have an impact on the church today.
[6:02] Obviously, here we are all these years later. And we're still talking about Augustine, this man, his dramatic conversion, and then the impact that his life had on the church then that, again, continues to reverberate into our times today.

Anyway, Paul, who's, so let me, another story. Just thinking about this conversion, I mean, we, and I talked about last week about John Newton and Mel Trotter and some others, these dramatic conversions.
And it's not like that for everybody. Every conversion is a miracle. Every person's salvation is something to be celebrated and is special. Well, I remember one occasion where there was a guy whose grandmother was going to the church that I had been going to.
And about this time, I was in college and I was helping out with our youth group. And he started coming and helping, too. Well, I hadn't met him before. And so I got to hear about his testimony, how he, very much like Augustine and much like many of the rest of us, he kind of went of his own way, lived his own life, did his own thing, living loosely, living recklessly, living sinfully.
And his grandmother prayed for him consistently for years and years. And his grandmother was a part of a Bible study with other grandmothers.
[7:28] And they prayed with her for his salvation for years and years. And so he told me that when he was saved, the first time that he walked into our church, automatically he was swarmed by a bunch of grandmas who were hugging him and holding him and crying on his shoulder.

And he thought that, you know, it was both strange and wonderful that all these people whom he had no idea who they were, they knew who he was. They had been praying for his salvation and they were realizing him coming into the church in answer to their prayers.
And so, like God has always been, he continues to be today in the business of saving sinners, in the business of bringing those who are spiritually dead to spiritual life.
And we, as his church, as his followers, we continue to go about that rescue mission, go to the unbeliever, go into the world, and to share the good news of Jesus Christ to make disciples.
God is continually in that business. And so as we go through and we continue to talk about Saul's conversion, we need to remember that God saves people, that God saves sinners.
[8:43] And he's not done doing that. And so we've got to continue to be serious about the mission and the calling that he's given us to go and make disciples. Again, no matter how far gone they may seem to be in our minds, as we can see through the example of Saul, and as we can look at the example of St. Augustine and so many others, no one is ever too far gone for God to save them.

And so we can't ever have it in our mind that, you know what, Christianity is just not for that guy or for that girl, right? We can't ever think that way. We've got to continue to go and continue to share and be used by the Lord to share the good news of Jesus Christ, knowing ultimately that it's the Spirit's work to save that person.
We've been looking again at the conversion of Paul, and we'll continue to do that tonight as we look at the marks of a transformed life. And so the main idea from last week is still the main idea for this week, which is that Saul's conversion, Saul's conversion reveals several features of the transformed life.
Anyone who is genuinely saved today will exhibit the same features. So we're looking at Saul's conversion and the features surrounding it that give evidence to the fact that this person truly has been saved.

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And anyone who's truly been saved ought to be able to look at Saul's conversion and see a parallel between his and their own. And so we saw last week that the first feature of genuine salvation is faith in Jesus.
[10:23] Not faith in faith or faith in yourself or faith in anyone else but Jesus. It's only Jesus. It's Jesus that I am the way, the truth, and the life. So faith in Jesus is critical to salvation, right?

Absolutely critical. You're not saved if you don't have faith in Jesus. And so along with that we saw that genuine saving faith is initiated by God, that it's God who makes the first contact.
And our going and our sharing the gospel, that's God using us to make that first contact. Also that genuine saving faith involves conviction. When you realize the truth of the gospel, that Jesus has come, that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, the natural or the reaction to that, if you're truly saved, is that you're going to be convicted.
You realize that you're a sinner. You realize that God is holy. You realize that it was your sin that Jesus died for. And so you will be convicted when you're saved. And then following that we saw that genuine saving faith results in true conversion.
And so Saul was on his way to persecute the church. Jesus made the first contact with him. Jesus told him that he was persecuting his church. Saul was convicted of that.
[11:38] And we see that, and we'll continue to see that Saul, as a result of that meeting, was saved. That he did come to faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and as his Savior. So now that Paul has been saved, we see from the following verses evidence that his salvation is genuine and his transformation has both taken place and is also underway.

He's saved and he's also undergoing now, from this moment onward, the process of sanctification, of being made more like Christ, just like we go through that same process.
And if you're here on Sunday or if you watch it online, we'll be talking more about that very same thing. When a person is saved, we need to understand that they are totally saved by God.
The moment of their salvation, the moment of their conversion. There is nothing left for that person to do. There's no list then that we say, okay, you say you're saved.
Now, you know, here's a list. Go out and do these works and you'll guarantee your salvation. The Bible speaks nothing to that.
[12:52] It says the opposite as a matter of fact. Those who are spiritually dead at the moment of salvation, they are spiritually resurrected. They become a new creation. They are transformed.

If they're saved one moment and then in the very next moment and the very next breath, they die, they are saved. And they will go to heaven because there is nothing left for them to do because Jesus Christ has done it all.
Though that's true, the Bible talks about our progressive sanctification. And if you know many of you men have been in men's night when we could have it before all this was going on.
And Paul, this is a problem because I called one of our elders Jesus on Sunday by accident. And now I'm confusing Tom with Paul, which that's got to be a compliment though, right?
Yeah, maybe to Tom. We can't speak for Paul. Boy. Boy. Boy. The word translated sanctification in most Bible means separation.
[14:03] In case you were wondering, it was Lee who I mistook for Jesus. So we got a, I got an issue here. But I guess that means, you know, I think highly of some, at least some of our elders.

Yeah, that's a compliment. And I still got disciples and apostles that I haven't used yet. So for the rest of you elders, I mean, eventually it's coming. And I don't know which one it's going to be.
Yeah. Hopefully not one of you isn't Judas. You know, that would be, that would be really bad.
Okay. So sanctification. Back to this.
Sanctification means separation. It's used in the New Testament. It's used in the New Testament according to Vine's expository dictionary of the New Testament words. It's described as the separation of the believer from evil.
And it is the result of obedience to the word of God. Progressive sanctification is what gradually separates the people of God from the world.
[15:03] And it makes us more like Jesus Christ. And so from the moment of salvation to today, looking around, it seems like for many of you, that moment of salvation, there's been some years since that.

So you ought to be able to look back like I can and see that you have become more like Christ. So it seems like we're more aware in the moment always of how sinful we are.

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And I totally understand that. If you stop and you think about the fact that, yeah, my desires have changed since that day. And my faith has grown. And that's because you have been, God has made you through the power of the Holy Spirit more like Christ each and every day until that day comes when you will go and be with him.
And you'll be glorified, which we'll talk about on Sunday. Today, sanctification differs from justification in several ways. Justification is a one-time work of God resulting in a declaration of your not being guilty before him because, again, not of what you've done, but because of what Jesus Christ has done for you on the cross.
And so when you're saved at conversion, you're justified in that moment forever. However, sanctification is a process beginning, again, with justification and continuing throughout the believer's life.
[16:27] Justification is the starting point, the starting line that represents the Christian life. And then sanctification is the rest of that line, all the way until the Lord returns, all the way until we go and be with the Lord.

In sanctification, the Bible talks about it as taking place in three stages. Past, present, and future. The first stage occurs at the beginning of our Christian lives, as we've been talking about.
It's an initial moral change, a break from the power of the love to sin. It's the point at which believers can count themselves dead to sin, but now alive to God.
Once sanctification has begun, we are no longer under sin's dominion, according to Romans 6.14. And there is, with that, a reorientation of our desires.
And we develop an increasing love for the things of God, an increasing desire to be righteous, to be obedient to him. No longer slaves to sin. Now, as Paul says in Romans 6.17-18, we are slaves to righteousness.
[17:36] The second stage of sanctification requires a lifetime to complete. As we grow in grace, we are gradually, but steadily, even though it might seem like slower than we would like it to be at times, we are gradually and steadily being made more like Jesus Christ.

This occurs in a process of daily spiritual renewal. The apostle Paul himself was being sanctified even as he was ministering to others.
Paul claimed that he had not yet reached perfection in Philippians 3.12, but that he still pressed on towards that. He pressed on to attain everything that Christ desired for him in his life.
The third and final stage of sanctification occurs in the future, when believers die and their spirits go to be with Christ.
Since nothing unclean can enter heaven, as we see from God's word, we must be made perfect at that point. The sanctification of the whole person will take place, body, soul, and spirit.
[18:44] We will finally be complete when the Lord returns and when we receive those glorified bodies. And again, this is exactly what we'll be talking about this Sunday.

God's work in sanctification involves all three members of the Trinity. God the Father is constantly at work in his children. Philippians 2.13, to will and to work for his good pleasure.
Again, he changes our desires. He makes us want to please him as we understand how bad sin is and how much we don't want sin to be a part of our life because we know that Christ died for our sin because we know that sin has a way of separating us from the fellowship that we have with one another.
And even though we can't ever have that fellowship with God severed when we sin, you know, sometimes when you've committed some sins and you're like, I, you know, I don't feel like praying. I don't feel like reading the Bible. I mean, sin hurts the people that God loves. And so we understand that as a part of our being saved, as a part of our going through the process of sanctification.
[19:51] We want less to do with it because we know how harmful it is in our lives. Jesus earned our sanctification on the cross and in essence has become our sanctification according to 1 Corinthians 1.30.

And he is also the perfecter of our faith. Hebrews 12.2. The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of our sanctification and he is the one who produces in us the fruit of sanctification.
So again, you ought to be able to look back, see that you've been growing and being made more like Christ and you ought to be able to see that your life more characterizes the fruits of the Spirit as well.

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Our role in sanctification is both passive and active. Passively, we are to trust God to sanctify us, presenting our bodies to God and yielding also to his Spirit.
1 Thessalonians 4.3 says, It is God's will that you should be sanctified and God will have his way. And I take courage in knowing that, that God will have his way, that he who began a good work in you will complete it.
[20:58] He will complete it. Actively, we are responsible to choose to do what is right. Again, 1 Thessalonians 4.4 says, Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.

So this involves then our putting to death the misdeeds of the body, putting to death the old man, the old flesh, and instead striving for holiness, which means fleeing from immorality, cleansing ourselves from every defilement, and making every effort to supplement our faith.
Both the passive role and the active role are healthy for a Christian life. To emphasize, the passive role tends to lead us into spiritual laziness and neglect of the spiritual disciplines.
The end result of this course of action is a lack of spiritual maturity. And I wonder if for many people in our country, that's exactly what we're seeing, too passive in our pursuit of righteousness.
To emphasize the active role, however, can lead to the opposite extreme, where we become legalistic, we become prideful, we become self-righteous. And the end of that is joylessness as we are attempting to live the Christian life.
[22:31] So we must remember that we pursue holiness, but only God empowers us to do so. The end result is a consistent, mature Christian life, which reflects the nature of our holy God.

John makes it clear that we will never be totally free from sin in this life. And he talks about that in 1 John 1, verses 8 through 10. But thankfully, again, as I've already mentioned, the work of God has begun in us, began in us in salvation, and he will continue it out.
He will bring it to its finish, to its completion. And so as we examine Paul's life, that is exactly what we are seeing taking place.
And as believers, we should be able, again, to look at Saul's conversion and think about these things, and we ought to be able to see the same thing having taken place in our life and continuing to take place in our life today.
We should be able, again, to look back from the moment of our conversion and see that since that time, we have continued to grow and to mature as the Lord is making us more like his son, Jesus Christ.
[23:48] We see that Paul's transformation is genuine because after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, all of a sudden, instantly, his will and his desires are changed, completely and totally changed.

He went there to persecute the church, and he went there obeying his own will. This is what he wanted to do. I'm going to go. I'm going to persecute these Christians.
I'm going to make myself a name for myself as a Pharisee, and I'm going to continue to ascend right up the chain, and I'm going to be a great Pharisee.
That was his plan. That was his desire. That was his will heading to Damascus. But then in verses 6 through 8, we see that he begins to follow and obey a different will, that being the will of Jesus.
Let's read verses 6 through 9, Acts chapter 9. So again, Jesus has encountered Saul. Saul's seen this light.
[24:55] He's heard this voice. He's down in the dirt. He realizes that he's having a supernatural encounter. He asks, Who is this that I'm speaking to? And Jesus tells him very plainly, It's me, Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

And then Jesus says, But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do. The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.
Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
So here we see that as a result of Saul's conversion, he's got a new will and a new set of desires. And here he was going to persecute Christians, to put an end to Christianity in Damascus.
And now he's obeying what the Lord has told him to do, to arise and to go into Damascus. Again, he planned to enter that city in a very different way. Instead of barging in as a conquering hero, as a religious zealot, he entered instead helplessly and humbly, as he's without sight, and he has to be

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guided into the city.
[26:16] He was blind. So again, we are called to go and make disciples by the Lord. We are called to baptize them, but we're also to remember that we're called to teach them.

And so we can't forget that, as we'll see, that the church's mission is not just to go and to share the gospel, but to also then, having done that, take converts by the hand and lead them in helping them grow as a Christian and teaching them about God's word and praying for them and praying with them.
And so not only do we make disciples, but we continue to disciple the disciples that we've made, as we see is the case, is going to be the case with Saul.
So here again, we have to understand that Saul has been crushed. His old self, his old desires, his old plans, everything that he thought was important about his life, the purpose that he thought he had for his life, everything was obliterated the moment that he met Jesus.
And again, the Lord would transform Saul's life, and from the ashes of that old life, of his old self, he would have him rise and become one of the noblest and most useful servants of God that the world has ever known.
[27:44] So while the first feature of the transformed life is faith in Jesus, now we'll see that the second feature of genuine salvation is fervency in prayer. So on your next handout, or in your next space in your handout, the second feature of genuine salvation is fervency in prayer.

And this comes from verses 10 through 12. Let's read those. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias, and he said, Here I am, Lord.
And the Lord said to him, Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen a vision, a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.
So what was Saul doing? While he was blind, while his life had been shattered, at least as he knew it, what do we see him doing? Well, he was praying.
He was waiting, and he was praying. And while he was waiting and praying, God was dealing with another man. This is not the same Ananias that was mentioned in Acts chapter 5, that Ananias was dead.
[29:09] This Ananias was likely one of the leaders of the church in Damascus at that time, and that being the case, he would have been one of Saul's primary targets.

So maybe Saul had done his recruiting of the churches there. He had done his work.
He had had maybe some field operatives, and they've told him, okay, these are the guys that you need to look for. These are the leaders. These are the ones that we've got to get. These are our primary targets. So it's very likely that Ananias was at the top of Saul's hit list as he was heading into Damascus.
So God tells him to go and to see the man who had come there to arrest him and drag him back to Jerusalem where, again, chances are, he would be executed.
And so here we've got to understand that this is a severe test of Ananias' faith. And so try to put yourself in Ananias' shoes.
[30:24] And God tells you that this great enemy of yours who is coming to arrest you and drag you away from your family, maybe drag your family away too, imprison you and kill you, well, I want you to go talk to him.

And you'd probably have some questions, wouldn't you? God tells him to go and to see him. In verse 11, we are told that over the course of three days, again, Saul, after having encountered Jesus and being transformed by that meeting, that he was praying.
He was fervently praying. And so when people are saved, what happens is they pray. That should be a mark of genuine salvation, of genuine transformation.
When we are saved, we should want to have communion and fellowship with the Lord who saved us, right?
Having understand what Jesus did for us that compels us. We have the need. We want to pray. We want to be in communion and in fellowship with the God who saved us.
[31:33] And not only that, I think, but also with his people, with his church. And so Saul felt compelled to pray. And he prayed unceasingly during that time as he waited for Ananias to come and see him.

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But again, while Saul waited, Ananias would be challenged to reciprocate the grace that he had received from God in salvation.
And so by going to the chief persecutor of the church, he would be showing grace to this man just as God had showed grace to him.
Here again, we see the loving kindness of God to answer in reply to the sorrowful prayers of Saul. God gave Saul hope through that vision that he would send somebody to him.
And so God would bring these two men together in a way that neither of them had ever envisioned taking place before.
[32:41] Ananias also displayed fervency in prayer when he double-checked with God to make sure that this truly was what God wanted him to do.

And so next we see the third feature of genuine salvation is faithfulness in service. Faithfulness in service.
As already has been mentioned, God's directing Ananias to visit Saul served as a severe test of his faith.
Again, he understood who Saul was. He understood what Saul had come to do, what he had already done. And so in his mind, you've got to think that at the very least, he's thinking that, okay, I go there and it's like I'm sealing my own death sentence.
This guy hates me. This guy wants me dead. And I'm going to deliver myself right into his hands. And so understandably, I think if we're honest, you and I would do the same.
[33:45] Ananias has a little bit of a question when he responds back to God in verses 13 and 14. Lord, he says, I have heard many and much about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.

And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name. And so by this point, word of what Saul had done and what Saul was doing had reached Damascus before Saul could get there.
So Ananias was fully aware of who Saul was and what Saul was coming to do. So in effect, what he's saying is, you know, God, just in case you don't know, let me tell you a little bit more about this man, just so that we're talking about the same person.
We're talking about the same Saul. This is the Saul. If you hadn't heard, he's trying to kill your church. Are you sure that this is what you want me to do?
Because again, in his mind, his life is at stake and so was his ministry and so was the church that he loved. And so again, he's making sure, double-checking that God was aware of what it was that he was asking him and what the possible outcome could be of his going to see Saul.
[35:11] But, as is often the case, whenever we protest to whatever God asks us to do, the judge of the universe always reserves the right to overrule us at any point.

And so he overrules Ananias here in verse 15. He says to him again, go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.
So here a point of application for us to understand is that the call to ministry, and all Christians are called to ministry, by the way. We're all called to serve in the church, to put our spiritual gifts to use, not for our benefit, but for the benefit of one another.
The Great Commission is a great commission for every believer. We're all called to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ. So we've got to understand here, from Ananias' example, that our call to ministry is not based upon our desires or our whims or what we would like to do or what we think we should do or what we think that God should send us.
No, it's up to God and his sovereign choice. And when he says go, our answer is go. And if we drag our feet or wait, God has a way of forcing us out the door, doesn't he?
[36:35] And so it's just always better to say, okay, I will go. And so Ananias does that. And we've really got to give him some credit here because, you know, we can try to put ourselves in his position, in his shoes, but how terrifying it must have been for him, even though God had told him and he had the faith to trust and to go as he got nearer and nearer to that place.

You know, kind of looking, is this a trap? Am I going to be ambushed? Maybe not. Maybe his faith was so strong that he was going to go in there and he knew that everything would be well.
In Galatians 1.1, Saul, also known as Paul, described himself. He said, Paul, an apostle, not for men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

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And God would have Paul fulfill everything that he told Ananias that he would. Everything that God said to Ananias, he'll be my chosen instrument, he's going to go, he's going to do this, and he's going to suffer as he does it.
Everything came true as Paul proceeded from Damascus to go on to become, again, a great leader in the church. Again, he became primarily a minister to the Gentiles and as he did that, that brought much suffering to his life.
[37:57] In verse 16, God says to Ananias about Saul who would become Paul, for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

And Paul detailed his sufferings in multiple places in Scripture. And so I want to stop and just look at what his ministry entailed.
First, in 1 Corinthians 4, 9-13. 1 Corinthians, if you want to follow along with me, 1 Corinthians 4, 9-13.
For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all. Again, this is Paul writing.
Like men sentenced to death because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ.
[38:54] We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we are in disrepute. To the present hour, we hunger and thirst. We are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless.

And we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure. When slandered, we entreat. We have become and are still like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.
In 2 Corinthians 11, he shared more about these sufferings. 2 Corinthians 11, verse 23, through 29. Are they servants of Christ? He asks. I am a better one. Am I talking like a madman with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death, again describing the sufferings that he endured while going and sharing the gospel?
Five times, he says, I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes, less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked.
[40:17] A night and a day, I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me for my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall? And I am not indignant.
And then again, 2 Corinthians 12, we move on to chapter 12, beginning in verse 7 through 10. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.
Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it would leave me. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
For the sake of Christ then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. And then ultimately, those sufferings would culminate in Paul's execution and Paul's being martyred for his work in the ministry.
[41:56] And according to church tradition, Paul was arrested and again, he was subjected to a harsh imprisonment. He was condemned by Emperor Nero and he was beheaded with the sword at the third millstone on the Ostian way in AD 67.

And so when we think about these things, I think of a couple things. One, we don't know anything like the persecution that Paul endured and many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are enduring in the world still today.
And so we've got to be careful when we talk about whatever persecution we might be facing. Not to say that we should make light of it, but he endured severe persecution and it's happening in the world today.
So one, you know, how often do we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are experiencing these very same sufferings today? How much do we truly care? How much are we really involved in helping them and praying for them?

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And secondly, what does this have to say about the health and wealth gospel? This is Paul. This is an incredible man of God, an incredible servant of the Lord.
[43:08] And he endured all of these sufferings that have been mentioned as a result of his being obedient to God's will and going where God had called him to go.

And often that meant that he was, like you said, imprisoned, beaten, left for dead, but still he continued on. Why? Because he'd seen Jesus Christ. He'd been saved by Jesus Christ.
He knew that this was what God wanted him to do. He knew that this world wasn't his home. He knew that to live is Christ, but to die is gain. And so you listen to sermons, you listen to health and wealth preachers, and they all talk about, you know, trying to create heaven on earth for you today. And if you look at Paul, Paul would have nothing to do with a gospel like that. And so we shouldn't have anything to do with it either today. It's not the gospel. It's a false gospel that we need to confront and we need to point people back to the word of God and this is what the word of God says and have nothing to do with it.
However, despite all of his sufferings as our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering like that today and even as we endure persecution in our country for what we believe, we see that for Paul to be persecuted was a time of joy for him.
[44:30] He felt joy when he was persecuted. Why? Because he was so closely linked with his Savior who was crucified, right? Who was persecuted as well.

And so he was so thankful to be so closely associated with Jesus Christ that when he was persecuted, he realized they're doing to me what they've done to Jesus.
They're doing this to me because I'm speaking the truth and they see Christ in me and that was reason for him to have joy and should be for us as well still today.
Because again, he knew whatever he suffered and whatever he endured that none of it was in vain. He knew that God was in control, that God knew what he was doing, that God was sending him where he wanted him to go and as a result of this man's ministry, I mean, man, God has extremely blessed it, right?
Here we are on the other side of the world, the gospel has reached us and it continues to go and it continues to spread to this day and we can trace a lot of it back to this man who was obedient to follow God's will for his life.
[45:38] So now strengthened by the confirmation from the Lord that he in fact wanted Ananias to go to Saul and overcoming the fears or whatever fears or concerns that he may have had in verse 17, it says that Ananias departed, he entered the house where Saul was and laying his hands on him, he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

So the stories of both Ananias and Saul illustrate the truth that a transformed life demands service to Jesus Christ.
Ananias was willing to go to him and we'll continue to see, there's several features here, these are only three, so several is more than a few, so we'll be back here next week and we'll pick up where we left off, but before we do that, there are three applications here that I think it's important for us to take from this text and to prayerfully apply to our lives.
The first is that those who are truly saved desire fellowship with God. Paul was truly saved and as a result of his salvation and encounter with Jesus, he prayed fervently during that time until Ananias came back and he continued to pray fervently throughout the rest of his ministry and that shouldn't be any different with us because as believers who have truly been saved, we desire that fellowship with God.
and so, I don't know where we're at at time, but you know, anyhow, there is one thing I want to say about this because of all this, what we're going through right now as a church with COVID and we've had to close, though we've never been closed, you know what I'm saying, we've social distanced and we've, you know, done a lot of our services online and now we're reopening and allowing people to come back, which is great, but during, before this, you know, in conversations with some pastors, I'll let you know that a lot of pastors have been and I think still are concerned about people coming back to church because we know, what, it takes like eight weeks for somebody, for a human being to develop a habit and so, you know, the concern is that some of our members will have developed the habit of not going to church on Sunday and so, some real concern about, well, will they come back?

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[48:07] But my thought has always been that, yes, the people of God, if they're truly saved, they desire that fellowship and that communion with God, they desire to have that day where they can come and gather with other believers and worship God.

It's just not the same online, it just isn't and we're thankful for the ability to do that for right now but, you know, hopefully as, as, as this thing goes away and we're hoping and praying that that's the case and I believe more and more believers will come back to the church because it's so important. We're thankful for the technology that we have to be able to continue to communicate and to worship in spirit but we desire that, that physical gathering of being together and so I think God's people will always gather together.

Second, those who are truly saved desire to obey God's will. His will as a result of our being transformed becomes our will and so as we are progressively being sanctified, what we should see taking place is less and less are we trying to bend God towards our will and more and more we are seeking to be obedient and wanting to know what God's will is for us.

Lord, what would you have me do? Lord, what would you have me, where would you have me go? I remember some of my first prayers as a child after I was saved and was baptized was, you know, Lord, I'm really looking for this toy and they haven't had it at the store and, you know, please, just this one time let it be there, right?

[49:50] Would you just do my will? I really want this toy and so hopefully, I don't pray that way anymore. You should be encouraged by that, I hope, but, you know, and you've probably been, you've probably been the same way too.

The more and more as you've grown in your sanctification, the more you realize your prayers have changed. You don't pray about the same things. You're not praying for worldly things trying to create heaven on earth for you.

You just want to be used by the Lord to do whatever he's called you to do and though we continue to wrestle with the flesh, we continue to wrestle with sin, we do have this desire and I think that that wrestling and that fight gives evidence that you are saved because you realize I want to be obedient and that is my desire to obey God's will and then third, when Christians follow God's will, the results are astounding.

The results are astounding. Again, Ananias on that day kind of wonder what he was doing, what his plans were for that day and all of a sudden he's praying and God says, I want you to go talk to Saul. That Saul? Yeah, that Saul and even though God told him, you know, go, it's going to be okay, I'm sure he was astounded by what Saul who became Paul eventually did in the church and the ways that God used his life and so, you've heard me say it before and it's not unique with me, I've heard other pastors say it, that when it comes to God, you just put your yes on the table, you say, Lord, I'm willing, Lord, I'll do what you've called and ask me whatever you call and ask me to do and don't be surprised when, you know, there it is and it's time for you to put your yes on the table and you follow through with whatever the Lord has asked you to do and I think our promise from scripture, what we've seen is that when you do that, you may have no idea what God's going to do but the results will astound you and they will astound the church and ultimately they will give glory and honor to our Lord.

[51:52] God bless you.

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