

## SUNDAY 10 OCTOBER 10 2021

### Paul – Who are you Lord?

Jesus spoke to many people during His earthly life and it changed so many people's lives. We don't know if Jesus spoke to Paul during his earthly life, but Jesus's conversation with Paul takes place from heaven, and it had so great an impact on Paul that, besides Jesus, he was the man who had the greatest impact on the Christian life and church. He walked thousands of kilometers by foot, making an impact all over Europe and Turkey, planting churches. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament, possibly 14, there is no certainty as to whether he also wrote the book of Hebrews. His work is also thoroughly described by Luke in Acts. Come and read his story.

#### **Acts 9:1-6**

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 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. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.*

We'll read more about the story later. But first we need to know who Saul/Paul was? Just something about the name. The Bible says in Acts 13:9:

#### **Acts 13:9**

*Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him*

Everyone who lived that time would understand this. Saul is his Hebrew name, and means:

*asked for, prayed for*

The first king of Israel was Saul. Paul or Paul is a Greek name, meaning:

**Small/short**

It is possible that Paul did not want to work with a Hebrew name under the Greek and Romans, or that it was his nickname. Outside biblical sources say that Paul was short, red-faced and bald, with red hair.

### **Who was Paul?**

He was a Roman citizen who was born as a Jew in Tarsus, today southern Turkey.

#### **Acts 22:3**

*I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.*

The city of Tarsus still exists today, and today has a population of nearly 350,000 people. I've had the privilege of driving through city quite a few times, it's just a dirty city.

So what we hear that even though he was born in Tarsus, who gave him Roman citizenship, he grew up in Jerusalem. Gamaliel was the guy you would like to have your child to learn about the laws of God. He was a senior official of the Sanhedrin, and may have been the leader.

Listen to what they write about Gamaliel.

*"Since Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, there has been no more reverence for the law, and purity and piety died out at the same time"*

Listen to what Paul wrote about himself.

#### **Philippians 3:4–6**

*For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*

So if you have to look at Paul's CV it's impressive for a young Jewish man. The "bottom line" is that Paul hated the new direction chosen by the Jewish believers, who were called the "way." Believers were first called Christians after Paul's conversion, before that they

were known as people of the way, because Jesus said He was the way and the truth and the life.

Paul did everything in his power to stop this new movement before it entered the whole world like Covid-19. He cruelly persecuted Christians.

## **Paul persecutor of Christians**

### **Acts 9:1a**

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.*

He was like a madman about the people of the way. *"He was breathing out murderous threats."* Like a trapped bull, he breathes death on the Christians.

Paul was present when Stephen, the first martyr for Christ, was stoned to death. After Stephen's death, we read that persecution had come and that many Christians had fled to other towns and countries. Praise the Lord, for they took the gospel into the world.

Listen to what Luke writes about Paul.

### **Acts 8:3**

*But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.*

That wasn't enough for Paul. He was so fanatical, under the influence of Gamaliel and very young when he persecuted Christians in this way.

### **Acts 7:58**

*Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

We are not sure how long after Stephen's death, Paul went to Damascus, but no more than 3 years later, rather earlier. I think he realized that you can't silence the people. So he goes to the "prime minister" of the Jewish believers, the high priest, and asks letters of recommendation to even persecute Christians in other parts of the world.

### **Acts 9:2**

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 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.*

Damascus is today still the capital of Syria, 220km north of Jerusalem.

It probably would have taken him between 10-12 days to get there. In the city there was a large established Jewish community, and there were many synagogues. It's to them that Saul is on his way and he's just got purpose. Catch them bringing them before the court and if they can be killed even better.

Hear what Paul says about himself when, after his conversion, he addresses the Jewish people.

#### **Acts 22:4-5**

*I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.*

And it came to be, when he had appeared before King Agrippa and his wife at Caesarea, where he had been held without trial for many years, and heard what he said of himself.

#### **Acts 26:9-11**

*"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.*

Driven by his hatred for Christians and therefore Christ himself, he is therefore on his way to Damascus. And it is here somewhere in Syria that one of the greatest miracles Jesus has ever performed is taking place.

**Acts 9:3-5**

*As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.*

Incredible encounter and a brief conversation change the course of history and establish Christianity once and for all. For near the city, Paul, the fanatical, persecutor of Christ and His church, meets the risen, glorified Jesus.

And Paul asks a question that each one must ask himself or herself at one time or another.

**Who are you Lord?**

We don't know if Paul knew much about Jesus when Jesus was still alive, or whether he saw him, but in this light, which was brighter than the sun, Paul sees the risen Jesus as He really is and it throws him to the ground. And Paul, full of bravado, is stripped of all his ego, and own will and radically changes his life.

For Paul, it was clear that his old life was over, for then Jesus answered.

*"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," He replied.*

The story of Paul's encounter with Jesus is told three times in Acts. Here and twice later Luke tells of Paul encounters with Jesus. It gives us a little more information about what happened here.

Listen to how Paul himself later describes this encounter with Jesus.

**Acts 22:6**

*"About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' 8 " 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. " 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 9 My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. 10 " 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. " 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.'*

And he obeyed his new Lord, and went with the people around him to Damascus, and returned home to a man named Judas, who lived in Straight Street.

### **Acts 9:9-12**

*For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."*

Straight Street still exists today, so somewhere down this street Paul spent his first few days as a believer.

For three days he was blind and he did not eat. His whole appetite was gone. Listen to the miracle of God. Ananias may have been the leader of the Christians in Damascus. Jesus also appears to him through a vision and sends him to Paul. And hear what is standing here, what was Paul doing?

*he is praying*

That's the first thing someone does that becomes a believer. Pray. When we stayed in Turkey, one of the Turkish believers visited a house and shared the gospel there with the family. Their child was sick and after praying for the child, the child got better. That night, that whole house became Christians. Yilmaz said that when he got up the next morning, he found the man asleep in the lounge on his knees in front of the coffee table. When he asked why the man was sleeping there, he said that when they all went to bed, he stood on his knees in front of the coffee table and worshiped this new God of his until he fell asleep. He says when the man woke up there, he was so full of the Holy Spirit that he ran into the streets, calling out in a Muslim country, *"I've become a Christian."*

Now Paul himself tells us what happened to him there in Judas' house.

### **Acts 22:**

*A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. 14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'*

One sentence and the world's history changed.

### **What do I hear about you and me?**

Your encounter with Jesus may not have been so radical. Maybe you're a believer since you were a little boy or girl. Or maybe you've only come to realize later that Jesus is your Lord. Or maybe you've had a radical turnaround or conversion. I knew the Lord, but at 29 years of age I experienced a deepening, which made Christ a reality for the first time, someone with whom I could have a relationship. It doesn't matter how you got to know Jesus, but it matters what you did after that.

Therefore, you need to be sure who Jesus really is. You need to move from religion to relationship.

### **A transformed Christian**

- **Knows Jesus**

Paul knew about Jesus. That's why he's on the road to Damascus. He hated the very people of the "way," who say Jesus was the only way to the Father. He must have known that the Christians say that no one can be saved from judgment and death except through Christ. That's what Peter and John said when they were arrested.

### **Acts 4:12**

*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

He was standing there when Stephen, just before he died, said that he saw the resurrected Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And when he himself came to know the risen Lord, he made the confession over and over again, Jesus is the Lord, the Savior. Just read his letters. You and I don't need to meet Jesus in such a way as Paul met Him. We have so much more. We have the recorded history of Jesus on earth, and all the wonders that have taken place there. And then Acts that tells of Peter and John and the disciples' transformation. And of Paul's conversion and how the church subsequently exploded. And the book of Revelation. We see the picture all we have to do we need to transition from knowledge of God and Jesus to "I know God personally and intimately."

The question is, who are you Jesus? Everyone must answer honestly. He is the one in control of your life. Or is it sin, the devil, and the world? Paul himself writes what one who knows Christ looks like.

## **2 Corinthians 5:17**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Complete transformation can only be done through Jesus.

- The one who was dying in sin is now dead for sin.
- The one who follows his or her own truth now follows the Biblical truth.
- The one who was insensitive to people is now having a compassion for people.
- The one who did evil deeds now likes to do the good.
- The rebel (as I was) now becomes God's friend.

The second evidence of a transformed Christian is

- **Obeys Jesus**

Ananias and Paul said, "*Here I am.*"

If you say you have had an encounter with Jesus, you need to allow God, through His Holy Spirit and His Word, to teach us the good "manners" of Jesus. And that in itself is a lifelong process. And I say again we are so much better position than Paul and Ananias and even the disciples, because we have the Word and the Spirit.



A third aspect that should be important in the life of someone transformed by God is prayer.

- **Prays**

Just after Paul's conversion, that's where we find him. Those three days he ate nothing and could not see, he saw spiritually and came to know Jesus and that through prayer.

What's the first thing a baby needs when he or she is born? Oxygen. And how does he or she get it? By breathing. You don't teach your child breathing. He or she has never done this before, but that moment when they were born, they breathe. Prayer is the breathing of every transformed child of God.

Yes, we have a prayer school, but if you know Jesus and obey him, prayer will become like oxygen to a baby. There is no right or wrong way to talk to God. Just open your mouth and talk and your life will change.

Prayer is communion with God. I was sitting in Orlando, Florida, U.S.A. at a big church meeting, just as we were on our way to Turkey. In the city where we settled, there were a lot of churches and Christians for centuries before that, now in a city of over 400,000 there was only 3 that we knew about. And while I was there, we had communion. My mind wanders and at that moment, I pray and say to the Lord: *"what do you want me to do in Turkey."* And at that moment I had an encounter with God, not a vision, but a voice here in my heart, which I knew came from God's. He said, *"I want you to go and have communion with me. For centuries people had communion with Me, but now, there is none."*

God says to you and me *today*, *"I'd like to have daily communion/meeting with you, but there's no one there."* A transformed child of God, seeking and thirsting for God's presence.

The passage that transformed my life, and which convinced me to go to work full-time for God, is beautifully described by Paul.

### **Philippians 3:7-9**

*But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

Develop that quest for more. Once you have tasted what it is to experience God, then all the other things a person lives for and are willing to die for become worthless. Paul says, *"Knowing Christ my Lord surpasses all things in value."* So I'll give up everything to know Him better and closer and more intimately.

Finally, a transformed child of God would like to tell about his or her relationship and encounter with Jesus. It doesn't matter if you grew up Christian or had a radical encounter with Jesus.

- **Talks about Jesus.**

Paul stands before the king and he does not hesitate to tell of his encounter with Jesus.

**Acts 26:16b-20**

*I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' 19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.*

Thank God for the conversion of Paul. Who knows, maybe he personally shared the gospel of Jesus to our ancestors? Or perhaps they repented because of someone who had heard it from Paul and then shared it to them. Nevertheless, thanks to that conversation with Paul, instead of wanting to stop the Christians and the course of Christianity, he was now giving momentum to it and in the rest of the world.

Who knows, someone sits and waiting for you to witness to them about your relationship with Jesus. I'm here because of one person's testimony. He is already dead, but through his testimony to me, the Holy Spirit has transformed my life and there are people waiting for you and me to carry it on.

A transformed life begins with faith in Jesus your savior and it runs out that you want to get to know Jesus better and obey His Word and Spirit. This brings us into fellowship with Him, and leads us to become servants to God and His Kingdom.

How does a transformed child of God look like? Paul wrote to the Galatians the following:

**Galatians 2:20**

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*