

Story, what is your story?

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Text: Acts 26:5, 10-16, 22-23

Something remembered from my adolescence: tricked—most important person in world, my mother. In Bible class, Jesus.

What is your story? Is it the same at church and elsewhere? You can tell your story at church, can't you? That is the heart of evangelism—the ability to tell your story. This is what God has done for me. You practice it over and over, and you can tell your story. But is it really your story?

When you get to talking to your friends and coworkers, advancement, \$, prestige, job... Maybe one of our great problems in evangelism is that we know in our heart of hearts that the story we are trying to tell and claim is not really our story.

What governs, motivates, charges your life? What is your philosophy of life?

Neitschze—materialism, no God

Aristotle—search for knowledge

Freud—search for self

Frankl—search for meaning

Paul—had a different story, different philosophy of life. When we have a different story, we have a different mission.

Our testimonies (from now on I will say our stories instead of testimonies) are powerful. Our stories are powerful because they reflect God; they reflect Jesus. They also reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ which is God's power. Paul's story is powerful, as he is talking with King Agrippa, as he is giving his story to the king, and they are trying to decide what charges they should bring against Paul. Paul gives his story to the king and at the end of that time the king says, "What Paul, would you have me be a Christian right now?" And Paul says, "Yes, you and everyone else listening." God and Christ are seen and reflected through Paul's story.

There is a difference between story and journey. The story is what you see—the image. The journey is in the heart—the truth. When we understand this distinction, our story is identified with his story, and tied to history. The story of the Bible becomes our story.

We often look at Paul's teaching as propositional truth, explained by propositional preaching. Today is a contrast—to look at Paul's story. Why could Paul say what he said?

Is it only what we know? No. It is what we know that changes how we live and who we are.

I. FOCUS--In my story, Jesus is my center, what I think about. Everything revolves around him. It wasn't always that way for Paul. Faithful in Judaism, persecutor of the church, a personal encounter with Jesus transformed his life.

In Paul, we see transition from historical Jesus to exalted Christ. It is in relationship to exalted Christ with whom Paul claimed personal, profound acquaintance that we best introduce the heart and soul of Paul. At least four foundation truths about Jesus provide an understanding of Paul's King and Lord. See the understanding that undergirded Paul's life once he became a Christian.

A. The Reflecting Christ (Example): The Image of God

Christ is the very image of God. As man in the OT, so fulfillment is in Christ. Col. 1:15 must be balanced with 1 Cor. 11:7. The same truth appears in Heb. 1:3.

B. The Revealed Christ (Explanation): The Message of God

Knowing Him, Making Him Known

We have little description of the form exalted Christ took on Damascus Road, but was life changing event.

Radiant light is Paul's recollection. That light was so glorious that he remembers it well when speaks of ministry of new covenant entrusted to him (2 Cor. 3). The dawning of faith is seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, so the light might shine out of the darkness (2 Cor. 4:4,6). This shining light dispels the blindness of unbelief.

Because of this glorious light experience on the Damascus road, Paul looked forward to the parousia, the manifestation in glory, as this appearance would be of the same character as the Damascus road event, except that what was then a mere momentary flash would become a more enduring experience, accompanied also by the glorification of his people, whether by transformation or resurrection.

C. The Resurrected/Reigning Christ (Experience): The Exalted Lord

Paul makes coextensive the identity of the earthly Jesus and the exalted Christ, distinguishing their modes of existence (1 Cor. 15:47), and clearly extending the same principle to all spiritual creation. A personal union is necessary, not life the closest personal union in this life, for this union with the Lord makes us one spirit with him (1 Cor. 6:17). So it is that when flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, it is as true of us as it is of Jesus himself. Now our problem is to separate this "one spirit" with Jesus from the "one Spirit" in whom all the people of Christ are united into one body. More on this during the series.

The exalted Lord will make all enemies his footstool (1 Cor. 15:25), including death, and then the reign of Christ will merge with the eternal reign of God. The reign of Christ, the age of the Messiah, is for Paul between the present age and the endless age of come, and from certain viewpoints the two may overlap.

When minds are liberated by faith in the crucified and risen Christ, then the bondage imposed by weak and beggarly elements is broken, and the strength of sin and the fear of death can no longer bind with their iron grip. The destruction of these principalities and powers may be described figuratively, but the reality is release and freedom for the believer who shares in some exaltation in the heavenly places.

D. The Redeeming/Resurrecting Christ (Exaltation): The Lord and the Spirit

This idea, based on the phrase, "the Lord who is the Spirit," comes from 2 Cor. 3:18, based on Ex. 34:29-35. The fading glory on Moses' face is contrasted with the unfading glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4). The inferior glory is passing so the surpassing glory will be evident to all. The Pauline experience suggested to him that Christ would never be conceived of apart from the spirit nor the spirit conceived of apart from him.

Something similar is in the John comforter accounts. The last Adam becomes a life giving Spirit (Rom. 5), and the description is of the spirit of life in Christ (Rom. 8:2). This Spirit quickens our mortal bodies, deals with the death dealing problem of the law, is the source of our renewal (2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:14ff), and we becoming one spirit with Christ (1 Cor. 6:17). We are united with the Lord by faith, deriving eternal life now, hope of glory to come, and since through the spirit life and hope are mediated, Paul can speak of the spirit as pledge and seal.

These four things Paul knew well as he reflected upon the Damascus road experience, generally drawn from fairly early writings. These were foundation of (1) his vibrant hope and expectation in early ministry, it was the undergirding of (2) his mature certainty in later ministry. These two topics are the next two lectures in this brief series.

Consider Col. 3:4. When the people of Christ in resurrection share fully in the glorious light and image of their exalted Lord, the spirit's ministry is fulfilled. The spirit who fulfils this ministry is the spirit that empowered Jesus without measure, and for Paul, the exalted Lord whose risen life and power are conveyed to his people by the indwelling spirit is dwelling in our hearts by faith.

II. FOUNDATION--In my story, Jesus is my rescue. He is what I am most thankful for. Paul had an intense sense of being rescued. This awareness was his motivation for all of his life—as a man of vision and man of action.

A An initial experience of Christ. ENCOUNTER

Between Paul's return to Tarsus and his call to Antioch, a strange experience left a mark on the rest of his life. Some account of it in Gal. 1, more in 2 Cor. 12:2-10. 14 years before writing would place it about A.D. 42-43.

Read 2 Cor. 12:7-10.

Sequel to this experience was distressing, indeed humiliating, physical ailment which he feared would be the death blow to his effective ministry. In fact, by giving self esteem a knockout punch and keeping him dependent upon the divine, it proved a help not a handicap. What was this thorn that was so essential to his ministry? Epilepsy, eye problems, Malta fever, malaria, deformity, neurasthenia, speech impediment are among the guesses. Paul learned, as we must, not so much of our own inadequacy, but the total adequacy of Christ, in whom, when he was weakest personally, he knew himself to be strong.

B An appreciation and understanding of the body of Christ. PARTICIPATION

The whole believing community, with its members one by one being only one, is vitalized by the risen Christ and the energizing spirit. Incorporation is effected by personal faith in Christ, sealed in baptism, sustained by the Supper. All this is clear in Paul, but is not our subject. The external washing has a clearly inward counterpart, 1 Cor. 12:13.

For Paul, this is more than sacramental theology, his own personal experience reinforces the truth: Gal. 2:20.

C Sharing the sufferings of Christ. SUFFERING

Interesting, challenging. Gladly Paul sought to participate with Christ, with some sense that more sufferings for him meant less for others (Col. 1:24; 2 Cor. 1:6). This was one source of his life in the spirit.

Paul based his life on Jesus, the fulfiller of God's promise and purpose of salvation; Jesus the crucified and exalted Lord; Jesus, the divine wisdom, in whom God creates, maintains, and brings to consummation everything that exists. Jesus, who here and now lives among his people by his spirit. Paul can passionately embrace the all surpassing knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord (Phil.3:8).

These were not a call to contemplative life, but an insistent call to lifelong action.

III. FUTURE--In my story, Jesus is what I talk about.

Jesus was Paul's message—woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. We proclaim him. AT THE END OF ONE'S LIFE, ONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT REALLY MATTERS.

1. GLORY of God

Christ's work is to bring us to glory without spot or blemish (Eph. 5:26), and he is the savior of the body. Here is no cheap salvation, but a salvation so broad in its scope that any narrow treatment misses it entirely.

2. Seeking RECONCILIATION and UNITY

The broken wall.

The one new building in which the Spirit dwells.

The divine mystery, Eph. 3, togetherness, God at work in us...

3. Understanding SUFFERING

Life's ebb and flow brings one from darkness to light.

4. HEAVEN--Sharing the glory

The heavenly ascent, heavenlies, Eph. 4:7ff.

5. Experiencing NEWNESS

The new life, the new man, Eph. 4:11ff, full grown; 4:17ff, with Christlikeness, living in love, light, wisdom.

6. HOLY SPIRIT--The power of the glory

The HS, the seal, the promise, the earnest, the source of our unity, the foundation of our togetherness in the body. This spirit makes unity possible.