

11/22/15

Acts 9:19-25

Marks of a Believer

and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

²⁰ *And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."*

²¹ *And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"* ²² *But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.* ²³ *When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,* ²⁴ *but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,* ²⁵ *but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.*

(Pastor Prays)

How do you know it's real? I mean, Saul converted suddenly and dramatically and powerfully. He was knocked to the ground and blinded. I didn't experience that and my guess is neither did most of you. I didn't have scales on my eyes and God speak to me audibly and, since I didn't, does that make my conversion any less real? Does it make my conversion any less genuine?

Near the end of his life, Paul would say in Galatians, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." I don't have any scars. I've not been beaten or spat upon or bruised. Have you? But I have been changed. My sins, though many, have been nailed to the cross. I've been purchased by the blood of Christ as many of you have and because of that, there should be evidence. You have to be able to see it. Jesus says that faith alone without works is dead. A *saving* faith is a *seen* faith, and I think from this passage in the early stages of Saul's Christian life, we see the prominent marks of a real Christian.

On the road to Damascus, Jesus Christ met Saul and changed him. The last words he said before he was converted were, "Who are you Lord?" and the first words after his conversion were, "Jesus is the son of God." Some of you came in with the question "Who are you Lord?" It's my prayer that you will leave here with the answer. "Jesus is the son of God."

There's something else here as well. Saul was a killer with a terrible past, a notorious sinner. The early church had to get over itself and accept this man. Often we are way too uncomfortable with how and what some people are saved out of.

As we move forward looking at the marks of a Christian, let's cling to the words this same man wrote in II Corinthians 5:17: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* With that new life, comes new evidence – new marks.

When a Person Loves Christ, You Will Be Able to Tell

In a Changed Life, There is a Genuine Yielding

Saul was a proud man when God broke into his life. He had authority in his hand and a chip on his shoulder. And when we find him broken and baptized, he's surrounded by the very people he used to hate. You see it in v. 19 as Luke tells us that for some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. Back in v. 17, a nobody named Ananias, came to him calling him "Brother Saul."

And now this bewildered new believer is surrounded by Christian brothers and sisters, drawing strength from the church and not resisting it, not trying to change it or bend it to suit his particular desires. His pride is gone and now in humility, he yields himself to the church.

One of the markers of a transformed life is the desire to be a part of the fellowship of believers – The Church - an imperfect, flawed bunch of redeemed sinners made righteous children of God by the shed blood of Christ. And part of loving Christ is a yielded love for the church. The Apostle John said it like this in 1 John 3:14: *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.*

Here are a couple of steps to a yielded life.

1. Pray for the church and its leaders
2. Be patient – benefit of the doubt – feet of clay
3. Participate in worship – come early – bring your Bible – Sing – Introduce yourself to ministers
4. Give your perspective – you are in this body.

In a changed life, there is a genuine yielding.

In a Changed Life, There is an Immediate Sharing

You'll see this in v. 20. Watch Saul and don't skip over the word "immediately." Let's read it. V. 20 says: *And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."* Saul is converted, he gets a quick course in Christianity and in v. 20, he's doing the absolute opposite of what he once did. He's declaring Jesus as the Son of God. Saul couldn't wait to share the news. It was too good not to share.

This is where there has been a breakdown. I think for so many Christians, we are so busy with our suburban lives on one side or fighting a culture war on the other, we have forgotten to tell our next door neighbor that Jesus is the Son of God.

The title – Son of God is a Messianic term of rulership. Nine times in the Gospels, Jesus refers to God as his Heavenly Father, making him Lord of Creation. A changed life brings immediate sharing.

Many of you know my son Mack is in basic training in the Navy. We talked to him last night and he talked for 20 minutes about being a sailor and all it means. He shared more in that 20 minutes about being a sailor than many of you have shared in a lifetime about being a Christian. I'm not trying to put a guilt trip on you or shame you, but if you wait till you feel like you know what to say, you'll never verbalize how Jesus saved you.

A simple outline is like this:

1. Who I was before Christ?
2. What happened to me to cause me to come to Christ?
3. How has my life changed in following Christ?

Because in a changed life there is a sharing of Christ.

In a Changed Life, There is a Strengthening Resolve

To see this you've got to take v. 20-21 together and watch the reaction in v. 21 as he shares Christ.

Acts 9:20-21: And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"

Do you see how they scrutinized him, maligning his character and questioning his sincerity? They keep bringing up his past. He sees people who either knew him in his former life or at least knew of his former life. In v. 21, he goes to those who were like him and they doubted him. They questioned his sanity and salvation.

Listen, your past is not a hindrance but a platform you stand on as a trophy of God's grace. When people bring up your past, you don't hang your head; use it to strengthen your resolve. We sing a great song, "All I have in Christ." I would get the words to it, then read it as a part of your devotional life. And then learn to say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. When that truth becomes a reality in your heart, you don't fear the insinuations and insults. You don't dread the bullies and broadsides. When you learn that for you to live is Christ and to die is gain, ISIS doesn't keep you up at night and worry doesn't plague you during the day. Because on *Christ* the solid rock I stand and all other ground is sinking sand.

Here are a couple of steps I think may help:

1. Strive toward an hour a day reading the Bible
2. Give stuff away – too attached to some things

3. Pray the Psalms – Don Whitney *Pray the Bible*
4. Go to bed. You need rest, each day is a battle.

And in a changed life, there is strengthening resolve.

In a Changed Life, You Pursue Real Growth

As Saul spent time with the young church, you can see his development as a believer. It's right there in Acts 9:22: *But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.*

Luke tells us he is growing in strength, taking what he knew in his head (remember he was trained under Gamaliel – an Old Testament professor) and applying it to his heart and proving that Jesus is the Christ. Proving – he was taking the Old Testament and reading it with a view of Christ. The Holy Spirit in him was like fire and God's Word was the fuel. His life is an example for each one of us to pursue real growth so that we are sanctified (becoming more like Christ) and there is a noticeable change, gaining victory over sin, a diminishing self-pride, a growing desire to serve and witness and a lessening in being offended. In a changed life, you pursue real growth.

Maybe there's just one more point...

In v. 22-25, Saul's influence has grown to the degree that his former colleges want to kill him. In v. 23, Saul finds out about their plot. In v. 24, Luke describes his escape. In v. 25, *but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.*

This started a whole life of risking everything for the Glory of Christ. It's interesting to me that so early in his Gospel ministry, Saul already had disciples, people learning from him. He was simply taking what he knew about the Lord Jesus and passing it on.

Here is one man's story. The story of a man who loved Christ and everyone could tell. He went from asking, "Who are you Lord?" to declaring and proving Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And it's the first step I'm going to ask you to take today: to taste and see that the Lord is God, to turn from what you've known and turn to Christ.

He lived a perfect life; you can't. He dies in the place of sinners and you are one. God raised him from the dead. The Bible promises if you will confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

(Pastor Prays)