

Apostle of Grace—The Life of St. Paul

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Date: 23 February 2020

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] Yeah, it's really good to be involved with Learners' Exchange. I get to work with Alexandra, and this is one of the areas that I connect with in my ministry. And, of course, it's something that has really built into a community, which is quite wonderful to see.

A community of people who are seeking to grow in Christ and to learn as you hear and as you interact with speakers here.

So I just think this is a really crucial ministry. It's something that Jim Packer started up, how many years ago was that? Harvey, do you have an idea of how long ago that was? I was young. Talk about medieval.

Medieval. So it's been over 30 years. So this is very good. And today I'm going to be speaking about the Apostle Paul.

And, Alexandra, what time should I finish? Well, we will listen to you for as long as we like to speak. No, well, that could be a long time. Do you have a leader service?

[1 : 09] No, and Aaron is preaching, so it'll usually be shorter, too. We usually finish around 10. Right at 10. So I'll aim for right at 10. And the thing with the Apostle Paul is that there is a huge amount of material that you could cover, obviously.

And so what I really wanted to do is focus on one aspect of his life particularly. One of the things that Alexandra asked of me when we thought about doing something to speak on is to speak on the liturgical year a little bit.

Well, the last kind of big feast day was the conversion of St. Paul. And that was on January 25th. It was very close to Robbie Burns Day, too.

Robbie Burns Day is not a holy day. Isabel, you're shaking your head. So we're going to assume for the moment that the Apostle Paul takes precedence over Robbie Burns, and that this was the last big feast day.

So I thought, well, I'll speak particularly about the conversion of St. Paul. And I have some more material that thinks about the consequence of that conversion, and we'll get to that a bit if we have some time.

[2 : 35] But I want to just start out by saying a few words about Paul himself. He was an extraordinary man.

And even if you hear from atheists that study Paul and think about him, there are some that will say that he was one of the most brilliant men in history, especially that time period.

Paul established Christianity. And by the time that he died, a quarter of the land space of the Roman Empire was heard the gospel because of Paul.

So in other words, there were churches that he was involved in planting and his mission work that went into that portion of the Roman Empire, a huge, huge part of the world at that time.

By the end of Paul's life in AD 64, Tacitus, who is the well-known Roman historian, said that Christians in Rome had become a vast multitude.

[3 : 48] Well, that's extraordinary when you think about it. Thirty years after Christ, there was a large enough community of Christians in Rome that the historian there would write about it.

And what Paul did was to really ensure that Christianity was truly an international movement of the Holy Spirit and that it was intellectually coherent, is what historians will say.

You know, because he wrote about what Christianity was in his letters. He explained the gospel in a way that was understandable by those who were reading it. Whether you were a slave or free, whether you were educated or a worker in the field, you had conversions to Christianity because people heard that gospel that Paul was passing on.

And he articulated it in such a way that the church understood together what the gospel was, who Jesus was.

And so what he did was he changed this Jesus movement from being something that was exclusively Jewish to being open to non-Jews as well. This is the gift of Paul.

[5 : 06] This is what we are all benefiting from today as we are here. And by the way, one of the things I want to talk about as we go here is how Paul affects you and I today.

His example, his life, as well as his teaching. But what he did was he invited people to, who were far away from Judaism, had no understanding of the Jewish Messiah, to embrace Jesus as that person, as the one who brings salvation, who transforms your life, who gives you hope, and a relationship with the living God.

Very, very powerful, that gospel that he was bringing out. And he did this without money or political power or influence. He was, as you probably know, a tent maker.

So he wasn't, he did not gain financially from any of his missionary work. He had to work with his hands. And probably this was something that his father did.

We don't know for sure what his father did, but he was probably making tents for Roman soldiers, for the troops that would go through Tarsus. We don't know for sure, but that's a likely thing.

[6 : 21] His father was probably fairly well off. So that's a likely scenario. But most important, more important than these amazing accomplishments, was the depth of his devotion to the crucified and risen Jesus.

This is what shines out. When you look at Paul's life, when you look at his writings, there is this burning love, devotion to Jesus Christ.

He, Paul will talk about joy. You know, even as he writes down a litany of the things that he went through, the floggings, the stonings, the rejection, shipwrecks, hunger, imprisonment.

All of this he actually writes a litany of, and he says in all of this, he is satisfied in Christ Jesus. And he really is the apostle of joy.

Joy permeates his work because of that devotion to Jesus, because of his love for Jesus and his thankfulness for him. And the amazing thing is that physically he never met Jesus.

[7 : 39] And, but we know that something extraordinary happens, which I'm going to get into in just a moment. I'll just say a word about Paul.

Paul was a, about his growing up. Paul was a privileged citizen of Rome in this hometown of Tarsus. And he, not only was he a Jewish citizen and he was educated there, but his father was a Roman citizen.

We don't know how he got that citizenship, but it's clear that he was. And this was a very valuable thing. If you wanted to buy Roman citizenship, it cost two years wages to do it.

And there was an application process as well. But once you became one, your children could as well. And so what, what Paul received when he was a young person was a wooden certificate that was permanent.

And in it was engraved his Roman citizenship, the particulars of it. And he could hold that as proof that he was a Roman citizen. But historically, we know that these wooden certificates existed and that's what he would have had, which I never knew before.

[8 : 58] How did people know, how could Paul prove that he was a Roman citizen in those places where he said, I'm standing on this right? Well, he pulls out the card. And it was something that was probably with him for his whole life.

During his teen years, he moved. So when he was in Tarsus, by the way, Tarsus, you know, is in sort of southern Turkey. And we'll see some slides of this in a moment.

And there he was educated as a Jewish boy. He learned to read and write and he was steeped in the scriptures as a boy.

And he also followed all of the requirements of the Jewish calendar as well, the feasts and so forth. So his upbringing was a privileged one.

It was one in which he learned the scriptures and he was formed in the Jewish life even though he was far away. And there were communities like this all over the Roman world and he was part of that.

[10 : 05] Now, something happened and we don't know for sure what, but there, he went to Jerusalem. We think probably, historians think, I should say, that he was a very good student and that there was communication made in Jerusalem to bring him to be a student of one of the great

teachers.

And in fact, that's what he does. Probably around the age of 14 or 15, he moved to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel.

And Gamaliel was the greatest rabbi of the day. There's a number of things written about him. He had a very strong following. He was very well respected.

And we know about that in Acts because Gamaliel could say, don't persecute right now. We're going to see whether this is going to take off or not. And they listened to him. So he was a very powerful leader, powerful rabbi in Jerusalem.

And so he goes to be educated with him as a teenager in Jerusalem, this big move. And that's where he is.

[11 : 15] He's moving there and he's living. And I want to show us a couple of slides here because here you see the Apostle Paul. By the way, the Apostle Paul, there was an apocryphal writing about him in the second century.

And you notice that in all the artwork, he's always bald. Somehow, there was a description written in this apocryphal work that said he was bald. And so that's just what people assumed from then on. And they took them on. So anytime you see artwork of Paul, he is bald. And here you have him with his scriptures and he is going to be obviously ready for a lot of missionary work with his walking staff and so forth.

And here he says that I was a Jew, I was born in Tarsus, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the laws of our fathers.

So he is brought up as a Pharisee. Pharisee. And we've been reading about Pharisees in our Matthew readings here.

[12 : 40] He was somebody who would have been zealous for the work of the kingdom of God as he understood it.

And it was different. He wanted, there was this deep desire to make all the people of Israel as pure as the priests were at the time of their two week long temple duties.

So if you could, a mission statement for Pharisees, I want you all as a country to be as pure as those priests are in the temple. And so the Pharisees were like the religious police.

So they reinforced the religious calendar, the Sabbath keeping, the dietary laws, and the fasting, and the tithing, and the purity washings. And so Paul was deeply devoted to the laws of Moses. And the other thing he was deeply devoted to was the honor of God. So those two things were critical for him. Honor of God and also the keeping of the law, the laws of Moses.

[13 : 45] And one of the things he said, and I want to just look at this, is that Paul had zeal.

When he writes about himself, he says, for you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond my own age among my people so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. So even among all of the students of Gamaliel and the Pharisees, he had a reputation for being extremely zealous for the traditions of my father.

So he was right at the forefront of the honor of God, the laws of Moses. And, you know, this is what he talks about in 2 Corinthians 11. Are they Hebrews? So am I.

As Israelites, so am I. Offspring of Abraham, so am I. And then he says, servants of Christ, I am a better one. I'm talking like a madman. He was speaking to those Judaizers who wanted the church to become a church that added to the gospel that said, you not only have Christ, but you have all of the things that Paul was zealous about.

[15 : 04] He said, I was all of that. And then if you jump down here to Philippians, he says, I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, and as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

So you see, here's a picture of Paul as he is growing up as a teenager. And that's what we can piece together. His zealousness is there.

Now, what happens here is really the center of what I'll be talking about here because Paul is confronted with Christianity.

And when we look at this is Rembrandt's image, what is this a painting of here?

Yeah, I shouldn't say that. I'm glad you're all reading. So that's the stoning of Stephen. And what you see is you see Paul up here and he's got on his laps the coats of those who are stoning

Stephen.

[16:29] And he is approving of what is going on. And what Stephen represented to Paul and to the Pharisees was a threat. What he was saying was the temple is not the center of your life.

It's actually the living God who doesn't live in a home that's made out of human hands but actually the Holy Spirit has been poured out because Jesus has risen from the dead.

And his point is that people become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Heaven comes to earth as God comes to reside in people because of Jesus' ascension, his resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Holy Spirit.

That was blasphemy especially for somebody like Paul because the temple was the center of your life. It was the hope. It symbolized in fact was a tangible thing you could touch and see and hear of God's living presence with Israel.

And that he would one day fulfill all the promises that they knew so well. If you start undermining the temple you're undermining the whole faith of Israel was certainly his understanding at that time.

[17:47] And as you know Paul goes from there and he persecutes the church. And this is the violently trying to destroy it.

So what Paul was doing is that he decided after Stephen that there needed to be a final purging of Christianity and what that was all about. And you know from reading from Acts that Christians were scattered because of this persecution all over Palestine, Judea, Samaria, we hear, and beyond. And it was a terrible time and he was at the forefront of that persecution. And he says it was violent. So we know that there was scourging which was part which was 39 lashes from a whip and there was imprisonment, there was destruction of people's lives and there may have even been killing. But we know for sure that there was violence that Paul himself was responsible for. So he attempted to destroy Christianity. He doesn't give details of it but we know that he is complicit in the stoning of Stephen.

And he receives permission from a high priest to ravage the church and enter into house after house and drag off men and women and committing them to prison.

[19:18] Those are the things that we know from Acts chapter 8 and 9. And Acts also says that Paul said I not only locked up many saints into prison but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.

So he was at least involved with that. And he said I punished them in the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme. And what he meant was to deny Christ. So this is Paul in the year 34, 35. This is what he's about. A deeply religious man, deeply devoted to God and his honor and to the law of Moses and at the same time doing terrible things to the people of God.

Now the hinge of Paul's life occurs outside the ancient city of Damascus. And I just want to ask are there any questions before we go into this event that you're probably all aware of to a certain extent. Any questions at all or comments about Paul's life? Yeah. That's very helpful to you. Paul thinks, I'm sure, Tom, right, I'm sure.

[20:37] This isn't arbitrary. He thinks he's in the tradition of Phineas. Israel is disobedient severely. Israel's permission to severely go after that disobedience and get rid of it.

So he's obedient to the image of Phineas who uses fierceness to attack Israel's enemies from within. That's right. The worst enemies from within. That's excellent.

Yeah. Within the tradition of Israel, within Israel, there was precedent for what he was doing. He's following in Phineas' footsteps. There's three books that I would recommend that I did research on in preparing for this.

One of them was N.T. Wright's book. N.T. Wright wrote a book on Paul and he wrote it last year, 2018. It's a very readable book. It has a very conversational sort of style to it.

You know N.T. Wright writes lots of academic books as well. This is a combination. He tries to get into the psychology of Paul too, which has to be conjecture in the ends.

[21:54] You've got to read it that way. It's interesting because he brings in a number of different possibilities there. One of the things he writes about, because N.T. Wright is very good at that, is localizing Paul in that whole Jewish tradition and history.

He's absolutely right. Phineas is a big influence on him, the zeal of Phineas. If you look up zeal in the Old Testament, you'll see that. That's why he uses that word as well.

The same word used Phineas. Thank you for that. The other book that was helpful is Paul Barnett has written a new book, just came out this past year, 2019, on Paul as well.

It's called A Short History of Paul. That's very good. In 192 pages, it gives you Paul's life, which is quite extraordinary.

He writes very concisely and clearly. Then a very well-known book is by F.F. Bruce. That was written in 1977. In 2000, he did a paperback version of it.

[23 : 02] F.F. Bruce is called something like Paul, the Apostle of the Free Spirit or something like that. But anyways, F.F. Bruce on Paul. Those three books are really helpful, very helpful books.

Yes, go ahead. And what was Paul's age during that? Well, we think that he was born, and the reason we do is we're just looking back and say, well, he was a young man when he went to do this stuff.

So that means he had to be at least 30 if they describe him as that. So he was probably around 30 at this time. So he was born in about 4 B.C.

is the closest. And so in 34, when this persecution was happening, a year after Christ, rose from the dead, he would have been about 34. And then he died, we don't know for sure when, but it's approximately 65 in Rome.

He was in prison there, released in Rome, and then he was brought back into prison and probably beheaded because he was a Roman citizen, which was the most humane way they could think of. So he was around 60 when he died.

[24 : 12] And that's a good question too because when you look at Paul's life, Paul Barnett brings this up, it's like it exactly breaks in half.

You know, you have from zero to 30, he is this man who is zealous for the traditions of Moses. he is zealous for the honor of God. And from 30 to 60, the second half of his life, he is zealous for Jesus, if I'm going to really simplify it.

But that's how his life unfolds. And the center of that change, that hinge, is the conversion of Paul, which was celebrated in January.

Yeah. Any other questions? Yeah. just a little plug for Aaron's sermon this morning. So, he's talking at the beginning of today's passage about how the Pharisees are sitting there and they're saying, well, this Jesus is becoming a real problem.

Let's kill him. And I just slap across my face, like, just wake up and look at what you're reading. So I just read it and I just gloss over it. And here they are with such a callous attitude.

[25 : 25] If they're going to kill somebody and think nothing of it, oh, and let's not do it during the Passover so we don't cause any stir. But isn't Paul kind of doing the same thing here?

So if you're saying that he's upholding the faith, well, surely the faith said something about killing an innocent man, or even if he wasn't seen as innocent, even if Jesus was seen as a rabble-rouser, how could that be seen as true Jewish faith?

Are you suggesting it is? Yeah, I mean, this is what Harvey's bringing up, is that part of that tradition was that you would be zealous in keeping the pure faith of Israel.

And if you have somebody who is deliberately going against that and leading people astray, saying, I am the Messiah, when the true Messiah is still to come, that's where your true hope is, you're corrupting this pure faith and religion.

temptation. And so, you know, we don't know what's going on in the minds of those Pharisees in our passage today, and likely a lot of them, it was just bitter jealousy and anger.

[26 : 34] But Paul talks about himself as being zealous for the faith, and that's where it probably was coming from, from the Pharisees. It wasn't so much, I mean, I don't want to defend them, but you have to remember it's not just a callousness, it's a zeal to preserve and to keep pure the faith in the law of Moses, which Jesus was breaking.

And he was also saying that the temple, well, he was saying all things of God's people. Was there legitimate ways that the Jews had for dealing with that, though? Like, yeah, let's take Jesus and lock him up.

It wasn't to kill him. Yeah, yeah. To me, that just seems like you're not zealous for the true faith. You're zealous for your political branch. Yeah, and what Jesus says, doesn't he says to, he asks the Father to forgive them as well, for they don't know what they're doing.

There was a real, there's a real sense of human sin and evil in there. There's no doubt about it. Yeah, it's not, it's turning what is good, desire to purify and keep pure, it's distorting that, as evil often is.

It distorts what actually is truly good. It made me begin out of a zealousness, but turn into a viciousness. That's because of a threat to yourself. Yeah.

[27 : 51] Yes? I just think it's interesting that I think it's a very recent societal move that you forgive or you tolerate or you love. And I mean, there's probably, you know, a learner's exchange to be given on how, you know, Christ brought forgiveness.

Yes. Whereas I think if you look in any society historically, it was quite legitimate that you killed people that didn't conform to what were the expected values of that society. Mm-hmm.

Yep. Yeah, and of course, they weren't allowed to kill. They had to get the Romans to do it as well.

Yes. Yes. It might be worth mentioning that the Jews had a special, for lack of a better name, dispensation under Romans.

Mm-hmm. They were not required to worship the emperor. Mm-hmm. This was a unique position that they had, like, you know, a special deal for them.

Yeah. And Pliny the Younger writes about this. When the Christian community left the synagogue, then they could be persecuted. Mm-hmm.

[28 : 53] Because they were no longer protected by that thing that protected the Jews. The Jews. Mm-hmm. So as a sub-state, which is what Israel was at that time, that was a pretty big thing for them to have received that permission, you know, to continue this faith and not worship the multitude of gods that the rest of the Roman group was doing.

Yeah. So, yeah, they might be thinking they're opening themselves up to persecution from the Jews by this, too. There was definitely a feeling of threat. And when that happens, humans act out.

And, yeah, clearly human sin was part of that. But we do, when we read Paul, we know that there, he's going to call himself, I'm going to talk about this in a few minutes, the, he's going to talk about himself as the foremost of sinners.

So he recognizes that even in that zeal, he was sinning. And it was because he was actually rejecting Christ, which shows the nature of sin as well, which we'll get into a moment.

Okay, one more question. Yeah. Yeah, I triggered off mind when you're saying Paul was a Jew that converted to Christianity. I was reading the B.C. Catholic, the earliest first Christian converts were Jews, the first Pope was a Jew.

[30 : 13] So it's interesting, these other histories are very Romanized Jews and they convert to Christianity. It seems to be the case with Paul, that's kind of neat. Yeah, yeah, and there were, and we know that there were Pharisees who came to Christ in the book of Acts as well.

A number of them did, which caused another problem because they wanted to make sure that all of the things they were zealous about, about the Jewish faith, would continue. And that made it hard when the Gentiles came in.

All right, let's, so let's go into this thing that happens. Um, um, the Jewish believers have been dispersed into these three regions of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee by this persecution in, um, uh, in Jerusalem, which, you know, which we saw being really initiated by, uh, this terrible occurrence here.

And, um, they're like scattered seed that take root in these, in these places that are far flung. It was God's work and his power that, uh, actually Christianity spread because of that persecution.

Um, and some who were more Greek actually left Israel altogether and they went up to this huge city called Antioch, which was in what's now Syria, right on the coast.

[31 : 33] It was about the third biggest city in the, um, uh, in the Roman world, in the world actually. And others went to Damascus. And, um, and so hearing about this, this great persecutor, Paul, uh, this zealot gets authority from the high priest.

He gets personal authority to travel there and to seize those disciples that had gone there and started meeting in churches and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and punishment.

So they were threatened by what was going on in Damascus. Uh, Paul knew that, uh, Jesus had been crucified. And now see, this is the thing for him that made it impossible for Jesus to be the Messiah because it is a curse to hang upon a tree.

There's no way that could be, um, he was a false Messiah. And, uh, you know, Deuteronomy states that if somebody is committing this kind of false teaching that they need to be dealt with very severely.

And so he goes to Damascus. And of course, what we know happens there is, um, is this extraordinary thing that takes place is that as he's going, uh, he is on, you know, Caravaggio has

this beautiful horse.

[32 : 55] It was probably a donkey, but, um, he is, he is completely, I guess the word is ambushed by the glory of God. And he sees a light and he falls off his horse.

And you see how he is, he is helpless. And, uh, and Caravaggio shows him as being blind there as well right away. So here's a blind man.

He is helpless and he hears the voice of Jesus himself. The one, the one that he is saying is the false, uh, Messiah. And he is saying, and what are the words that he says?

That Jesus says. Why are you persecuting me? Yeah. Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me?

Um, now in that moment, we can't imagine what was going on in Paul's mind.

Um, because the hope that he had in, in Phariseism, what his zeal was about, all of that is suddenly undercut.

[34 : 04] And he's, and he realizes in that moment that everything that he has been about has been opposed to Christ. His zealousness, all of the things that he was doing, that his life was, um, was leading the forefront of was undercut.

I would say it was nothing. In fact, what was worse, worse than nothing. He was actually persecuting God, rejecting the living God himself. And, um, you know, the, this is something that we hear in society, don't we?

I mean, maybe it's less so now, uh, Damascus road experience, uh, was sort of a line that was used to talk about this utter sense of change, of, of repentance, of whole way new thinking that has to happen.

Paul often talk, would talk about how if you're in Christ, you are a new creation. At that moment, uh, he became a new creation because his life was about Christ.

His life was about zeal for Christ. This is the hinge in his life. Whereas it had been zeal for, um, the law and, and the glory of God.

[35 : 19] And the thing that we have to remember is that in this, in this conversion, and there's going to be, it's going to take a while for that to play out in his life. We're going to hear in that conversion, he, he understood and realized that actually Jesus was with a fulfillment of everything that he had learned and was zealous about in Judaism.

It wasn't, it wasn't something where, oh, there's a new religion that's come and I got to go over there. It was actually a, uh, a fulfillment of the promises of God, which was his hope.

And he understood what it was that the temple was about, what it was, uh, as time goes on, what it was that those, those prophets were saying and what it was that, that Moses was all about in knowing Jesus, this risen Jesus on that road.

Um, so this is, uh, so what happened here, I'm going to say three things of, uh, what happened on this, on this, uh, in this conversion, this incredible moment.

First of all, Paul's eyes, um, are opened. Paul's eyes are open about Jesus. And there's a reason why he's made blind. You know, it's, it's to show that it's to show that when he is, when he is healed of that blindness, it's a physical sign of what is happening to him spiritually.

[36 : 47] Uh, so his eyes are open. He says, he later writes that God revealed his son to, and actually the Greek says in me and God shone in my heart.

Galatians one 16. Um, his eyes were open. Uh, God spoke from the glory of heaven as he had spoken to Moses. Isn't that interesting?

Which person is this again? What's that? Which person is that that's lying on the ground? That's Paul on the ground. Oh, before he's bald. Yeah. And so, he's got, he's got a full head of hair there. But you see, you know, the great Moses sees the glory of God on Sinai and Paul sees the glory of God in Jesus on the road to Damascus.

And so, and Jesus is speaking from the brightness of heaven when he says, why are you persecuting me? So, he understands now that the crucified one, the one who is a, uh, a curse is actually the glorified one.

[37 : 54] And, um, and that God's curse on him means our redemption. And, of course, Paul is being redeemed here as well.

Um, so he realizes this radical truth that righteousness with God was not through keeping of the law as he had believed, but it is actually through faith, a faith relationship with, with the son of God.

So, this is radical change that takes place. Okay. So, righteousness is not through keeping the law. It's through faith in Jesus Christ, the son of God. So, that's what his eyes are open to.

And the second thing is, not only does God open Paul's eyes, um, it's from this point on that Paul knows that he is in Christ. So, he knows he is in Christ from this moment on.

He's joined to Christ. And so, Paul often talks about being united to Christ. And this is the gift that you and I have right now because of Jesus. That nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[38 : 59] This is what Paul really clearly says in Romans 8. By the way, this is just a short aside, but there's lots of criticism about Paul these days. You know, that Jesus was the one who spoke about love and acceptance and, uh, um, and forgiveness.

And Paul was, was harsher and he, he talked about judgment and about, um, sin and so forth. Um, but if you actually look at it, it's, it's a much different situation.

In the New Testament, Paul talks about love far more than, uh, you hear in the Gospels. And you have this sense of God's grace in his life and this gratitude, this joy.

And there's this sense in Paul of doing his, his zealousness comes out of a thankfulness to God.

Uh, he, he is loving because God has loved him first.

That's what his, that's what his missionary work is all about. He knows that he is in Christ. And he said that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old has passed away.

[39 : 59] Behold, the new has come. So Paul has this completely new worldview and life direction. He's in Christ. His eyes are open about Jesus.

And thirdly, uh, is that God calls him at this point. There's a call to the Gentiles. Uh, he, he is actually called to extend the blessings of this covenant that God has made with Israel to the whole world.

And this is going to characterize his whole work is that he is an apostle to the Gentiles, to the world as a whole. Um, there's this promise to Abraham that in, uh, Abraham, all the nations of the world shall be blessed.

And of course it's in Christ that that happens by the power of the gospel. So Paul's going to be a God's apostle to bring the blessings of God as promised to Abraham to the whole world.

And there was nothing so radical to this young person as God's commission to this, to the non-Jews. You think about what his life was like. And all of a sudden now he's, he's going to be going to those Jews, uh, to those Gentiles.

[41 : 08] Um, now we, we only have about 15 minutes and I want to have time for questions. So I want to talk about the implications of this, of this conversion. Uh, remember we're just up to age.

We're, we're just up to, uh, um, 34, age 30 years old right now. He's a young man. So I haven't gotten into the rest of his life, but I want to, what's that?

Part two. But I want to talk about, um, what this means for, um, for him and actually for us as well. Because, um, one of the things, as I mentioned at the beginning is that Paul, you know, he understands this and he goes to straight street.

By the way, you can go to straight street today and that's rather blurry, but there, but there it is. It's in Damascus and you don't want to go there probably right about now.

But, um, you, we know where that was. It was a well-known place and still is. And this is where he is taken and, uh, he, he receives his sight back and the Christians receive him as well.

[42 : 18] And they are very suspicious of Paul, understandably. You know, we are supposed to reach out to him, this person who has created the most distress that you can imagine in our community.

And we're going to accept him. Well, here's the question they must have asked. Why did God wait to confront Paul until after the stoning of Stephen?

Why did he wait until after the persecution of the Jews and the destruction of so many people's lives, uh, before Paul was converted? God could have done this to him, uh, you know, this, uh, incredible conversion, uh, at any time.

So why? It's a mystery. And, um, but perhaps it was so that God, that Paul could know that he was the worst of sinners.

Um, that there's no, when you think, when he's converted, he must have thought my righteousness was nothing. There's no shred of evidence of my righteousness. He is the chief of, um, he is the chief of sinners.

[43 : 25] Uh, and so he realizes what is absolutely the case that God who is rich in mercy has made me, Paul alive in Christ, even though I was dead in my trespasses.

I'm saved by grace through faith, not by works. And he'll say again that, you know, even as we were enemies of Christ, God reconciled us to himself.

Well, he knew himself in that story probably more than anybody else did. Um, he, he understood that his righteousness was like dirty rags when he looked at what was going on in his life.

He was keenly aware, probably for the first time of the depth of his sin and of the fallenness that he had, you know, literally he, he fell here, but he was a fallen man and he needed a savior.

Uh, and in that time he saw the depths of his brokenness. Um, and in seeing that he was also seeing here the extent, the full extent of God's mercy and grace.

[44 : 35] What God's doing here is God's adopting that person into the family of God. And it's an amazing thing for him to know. And I think that, you know, when we think of ourselves, um, and you may know people in your life as well, this may be your story.

Are there people that cannot get over their past? What has happened in their life? Um, and Paul is the perfect example of how the gospel of Christ, how Jesus himself deals with us.

Um, in, in talking with people or talking in your own life about this, instead of urging the need to, to, to lay down the sins of the past continually, which is obviously something that we do in our forgiveness, the, the, we need to instead to into, into, I shouldn't say instead, but to include in that.

In fact, the thing that's most important is to draw them to the power and the love of Jesus. And this is what's happening here. He is being brought drawn into the living presence of Jesus.

And this is sometimes something that we forget in dealing with our own sin and the sins of others is that we look to this powerful risen, uh, ascended Jesus and his love and the joy of being adopted into Christ family.

[46 : 01] This is the thing that strengthens us in our despair or in addiction, in the things that we are looking at in our past or the peoples in our lives to, to point them to this glorious Jesus who actually calls people by name, Paul, Paul, Saul, Saul, why are you persecution?

me. And, um, and this is, this is Paul's new identity. Jesus gives him a new name to point out to us. I think that in Christ, we have this new identity of, of, uh, of what our life is all about.

We live in a society that is all about confusion about our identity, but our identity is formed not by people who are important in our life or by movements in our culture.

It's actually defined by Jesus. That is our rock and our stability. This is what moves us into mission as well, that our identity is in Christ.

As, as I'm in him, I'm a new creation. Um, you know, we often will hear if God really knew who I was, he wouldn't love me. God knew who Paul was and he loved him.

[47 : 09] And that's Paul's message in scriptures, the transforming power of the gospel to save, you know, first the Jew and then the Greek. I believe in this. He's saying, I'm not ashamed of this because it's happened in my own life.

Okay. So I want to, um, I want to end with that, uh, because we got about eight minutes left. I'd like to just see if there's questions about this, uh, about Paul's conversion, about his, uh, life before, uh, up to the age of 30.

You can, you can go on ahead a little bit more if you want to, but I'd like to hear a little bit about what you think about what he may have been going through in this conversion of seeing himself as the foremost of sinners.

Uh, maybe I'll put that up there actually. Um, that, um, this is, this is from Timothy and this is where I'm getting it from.

It says, we say this in our communion service. You know, he says, I thank him who has given me strength, Jesus, our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.

[48 : 16] He judged him faithful. Though formerly I was a blasphemer, I was a persecutor, I was an insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

That is his conversion. And then he says this, this is our communion service. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

We leave this part out because this is all of us in a sense. He says of whom I am the foremost, the chief, but I received mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost, Jesus might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

And then he says, this is what my life is about to King of to the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. So here's, here's what he was about. God chose in his sovereignty to convert Paul and to, and his hand was on Paul's life right from the beginning of his life.

[49 : 29] even as he was the chief of sinners and he brought him to this place where he received mercy and was saved. So do you have thoughts about that?

Thank you.