

Radical lives for all People

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[0 : 00] I love radical stories of change and transformation. Whether it's people changing their lives or rebuilding a house or someone taking an old rusty tool and fixing it up.

TV shows that have these things are always really popular. I don't necessarily like the drama of them, but I love the before and after shots. One thing is central to these TV shows.

They take something that was not fit for purpose and they change it so it is fit for purpose. The dad who can't run and play with his kids, he goes on Biggest Loser and he drops all this weight and now he can play with the kids.

The house that's falling apart, it's derelict, it's due to be destroyed, but then the team comes in and they transform it, they rebuild it, and then the family can move in and it's now fit for purpose.

I wonder if it's possible that we don't think that real and radical change can happen in our lives. Is it possible that we doubt the impact of God on our lives?

[1 : 16] Maybe if I went on a Christian TV show, then God could do something. Maybe if I had 10 weeks on The Biggest Christian, I was going to say Loser, but that doesn't sound right, just The Biggest Christian TV show, maybe then God could do something in my life.

But do we actually expect God to bring any real change or to do anything in our lives? It's incredibly hard in this season because it just feels like we're treading water.

I want to see change in my heart. I want to see change in the way I relate to people. I want to love people more than myself. I want to sin less. I want to bring more glory to God. But all of this seems really hard at the moment.

Today, we're going to see the best transformation story. We're going to see a radical story of change and how it is on offer for all of us.

A change that has a purpose that makes us fit for purpose. We've been going through the book of Acts in this season, and we've seen that the gospel is for all people.

[2 : 26] It's also been wonderful to be celebrating and praying for what our missionaries are doing overseas, and it was good to see what the clean sauces are doing. Even though they are struggling, seeing radical change.

In the book of Acts, in what we're up to, we've seen that Paul has moved across different regions. He has preached. He has trained and taught leaders. He has planted churches.

And now, God is calling him to go back to Jerusalem, back to his home, and we're going to see how God has radically transformed Paul and called him, how he has made Paul fit for purpose.

And the challenge for us today will be to see if God has made any change in our lives. Has God changed our lives, and how is he changing us so that we are fit for purpose of responding to his call to love other people?

So there'll be two points today. Firstly, radical change. Secondly, radical call as we go through Acts 22. But let's pray before we jump in.

[3 : 36] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word to us here from Acts 22. Lord, help us to listen well to your word. Change us that we would be like you, and let us respond to your call to love people like you love us.

Amen. In Acts 22, Paul has come back to the city of Jerusalem, and he has accidentally caused an uproar.

Jews from across Asia, which we saw in chapter 19, had all heard the gospel. They see Paul going into the temple and assume, wrongly, that he is taking a Gentile with him.

They get angry. You don't take Gentiles into the temple. The temple was only for Jews, only for those who were ceremonially clean. And so they assume Paul is doing this terrible thing, taking a Gentile in, and they get angry.

They want to rip him apart. And so the people riot. Paul is grabbed by Roman soldiers just before he is killed, and he talks to this unruly crowd.

[4 : 46] He speaks to them, those who are intent on shedding his blood, and he gives a defense, and he preaches. And this is our first point today. He preaches of the change in his life, the radical change.

Now, Paul is very mindful of the crowd here. He speaks to them so that they can hear him. He speaks to them in Aramaic. He explains how much he is like them before he gets to the change. So please, have Acts 22, verse 1 open, so we can be looking at God's word together. From verse 1, Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.

When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said, I am a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city.

I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the high priest and all the council can themselves testify.

[5 : 57] Now there are three key parts to how Paul is describing himself. He describes his ethnic identity, his education and his job or his mission.

Firstly, his ethnic identity. He says that while he was born outside of Jerusalem, he is a child of this city. This is where he grew up.

He is central to this town. He knows this city. He is a Jerusalemite, just like the rest of the people here. He's saying, I'm just like you all.

He speaks of his education. He was trained by Gamaliel. He was the most prominent of the teachers of the law. Paul took the law seriously. He had the best education.

It's like saying that he studied law at Harvard University. Paul had the very best education that could be offered at Jerusalem. And not only was he of the city, not only was he educated, but he was zealous.

[7 : 08] He was passionate. He was passionate about the law, so much so that he persecuted Christians, persecuted the people of Jesus, the way.

That was his mission. That was the job that he set out to do. He had his work approved by the elders. His job in his eyes was to get rid of Christianity.

If Paul stopped speaking here, you know what? This crowd probably would have applauded him.

Oh, yes, very well said. This boy, he's one of ours. Yes, isn't he great? He's just like us. We're very proud of him.

But Paul no longer found his identity in his former life. It wasn't his ethnic identity, his education or his work that shaped who he was.

Something had changed. Something powerful and radical must have grabbed him by the neck and given him a good shake. Something massive must have happened to change him so drastically.

[8 : 12] Paul identifies with this crowd firstly so that he can show how great the change is. How did Paul's life change? How did his life get turned upside down?

He met Jesus. Have a look with me. Verse 6. Now, this isn't just a vision or a prophecy.

Jesus actually appears to him. His companions could see the light, but they couldn't understand the voice of Jesus. This is just like the rest of the crowd that Paul is preaching to at this point.

They could hear what he was saying, but they couldn't understand it. Jesus interrupts Paul's life, interrupts his mission. He was the perfect Jewish man, the ideal son.

He had the best education. He had the ethnicity like everybody else. He was on a passionate path, but Jesus steps into his way because he was going down the wrong path.

[9 : 34] Jesus says, I am the one you were persecuting. And so Jesus sends him on to Damascus to find out what Jesus was going to send him to do.

And there he meets Ananias, who gives him a message from the Lord. Verse 14, Then he said, that's Ananias, the God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one, to hear words from his mouth.

You will be his witnesses to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

Ananias makes it very clear. Paul has seen the righteous one, God himself, the same God he worshipped, has actually interrupted his life to bring change, to call him to something new, to call

him to be his witness, just like the apostles, to all that he had seen and heard.

And at that, he's baptized. He sets aside his former identity, Jewish, well-educated, passionate to persecute Christians, and he takes on the identity of a Christ follower.

[10:55] But can you imagine how Paul would have felt on the way to Ananias? He was there, partially responsible for Stephen's death.

He was on his way to arrest and kill more Christians. And he meets Jesus, who points out that Paul is in the wrong. Can you imagine the depth of shame and guilt he would have felt?

Everything that I was passionate about, everything I thought I knew, it was all wrong. But Jesus sends him to Ananias, who preaches God's good news.

The gospel is for you, even this enemy. Your sins are forgiven. They are washed away because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

In Paul's baptism, he sets aside his former way of life. As he went to arrest Christians, Paul was arrested by Jesus.

[11:58] And his life would be forever changed. There's a quick note here, that Paul's name actually doesn't change. The name Paul and Saul are the same name.

They're just different languages saying the same name. It is much like how a person moving to Australia from another country will pick a name in English that sounds similar to their name.

Or if I'm introducing myself in Chinese, I would say my name is Jan Wuxi. It is the same thing.

Whilst everything in Paul's life is radically changed, his name is actually not one of them.

But his life is changed by meeting Jesus. God took Paul from being his enemy and has saved him.

He's dealt with his sin and shame and brought him into his family.

Paul has put aside his ethnic identity, his education and his work, all because Jesus offers something better. His new identity is better.

[12:59] My testimony is the same as Paul's. I was his enemy until Jesus stepped into my path and said, come and follow me. If you're following Jesus, your story is the same as Paul's.

Sure, Paul is one of the most influential Christian leaders of all time, but our stories are actually the same. Our stories are just as amazing and awesome as Paul's.

That God would forgive. That he would deal with our pain and our shame. Sure, we may not go from being a radical terrorist to a missionary leader, but the heart of the change is still the same.

God takes us from enemy to family, from shamed to saved, from forsaken to forgiven. If you don't know Jesus yet, you might be feeling in the same position that Paul may have before he met Ananias, feeling the weight of sin.

Hearing about the love of Jesus might be hard because maybe you feel like you are not worth God dying for you. Not good enough. Stuffed up too many times.

[14:16] I've made too many mistakes. I've hurt too many people. My heart is too rotten for God to even love me. The wonderful reminder of this part of the Bible is that God would love even someone like Paul, a radical terrorist who was his enemy.

And he would bring in someone far worse than us. The gospel is for all people, even us who are like Paul, to be part of God's family.

God radically changed Paul's life, brought him into his family. And now Paul has been given a new identity. He's now a Christian. He's been given a new education.

He has seen Jesus and heard from him. And now God gives him a new job. This is our second point today, radical call. Paul is given a radical call.

Be on mission. Go and be a witness to all people. On Paul's first visit back to Jerusalem, Paul raised doubts about his fitness to do this.

[15:28] Chapter 22, verse 19, have a look. Lord, I replied, these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you.

God, you have got the wrong guy. It's not gonna work. How can I do this? They know who I am. But God confirms his mission. Verse 21.

Go. I will send you far away to the Gentiles. And that's what Paul did. God sent him far away. And Paul spread the gospel, preached for years and saw the gospel spread all across Asia as we saw in chapter 19.

Paul obeyed God's call, even when it was difficult, even when he wasn't sure about it, because his life had been captured by Jesus and changed to follow him.

In Paul's speech to this rioting crowd, he appealed to them. He identified with them. I am just like you. I speak your language. I'm zealous for the Lord, just like you are.

[16:32] Spoke of his own hatred for Christians before he met Jesus. But his language started to change. He met Jesus, the righteous one. God himself commissioned him and sent him out to the rest of the world.

All of this, the crowd listened to, it says, right up until this last point. Now, they get violently aggressive again.

They've turned back into that mob, trying to rip Paul apart. What's so offensive about what he said? Well, Paul is saying that God not only wanted the Jews, but God also wanted to bring all of the Gentiles in to God's family.

The Gentiles were the enemies of the Jews. They were unclean. They couldn't get into the temple. They were the bad guys who were in control. Paul, and the Jews couldn't stomach this.

They reviled. They hated the Gentiles. And anyone like the tax collectors who worked with them, the Gentiles would ruin the temple. They were their harsh overlords.

[17:42] And Paul is saying that the Holy God wants to bring them in. It would be as if Joe Biden, the President of the United States, got up and said that he was going to welcome all members of the Taliban into the US.

People would riot. They were the hated enemies. And it's no wonder the Jews get angry at this point. Because Jesus is doing something radical.

If he can bring in an enemy like Paul into God's family, he is going to bring in all of those who are far away from God.

That is the mission that God sent Paul to, to bring people into God's family. And God has so radically changed Paul that he would follow his call even to go back to Jerusalem, to preach this, even if he would end up in chains.

In chapter 21, whilst Paul was still heading to Jerusalem, Christians, through the Spirit, knew what was going to happen to Paul, knew that he would be bound and arrested, and they tried to stop him.

[18:52] But Paul's response is really awesome. In chapter 21, verse 13, Paul says, I am not only ready to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul has gone from someone who was ready and willing to kill people who follow Jesus, and now he is ready to die for Jesus. Paul knew his call to follow God and to be a witness, and he was going to do that.

Paul had all that he had in life interrupted. Jesus turned him around and called him to follow him, and Paul follows him, even if for the rest of his life he is going to be bound and in chains.

When we meet Jesus, like Paul did face to face, or when we meet Jesus in the pages of the Bible as we do, he totally changes our lives.

but he also calls us to be on his team. We are also to be witnesses to what we have seen. We are to be witnesses to who Jesus is in the Bible.

[20:01] God doesn't just save us and then go, great, now you're part of the team, you go sit and warm the bench for the rest of your life. He sends us out to be part of his team, to be on his mission.

Paul didn't think it was going to work, there was too much baggage to who he was, but that didn't matter. God used him and he wants us to be on his mission too.

We are all called to be on God's mission. He has taken us from being his enemy to being his emissary, from sinner to sharer of the gospel.

Now it's lockdown, I hear you saying. How is God going to use me to be his witness? I'm not legally allowed to really go out of my house.

I can't go to work, I can't see people. It's really hard to share the gospel over a team meeting at Zoom because there's no chit-chat. How am I supposed to witness? I can't go out like Paul did.

[21:04] That's fine, I'm not going to tell you to break the law, trust me, I'm definitely not going to tell you to break the law. But how are we going to follow God's call, not only to follow him but also to witness to other people in this season?

Well there's four things that we can do. We can pray, we can give, we can look out for our neighbours and look out for our family. First of all, pray. Be praying.

God is the one who saves lives. God is not in lockdown. There is no border closure that can stop the gospel spreading. Get the mission booklet in the links below, open that up, be praying for our missionaries, be praying for our cleansers that we heard about today, be praying for Sam and

Sally Lowe in the Gold Coast who we're raising money for, be praying for the Nepali theological students who are training to be pastors.

Pray that God would use them to impact those nations. that not only South Africa would be impacted by the work of the cleansers, but all of Africa. Be praying for our mission partners in Germany and in Japan.

Next week, come to our prayer afternoon as we bring these partners and our desire for God to change people's lives to Him in prayer.

[22 : 30] Pray for your neighbours, pray for your colleagues, and pray, God, what do you want of me? Where do you want me to be, Lord?

Do you want me to stay here and be the best witness I can be to my family, to my friends, to my colleagues? Or are you calling me to do something like Paul to go on mission?

God, where do you want me? Do you actually want me to uproot my life like Sam and Sally for the benefit of your kingdom? We need to be willing to not just tell our family, but do something radical like Paul did.

Change his identity and make the priority Christian to follow his call in our lives. Secondly, give. Give to the mission account.

You can find the mission account details on our website. While it is difficult for us to do mission, it is not impossible. Right now, we can be supporting the ongoing mission work of the Lowe's in the Gold Coast.

[23 : 41] We're seeking to raise 20 grand. We're seeking to do something radical to impact the Gold Coast. We're raising money to do that, and this is something wonderful.

Last time I checked, seven and a half grand from about 20 different households. This is wonderful. Thank you, church. Thank you so much for your generosity. But I know there are about 50 households watching this stream right now.

Imagine if we all did something radical. If we all gave out of what God has given us to continue to support the work of ministry.

Give to Sam and Sally. The money we give does make a difference to the people's lives in the Gold Coast and to our hearts to be growing more generous like a Heavenly Father.

So be praying. Be giving. And thirdly, care for your neighbours. Get to know your neighbours. I have been living in my house for three and a bit years.

[24 : 47] I don't know my neighbours that well. But in the last couple of weeks I had a chance to go and pick up some medicine for a neighbour which was wonderful. Got to go into the shops. They were a bit cautious about that.

And then after when I dropped it off I had a half an hour conversation with one of my neighbours and got to talk about church and Jesus and all kinds of wonderful things. These opportunities don't come up too often.

Take this chance right now to get to know the people around you because people all around us are doing it tough. people need Jesus right now.

More so almost than any other time in life where we are anxious about the future, where we are considering death and disease when we can share with them the good news that Jesus is more powerful than them.

Lastly, be on the lookout for your family. Family members are one of the hardest groups to convert. I'm aware of that but there are a number of things you can do.

[25 : 47] Share this YouTube link with them. You can say this is the church service that I was part of this morning I found this really encouraging why don't you watch it as well? Tell them hey look this is what I've been watching this is what I do I go and hide away in my bedroom and watch church I just want to share this with you because you're such an important part of my life watch this as well.

Maybe you could do something a little bit scary if you're up for a radical challenge do something scary and ask hey family member brother sister mum dad what was I like before I became a Christian have you seen any change in my life?

Don't know what they will respond with have they seen any change? You might be scared at their response but this is a wonderful opportunity to get the people around you to reflect on what God is doing in your life so that you can share how great Jesus is.

Pray give look out for your neighbours look out for your family there is much we can do to respond to God's call because he has changed the direction of our lives.

Now at this point I could tell you all kinds of stories and motivate you about the change in people's lives I could tell you about the African terrorist who became a missionary I could tell you about the devout Chinese atheist who became a pastor despite much persecution there are so many wonderful stories of amazing conversions but they can make us think that God does amazing things but not really for little old me my story your story is just as amazing and radical as his God God through his love for us sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for me and for you meeting him we would be radically changed to no longer identify with the former things of our lives with work and education and our chosen fields but now the most important thing in our lives is

[28 : 00] Christian because he has taken away our sin he's taking away my love for that sin and he is replacing it with a love for him and a love to be on his mission God in his love for you is making him more like you every day fit for the purpose of knowing him and loving other people let us pray that God would do that heavenly father I thank you for your love for us that while we were still far off you sent your son to die for us heavenly father make us fit to be part of your family change us make us generous make us love other people like you love us and heavenly father be with us in the coming weeks as we seek to love those around us so that we can respond to your radical call on our lives we ask this in your son's name amen