

BEFORE & AFTER

Acts 26:9-23

ATTENTION:

Life is a Before & After series of events:

- You get a few years on you and mom will embarrass you with your friends with pictures of “what you looked like before”
 - when you were 3 years old.
 - For me there was the before and after braces – (show pic)
- Then there are the parts of our stories:
 - There is the before and after marriage
 - Before and after children
 - Before and after guys lose their hair
 - Before and after we become a Christian

ATTUNE:

There are a lot of Before & After Stories/events in scripture.

- Let's notice one as we begin:
 - Notice the B&A story of the resurrection:
 - This is a story about a radical transformation.
 - Before it looked like Jesus was a false prophet and all hope was lost
 - Before there was a bloody cross - after there was an empty tomb.
 - Before, there was a horrible death - after there is the promise of new life.
- The resurrection of Jesus set in motion the transformation of others as well.
 - The B&A story of Jesus began to be duplicated in the lives of other people:
 - those who became His followers
 - ...who came to believe that He really was the Son of God and that forgiveness was possible
 - Result? Christianity spread all over the Roman Empire.

BODY:

TRANSITION:

- An amazing example of this transformation = Saul – Paul
 - From an anti-Christian activist to the greatest Christian missionary ever!
 - He took the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles
 - He authored 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.

- During the first century, no one had more influence on the spread of Christianity
- There was a moment in Paul's life when he encountered the resurrected Jesus, and it changed everything for him.
- 3 places in Acts where Paul's story is told = Acts 9, 22, 26
- I want to communicate that the resurrected Jesus moves people from darkness to light for life and eternity.
 - I am praying that everyone here will have this same experience of transformed!

DARKNESS

At this point we find Paul standing as a prisoner before King Agrippa ready to give his defense. He is making his way through the court system after having made an appeal to Caesar. The Roman Governor, Festus, wanted some advice. So, he sent Paul to the Jewish King Agrippa, who was more familiar with religious issues.

- Paul had been arrested for preaching that Jesus is the Messiah

King Agrippa, I am being accused by the Jews because of this hope. ⁸ Why do any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? ⁹ In fact, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ I actually did this in Jerusalem, and I locked up many of the saints in prison, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to death, I was in agreement against them. ¹¹ In all the synagogues I often punished them and tried to make them blaspheme. Since I was terribly enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

Acts 26:7b-11

- His aim was to make Christians' lives unbearable so they would deny that they really believed in Jesus.
- We don't know the number of people Paul arrested, brought to trial, and saw executed.
 - We do know there was no one who was more dangerous to the church of Jesus at the time than Paul/Saul.
- Notice the word *convinced*.
 - Paul was not only doing what was wrong but was convinced he was doing what was right.
 - He was blind to the truth of Jesus the Christ.

- A devout man, trained in the best schools, knew the Scriptures, and was absolutely convinced he was right.
 - But he is totally wrong.
 - Not only was He doing the wrong things, he was blind.
 - That is the same thing that we experience:

4 In their case, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 4:4

21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened.

Romans 1:21

- The problem with Paul before he met Jesus is the same problem that we all have: we are convinced that we are right.
- We are blinded to our true condition.
- **We** convince ourselves to do wrong because deserve the pleasure, the joy, of what it brings us.

We get involved in addictive actions and behaviors, and convince ourselves that we can stop at any time, but we don't.

We know it isn't right to hurt others, but we convince

- Problem - convince selves we are correct and act upon it.

- What have I done? My guess is you have asked that question!
 - Maybe it was a bad relationship, and you knew you shouldn't have been in it.
 - Or you think back on how you treated your parents or a friend, and you see now how mistaken you were.
 - Look closely enough, and you'll find some soul blindness.
- Paul's problem is our problem!

Light

- **BUT**, Paul's story did not stop there. In Acts 22:6-16 we learn about Paul's encounter with the resurrected Christ. It changed his life forever, and it is a great example of being brought out of darkness and into the light. Here is what happened:

6 "As I was traveling and approaching Damascus, about noon an intense light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'" 8 "I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?'

"He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting...'" 10 "I said, 'What should I do, Lord?'

"The Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything that you have been assigned to do.'

11 "Since I couldn't see because of the brightness of the light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and went into Damascus. 12 Someone named Ananias, a devout man according to the law, who had a good reputation with all the Jews living there, 13 came and stood by me and said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight.' And in that very hour I looked up and saw him. 14 And he said, 'The God of our ancestors has appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the words from his mouth, 15 since you will be a witness for him to all people of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now, why are you delaying? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

Acts 22:6-16

- Paul - transformed in this encounter with the resurrected Jesus
 - He was confronted with just who Jesus was, and it changed everything.
 - Paul realized the message about Jesus was true.
 - He had believed Jesus was a false prophet.
 - ...that Christianity was ruining everything.
 - ...none of it was true.
 - His resurrection had been faked.
 - Then he met Jesus - spoke to Him - faces the reality that Jesus really was alive!
 - His resurrection was true.
 - If that was true - everything about Christianity was true.

PROJECT:

- This same Jesus speaks today through his Word, Bible, scripture!

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16

¹² For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

- This means the Word is able to show us who we really are.

ACTION:

- This event had an amazing impact on Paul!
 - It radically changed his life forever.
 - The greatest persecutor of the church became its greatest champion!
- The dramatic change of his life should also be an example of the impact of becoming a Christian on all of us!
 - Everything about Paul's life was changed in that moment.
 - He was born again! Made anew! From death to a new life!

Take this verse home with you this week!

You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19b-20