

GOD'S SUPER HEROES – PAUL

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A hero is someone who saves someone from some impending danger. I saw the news just recently about a woman who was trapped on railroad tracks. She fell out of the chair and was lying on the tracks with a train coming straight at her. A young man who was driving down the road happened to see what was going on. He stopped his car and quickly went under the cross bars and pull the woman away with only seconds to spare. That young man was a hero. Heroes save people from all kinds of situations that would be harmful.

As we have seen, God has through the years had his heroes, people who have saved people from the damage of sin by giving them God's word. We have had the privilege of studying the lives of some of these people. These were people just like you and me. They lived in a fallen, sinful world, but they would not go with the flow of society around them. Instead, they had a desire to know the one who created them to give their life in service to Him.

Today we have the privilege is studying the life of a man who is perhaps the greatest Christian who ever lived, the Apostle Paul. His life and his inspired writings have strengthened and brought people closer to God for thousands of years. If your life is comfortable and you wanted to stay comfortable, then you probably don't want to read Paul's writing's as he will put the heat on your life. He makes it very hard to stay in your comfort zone.

1. PAUL WAS A PREPARED MAN

As we have seen, God is at work in our lives to prepare us for the work that he has for us to do in our future. That is certainly true in the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul was a unique vessel that God raised up to be the apostle to the gentiles. In Paul's day, there were three Greek university cities, Athens, Alexandria, Tarsus. Paul was brought up in Tarsus. It was there that he learned about the culture of the gentiles. Later when he was preaching in their cities, he knew their philosophies. He understood their customs and was familiar with their idols. He knew how to speak their language.

Not only was Paul the apostle to the gentiles, he was as you know, the writer of most of the New Testament. Since the New Testament is based on the Old Testament, the one who wrote it must be very versed in Old Testament teachings, and Paul was. He studied under one of the greatest rabbis who ever lived, a man named Gamaliel. Gamaliel was so well respected, that the people called him "the beauty of the law." In his early years, Paul would sit with Gamaliel. Gamaliel would ask Paul questions to which Paul would reply, and Paul would ask Gamaliel questions so that there was intense interaction between the

two. That one on one teaching with one of the greatest Old Testament teachers alive prepared Paul with an extensive education in the Old Testament scriptures.

2. PAUL WAS A CHANGED MAN

Christianity is a religion of conversion. Everything we say and everything we believe is built upon one fundamental and revolutionary premise: You don't have to stay the way you are. Your life can be radically changed by God. Conversion means that long-held prejudices can be overcome, lifetime habits can be broken, and deeply ingrained patterns of sin can be erased over time. Conversion is the certainty that what you were does not determine what you are, and what you are does not determine what you will be. Your life can move in an entirely new direction.

If you take that truth away from Christianity, it ceases to be a supernatural religion, and it becomes nothing but a set of rules. Matthew the tax collector is a good example of conversion. He was a self-centered thief who stole from his own people. After meeting Jesus, he was a changed man.

Of all the conversion stories in the Bible, none is greater than the conversion of the man called Saul of Tarsus. As Saul got older, he became a violent persecutor of the early Christian church. He hated Christ and his followers so much that he did his best to eradicate the new religion as if it were some sort of dreaded virus. He was a terrorist who did his evil deeds in the name of the God of the Bible.

Galatians 1:13-14. "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers."

Acts 8:1-3 tells us that Saul went from house to house in a sort of reverse evangelism. Knock, knock. "Any Christians here?" If the answer was yes, he dragged them out of their homes and had them put in prison. His heart was full of murderous rage against anyone who claimed to follow Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 9:1-2, "He was "breathing out threats against the Lord's disciples."

He approved of the stoning of Stephen and when other Christians were put to death, he cast his vote against them. In his mind, the best way to defeat Christianity was to kill all the Christians. No one was as fierce an enemy to the church of God as was Saul. His reputation was so bad that when he got saved, almost no one believed that the change was a real. But it was real, and his life was permanently transformed.

Galatians 1:15-16a, "But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles"

Focus for a moment on the first word. "But." This is the great interruption. All that happened in Paul's life came because of that one little word. When Paul made Jesus, everything changed for him.

1) The Christian gospel comes from God, not from man.

This is a hugely important point because we live in a pluralistic society that teaches us—over and over again—that all religions are basically the same, that we are all going to the same place, and that no religious system can be thought superior to any other system. That is nonsense, but that is what people are taught, and that is what they believe. Paul's story points us in the right direction. The gospel is not the result of polling data or the work of a committee. It is based on the historical facts surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2) No one is beyond the reach of God's grace

It would be hard to imagine a more hopeless case than Saul of Tarsus. If God can save a man like Paul, he can save anyone. It doesn't matter what someone has done or what their background is. God can change anyone's life into something that no one would ever have imagined.

Jacob Koshy grew up in Singapore with the one driving ambition: to be a success in life, to gain all the money and possessions he could. And that led him into the world of drugs and gambling, and eventually he became the lord of an international smuggling network. In 1980, he was arrested and placed in a government rehabilitation prison in Singapore. He was frustrated beyond endurance. All his goals, purposes, dreams and ambitions were locked up with him in a tiny cell, and his heart was full of a cold emptiness. He was a smoker, and cigarettes weren't allowed in the center. Instead he smuggled in tobacco and rolled it in the pages of the Gideon bible. One day he fell asleep while smoking. He awoke to find that the cigarette had burned out, and all that remained was a scrap of charred paper. He unrolled it and read what was written: "Saul, Saul, Why do you persecute me?" Jacob asked for another bible and read the entire story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He suddenly realized that if God could help someone like Saul, God could help him to. There in his cell he knelt and prayed asking Christ to come into his life and change him. God answered his prayer, and he started sharing his story with other prisoners. As soon as he was released, he became involved in a church. He met a Christian woman, married her and is now a missionary in the far east where he tells people far and wide, "who would have believed that I could find the truth a smoking the word of God?"

When you come in every Sunday morning, never underestimate what God may do with the person sitting to your right or left. God is a God of surprises when it comes to what He does in the lives of people. And He just keeps on doing it. We ended our time together on Wednesday night singing amazing grace. As you know, that song was written by John Newton was a vile, wicked slave trader of salvation. He was lost, but God found him. He was spiritually blind, but God caused him to see.

3. PAUL WAS A TOTALLY COMMITTED MAN

a) Paul had a passionate pursuit of Jesus Christ

Everywhere you read in his writings, he is constantly calling us to focus our lives and attention on Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

When Paul said it is no longer he who lived but Christ who lived in him, he was not just speaking vain words. Those words were the core of all that he was. Paul said, "You cut me, and I believe Jesus." If you look at my day, you'll find Jesus."

b) Paul had a passion to reach other people for Christ

Passion for Christ shows itself in a passion to reach people for Christ. The two go hand in hand. If you do not find in your life a passion for reach others for Christ, then you don't have a passion for Christ. We know that because Jesus was passionate about reaching people, and if you love him, his passion will infect your life. It was that passion of reaching others for Christ that led Paul to do all that he did. That's why he went on his missionary journeys. That's why he wanted to go to Rome. His whole life was consumed with reaching others for Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:19-21, Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."

Paul said I have become all things to all men. Paul ministered to the most legalistic Jews to the most pagan gentiles, and he always found a way to be able to relate them without compromising God's word. He could walk into a Jewish synagogue, take the Old Testament scriptures and tell people about Jesus Christ. He could walk into Athens where they had an altar to an unknown God and say "I can use that." Then he would tell them that he knew who the unknown God was and start preaching the good news about Jesus Christ. His mind was always on one thing-sharing the good news that changed his life with someone else.

4. PAUL HAD AN ABSOLUTE AWARENESS OF WHO HE WAS AND WHO HE WAS NOT

Paul had many enemies who did not mind criticizing him. Look at what they say about him a second Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 10:10, "For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing."

Many think that Paul was not a very impressive guy. It could be that he didn't even speak well in public. We know that he had a thorn in the flesh which could have been poor eyesight, epilepsy or some other form of ailment. But in spite of those weaknesses, he knew that the power of God would work through him, and that is all that mattered. That is why he was able to say in

Philippians 4:13, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

Paul understood that the issue was not what he could do. The issue was what God can do through him. In the same is true for everyone of us. If you think that God cannot use you, you need to understand that you are a prime candidate to be used by God. God delights in taking the weak make them strong for his Glory.

I heard a story about a great trumpet player named Winton Marcellus who was playing with a small jazz band. Somewhere in the arrangement to trumpet player broken out into this mournful solo that fill the entire room and brought everyone under a spell. When he was almost finished he played the last words of the song each word being held out there distinctively until I came to the last two words. At that point and someone's cell phone when all and began playing some goofy little tune. The person who owned the cell phone realize that it is destroyed a great masterpiece, and he quickly took the cell phone outside. But the damage had been done. At that point, the trumpet player did something unusual. He started playing the little goofy song cell phone had played. After playing that little goofy song for a minute or two, he began to change some of the notes into a minor key. He continued to change the notes until he was able to transition back into the song he was playing before being interrupted. He finally ended up playing the final two words of his original song that had been interrupted. The crowds stood up and erupted into applause because he had taken something that was goofy and turned it into something that was great. That is what God wants to do in your life and in my life. He wants to take the weaknesses and turn them into strengths so that the world will stand up and applaud when God is done through such an unworthy instrument as us.

5. PAUL HAD A COMMITMENT TO FINISH THE RACE NO MATTER WHAT THE COST

1 Corinthians 9:24-26, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize."

25Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air."

Paul said, "I'm doing what I am doing on purpose, and I don't want to simply be a starter; I want to be a finisher. I don't want to look back over my life and remember a season of time when I was passionate about Jesus, and see a time when I was reaching people." Paul said I want to keep on running the race until I die. If Paul had to watch carefully over his life, how much more do we need to do the same.

How to become more like Paul

1. Never get over the wonder

Coming to know Jesus Christ is a wonderful thing. It is as if your eyes have been opened for the first time, and you begin seeing things in a different way. Life takes on a meaning that it has never had before, and you begin to fellowship with God and with his people. An old evangelist was once asked how he maintained his excitement and vigor throughout all of his years. His reply was, "I have never lost the wonder." Such was the case with Paul. He never forgot his experience on the Damascus road when Jesus Christ and mercifully stepped into this life and changed it all. If the Christian life has lost its wonder in your life, you need to renew your commitment to God and fall in love with him all over again.

2. Measure your spiritual growth by comparison to Christ, not other Christians

Ever a church has a certain level of spirituality among the people. When someone becomes a part of that church, it is a natural thing to do to rise to the level of spirituality the church has. That's why many people level often their spiritual lives. They feel like they have reached the standard, and they become satisfied. None of us in this church is the standard for your Christian living. Jesus Christ is the standard.

3. Live your life in the light of eternity

If you read the writings of the Apostle Paul, you see that his life was consumed with the understanding that he would soon leave this world and live in eternity with the lord. Knowing that he would face the lord and given account for what he had done drove him on to the day of his death. Life is not walking by us. Life is flying by us, and before we can blink your eyes, we will have left this world and enter into the next. Live your life preparing for that next step.