

Power to Change

Sermon # 1

“Anatomy of A Conversion” Acts 9:1-19

(Synopsis: using the story of Saul/Paul as a basis, we want to challenge our listeners to be sure of their conversion, but more importantly understand what has to take place in order for someone to be converted. As a result of this sermon, our hope is that our people will be sensitive to others who find themselves in the throes of the conversion experience)

Introduction:

1. You have heard the old story about “how many electricians does it take to change a light bulb...only one, but the bulb has to want to be changed”...how about these?
 - a. how many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb? CHANGE? Who said anything about change in a Baptist church
 - b. how many Pentecostals does it take to change a light bulb? 7...one to change the bulb and 6 to pray away the spirit of darkness
 - c. how many Evangelical Free Church people does it take to change a light bulb? As many as are needed to determine a quorum to vote on the idea of changing the light bulb
 - d. on and on...
2. We laugh about change, but change is a powerful, dramatic thing. Over the next 2 weeks the entire province of Saskatchewan will be offered the opportunity to change. Not the trivial thing of changing a light bulb, but the powerful thing of changing their lives.
 - a. 95% of the province is going to be saturated with the message that life change is possible, through Jesus Christ
 - b. people watching t.v., listening to radio, looking at newspapers, standing in the lunch line, waiting for a bus, speaking to a neighbour will be talking about this media blitz alerting people to the possibility of life change.
 - c. It will hit our province like nothing has for a long time.
3. Do I believe that change is possible, through Jesus Christ? You bet I do
 - a. Illus. share how Jesus Christ changed my life (testimony)
 - b. It is my hope that people all across this province will know the reality of a life Change possible through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
4. How does change happen? What is the process? The experts say that change is an individual thing, each of us would go through it in our own way. But I suggest to you that there are some common threads in a person’s conversion. Today I want to look at the story of one man’s conversion and use it as a reminder for us to be watching as God does the working of bringing people to Himself over the next while. My hope is that you and I will be sensitive to God’s change process in the lives of our families,

friends, neighbours and co workers. Let's turn in our Bibles to ACTS 9 and look at what I call, "The Anatomy of A Conversion", the story of how "Saul" became "Paul".

We are going to look at the story in three movements, let's see it like 3 parts of a play.

I. Act 1—A Murderer Meets Jesus

TEXT: (retell the story for sake of reminding the audience)

1. context is the persecution of chapter 7 and especially 8:1 (research background a bit...)
2. Saul, is not just participating, but salivating and leading the charge of persecution...it's gone beyond a passion, it's become a vendetta against Xns
 - a. seeks out permission to travel two or three hours to Damascus (v2)
 - b. goal is to find followers of Jesus, the way the truth and the life (v2b)
 - c. plan is to arrest them (2c)
3. But suddenly, in the midst of the journey, with no hint of warning, he's Knocked to the ground by a brilliant light...lightning? search light? Laser light? We are not told, but it literally causes him to fall to the ground, blind. (v3,4a)
4. and he hears a voice, not identified by name, but he recognizes the tone somehow...and the voice confronts him with the question "why...why...why are you persecuting me?) v4/5
illus. like when you were a teenager in the midst of doing something stupid and the phone rings and the voice doesn't identify itself, but you know in an instant it's your mother and she's asking "why...why...why" only this isn't his mother, it's Jesus himself...and his blood runs cold, and his heart beats faster
5. interestingly, his companions hear a noise but see nothing...and Saul is blind, sightless, but clearly rattled...they are puzzled and lead him the rest of the way to Damascus and settle him into a quiet setting (v7-9)

TODAY what does this scene teach us? It teaches us a lot about who God reaches and how he goes about it.

1. we sometimes think God works on quiet, gentle, soft people who are "reachable". Yep, He does, but sometimes He goes after the hard core, haranguing, desperately destructive types too. No one is outside of God's reach.
 - a. Peter reminds us that "God is not willing that any should perish" and that Includes the hard core, distant ones.
 - b. God know the heart of a man is stubborn, resistant, proud, even hostile to God. He'll do whatever is necessary to reach him, even bringing brokenness into his life.
 - i. A.W. Tozer used to say, "before God can use a man, he must break him"
 - ii. You listen to people's conversion story in life, how many times do you hear about God reaching down and touching them in the midst of marital break up, financial bankruptcy, personal breakdown

iii. What we deem as disaster, God says is part of a plan to reach people.

Illus. arguably one of the most famous conversions of the 20th century was Charles Colson, intimate aide to the president of the United States in the early 1970's. He was known as the "hatchet man" of president Nixon's administration. You know what turned his life around? He was caught breaking the law in the Watergate Scandal, sentenced to prison, disgraced, disbarred and humiliated. And in the brokenness of a prison cell, God reached him with the message of change.

iv. there is no life that is irredeemable by God's power to change.

2. be alert to people in their time of need, often it is God's opportunity to share the grace, and mercy, and forgiveness of Jesus with them. In your network of friends, co workers, neighbours, who would be the furthest person from God? What would it take for them to be reached for Christ?

(that leads to scene 2 in our story...we pick it up in v10 ff)

II. Act 2—A Friend of Jesus Meets a Redeemed Murderer (v10-16)

TEXT—retell the story here, narrating it afresh

1. in the city of Damascus is a believer, his name is Ananias. We are not told a lot about him, but he evidently knows the Lord. Look at the contrast between Saul's response to a voice in v5 and Ananias' response to the same voice in v.10. One of the marks of a believer is that he or she recognizes the voice of God in their lives. (v10)
2. Ananias gets some pretty specific instructions (v11,12). That's how it is with God, sometimes He gives broad direction, sometimes it is precise, specific, to the point—this one is indisputable...God wants something done.
3. Ananias is spooked...v.13,14 he understands the request...too well. He knows all about Saul's reputation, only too well. No wonder he's reluctant.
 - i. God told you to go to the publisher of Playboy magazine? God told you to go to the local hell's angel chapter? God told you to visit a local native witch doctor?
4. But look what God tells him..15/16...Saul is now called "God's chosen instrument...he's been given a mission"
 - going to the Bay for a "makeover"...pretty neat thing, but this more than just the external adjustment
 - when God changes a man, it's complete...it's total, it's a makeover, from the inside out...he changes people hearts...

TODAY how bout us? Do we have the courage to reach out to someone who only yesterday was the enemy of all that we stood for and believed?

1. God will use the videos, and the advertisements, and the radio spots to awaken people to change, but it's going to take the personal approach and involvement in people's lives in order for the whole process to be complete.
2. Did you know that it takes on average 7 presentations of the gospel before people make a commitment? Like Naaman washing in the Jordan River (2

Kgs5) it's a process. How do you know that your presence is the first? Second? Or 7th time in a person's life?

3. In Saul's life, there was Ananias? To who will you and I be an Ananias?
Illus. John 4:39-42

III. Act III Expanding the Circle of Fellowship (notice the progress in the story, from murderer of the disciples, to broken convert to "brother Saul" v.17)

TEXT—Ananias does what he is told, and look what happens!

1. Just as God had directed, it happened (v17.) If God gives you direction to speak to someone, don't hold back, listen to God! Ananias explains Jesus to Saul
2. And Saul takes steps, baby steps of Christian obedience (v18)
3. And Saul takes steps, baby steps of Christian service (v19,20)

TODAY

1. God does the converting, you and I have the wonderful privilege of being a spiritual midwife. Like human birth, timing is everything. You have to be there in order to help.
2. I challenge you over these next two weeks to ask God to give you eyes to see new born babes in Christ. I want you to do three things
 - a. write down people you know who might be touched by God's presence during this campaign...start to pray for them by name.
 - b. Make plans to have a cup of coffee with them...especially if you sense God is using this time of harvesting in their lives
 - c. Bring them here to church in the next Sunday or two. There is always room for one more sinner in our benches.

CONCLUSION Power to Change is all about change. It's life change. It's the kind of change that God does. It takes a person who is far from God, lost as a left shoe and brings them close. It's not just a media campaign though, it's a tool, that God will give to you and I to use in seeing people won to Jesus Christ. Will you join me in the endeavour?

Power To Change

Sermon #2

“Religious People Need To Change Too” John 3:1-17

(Synopsis: in this sermon the challenge will go out to church people to ask them to consider if indeed they have come to a place in their life where they have surrendered themselves to Jesus Christ, but also empowering believers to speak to “good people” about the gospel of Jesus Christ)

1. last week we talked about Saul, a man who saw a dramatic conversion to Jesus Christ, and it was that. Saul was a murderer, and he became a preacher. Can a drug crazed alcoholic find God? You bet. Can a white collar criminal up and outer find Christ? You bet. Can a man or a woman who has made a mess of their lives truly be forgiven and start again? You bet. You see that’s the message of Power To Change. That with God, all things are possible. God gives to us the power to change our lives, regardless of how broken they are. We get a second chance. In a world of sadness, despair, shame and guilt, you don’t think that’s good news? You bet it is!
2. This week though, I am going to change directions and take you down a different path. I am going to talk to you about religious people needing to find the power to change too. When I say “religious people” I mean people who go to church, like you and I, but also a whole host of people who don’t go to church but say they try to live by the values of church.

Illus. I constantly meet people who used to go to church, and don’t. But say they live by the lessons they learned in Sunday School years ago. Or lessons they learned by reading Reader’s Digest articles. Or lessons they learned by watching Robert Schuller on TV. You don’t have to go to church to be religious....and I am telling you, they need what the Power To Change is all about as well.

3. let me take your thinking with me as we turn to John3 and meet a religious man who met Jesus...you probably know the story well, it’s the story of Nicodemus...turn with me to John 3:1-17. Let’s look at it as a dialogue between Jesus and an enquirer. But instead of just calling it a conversation, let’s call it a “tennis match” and see how the ball goes back and forth over the net.

I. Opening Serve from Nicodemus (v1,2)

(Like any good tennis match, it’s got to get started, so Nicodemus walks to his side of the court and prepares to get it going) We learn a lot about him in a few short verses

1. He is a Pharisee (needs historical research and explanation)
2. He’s part of the ruling council, the Sanhedrin (historical research ...)
3. He comes to Jesus *at night* (v.2) why?
 - a. because Jesus was too busy during the day?
 - b. Because Nicodemus was too busy?
 - c. Because Nicodemus didn’t want to be seen?
4. He makes a pretty profound statement about Jesus...v2...he admits Jesus is from God...because he’s seen the miracles Jesus was doing...

- Illus. like me saying to Tiger Woods, "I see you're a pretty good golfer"
- Illus. like me saying to Bill Gates, "you know how to operate a computer"
5. don't miss the point, he's spiritually sensitive, he's not opposed to Jesus, in fact he's intrigued...willing to ask some questions...

APPLICATION:

- A. If you are sitting in church today, you are telling me that you are spiritually sensitive, at least willing to consider Jesus
- B. If you know people who try to live moral lives, follow the golden rule, They are saying they are "spiritually interested"
- C. If you have discussions with people interested world religions...
- D. If you know someone who wonders about heaven...

There are a whole host of people in our lives who are like this Nicodemus, actually interested in Jesus. They may not be interested in church (chances are they aren't) but they are interested in Jesus.

II. Jesus returns the serve, with equal velocity, and even some topspin...v3

His words are powerful, yet a little ambiguous

- 1. "I tell you the truth"...phrase Jesus (and the rabbis) used to lay down a straightforward, spiritual truth...kind of like when we preface something by saying, "let me put it simply" or "in a nutshell" or "well, to be brief and to the point"
- 2. "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"...
 - a. Nicodemus understood the "kingdom of God" part...he's a Pharisee, they Tried to live their lives perfectly/scrupulously to gain the kingdom of God
 - b. this idea of "being born again"? what does that mean?

APPLICATION: before I move on, let's grasp the immensity of Jesus' words, you cannot see God unless you have this "born again" experience, whatever that means...it's not church attendance, it's not attention to the rules, it's not fastidious efforts in acts of kindness or avoiding acts of meanness, it's experiencing this "born again" thing that qualifies you to see heaven? You can sit in a church bench for 80 years and miss heaven...you can do huge magnanimous acts of charity and benevolence and miss heaven...you see what Jesus is saying, how important is this "born again" thing? It's huge!

III. Weak volley by Nicodemus, barely gets it back over the net (v4)

- 1. He heard the words "born again" and concludes Jesus is talking about physical birth (it's the only kind of birth he's aware of). He likes the idea of getting a fresh start on life, a second chance, but if you have messed up for 40 years, how can you undo it all by starting all over again. "nice idea Jesus, but totally impractical"
- 2. **APPLICATION** bt of society thinks like Nicodemus, they think that in order to reach God, you have to be perfect, and if you have messed up, well, you can do what you can, but if you've done too much destructive stuff, it's too late to get it all right...it's a nice idea, but you can't start all over again.

Illus. eastern religions (Buddhism) teach reincarnation...you work hard at each life, and if you do well, you improve in the next life and if you don't you go down the ladder...eventually, if you do things well enough for long enough, you reach "nirvana"

- IV. Jesus approaches the net to cut off the weak volley and hits a hard liner right back at the feet of Nicodemus v5-8
1. Jesus explains the picture of being "born again" as a second birth of a different kind...water birth and spiritual birth (v.5)
 - a. just as there is physical birth 6a
 - b. there is also spiritual birth 6b
 2. Spiritual birth is like the wind, you can't see it coming, you can't even really see it's outcome...but you know it's there. You hear some noise, and you see the results, that's how you know it's real. When God touches a person's life, it's just like that wind.
 - a. you don't know when God is going to touch a person's life...you can be sitting there going along merrily and all of a sudden you realize, you've been going through the motions and you've never turned your heart over to God, you've just been playing religion, all these years
 - b. when God touches your life, all of a sudden, your values change, your priorities change, your desires change, the things you used to love become part of the past, and you find a whole new set of dynamics at work in your life. People look at you and say "what happened to you"
"illus. Jennifer 'finding religion' (substitute your own illus here)
Spiritual birth changes you..."
- V. Nicodemus barely gets his racquet on it, and it hits the frame, dribbling weakly back into the net..v9-15
- A. Nicodemus—pretty anemic answer Nicodemus!
 - B. Jesus—speaks of
 1. what we know---power of experience
 2. what we have seen—power of experience...
 3. if you only have earthly experience of God, no wonder the heavenly experience seems so profound, mystical, even strange...but it's true...Jesus was sent from God...as God's son to show us God...
illus. bridge illus from Navigators

APPLICATION

1. this is embarrassing...I feel so stupid...I've been going through the motions for so many years and I'm a little ashamed that you're just taking me apart...
3. it's okay, you can't play tennis with Jesus and expect to win do you? Or even hold your own?
4. Hardest thing for religious people to overcome is this idea of shame and embarrassment... Friend! Get over it!

- VI. Jesus walks off the court, leaving with His final words to Nicodemus v16, 17
- A. God loves the world, doesn't hate it...he cares deeply enough to do what it needed in order for i be part of his heaven forever...if a person "believes" in Jesus, a deep seated, heart oriented, turning from outward behaviour into an inner spiritual experience, the promise is that they shall see God, now and forever v.16
 - B. The heart of God is inclined to receive people, far more than we are willing to receive Him...that's what grace is all about v.17

CONCLUSION

What does all this say to us?

1. are you interested in living a full eternity with God? Sure you are, that's why you are here today. Are you trying to do it by your own physical steam? If you are, it's admirable, but you know, none of us is able to do everything perfectly possible. Even if we got a fresh start every day...it's not gonna happen. We need to be born again, we need to give our lives over to the wooing, whispering winds of God's spirit.

Don't miss the opportunity today.

2. got a friend interested in spiritual things? Maybe they are mainstream religious? Good for them, we need lots of religious people...but sometimes the very thing that keeps us from God is our religion. Maybe they are new age religious? Lots of people are, in fact there are more religious people than not today. But what is it that takes us to God...our efforts, our behaviours, our biases, or our beliefs in Jesus.
3. You know what's really strange at the end of all this? We never hear what Nicodemus finally decided to do...I wonder sometimes...what about you today? Don't miss the moving of God's Spirit if indeed he is blowing in your life.

(opportunity for people to respond to the gospel invitation)

Power To Change

Sermon #3

“Sowing Seeds, Reaping Results” Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

(Synopsis: though the Power To Change campaign finishes after two weeks, it really was an exercise in seed sowing...some of the results may be immediate (and problematic!) but some of the results may be longer term, not yet seen, but seen in the days, weeks, or months to come...or even in eternity) The strength of this message comes in bringing plenty of personal anecdotal illustrative material from the preacher's experience in sowing and reaping.

Intro:

1. Stephen Covey in his book “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” talks about sowing the seeds of the future today. He uses the easily understood garden picture that if you want potatoes for supper tonight, you don't plant them this morning. And it's true, the things we sow today don't bring fruit today, but down the road they will.
2. I remember talking to a non-Xn friend about an incident where he had taken too much alcohol and in driving home had turned too sharply into his driveway and had clipped a pole doing some damage to his car. He looked at me kind of smugly and said “there must be some Bible verse to teach me a lesson right Rev?” expecting me to come up with some statement about strong drink or drunkenness. But he was shocked when I said, “you bet, Galatians 6:7 ‘you reap what you sow’. It's true, the things we sow today may not bring fruit today, but down the road they inevitably they will.
3. Over the last 2 weeks we have been involved in a mammoth, province wide seed sowing exercise. Through the agency of television, radio, newspaper, bill board, magazine articles, we have been sowing into the spiritual soil of Saskatchewan that there is “Power To Change” in Jesus Christ. By our reckoning, 95% of SK has seen at least one of the promos. In the industry this is called saturation coverage. The field has been seeded...and some results are coming in.
4. I want to talk about what we did, and we can expect for the future in light of what we did by turning your attention to a passage of Scripture found in Matthew 13 in a familiar story entitled the Parable of the Sower.
 - a. Jesus was a masterful story teller...he knew that one picture was worth a 1000 words so he often spoke in pictures, in parables, in stories...they were powerful stories...kind of like jalapeno peppers, you could pop one in innocently thinking it was just a story, but once it got by your lips POWWW!!!
 - b. This is one of those stories. Read the passage---v1-9

Let's look at the story in the 4 parts that it unfolds for us...

- I. Seed on the stoney ground (v4/v19)

- A. Text—explain and illustrate the picture...”broadcasting seed by hand”, inevitable scattering...hardened path where people walked...lot of seed went onto it
 - B. Application
 - 1. people won’t receive the message...just won’t penetrate, hearts are too hard... illus/illus
 - 2. evil one does a number before the seed can penetrate
illus/illus
- II. Seed on rocky places (v5/6, v20/21)
- A. Text—explain and illustrate the picture...trying to grow a crop in rocky soil, possible to germinate the seed, get some response...but rare to see plant survive and thrive...too little soil there...
 - B. Application
 - 1. some people respond...seem to be actually enthused, glad...
 - 2. trouble comes...persecution comes...
 - a. being a Christian isn’t easy...doesn’t always solve your problems
 - b. can even create some problems...
illus.
- III. Seed amongst thorns (v7, v.22)
- A. Text—picture of a garden, and weeds growing in it...crop can grow, but the weeds affect the health and vigour of the plant
 - B. Application:
 - 1. weeds= the worries of THIS life
 - 2. weeds=the deceitfulness of riches
illus.
- IV. Seed amongst the good ground (v8, v23)
- A. Text—picture of a seeds amongst the clear, clean black dirt, carefully prepared, ready to receive the planting illus. preparing a garden for seeding
 - B Application:
 - 1. little tiny tomato seed producing a plant with dozens of tomatoes
 - 2. tiny cucumber seed producing a crop of sweet tasty cukes
- illus. Jonathan Edwards’ family...converted illus. Sarah Wesley & family

Conclusion:

- 1. you reap what you sow, we have sown
- 2. you don’t always reap exactly where you have sown
- 3. you reap more than you sow
- 4. you reap in due time.