

Transforming Gospel: Signs of Life and Gift of Peace
Acts 9:19b-31

One hard question for me as a dad is:

When is a mess worth making?

Life is busy. Time is valuable. Messes get in the way.

I remember one Christmas. We were at my in-laws' house. Kids were unwrapping presents. One of my kids got Moon Sand.

Really. Here's what goes through my mind as this present is being unwrapped.

---Who in their right mind thought it was a good idea for kids to play with sand inside the house? People will Market anything that will sell.

--But, who in their right mind would buy this box of sand for kids to play with inside the house? A Parent would not. A grandparent would. Ok, so you can't be too hard on grandparents.

--But, what parent in their right mind is going to let the kid open the box? Not this one, I thought, **but I did**. Why? Because, some messes are worth making.

And, consider this. . . In his wisdom and abundant mercy, our heavenly Father thinks the same thing. Some messes are worth making.

Acts 2:42-47: ⁴¹ So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. ⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them^[a] those who were being saved.

Ideal Picture of the Church . . .

But. . . .

Paul's calling created a mess: Calling the Apostle Paul did not make everything easy.

(1) He was called to be the apostle to Gentiles to reveal the mystery of God to make one-new-humanity under the rule of his beloved Son. That created a mess.

-Read Acts 15 or the entire book of Galatians.

(2) In this passage, we have a window into the first three years of Paul's ministry. The text ends with the declaration that the church has peace. But, it looks more like a mess than peace.

-He shows up in Damascus. Preaches Jesus.

-People are amazed but do not repent.

-People are confounded but do not repent.

-Some Jewish people have enough and plot to kill him

-He leaves. After three years in Damascus and Arabia, he returns to Jerusalem.

-The Disciples are afraid of him.

-The Hellenists seek to kill him.

-He leaves for Tarsus (and he is there for 10 years before we see him again at the end of Acts 11).

God in his sovereign goodness determined that converting Paul was a mess worth making because . . . *through it he shows gospel life and he gives peace to the church.*

God creates New Life through the gospel (vv. 19b-21) and God gives Peace

Read Verses 20-21: Those in the Synagogue are amazed (v. 21). . . At what? Three Spiritual Signs of life: A Transformed Man, a Message and a Mission.

A. Transformed People:

i. Paul:

-“With the disciples in Damascus” (v. 19b)

-“He proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues” (v.20) and in other places

ii. His Disciples:

-“His disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.” (v. 25)

iii. Jerusalem Disciples/Brothers

-“**Disciples** . . . afraid of him. . .” (v. 26) and

“**Brothers** learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.” (v. 30)

B. Transformational Message

All of these people are transformed by the same message.

i. **Paul:** “He is the Son of God.” (v. 20) and “Proving that Jesus was the

Christ.” (v. 22) and “Preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.” (v. 28)

ii. His disciples

- iii. **Barnabas:** His story is ours. . . (v. 27)
- iv. When they realize this, the Jerusalem disciples let him “go in and out among them.” (v. 28)

What is this message that transforms? This is the great question, is it not? There is no question as to whether this world wobbles as it spins on its axis. That’s not an astrophysical observation.

It is a moral one.

This world is shot through with pain, sickness, and confusion. It is shot through with people who are self aware that their habits, behaviors, patterns of life are destructive.

And, we can’t seem to change any of this. Jacob Needleman’s book: *Why can’t we be good?*

But, in this text, and in the preceding one, we have this example of someone who has been changed. Really changed!

How? We can find two answers in this text.

The first one . . . we will deal with under this point. The second under the next, and final, point (Transforming Mission).

The answer comes from the Message. Saul’s message. Let’s listen to Saul’s message in this text.

- a. He says: “[Jesus] is the Son of God.” (v. 20)
- b. He says: “Jesus is the Christ.” (v. 22)

Transformational message:

“Jesus is the Son of God.”

You read biblical commentators on this passage. They are curious about Paul’s use of “Son of God.” It is the only use of the phrase in Acts. They make the point that whatever Paul means by it, it synonymous with “Jesus is the Christ.”

That misses that his declaration is a bomb going off. This declaration has rattled Paul to the core, and it agitating those he is preaching to. The one who persecuted Jesus and his followers, now identifies with him and is walking into the Lion’s Den, unconcerned about the roar or mouth of the lions.

What led him to do this? He believes that **Jesus is the Son of God.**

John Piper says, “The Jesus that he thought was dead was not dead. And not only was he not dead, but he was the living Lord of the universe. Jesus was able to make light shine into the world, and speak audibly to humans on earth, and strike a man blind,

and give visions in prayer, and send a man named Ananias with the word that Saul was Jesus' chosen instrument to spread praise to the nations. So Paul's whole worldview collapsed in Damascus. And was rebuilt with the great, unshakable, stone pillars of truth about Jesus.”

What does he mean by Jesus is the Son of God? Big biblical statements that unite the story of Scripture. Volumes of books are required to explain it. Hours of teaching would be required to demonstrate it.

“It is more significant than might be supposed at first glance that the only occurrence of the title ‘Son of God’ in Acts should be in this report of Saul’s early preaching. It was as the Son of God that Christ was revealed to him on the Damascus road ([Gal. 1:16](#); cf. [2 Cor. 1:19](#); [Rom. 1:4](#)).” F. F. Bruce, p. 190.

“That our Lord’s contemporaries believed the Messiah to be in some special sense the son of God is rendered probable by the wording of the high priest’s question to him at his trial: ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’ ([Mark 14:61](#) par. [Matt. 26:63](#); [Luke 22:67, 70](#)). As applied to our Lord, then, the title ‘Son of God’ marks him out as the true representative of the Israel of God and as God’s anointed king; but it is no merely official title. As he himself understood the heavenly voice, which said to him at his baptism, ‘You are my Son’ ([Mark 1:11](#) par. [Luke 3:22](#)), it expressed his unique relationship and fellowship with the Father.” Ibid.

- i. His encounter with the resurrected Christ (9:5-6) leads him to Peter’s conclusion “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16).
- ii. This convinced him that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 1:1-4) and he is the promised descendent of David.
- iii. He is the king promised in Psalm 2.
- iv. Through him, that God will save his people and establish his kingdom and judge his enemies.
- v. Jesus is the one who God promised to send. He fulfills all the promises in this book. This book reveals God’s plan for the whole world. So, there is not a nook or cranny on the earth where this declaration does not have implications.

He's the Messiah promised of old and now in the fullness of time, God has sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those under the law. This Christ, Saul proclaims, and he proclaims Him the Son of God. He proclaims Him the Son of God, God incarnate, the Son of David. You see the focus? He bears witness to Jesus Christ, the majesty of His person and His work for the salvation of sinners. It is a Christ-centered witness.

Acts 13:13-41

¹³Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ¹⁴but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a

message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”¹⁶ **So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:**

“Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it.¹⁸ And for about forty years he put up with^[b] them in the wilderness.¹⁹ And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance.²⁰ All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.²¹ Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.²² And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’²³ Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.²⁴ Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.²⁵ And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

²⁶“Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation.²⁷ For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.²⁸ And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed.²⁹ And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.³⁰ But God raised him from the dead,³¹ and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers,³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you.’

³⁴And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

³⁵Therefore he says also in another psalm,

“You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

³⁶For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption,³⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is freed^[c] from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.⁴⁰ Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

⁴¹“Look, you scoffers,
be astounded and perish;
for I am doing a work in your days,
a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.”

C. Transforming Mission

Transformed people with a transformational messages leads to a transforming mission.

By transforming mission, I am referring to both what happens to the missionary and describing gospel expansion (the result of the mission).

Missionary: REMEMBER: **Those in the synagogue are amazed:** Is that Saul? What is he saying? Now, looking at what he is doing! He is preaching. He is reasoning. He has been turned inside-out.

Above, I said there are two ways people change in this text. **First** is the sheer reality of the message—the gravity that Jesus is the Christ of History.

Now, the second way people change is through being strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Paul is strengthened in the missionary enterprise. (v. 22)

Saul's conversion did not bring instant maturity or spirituality, but was the point where growth commenced. We know from Romans 7, for example, that Paul had struggles in his spiritual walk. We know that Paul was not instantly a biblical scholar or a seasoned apostle. His conversion was the beginning of a life-long process of maturing and growth in the Lord.

I don't think that Paul's maturity is the most fundamental point here.

He was empowered to be a witness. Jesus told his disciples that: **Luke 21:12-25:** “¹²But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.”

Strengthened/Empowered: Same word:

Phil 4:13: “I can do all things through him who **strengthens** me.”

2 Tim 4:17: “the Lord stood by me and **strengthened** me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.”

Paul, the one who is strengthened here, prays that church would be strengthened in Ephesians.

Ephesians 3:14-19: ¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family^[e] in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the

breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We discover in the prayer that it is *good* for us to be strengthened and *how* to be strengthened. You have three steps here: **(1)** Strengthens so that Christ will dwell in our hearts, **(2)** Christ dwelling leads to strength to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, and **(3)** that knowledge enables us to be filled with the fullness of God.

I am reminded of 1 Peter 3:15:

Compare: 1 Peter 3:15: in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

The result of the mission is peace for the church (v. 31). In fact Luke gives us 5 characteristics of the church here.

(1) Peace, (2) strength, (3) encouragement, (4) growth, and (5) godliness.

There is a link here that is not totally apparent in English translations. There are two sentences. There should be one. *“Then the church throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being strengthened and going in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it multiplied.”*

By the Sovereign Goodness of God:

Saul seems to have been the instigator of the persecution of the church, which began at the death of Stephen in Jerusalem and worked outward from there. With the conversion of Saul, persecution of the church did not stop, for now some of the Hellenistic Jews were opposing his preaching (and no doubt, the church at large as well). It was only with the exit of Saul from the Holy Land, back to his native land (Tarsus), that peace once again returned.

Acts 8:1-4: And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Through the Faithfulness of His People:

What I mean is, while God has sovereignly worked to secure peace, the church experiences the peace through “being strengthened” and through “walking in godliness and the comfort of the Spirit.”

Spiritual realities become “experienced” through obedience.

John says in 1 John 4 that if we love one another, God’s love will be made known to you.

Conclusion:

James Taylor: “Secret of life is enjoying the passing of time.”

--Maybe. . . **“But, biblically, if there’s a secret of life, it is realizing that God is redeeming people in time. It is messy.”**

Romans 5:1-5: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith^[b] into this grace in which we stand, and we^[c] rejoice^[d] in hope of the glory of God. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

1 Peter 1:3-9: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.