

November 16, 1978 it happened for the first time. The convicted killer stood in front of a three person panel for three hours trying to convince them he didn't do it. It had only been a year since the conviction and they weren't buying it. Parole denied. Eleven more times over thirty three years that same denial came down. No matter the arguments, no one believed he'd changed. Big changes like that don't happen. No one thinks Charles Manson has changed.

Big changes in people's lives don't happen. That's what the world tends to believe and we along with it. Someone who commits murder isn't going to change. Someone totally committed to the destruction of Christianity, someone who will stop at nothing to kill or imprison Christians wouldn't change either. Only by keeping such a person away from society could people be safe. No one believed that Paul's life could change.

Huge life changes are rare. They're hard to trust. Now you're thinking "I shouldn't be compared to Paul or Charles Manson who were both murderers." Maybe you think your life doesn't need such a big change. But even little changes, how often don't people question you? And how far can faith go? When everything signals we shouldn't trust something we can't see, what can faith offer? What is necessary to change someone like Paul or Charles Manson? What is necessary to change you or me? We need to study the second lesson, Paul's letter to the Galatians, and see...

**A life changing revelation  
Not from men but from God  
Needing to be shared**

Some might say doubt was protection. Obviously something or someone had gotten to him. His message and life was completely different. But how serious could they take that? Was it a trick? Was it a clever plan to get them to lower their guard? Doubt was just self preservation. The Galatians would be better off if they kept their distance from someone claiming such a big life change like Paul.

He asked the Galatian Christians to just consider his former life. **"You have heard about my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it."** He never hid his former ways, his evil intentions to destroy Christians. But did they really think someone with that much drive could be easily changed? That's like someone telling you the sky is yellow. You wouldn't believe that because you're convinced it's blue. It would take more than just a couple of people giving Paul a message for him to change his life so drastically. **"I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it."** A life changing revelation changed Paul. No man could be the source of that message. **"I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."** A life changing revelation not from men but from God.

I've heard on more than a few occasions people say about the Bible, "It's okay if you have your interpretation. I have mine. They're both equally valid." You've probably heard similar thoughts, maybe even had similar thoughts. It seems easier to keep the peace when we believe the Bible is nothing more than another book that we humans have to figure out. If the Bible is a book for human beings by human beings there's more than enough doubt. I'll agree with you then that it can't bring about life changes. A book by mere human authors written centuries ago is probably not worth reading or treating differently. We're in trouble for putting so much belief in it. We can sinfully leave it on the shelf.

But of course that gospel comes from a different source, a divine source. Paul received it because **"God who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me."** Not from men, but from God and his grace. That message from Jesus brings dead people back to life. A little boy from Nain and a widow from Zarephath experienced that in the other lessons. It's a loving message that brings spiritually sinful and dead people back to life. You've experienced that. The message of what Jesus did for you on the cross is the source for your life, forgiveness of sins, and hope. For many in this room life would be different without that revelation of grace from God. Don't confuse the source. It's not mine or Paul's. It's not from man. It's not opinion or made up stories. It's the truth of God's Word. It's a life changing revelation from Christ that comes not from men, but from God.

My grandma always wanted the best deal on gas. She would go to great lengths to get it, like driving miles across town to save pennies per gallon. She loved to share that too. Saving two cents by going to a far out gas station was a personal success she wanted us to know about. The benefits of knowing Christ and his good news message cannot be compared with a couple of pennies on gasoline. The way the good news of God changes lives can't be measured either. But this life changing revelation needs to be shared.

Paul never questioned what happened. He didn't need to check with a doctor or the religious leaders. He knew the power of Christ had completely turned his life around. That needed to be shared. **"But when God...was pleased to reveal his Son in me...I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus."** Paul knew the mission. He was to preach what God had done for him and how God could do that for others. Imagine how amazing that was to hear. **"The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."** Paul couldn't make this kind of message up. He wasn't preaching what made him popular or gained him fans. He was proclaiming what changed him. He proclaimed God's grace. He spoke about Jesus.

In his book *Surprising Insights From the Unchurched*, Thom Rainer interviews people who used to stay away from church but now are Christians. He's trying to find out what happened to change their life. One such person was Art from Florida. Art says, "*The reason I'm in church today is because of my wife. When I saw the change in her life, I decided to try it out. Now I'm a Christian and hardly ever miss church.*" Marion from Indianapolis was another. She said, "*My niece invited me. No one ever invited me to church before. Why is that?*" Both these strike me. You know the gospel is a great message. You know that sins have been paid for by Jesus. You and I have experienced a life change. And yet it pains me when I hear Marion ask why no one invited her to church? Each of us, you and me, needs to examine what keeps us from sharing the life changing revelation we have with others. I have cousins that don't go to church at all. I'm not speaking to them about Jesus and what he means to me. Why do I sin by not sharing?

See again the Savior who comes to you and me by grace. See him who gives life purpose and hope for eternity. See him who can take those looking to destroy Christians and in a beautiful act of grace change their life around. Your sins and mine, though great can't compare to Paul's persecution of Christians. If God's grace comes from him, God's grace comes for you. His love for you despite your failures, because of your failures, is shown in the Savior Jesus. His powerful life changing revelation to you and me needs to be shared.

It's time to redouble our efforts. Jesus doesn't have to be part of every conversation. But we can be intentional. Present Christianity in positive ways. Be a Christian who shows to others a changed life. We have hope where the world expects none. What's important in life is different. What I say, how I act, and how I think are different. I know it's changed your life too. Be open in conversations with people about what Christianity means to you. No need to be over the top. Keep it simple and subtle. How will you speak about the sermon or God's Word you hear today? "That sermon I heard on Sunday was just what I needed for my week"...and then say why. Casually mention the importance of Sunday morning to you. "Heading out for groceries on Sunday I always make it a point to go to church first for encouragement from God." Be honest with people when you hurt or the problems you're facing. Let them know Christians don't claim their life is perfect. Then be honest about why you look at life different anyway. "Hey, what helps me get through is knowing Jesus loves me and gave himself for me. I love talking with my friends after church. It really boosts my spirits." Easy, simple, subtle.

For the twelfth time last April Charles Manson was denied parole. Still no one believes he's any different than that 44 year old convicted killer. Big changes from a worldly perspective are rare. We just don't believe people could change that much. Paul's change was hard to accept. A former murderer of Christians now trying to make people Christians. You and me too have changed in big ways. A life change no one might expect. Something totally impossible to believe. But Christ Jesus changes lives. Life changes because the source and power is God's love in Jesus. That's a revelation from God that will change your life.