

The difference knowing Jesus makes # 4 in God of the Second Chance

Message for Sunday, May 19, 2019
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Acts 9:1-21

Children's Message: Sing “God Loves You and I Love You” and in between tell stories of people God shouldn’t love, but does anyway. That includes us!

- What do you think about people who make promises and then never keep them? Is God disappointed in them? But does God still love them? (He still loved Peter! – even after Peter said that he didn’t even know Jesus..)
- What do you think about people who have trouble making up their minds? What does God think about people who have doubts about him? But does God still love them? (He loved Thomas! – we heard about him the Sunday after Easter.)
- What do you think about people who waste their lives on booze and drugs? What does God think about them? But does God still love them? (He did in the story of the Lost son — we heard about him two weeks ago.)
- What do you think about people who do what is wrong: they *know* it’s wrong, but do it anyway? Do you ever do that? Does God still love you when you do that? (He did the woman who did bad things — we heard about her last week.)
- What do you think about people who make fun of you because you follow Jesus and go to church? Do you like that? Does God like that? But does God still love that person? (He did with Saul; we heard about him just today.)

Message: “The difference knowing Jesus makes”
4 in God of the Second Chance

Saul is visiting the church in Jerusalem, and is telling them about what happened to him on his trip to Damascus.

Good morning. My name is Saul, from Tarsus. No, no! Don’t run and hide; I’m not going to hurt you! Really! You’re safe.¹

You’re thinking about the old Saul. Something happened to me to change all that. I’m here to tell you about it... about *him*.

You’ve obviously heard about me, to be so scared of me. I’m not normally a mean and nasty person. But I believed that something had to be done about the Christian “problem.” After Jesus was killed, we all thought that was the end of it. And so it appeared: his band of followers had disappeared, and life was back to normal in Jerusalem and the whole country. But about two months after that, his followers—including some of you here—suddenly appeared in public again. And you talked non-stop about this Jesus, and about how he had risen from the dead, and he was the Son of God, and everyone should worship him as Lord. Such blasphemy was an outrage!

To make matters even worse, they were multiplying like rabbits. It was clear that drastic action was needed, and it had to be done immediately before chaos descended. So I volunteered to round up the Christians, give them a good beating, then put them in chains and bring them to the High Council to stand trial for their blasphemy. If a few of them “happened” to die along the way, there would be no questions asked.

I heard there was a group of Christians in Damascus to the north, so I took some friends with me there to round them up. We were almost there when something amazing happened.

All of a sudden there was a brilliant flash of light all around us. I was so stunned that I fell to the ground. Then I heard a voice speaking to me, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?”

I answered, “Who are you, sir?”

The voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!”

My heart stopped. Or it felt that way. Isn’t it amazing how quickly the mind can work? In that

¹ Acts 9:26

instant, I saw myself kicking the man I had arrested a few days earlier; he had fallen on the ground, and I was telling him to get up and keep marching. I saw myself whipping a woman with a chain. One after another, the memories flooded back. And now... Jesus really is alive! That means he really must be the Son of God. And here I've been persecuting his followers. I braced myself for the death blow that I knew I was about to receive.

Strangely, nothing happened. Instead, the voice continued, "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

I was completely confused. I had no idea what was going to happen to me. Were they going to torture me—a lingering, painful death? But something about the voice—it was a strong voice, but also kind—told me that I had nothing to fear. The people who were with me couldn't help: they had heard the voice, but had seen nothing. The blazing light had blinded me; they had to take me by the hand and lead me.

A short while later, we arrived at the place where we were staying. The voice had told me that someone would tell me what to do. None of the people in that house knew anything about this. So I waited in my darkness. They offered me food and drink, but I wasn't interested. My mind was on other things: I spent most of that time praying. In my prayer, I had a vision of someone named Ananias putting his hands on me, and my eyesight coming back.

Finally, after three days, a man named Ananias came to the door. He asked for me, and they let him in. He came over to me, laid his hands on my head and spoke to me, "Brother Saul"—*Brother* Saul! But I was his enemy!—"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus sent me. He is the one you saw on the road on your way here. He sent me so that you can see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." As he spoke, something like fish scales fell out of my eyes, and I could see again.

By then I was starving! But before I had anything to eat, I asked Ananias to baptize me. I had learned that this was the sign of someone who was committing his or her life to follow Jesus as Lord. There's nothing in the world I wanted more than to do that.

I used to think that I was so great: I was circumcised when I was a week old. I was an Israelite by birth, of the tribe of Benjamin, a pure-blooded Hebrew. As far as keeping the Jewish Law is concerned, I was a Pharisee. But now I consider all my credentials and all my achievements to be worthless garbage, when I compare them to the priceless value of knowing Jesus Christ, my Saviour and my Lord. To me, he is life itself.²

I was the worst of all sinners. Yet the grace of the Lord Jesus was poured out upon me. He filled me with his abundant love. All my sins were washed away, and I became a brand new person.³

From now on, I don't care about my own life. The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me – to tell people the Good News about God's grace. And that's what I wanted to tell you about today.⁴

Back to Bruce

There you have a snapshot of the turning point in Saul's life. Even though he expected to be punished for his actions, God was gracious and gave him a second chance.

Everything in his life could be marked as "Before Christ" and "After Christ." In fact, it was shortly after this that he even went by a different name, Paul, to indicate there was a new person in that body. For Paul, knowing Jesus and his unmerited love and forgiveness meant more than anything else in all the world. That was his message from then until the rest of his life.

He spoke about Jesus wherever he went. He wrote letters, both to churches and to individuals, and they always contain that good news.

² Philippians 3:4-8; 1:21

³ 1 Timothy 1:12-16; 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁴ Acts 20:24

I mentioned that in his writings, Paul described himself as “the worst of all sinners”⁵ So, if even someone like him can receive God’s love and forgiveness, that means that no one—absolutely no one—is beyond hope.

Draw people’s attention to the header on the bulletin, and read it aloud.

Theme for today: You can’t start over. Ever. The past is gone, and you’ll never be able to retrieve what happened back then. But you *can* change the ending. That is still possible. You may think it’s beyond hope. But with God, nothing is impossible.

God is the God of the second chance. Even when you feel like giving up—whether that’s giving up on yourself, or giving up on someone else—God never gives up.

I’ll close for today with this thought: is there someone you know who needs some good news? What better news could there be, than to assure someone that God loves them? Will you do that this week?

Next Steps:

- Pray: Thank God for giving you a second chance. Or third. Or thousandth... whatever is needed. God never gives up on you.
- Accept the offer. Surrender your life to Jesus Christ, or renew that decision, as the case may be.
- Give hope to someone. Tell someone the good news that God loves them, and wants to give new life.

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:16