

Discipleship Moment

Text: Acts 9:19b-22

I remember the feeling I had the first time I returned to my home church after leaving for college. I was studying to be a pastor: I was off studying theology and ministry. And when I came back to my home church for the first time, I had overwhelming anxiety. I realized that these people, my friends, knew all the dirty things about me. They had heard me swear too much, they had suffered my bullying, they had heard my pathological lying, they had experienced all of the horrible things I had done. They knew my pride, they knew my anger, they knew my self-righteousness, they knew my laziness.

My home church proved much more forgiving than I imagined. There were no questions, no weird looks, no concerned murmurs, just unconditional support. But my anxiety and guilt persisted. And it wasn't until I went back, several years later, and had the opportunity to preach (on this specific text in Acts, coincidentally!) that my guilt began to heal. I stood in front of this congregation that had reared me and loved me, and apologize and repent, to confess and lay out my shame and tell them how my past sins had driven me to despair, but they loved me anyway. I was freed from guilt because they got to tell me, personally, that I was forgiven, and that they loved me.

I imagine Saul experience something similar, he was a murderer—rooting out Christians and killing them. And as he begins to proclaim the Gospel people ask, “Isn't this the guy who persecuted the Christians before?” And, “How can anyone take him seriously?”

I imagine you may feel this tension. You are encouraged by leaders, pastors, and books to share your faith and evangelize, but your friends and your family know you've messed up in the past, often you've messed up big time. This complicates evangelism.

On Sunday we heard the Gospel. The Gospel is not, “believe this (that is Jesus crucified, risen, and ascended into heaven), and your behavior will change, and everything will be better.” No, no, no. The Gospel is, “believe this, and God has already done this for you.” Jesus lived a pure life, Jesus already lived a life of obedience, Jesus already died and came back from the dead. God does not expect you, reader, to do these things, because Jesus has already done it. You will not be perfect. You will not be sinless. You are not able to be pure. The Gospel is that Jesus has done this for you.

The life change that occurs in the believer happens not because “I found Jesus.” But because I trust that Jesus has done it for me.

So, when we evangelize our friends, family, and neighbors, it is not from the place of, “I am better than you, I have my life figured out, and you can, too.” Rather, it is saying, “My life is unmanageable, and God has restored me to sanity because of Jesus. Your life is unmanageable, and God can give you sanity, too.” You can tell others that you are a sinner, you are angry, bitter, lazy, an adulterer, but God has forgiven you, and, by his Grace, he is drawing you out of your sin that leads to death and into Christ's life. You can tell others that you are not good enough, but God is good enough. You don't have to be perfect, or have your life together, in order to preach the Gospel, because the Gospel is all about messed up people being accepted by a God who has given us Jesus to live and die in our place.

You can tell your friends and family and neighbors that they are not good enough, and that's okay. God is good enough. And, because of Christ, he accepts them as if they are good enough.

Now that's some good news!

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.

1. What parts of your life are unmanageable? Why are they unmanageable? How do you feel about those areas of your life?
2. How have whatever negative emotions you feel about your life being unmanageable affected you? Do they make you feel useless, hopeless, sad, depressed, etc.? Have these emotions effected your relationships in your life? How?
3. Read Ephesians 2:8-10, what does this passage say? What does it tells us about salvation? Who owns salvation? How are we saved?
4. Faith can be translated as *trust*. What does it mean to trust God? What does Eph. 2:8-10 say we trust in? What are we trusting him to do? What has we done that we can trust in?
5. How does this truth—that salvation is not yours to gain or lose, but a gift of God—change the way you think about your life and your sin? What does God's gift free you from? Why is this important? Why do your friends, family, and neighbors need this Gospel?