

There are four life-defining questions that every human being asks him or herself at one time or another: “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “Where am I going?” “How will I get there?”

**Illustration: Who am I?** Abridged from pp. 125-27 in “Stories for a Faithful Heart Compiled by Alice Gray – Author Unknown

I was born in 1725, and died in 1807. The only godly influence in my life was my mother, whom I knew for only seven short years until her death, which left me virtually an orphan. My father remarried and sent me to a strict military school where the severity of discipline was unbearable and out of rebellion I left at the age of ten. I vowed never to enter formal education again and became a seaman apprentice following my father’s trade in hopes of learning how to skillfully navigate a ship.

My way of life spiraled downward and I gave myself over to the devil. I was determined to sin without restraint as the righteous lamp of my life had gone out. I ended up in military service where again discipline worked hard against me and I further rebelled. My spirit would not break and I became increasingly more and more a rebel. I finally deserted, only to be captured and severely beaten repeatedly. I endured this and fled again, this time, with the thought of taking my own life. I headed for Africa, a place far away where no one would know me and again made a pact with the devil to live for him.

I somehow managed to meet up with a Portuguese slave trader, and ended up living in his home. He was married to a black woman, who was brimming with hostility and she took it out on me. I was beaten, ate like a dog on the floor and when I refused, she’d whip me with a lash.

I fled penniless and with only the clothes on my back, to the shoreline of Africa where I built a fire to attract a ship that was passing by. Although the skipper thought I had gold or slaves or ivory to sell, when on board, he was surprised to discover that I was a skilled navigator. It was a slave ship, and it wasn’t uncommon for there to be upwards of six hundred blacks in the hold down below being taken to America.

I narrowly escaped death on a number of occasions. I once opened some crates of rum and got the crew drunk. The skipper was incensed with me and I was beaten and thrown down below where I lived on stale bread and wilting vegetables for a seemingly unendurable amount of time. He brought me top deck to beat me again and again and on one occasion I fell overboard, but because I couldn’t swim, he harpooned me and pulled me aboard. I lived with that scar in my side, big enough to put my fist in, until the day of my death.

I was inflamed with fever and enraged with humiliation. A storm broke out, and I wound up in the hold again. I ended up being a servant of the slaves. Bruised, confused, bleeding, and diseased, I was the epitome of degenerate man. Remembering the words of my mother, I cried out to God for His grace and mercy to deliver me, and upon His Son to save me. The only glimmer of light I could find was through a crack in the deck above me, and looking up to it I screamed to God for help, and He heard me.

Thirty-one years passed, I married a childhood sweetheart. I entered the ministry and in every place that I served, rooms had to be added to handle the crowds that came to hear the Gospel and the story of God’s grace in my life. My tombstone reads, “Born 1725, died 1807. A clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he once long labored to destroy.”

Before my death I decided to put my life’s story in verse. And that verse has become a hymn. My name? John Newton. The hymn? “Amazing Grace.”

“In evil long I took delight, unawed by shame and fear, till a new object struck my sight, and stopped my wild career. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.”

In his old age, it was suggested that Newton retire because of bad health and failing memory. He replied, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!"

## Prayer

I invite you to turn to Paul's letter to the Colossians. If you recall the Horizontal Chart I had placed in the worship folder 3 weeks ago, we are going to be looking at Ch 1: 1&2 which is Paul's Introduction and Greeting, "Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus ..." you don't mean Saul of Tarsus, do you? No way! That can't be! God couldn't possibly be willing to accept someone like him, let alone allow him to be an Apostle. There must be some mistake. But ... God doesn't make mistakes – He's perfect. So ... what gives?

There's a reality that we find rather difficult to grasp and that's How God sees people. People from all walks of life, with backgrounds that are very different. "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Sa 16:7b) "for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts." (1 Chr 28:9). "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (He 4:13).

Penetrating thoughts in words from God. God specializes in unlikelies. We're going to be spending most our time this morning reading from the Bible. Isn't that wonderful and so God honoring. How important is what God says to you? Paul exhorted young Timothy in 1 Ti 4:13, "...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching."

What difference can believing in Jesus Christ really make in your life?

Let me give you some biblical background on **Paul before he believed in JX:**

In Acts Ch 7 Stephen gave the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme high court, a history lesson beginning with Abraham, through Moses to David, and then on to Jesus whom, Stephen said very pointedly, they had betrayed and murdered. **Ac 7:58** says, "*They dragged Stephen out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.*" **Ch 8:1** states, "And Saul was there, giving approval to his death."

This is how Paul described himself in **Ac 22:3-5**, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city (*Jerusalem*). Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished." (cf. 9:1-2)

**Ac 26:9-11**, "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to *oppose* the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them." Paul went out of his way to make the lives of believers in Jesus Christ as miserable as he could.

In speaking to the Galatian believers in **Ga 1:13,14**, Paul reminded them of his former life, "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers."

Can you image the chills that must have run up and down the spines of believers in Jesus Christ in that day when even the name, Saul of Tarsus was mentioned?

Why am I here?

Something simply amazing happens when God gets hold of a person's heart and begins to transform it by His grace.

Let me tell you about **Paul's conversion from Judaism to Christianity through faith in JX** from the Biblical account in **Ac 9:3-18a**:

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel (*incredible*). I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again.” (cf. 22:6-12, 26:12-18).

**“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound – That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.”**

What happened **immediately after Paul believed in JX?** In **Ac 9:18-22** we read:

“He got up and was baptized ... Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?' "Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ”

**Ac 9:26** says, “When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples (Can you imagine that? I can just hear the disciples (WHAT!), they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. (IMPOSSIBLE!)”

Paul explained in **Ac 22:17-21**, “When I was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' " 'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

Where am I going?

What happened to the importance of all that Paul had achieved when confronted with the truth claims of Jesus Christ?

**Php 3:4-21** gives us one of the most powerful testimonies in the Bible. And, yes, It's Saul of Tarsus the **Pharisee**, now transformed by the grace of God into Paul the **Apostle** of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles:

“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. **I want to know** Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ (Paul was one of them, and so was I, and so are all those who have not believed in Jesus Christ). Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And, we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Ro 7:24)

**“’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.”**

What a remarkable re-centering from Paul’s zeal for the Law to his zeal for the fulfillment of the Law, Jesus Christ.

How did this happen? Co 1:1 says, “by the will of God”. Php 2:13 records, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.” God, Eph 1:11 tells us “works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.”

In **2 Co 11** Paul expressed his deep concern for the believers in Corinth and throughout Achaia regarding false apostles. In **vv3,4** he wrote, “I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” There were those preaching a Jesus different from the one Paul preached and a different gospel from the one they had accepted. Paul adds in **vv13-15** “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.”

Paul went on to describe what he had experienced in his ministry of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ over against the false apostles in **vv 23-31**. “I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying.”

Paul the persecutor of the faith became Paul the persecuted for the faith.

Paul through personal experience knew how to identify with those going through severe times of trial and testing. Jesus experienced it all for all.

**“Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; ‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”**

How will I get there?

What changed Paul’s life? Was it enlightenment – the possession of a higher knowledge? Was it reformed life – doing the right things rather than things? Was it religiously following traditions, rituals, rites, observances and ceremonies. What changed His life? He encountered the Lord Jesus Christ and believed in Him. Jesus changed his heart and transformed his life – **nothing else in all of creation can do this!**. And He can change the hearts and lives of every other human being on the planet.

Paul was one of the most influential figures of his time. He rocked the world of his day, first with his ruthless persecution of the people of the Christian faith and then with his relentless passion for those same people. Paul wrote almost half of the NT books.

Paul mentions Timothy in v1 because he had a close relationship with him ever since he met him on his second missionary journey (Ac 19:22). We readily sense Paul’s confidence and deep love for Timothy in Php 2:19-22,

“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the Gospel.” Paul referred to Timothy as his son in the faith in 1 Co 4:17 and now he calls him his brother.

Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy in which he charged him as his successor with the responsibility of preaching the Gospel faithfully (2 Ti 4:1,2).

Paul concluded his introduction of vv1-2 with these words, “To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.”

Let’s quickly define the terms Paul uses here: “holy” – set apart for the work and worship of God; “faithful” – loyal to Christ; “in Christ” – spiritually joined to Christ as limbs are to the body, parts of an inseparable whole; “Grace” – the essence of God’s saving activity in Christ, His freely given love; “peace” – binding together, wholeness, soundness. There is no peace until we know with certainty that we are loved, forgiven, and accepted.

**When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun.**

Paul did not begin his letter by addressing the false teachers and their false teaching but by establishing the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

We live in a day of tolerance which to some means one religion is just as good as any other. Fact is, all religions are different and it’s man not God who makes them different. There are different faiths, but again, man is responsible for the difference. There is only one saving faith – faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and there is only one standard for that faith – the Bible. Anything else is not of God and cannot save anyone.

Biblical truth is God’s answer to intellectual confusion. And it is with awe and wonder that we are to acknowledge our **position** in Christ and our **place** in God’s family. God’s response to our questions about who we are, why we are here, where we are going, and how we will get there is a gift to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ – His indescribable gift (2 Co 9:15).

Why spend so much time on two verses comprising an introduction and a greeting? These verses resound with the ring of relationship: “Paul,” “Timothy,” “brothers in Christ,” “God our Father.” Life is all about God and people in relationship in Christ. That’s what’s important. That’s what matters more than anything else.

What’s most important in your life? What does your life revolve around?

God knows everything about me ... everything; every single detail of my life: everything that’s happened to me, every thought that has run through my mind, every word I’ve spoken, everything I’ve done and not done. He’s aware of every single personal struggle I’ve had that has threatened to undo me. God has seen me at my very worst and He still loves me and wants a relationship with me. Question is, do I want Him? Do you?

Benediction:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thes 5:23).