

Turn Your World Upside Down
Part 1 – “Why?”
Pastor Dale Campfield – Eastgate Community Church
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Intro:

Matt 28:19 “Go and make disciples of all nations...”

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration and connection groups. To grow...which is expressed in our Path to Discipleship. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

Often times, we get ourselves into a rut, doing the same old thing over and over again. Our lives lose their IMPACT due to lazy attitudes and taking things for granted. To put it simply – we’re spoiled. It’s time to turn our life as we know it UPSIDE DOWN.

During this series we will look at how to turn our way of doing things UPSIDE DOWN to make an even greater IMPACT in an ever evolving culture. Doing life differently, thinking about life differently, and refining the way we’ve always dealt with our issues in new and innovative ways. How do we change the paradigm of the church in the way we think and act towards the different issues of life? How do we allow the Holy Spirit to turn our lives “UPSIDE DOWN” in order to make a greater IMPACT for the Kingdom of God?

That’s what this series is all about.

Today, Part 1 – “Why?”

Today, we will look at three questions as to the “Why’s?” that surround turning our world upside down.

Question #1: Why does our world need to be turned upside down?

Answer: Our world is hurting and needs Jesus.

The world is full of sin. You can look at the facts that surround us and the facts that people are looking for answers to their lost and hopeless lives.

Illus: Facts

Question #2: Why is it important that we allow Christ to turn our lives upside down first?

Answer: The church should be leading the world, not the world leading the church.

Too many times throughout history the church has stepped back and allowed the lead the pace in the world. And as it seems, the world often times gets it done right to begin with then it gets twisted in the truths and motives for which they do what they do. I can think of the American Idol show and how they have a week called “Idol Gives Back.” They raise millions of dollars to help the less fortunate people around the world. It’s been a huge success. Why can’t the church do that? Why isn’t the church doing that? Why is it that the world has more success than the church does?

How is it that the world can build huge stadiums and fill them up every weekend to watch a football game and the church has problems raising money to build a church structure to worship in and then hardly nobody shows up? There’s something wrong here!

Question#3: How do we turn our lives upside down?

Answer: By having an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Without a personal encounter with Christ Jesus, we will never have a life that is changed and turned upside down, thus we’ll never be able to turn the world in which each of us live in upside down. We must have this encounter – and not just once; but ongoing!

EXAMPLE: Someone in the Bible whose life was turned upside down...and because of it, many others lives were then turned upside down.

- **Saul of Tarsus**

Here is a man whose life was completely turned upside down because of an encounter with Jesus Christ. He had an Extreme Makeover, if you will.

Illus: Show examples of those who have had them. Christ wants to give us that...

Let’s look at the book of Acts – Chapter 8 and 9

In our text, we have an unusual conversion account. We have someone who did make a big switch in his life, a life turned upside down. That switch or conversion was from legalistic Judaism to loving Christianity.

Saul did everything he could to stamp out Christianity. He stood by and held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. He dragged Christian men and women out of their houses and put them in prison. He obviously hated Christians and Christianity...and yet he made the switch and became a follower of Christ. How did it happen? His life was turned upside down. What happened?

5 Stages of Saul's Journey

- 1- A mean man
- 2- A deceived man
- 3- A humbled man
- 4- A new man
- 5- A preaching man

I. A MEAN MAN

How mean can a person be? Well, look at this way.

ILL.- Do you think someone would be mean if they said words like these to you?

- "Anyone who told you to be yourself couldn't have given you worse advice."
- "Calling you stupid would be an insult to stupid people."
- "Did your parents ever ask you to run away from home?"
- "Go ahead, tell them everything you know. It'll only take 10 seconds."
- "How did you get here? Did someone leave your cage open?"

Some people can be pretty mean and especially, with their words.

Prov. 12:18 "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

Acts 7:58 – 8:1

"While stoning Stephen, they laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Saul consented to his death."

Acts 9:1-2

"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

Breathing our murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. I'd call that pretty mean, wouldn't you?

What about you? Did you ever have a mean streak in you? Did you ever talk mean or act mean to anybody? If so, get over it! You are supposed to be in Christ, which means you are supposed to be better and getting even better.

If meanness is still operating in your heart and mind then please do a double-take, take a second look at yourself and start praying about it. Ask for mercy for being mean (in other words, ask for forgiveness) and then ask God for His grace to get over it.

II- A DECEIVED MAN

- Saul thought He was good
- Saul thought He was wise
- He thought He was religious
- He thought he was being zealous for God!
- He thought He knew God!
- He thought He was doing God a favor!
- But He was moving directly against God!

We must look at this man named Saul.

1) Very religious – blameless according to the Law of Moses, a Pharisee among Pharisees, very zealous for the faith of his fathers and absolutely convinced that he was doing the Will of God.

2) Rich Heritage – a Jew among Jews, born into the tribe of Benjamin

3) Well educated – Trained at the feet of Gamaliel, one of Israel’s greatest teachers of the day

4) Ambitious – advancing quickly up the ranks of the Pharisees and had ability, desire and talent far above his peers.

5) A man of Loyalty – sought out the permission and approval of the High Priest before he acted

6) Full of bitterness and hatred – hated anything and anyone who could be a threat to the things that he believed, and those who would cause trouble for his people and those who opposed the teachings of the high priest and the Law of Moses. He hated those who preached and taught heresy against the Law that had led Israel for so many years.

Saul was on his way to do the Will of God as he traveled to Damascus – at least what he thought was God’s will. Saul was destined for a confrontation, for change and for the greatest challenge of his life! I want you to know that we are traveling down that road too!

Too many Christians are convinced that they are the only ones that are right. We have become such a self centered church (the church in general) that we think that we have the right and moral and spiritual obligation to fight against anything and anybody that is different.

Just like Saul, we set out on our journey to defend the faith with “blood in our eye”. We are determined to confront, convert or convict anyone who doesn’t agree with us.

There is no love for the lost – only condemnation and judgment for what we see as “sinners who hate God”

The majority of those who claim to know Christ today are bent on confrontation with the world and with the society around them.

Show your support by joining our March, or walking our picket line, or boycotting our enemy or blocking the entrance to a building or any number of methods of disrupting the plans of those we consider as our enemies.

I am as much, if not more, against many of the same things that these well meaning and totally convinced people are, but I believe that there is a far better way to bring about the changes that are needed.

Saul headed out ready for confrontation with the enemy of the Law of Moses. He rode along with his vigilante committee with the permission of the High Priest.

He would do everything within his own power to stop the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to arrest or kill his followers.

Suddenly – a blinding flash of light knocked him off his high horse.

III. A HUMBLER MAN

Acts 9: 3 – 9

- he came near Damascus
- suddenly a light shone around him from heaven
- he fell to the ground
- he was blinded
- he had to be led by the hand

3As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. Saul was a humbled man. He got knocked to the ground by the Lord.

Illus: Delbert Wheeler and I

Delbert was a tough guy in my school that intimidated everyone. I played football with him. He was go head to head with everyone in the drills, and destroyed everyone. When it was my turn, he pummeled me.... But the next time, I went for his ankles (out of fear), and he went down – humbled. After that, Delbert got along pretty well.

That boy got humbled big time. He was brought low. He got knocked to the ground.

Did you ever have that happen to you? It's very humbling. And sometimes we all need to be humbled when we are so filled with pride and arrogance that we think we know everything or that we are always right or when we're exhibiting a bad attitude or mean streak.

Just as Delbert got humbled and knocked to the ground, so did Saul of Tarsus. I'm sure that Saul was feeling mighty high on the hog by persecuting Christians, but God decided otherwise. And when God knocks a person to the ground, they are grounded!

Saul was blinded by a bright light and it was the Lord at work. I suspect it's kind of like having your eyes dilated at the Dr.'s office and then going outside and looking directly into sun. No, it was worse for Saul. He was blind for three days. THAT WOULD PUT SOME FEAR IN YOU, WOULDN'T IT? Hopefully, it would put the fear of God into some people and in a sense, it did Saul.

Of course, in his blindness, the Lord spoke to him. Many people talk about the Lord speaking to them audibly but I'm not so sure this always happens but it did here. And the Lord can certainly do that if He wishes!

Brothers and sisters, everybody has to go down before they can ever go up. That's the way it is with God. Some people, however, get knocked down by various tragedies but still don't have sense enough to look up. If you've ever been knocked down in some form, please realize that it might be the Lord trying to tell you something.

Saul had not really heard the voice of God, he had listened only to the voice of religion and of the world.

But now he heard a different voice – a voice with power and authority that shook him to the core of his soul.

This same voice had spoken the world into existence.

This same voice had called to Adam in the Garden

This same voice had spoken judgment upon Satan, the serpent and all of creation as a result of sin.

This same voice had spoken to Moses on Mt. Sinai and given the Law

This same voice had spoken to Lazarus and raised him from the dead

This same voice had raised the Window's son at Nain.

This same voice had caused the Soldiers to fall backward in the Garden of Gathsemane

This same voice had cried out, "it is finished" as he paid the price of redemption on the cross

This same voice cries out to us today – follow me, and I will make you fishers of men

This same voice speaks to each of you – this is my will for your life, now do it

This same voice will someday say to us "Well done my good and faithful servant"

I want to hear his voice –

I want to be a sheep of his fold –

I want to know his voice –

When that voice came from Heaven, Saul knew this was no ordinary voice, but he didn't know the Lord and didn't recognize him

But Jesus had come to make a change in Saul's life, so He revealed his identity to Saul

I AM JESUS – the one you are really fighting against, the one you are really condemning, the one you are really persecuting – I AM JESUS CHRIST, THE KING OF KING AND LORD OF LORDS, CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE – I AM THAT I AM!

Now those around him didn't hear what Paul heard. They weren't ready to hear.

God come to each man in his own time and in the way that He knows will reach him.

People who haven't heard the voice cannot understand and cannot know what we are all about.

They only know that we are different – that something has interrupted our lives and changed us in a flash.

Some earthly minded preachers have said that Paul's experience was:

- 1)Heat stroke from the desert sun
- 2)Paul was struck by a bolt of lightning on a clear day and he only thought he heard a voice
- 3)Paul had an epileptic seizure

Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher of the past said, "If that's true, I wish that all men could have epilepsy."

Man is always trying to explain away the things of the supernatural.

To admit that there is really a world of the supernatural is to also admit that Heaven and God and Hell and the Devil are also real and man can't face the idea that he isn't the final authority on anything.

Paul was confronted with the Light from Heaven, coming down from the Father of Lights with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning.

When we are confronted with the Light of Jesus by hearing his Word preached or the eyes of our spirit are opened and the light of love flows in, we can't help but be changed.

We can then chose to change and follow the Light or we can chose to close our eyes and walk into the depths of darkness.

Saul did not stand up and look into that light and say, "Look at me, I'm Saul, Look at who I am". All that Saul was, all that he knew, all that he had planned suddenly meant nothing.

Without Jesus we are nothing, we can nothing outside of His power within us, we can accomplish nothing for the kingdom of God without Jesus.

IV. A NEW MAN

Acts 9: 10 - 19

God spoke to Ananias
Saul's reputation changed

15But 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. 16I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." 17Then 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." 18Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul became a saved man, a new man. That's what happens to you after you're saved, forgiven, cleansed by the Lord.

There is only one place to find true and lasting change and that is in Christ. And that's what Saul discovered.

II Cor. 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Saul the prideful Pharisee became Paul the humble servant of Christ who said, "I am the chief of all sinners." Saul the persecutor of Christians became Paul the preacher of Christ.

V. A PREACHING MAN

Acts 9: 20

"Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21All 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?" 22Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

Saul started preaching right after he was converted to Christ! Can you beat that? I don't doubt it. Did you ever know of that happening? Not often, for sure.

Some, however, were so excited about their conversion that they just had to tell others!

HAVE YOU PREACHED TO ANYBODY LATELY?

We are preaching a sermon everywhere we go. Therefore, we should be our best. However, it should be genuine and not “PUT ON.” If we have truly put on Christ we will have a different face, etc. We will be new people in Him and we will be excited somewhat.

Saul was truly converted to Christ. He suddenly believed in Christ as His Savior and wanted to tell others. He could not keep from telling others. His life was turned Upside Down! We need to do the same.

Conclusion:

Paul was on the road to Damascus.

What road are you on today and are you willing to allow God to turn you Upside Down?

Some of us, we're on the road to where we think our future is, and God wants to interrupt that journey – turning our lives upside down!