Charles Haddon Spurgeon Memory Verse: Isaiah 45:22

Aug. 6th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 29:10-14

**Slide 1: title**

 For the last month, we have been talking about conversion in the lives of famous Christian leaders. We started with the apostle Paul and his story in the book of Acts and last week we looked at John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. It is good to know about these historical figures. We can learn a lot from their lives, from their examples. But, for now, we are most concerned with the point of their conversions. What happened when they met with Jesus? How did Jesus change their lives. We have said throughout this series that the proof of conversion is in the changed life. And knowing the stories of others can inspire us pursue our own walk with Jesus, to open ourselves up to the change the Jesus offers.

 One of the things that has become clear over the course of hearing these stories is that conversion is not uniform. It is varied and personal. Everyone who claims to follow Jesus has a unique story. Conversion, overall, is a mystery of God. And yet, in the midst of that mystery, there are some common themes. We have talked about those along the way as well. We know that conversion begins with a vision of truth, some sort of revelation. On the heels of that truth comes the realization of our sinfulness. But Jesus steps in to offer forgiveness and freedom, and we get to experience joy which in turn sets us onto a new path with a new mission. As we have said, converted people get to work!

 Now for some, the apostle Paul for example, these steps pretty much occurred all at once, but for others, like Charles Spurgeon, whom we will discuss today, the process can be much more stilted.

**SLIDE 2: Charles Spurgeon**

 Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born on June 19th 1834 in Essex. He was the oldest of 17 children. His father and his grandfather were both ministers and he grew up within the walls of a church. For part of his childhood, Charles lived with his grandparents who would pay him a penny for every hymn that he could memorize. Eventually his grandmother had to halve the price because he took to it with such vigor. He called it an “easy and pleasant method of earning money”. Charles also fell in love with his grandfather’s library, and he read all that he could referring to it as a “gold mine”. Charles especially loved the story of the *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan and it is said that over the course of his life, he had read it over one hundred times.

 Now we look at a child like Charles, who stayed out of trouble, who performed well in school, who grew up knowing how to articulate the gospel, and we might think, how does someone like that need conversion? By virtue of their family and their circumstance, it seems like conversion was sort of a given. Doesn’t it just come included with the whole package?

 So the sermon this week is especially for people like me, or my children, or anyone who has grown up in a Christian home, anyone who cannot remember a time when they were not a Christian. Jesus is just a part of the environment, you are raised in it, so you just sort of fall into it. But that is not how it works. Conversion is for us as well! Jesus said it himself, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” We can never reach God through our parents, or through our pastors, or through a legacy of faith that has been established by our family. We must go through Christ. We must not only know about him, but we must know him personally. We must be converted.

**SLIDE 3: We must be converted.**

 I often fear that when I have discussions about faith and Jesus with my own kids, kids who mostly stay out of trouble, kids who are generally well-rounded citizens, but these are also kids who know the right answers. I fear they can tell me what I want to hear…but do they speak about Jesus with their heads or with their hearts? Do they know Jesus? Sometimes it’s hard to tell…but the proof of conversion is in the changed life. My kids, pastor’s kids the lot of them, need to be converted. They need to have an experience with Jesus, and I as their father, I can pray for that and long for that and hope that for them, but I cannot make it happen. I cannot give them faith. So Spurgeon’s story especially speaks to those of us who have known about Jesus all our lives. It could be the case as well, that maybe we have sort of fallen into faith. Maybe Christianity has always been our default setting…

 As he grew up, Charles came to think of himself as a rather respectable young lad. He took pride in the fact that he was not like the other boys who lied and swore and disrespected their parents. But all of a sudden, Spurgeon writes, “I met Moses, carrying in his hand the law of God; and as he looked at me, he seemed to search me through and through with his eyes of fire. He bade me read ‘God’s Ten Words’ – the ten commandments, - and as I read them, they all seemed to join in accusing and condemning me in the sight of the thrice-holy Jehovah.” The Holy Spirit was bringing about conversion in the life of young Charles. He was able to understand the words of Paul in Romans 3:19-20. READ.

**SLIDE 4: Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, in order to shut every mouth and make it so the whole world has to answer to God. It follows that no human being will be treated as righteous in his presence by doing what the Law says, because the knowledge of sin comes through the Law. Romans 3:19-20**

Charles became very aware of his sin. The Holy Spirit was revealing to him a vision of the truth. He knew that he was unworthy of the gift of salvation, he knew that he could never deserve or earn forgiveness. He faithfully studied the Bible and found that he could not quite accept the promises he found there, but that the parts of condemnation landed squarely on him. He was in a sort of agony, knowing his sin and yet unable to get out from under it. As Charles observes, ‘Moses never says, “Mercy.” The law has nothing to do with mercy.” And mercy is exactly what Charles needed most. It is what we all need most, whether we realize it yet or not.

In his quest to find peace in Christ, Spurgeon wrote, “It surely cannot be that, if I believe in Jesus, just as I am, I shall be saved? I must feel something; I must do something…Oh, the many times that I have wished the preacher would tell me something to *do* that I might be saved! Gladly I would have done it, if it had been possible…yet the simplest of all matters – believing in Christ crucified…I could not get a hold of it.” Charles felt he was being driven to despair, yet he found hope, something he could cling to, in Romans 10:13, “All who call on the Lord’s name will be saved.”

**SLIDE 5: Romans 10:13, “All who call on the Lord’s name will be saved.”**

A simple truth that Paul ripped from the pages of the Old Testament prophet Joel. The solution to humanity’s sin problem has always been the same; call on the name of the Lord. How can we do that? How can we call on the Lord with more than just our lips? How can we do it in our heart of hearts? Spurgeon puts much stock in to the classic sinner’s prayer that simply says, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This might be a perfect sentence. It properly identifies God as a God of mercy. It properly identifies me as a sinner in need of mercy. Those dots connect themselves. This prayer is a plea, a request. It acknowledges our need and God’s ability to provide. We come to him because we cannot do it on our own. We cannot bear the burden of sin, we cannot solve the issue of our iniquity. We have no recourse but to fall onto the mercy of God. This prayer recognizes the relationship that God has established with us. This prayer connects us to God. For Spurgeon, it was the first real prayer that he ever prayed, and I think for any of us, it ought to be a staple in our repertoire, a song that we reprise often. “God, have mercy on me a sinner.”

Chapter 11 of Spurgeon’s autobiography is called “The Great Change – Conversion”. We must never forget that conversion always results in a changed life. As a boy of 15, Charles resolved to find the way of salvation and be done with this problem of sin. His plan was to attend all the places of worship in the town where he lived until it was made plain to him. Here is Spurgeon’s account of what happened. READ pg. 79.

**SLIDE 6: Charles**

Charles was taken, by God from the depths of condemnation and guilt, to the heights of joy in knowing salvation in Jesus. Charles knew that he had been changed. He was assured of his relationship with Jesus…That gift of grace had been sitting there all along, but Charles was keeping his eyes upon himself…upon his sin. All he had to do was look upon his Savior to be saved. Hallelujah!

Now, I have read that verse in Isaiah before. I am sure many people have. It did not have the same affect on me or on them. We understand that the verse itself is not the key here, and certainly, from Spurgeon’s story, we understand that the preacher is not the key here. In fact, he admits that of all the sermons he sat through in his young life, surely there were times when the gospel was faithfully and fully communicated to him. But he did not have ears to hear it…or a heart to receive it. Conversion rests on the work of the Holy Spirit.

**SLIDE 7: Conversion rests on the work of the Holy Spirit.**

Whether we are talking about Paul or St, Augustine or John Wesley or you are me, all credit goes to the Holy Spirit working truth into our lives. The truth about our sin as well as the truth about our forgiveness in Christ.

But let us not miss the great lesson that Charles Spurgeon shows us. Even in his doubts and despair, even in his angst, he kept on seeking. He was not content, and probably not allowed, to sleep in on Sunday’s. He did not leave the bible to sit on his shelf. He struck up conversations with other believers. He was active in seeking after the Lord. It is a promise that runs all through the bible…God says to us, “If you seek me, you will find me.” Amen, amen, amen!

**SLIDE 8: “If you seek me, you will find me.”**

God is not out to hide from us, but we will not find him on our own terms. We come to him on his terms…he is God after all. It starts with a vision of the truth, a realization of our sin, the joy of forgiveness and the acceptance of a new mission.

Spurgeon now had that joy and he fully embraced that mission God had in store for him. Charles became the pastor of the largest Baptist church in London at the age of 19. Under his leadership the church outgrew their building and eventually they built the Metropolitan Tabernacle which became the first megachurch in the world with over 14,000 members. His sermons went viral as 25,000 copies were sold every week and even translated into 20 different languages. He is now known as the Prince of Preachers with his collected sermons filling 63 volumes, the largest set of book produced by any author in church history.

God used Charles Spurgeon in a mighty way, but we can also see how much God invested into Charles. He was a third-generation pastor, the offspring of faithful servants. He was nurtured and encouraged from birth to follow and obey God. We remember his grandmother encouraging him to learn hymns when he was a boy, a gift his says he used through his whole life…he could always recall a hymn no matter what the topic at hand might be. Everyone in his life proded him along and encouraged him in his faith.

Before we close, I wanted to share a few words of encouragement from Spurgeon himself as he reflects on his childhood. A few words for us today who are raising children or caring for them. Spurgeon writes: READ Pg. 49

**SLIDE Charle’s Children and Wife**

The prayers of his family, the pleadings of his mother, surely are heard by God and answered. If you remember, we saw the same dynamic in St, Augustine’s life from the undying prayers of his mother Monica. “Mothers and fathers are the most natural agents for God to use in the salvation of their children.”

**SLIDE 10: “Mothers and fathers are the most natural agents for God to use in the salvation of their children.”**

Not the only agents, but the most natural ones. So I ask you, I ask myself, is there a Spurgeon in our midst? Is there a dynamic man or woman of God among us that God is going to unleash upon the world for his glory? Is that person upheld by our prayers? Is that future servant even now experiencing the benefit and unmatched power of prayers and pleadings spoken on their behalf? Are we as parents, and we as their family of faith, faithful to keep these young ones bathed in prayer?

I want to invite any kids present to come on up front here simply so we can pray for you. I also want to invite anyone who would like to offer up a prayer to come on up as well. We are just going to take a few minutes to thank God for these kids and to lift them up in prayer, to plead for their souls and to ask that their gifts and graces God had invested in them might be fully used for his glory.