

Jesus and Paul – Acts 9 v3-20

As Saul was coming near the city of Damascus, suddenly a light from the sky flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?⁵“Who are you, Lord?” he asked. “I am Jesus, whom you persecute,” the voice said. ⁶“But get up and go into the city, where you will be told what you must do.”⁷ The men who were traveling with Saul had stopped, not saying a word; they heard the voice but could not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground and opened his eyes, but could not see a thing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was not able to see, and during that time he did not eat or drink anything. ¹⁰There was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. He had a vision, in which the Lord said to him, “Ananias!” “Here I am, Lord,” he answered. ¹¹The Lord said to him, “Get ready and go to Straight Street, and at the house of Judas ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying, ¹²and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he might see again.” ¹³Ananias answered, “Lord, many people have told me about this man and about all the terrible things he has done to your people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who worship you.” ¹⁵The Lord said to him, “Go, because I have chosen him to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake. ¹⁷So Ananias went, entered the house where Saul was, and placed his hands on him. “Brother Saul,” he said, “the Lord has sent me—Jesus himself, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. He sent me so that you might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸At once something like fish scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he was able to see again. He stood up and was baptized; ¹⁹and after he had eaten, his strength came back.

You are Unique

You **are** unique, and complex, of our Father Gods design. You are loved by Jesus and purposed for good works, through the power of his Holy Spirit. This is who **you** are.

When you look in the mirror what do you see? Look intensely at some-one else- what do you see? What you don't see – is what God sees. You are each totally unique.

There is no-one else like you. You **look** different. Your body shape is different, your face and voice are different, even your thumb print is totally unique. You **think** different. Your brain works in different ways to other people; you have different musical tastes, different food tastes, and a different sense of humour. You will have different creative talents and interests. You have different intuition and different ways of communicating. You have different **experiences**. No other person has been through and had the same experiences as you in life. You will view life differently and the things you believe will be different to other people. Different things will please you or stress you out.

You are uniquely designed by God. You may have taken wrong things into your mind and body which means you are not exactly **now** what God intended for you, but fundamentally you are his wonderful design. You are greatly loved by Jesus and he wants to encounter you in your uniqueness, in such a way that he becomes your desire in the same way that you are his. He wants to encounter you in such a way that you seek after his unique purposes and plans for your life and not your own plans, and are empowered by His Holy Spirit to carry them out.

Give yourself a pat on the back for being so wonderfully different to everyone else.

Gods choice – not our choice

We are complex people and if we are to channel our uniqueness in the right ways, then we need good leadership and inspiration to help us develop, reach our potential and fulfil Gods plans.

Imagine that your church is looking for a new member of the leadership team, one who will head up the churches evangelism and mission work. One man comes to preach with a view but you were away that Sunday, and asked the deacons to fill you in on what happened. You want to know everything. What was he like. Well imagine if they said this.

Well for a starter he looked a bit odd. He is shortish, balding, with crooked legs, and a hook-nosed. His eyes were peculiar, his eyebrows met in the middle and I noticed that he had really rough hands.

From his preaching he seemed very dogmatic and he also seems to upset most people that he meets, and he even speaks in tongues ! His CV tells us that he is not married, he divides his congregations, he

never stays in one place long, he has been in prison and is **frequently** in trouble with the authorities. On first impressions, none of us liked him.

“So we are still looking then?” you say

“Oh No”, comes the reply. “Our prayer secretary says she is sure he is God’s man for us so we decided to call him anyway !”

You are shocked. How could some-one that looks like that with that sort of history and attitude ever be effective in leading up church evangelism? Surely people will run a mile from him. You think the deacons have gone mad.

But this is a description we have of Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament. So when we put together the accounts from out from our New Testament and from another early Christian manuscript called the Acts of Paul. He is short, looks strange, and seems to have a very dodgy background.

God sees differently to us. He would not be **our** choice, but he **was** Gods choice. You see God chooses very different people for his work than man might choose. He sees something deeper that we don’t see. So whilst Paul would not have been our first choice evangelist, God knows best and Paul became probably the greatest missionary there ever was.

We find this elsewhere in scripture. Paul was a Jew from the small tribe of Benjamin. His Hebrew name was Saul, and he was no doubt proudly named after the first king of Israel, who was man of good stature and a fine-looking warrior. He was the people’s choice. But Gods choice was the shepherd boy David.

We cannot look ourselves in a mirror and see what God sees. We also cannot look at any of friends, family members or work colleagues and see what God sees. We make our own judgements, she would make such a good Christian, but as for him – no chance. That’s looking through human eyes. We don’t know who will would make great on-fire for God disciples and there are **no** hopeless cases when it comes to the Lord of all Hope !

Jesus appearances

The Gospels record a number of appearances that Jesus makes after his crucifixion. These are all in his resurrected body, but before Jesus had ascended to heaven. So he had not yet sat back at the right hand of the Father, as we sometimes say – in the Glory.

There are **ten** scripture references to resurrection appearances. Acts 1v3 sums this up;

³ For forty days after his death he appeared to them many times in ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive.

Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, with other women who were running to the city having seen an angel, then to Cleopas and a companion on the road to Emmaus, and a private meeting with Peter, before seeing all the disciples as a group (first without Thomas, then later with him). He met 7 of the disciples including Peter on the shore of Galilee after they had been fishing and then later met them at a mountain in Galilee probably within a crowd of 500 people. After this, he had a meeting with his half-brother James who went on to lead the church in Jerusalem. Then finally he led the disciples towards the Mount of Olives where they saw him ascend into heaven.

But there is one more appearance of Jesus recorded in our scriptures, but this time and the only time in scriptures, it is not in his resurrected body, but his glorified body. He has spent time with his Father in heaven and returns to visit and instruct some-one. That some-one is Paul and it is the only New Testament appearance of the glorified Jesus. So as far as the Bible goes **this** is the end of the story of Jesus on Earth not the ascension. So we must not miss what Jesus is doing here. As we see how Jesus interacts with Paul in his uniqueness, then we can learn something of of how Jesus wants to interact with the unique me, and the unique you.

The Complex Paul - You can not tell a book by its cover.

So why did he make his last appearance to Paul?

There is a saying you only have one chance to make a first impression, and its often first impressions that stick in our mind, and becomes our judge of others. We too quickly write off others as we don't look deep enough. So let's give Paul a proper examination. What was unique about Paul, that he was purposed to become perhaps the greatest and most famous of all missionaries?

Paul was unique. He was Jewish by descent and faith, he was Greek by intellect and culture, he was Roman by citizenship.

He was a proud Jew, part of the diaspora (those Jews that had moved away from their homeland), and lived in Tarsus in the Roman political kingdom of Cilicia, which was on the Mediterranean coast, now in modern day Turkey. Tarsus, known for its great university (one of the top 3 along with Athens & Alexandria) in the ancient world. Its crowded wharfs were on the Sidonis river and it was a very Cosmopolitan town. His parent language was Aramaic (similar to what Jesus spoke) which had been imported by the Persians, but Greek was the common language up and down the regions, and Greek was Pauls preferred language and a big part of his culture. Tarsus was under Roman rule and they were very grateful to them for it, as it brought a release from small warring kingdoms and pirates, and gave them a level of Peace and Prosperity that they had not known before. His family business was tent-making, and his family were most likely prosperous with contracts to provide tents for the Romans, portable stalls, and repairing canvas on wagons. His Father had been honoured with Roman citizenship, which was hereditary, so Paul benefitted from the privileges that came from being a Roman citizen.

So he had a complex background but he also had the complex character to match. Despite first appearances he was a man of tremendous dedication, zeal and enthusiasm, single mindedness, incredible courage, and controlled anger.

He had this complex cultural mix, and determination, which equipped him perfectly for the job that God had purposed for him.

Paul, the temple and Gamaliel

Paul was an intellectual in the making, but If he was to form a reputation in his own town, he could only do this by studying abroad then returning. With the family tent business doing well, Paul's Father could allow one of his younger sons to go and train as a Pharisee in far off Jerusalem. For the 7 million Jews of that time, Jerusalem was where God lived. He could be known anywhere in the world, but the temple in Jerusalem was the only place where he could be worshipped with the offerings he desired. The Pharisee movement was born with the original aim to influence the conduct of worship and sacrifice in the temple, it taunted the young priests into scrupulously doing everything that the written and oral laws demanded.

Paul was apprenticed by a Pharisee as a teenager , and for four years exceeded in his studies, himself becoming a Rabbi, a master teacher of the Pharisees, and he had a real passion for upholding the traditions of the law and temple. Paul says he studied under Rabbi Gamaliel who was the greatest influence on the Pharisees in that day. However Gamaliel had had some sympathies with Jesus and his view that all humanity could come to God. He was a liberal who is mentioned in the bible when the problem of Jesus' followers was raised, as saying wait and see with these Christians, if it is not of God it will die out. His student Saul was much more hard-core, he was not going to wait, and he was committed to wiping out Christians, and became an anti-Christian missionary travelling to other countries to arrest them!

The popularity of Gamaliel was a threat to the authority of the High Priest Caiaphas, and Gamaliel's tolerance of the Jesus sect in the temple, probably turned Paul over to the side of Caiaphas. There was one of the Jesus sect calling themselves 'The Way', which really wound up Paul and other religious leaders as instead of worshipping quietly at home, he insisted on taking his views into the temple, and had even been quoted as saying that his triumphant Jesus would destroy the temple (Acts 6v14); Pauls

beloved temple, for which he was keen to show his loyalty, against this trouble-maker called Stephen who would not give the temple its proper place. When surrounded by accusers Stephen claimed he was having a vision of Jesus raised from the dead, and standing at the right hand of God. Only the High Priest once a year in the inner temple could be right next to God in his presence. This was pure blasphemy to Paul's ears, and he was happy to hold coats for those that then stoned Stephen to death, whilst he looked on giving it his Rabbi approval.

Paul had learnt a lot from Gamaliel though including his practice of writing letters to the Jews dispersed around the Mediterranean.

God was preparing Paul for his life-task long before his conversion.

The high priest Caiaphas who had effectively murdered Jesus, with his false trial and persuasion of the Romans to crucify him, was now keen to rid the Jews of this Jesus sect, that he saw as undermining his authority and the sacred temple practices. He would route them out of the synagogues in the Diaspora and bring them to trial. As part of this initiative he had written letters from himself the High priest to synagogue leaders to arrest Christians. Jewish communities outside Jerusalem respected the High Priest and respected whoever he authorised to carry out his work. Caiaphas needed educated zealots who could deliver, read, explain and defend these instructions, to both Aramaic and Greek speakers. Paul, A bilingual, Pharisee who hated the Jesus followers, was a perfect candidate. When Paul agreed to the mission, it must have been a delight for Caiaphas to have one of Gamaliel's students break ranks and stand shoulder to shoulder with the High Priest on this issue.

Paul meets Jesus

Paul set out of the Palestine region taking the road to Damascus, where tens of thousands of Jews lived. He had just stepped out of Jewish territory into what we now know as the Golan Heights (a couple of hours only from Damascus). As soon as his feet were on Gentile soil, an extra-ordinary event happened.

v3-5 ... suddenly a light from the sky flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?'. "Who are you, Lord?" he asked. "I am Jesus, whom you persecute," the voice said. ⁶"But get up and go into the city, where you will be told what you must do."

Dazzling light signified the Shekinah glory of God, and in scripture we see this when God himself shows his presence. In Exodus, Moses wants to see this dazzling light of God's face, but is told that seeing his face would be just too gloriously bright and would kill him, but he could instead hide in a rock as God passed him by, then look and see the back or tail of Gods shining glory.

When Peter James and John were with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration we read that **"As they looked on, a change came over Jesus: his face was shining like the sun, and his clothes were dazzling white. (Mt 17v2).** Then a shining cloud come over them in which the voice of God was heard. This was the presence of God coming down and meeting with Jesus, which made him dazzle with brightness. But not so bright that the disciples could not still look at Jesus. However this visit to Paul was Jesus coming down from dwelling for a time in the physical presence of God, so he was now blindingly bright.

This light brighter than the mid-day sun, appeared on Paul and surrounded him. The divine appearance in this blinding light made Paul screw up his eyes tight shut and fall to the ground. This is characteristic of others before him in the scriptures, when faced with divine or angelic revelations, they fall flat on the floor. I am sure we would do the same.

Paul knew that God sent angels as messengers. Daniel, the hero of the exile, was a classic example of how those with spiritual insight could be given personal messages by an Angel coming in a bright light. However angels were not always safe, as Jacob discovered when an angel wrestled him and dislocated his hip! We also see Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, being struck deaf and dumb for not believing the angels message of baby news. They seemed to scare most people they visited including

Mary and Joseph. Their Old Testament one is not of winged ladies with halos and frilly white dresses as you might see on a Christmas trees, but of warrior like figures who can blind and slay the enemy armies of Israel. Paul was frightened and quite rightly so. Probably more so, when he was addressed personally in his Aramaic name. His name is repeated Paul Paul. In Jewish literature names are often repeated when God calls out to someone bringing special attention to what is about to be said.

In fear Paul calls back to his visitor, and asks who he is. **“Who are you Lord” (v5)**

Paul uses Lord, respectfully and fearfully, as we might politely use Sir, as he has no idea who his Godly visitor is. The answer from this divine creature was the very last name he had wanted to hear.

I am Jesus, who you persecute (v5). Persecuting the followers of Jesus, was the same as persecuting Jesus as they are his representatives on Earth, and this was a fact that Paul instantly recognised and never disputed. It is interesting that when Jesus was alive he never complained about being persecuted himself, but when he is persecuted through his followers, it is a different matter. It clearly grieves Jesus enough for him to personally challenge Paul.

The accounts of this event suggest that those supporters of Paul that travelled with him, saw the light and heard noises, but not what was said. These words were for Paul alone, so perhaps the ears of the others were blocked by Jesus. We don't know. When Paul opened his eyes he realised that the light had blinded him. His companions, a good name for his heavies, or lynch mob, led him by the hand for the last couple of hours of the journey to Damascus. They were probably keen to leg it back to Jerusalem and having nothing more to do with this persecution in case something happened to them.

Pauls Conversion

He was left at the house of a man named Judas in Straight Street, who I assume is his arranged Jewish host that had agreed to look after him whilst he rounded up the Christians. The man that showed up was far from what Judas had been expected. No mighty zealot Rabbi, but a small odd-looking man, blind and traumatised. Hospitality was everything in Jewish culture, you were known by the table you could spread, and no doubt Judas went to great efforts to impress Paul on his arrival with a banquet and special guests, but Paul refused to eat or drink anything.

Pauls conversion or rebirth happened over 3 days, where he went through a process of revelation, conviction, then commitment.

Revelation: Paul's whole life purpose had come crashing down, he had so badly wanted to be devoted to the one God and serve his temple without sin. Despite his great learning of the scriptures, he had somehow been blind to the mysterious truths of Jesus hidden within them. The Holy Spirit needed to open his eyes to these truths. Paul had thought he was in a place of full acceptance with God, only to discover that he was actually a lost sinner. He was in need of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Conviction: 'I am Jesus – who you persecute'. Paul was convicted. He was guilty of this sin of persecution; persecuting Gods own Son and his followers. Then for three days he thought over the implications of his spiritual encounter with Jesus and spent his time in prayer and total fasting. He became more aware of his sinful nature and how he was not assured eternal life as a son of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin, but actually was deserving of Gods wrath and eternal punishment.

Commitment: His old life and mission were gone, he needed to realign himself with a new mission, and that was what he was waiting for. Jesus had told him to go into the city and wait to be told what to do. He had shunned the banquet and everything else outside of this one command from Jesus. He had already single-mindedly committed himself to doing whatever Jesus commanded. Clearly his host Judas, sympathetic with his initial cause, could not enlighten him, so he sat waiting instructions from elsewhere.

Then he had a vision, this time in his mind so no blinding light. The vision was of a man named Ananias who came in and placed his hands on Paul so that he would see again. On the third day with no food or water so not far from death, Ananias did call. He was one of the Christians that Paul had come to

persecute, so was reluctant at first. But Jesus had also appeared to Ananias in a vision to tell him to go to Straight Street and ask for Paul. He passed on Paul's new mission to him which he had received in his vision, which was **“to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (v16)**

Ananias, had no promises from Jesus that he wouldn't be arrested but went anyway and found himself praying over this strange little broken man, that he might see again, and what appeared like scales fell from Paul's eyes. Paul stood up from where he had been waiting for 3 days and was immediately baptised in water and in the Spirit by Ananias, in the name of Jesus. A man of faith was born. A man that would change the known world with the name of Jesus. . A new spiritual nature joins Paul's human nature, and empowers him with truth, then Paul's blindness is ended (Both his spiritual blindness and his physical blindness). Now at last he could eat, and his strength returned.

Reputation and Character

Paul had left Tarsus to gain a reputation as a Jewish intellect, a top Pharisee, a respected Rabbi. Instead he gained another reputation as a persecutor. In the words of Ananias **“many people have told me about this man and about all the terrible things he has done to your people in Jerusalem” (v13).**

When he met Jesus, his intended and his intended reputation becomes nothing. The only reputation he wants now is to faithfully serve Jesus and fulfil his new commission. The reputation he finally gets, is as Apostle to the Gentiles..

This unique character of Paul, had been chosen for a purpose that perfectly fitted his design. He had been enlightened to his sins that he had been blinded too, he was convinced that he had been wrong, and he accepted a renewal in Jesus, making him Lord over his life, and taking on a new mission for him.

Despite putting down his old commission of eradicating Christians, and taking up a new commission to take the name of Jesus to Gentiles and Kings, it was not a calling that he could immediately walk into. He had to **wait** for God's timing.

Gods timing for Paul

Jesus has appeared to Paul in his glory, the only such appearance in the whole bible and told him etc wait for instruction, then Jesus appeared in a vision to Ananias to give Paul his new mission, his calling. In human terms, you can sense a real urgency about Paul has to do, and something that Paul immediately sets about his task of an apostle to the non-Jews, sharing the name of Jesus, planting churches, commissioning elders, and encouraging their growth.

But No. It was 13 years before he started.

He went to Arabia for 3 years to think through his theology. How could he reconcile everything he knew from the prophets, the wisdom literature, the Law, and the oral traditions, with this new revelation about Jesus. He then returned to his home city of Tarsus for 10 years waiting for this call on his life to be confirmed. It was Barnabus that finally came to him, and took him to Antioch which was the Sin City of the Ancient World. It was no doubt where Jesus had in mind for the Prodigal Son in the parable when he went to a far-away city and partied away all his money. The only place that fits the description was Antioch. Today it would be a prime destination for stag-nights and hen dos. This disreputable place is where the first Gentile church was established and when the name Christian was first used. When news reached Jerusalem about this Gentile church in Antioch, the Apostles sent Barnabus there to help lead it, and he in turn recruited Paul for the work there where he could develop his teaching and leadership skills. This was the first ever Gentile church, and they were in a prayer meeting, when a prophecy came for Paul and Barnabus to be separated out from the work Jesus had called them to i.e. to make his name known to Gentiles and kings and to the people of Israel.

They had both been deacons first, and together looked after the famine fund for Jerusalem. They did this small job first, before taking on the bigger task. The first thing Paul wanted to do was to evangelise the whole of the North East Mediterranean world as far as Rome. He went first to Cyprus, then back to the

mainland. He planted a church in the key towns of a district and it was them up to them to evangelise their province.

He understood the call of Jesus on his life, and kept going despite incredible dangers, on his journeys often hungry and sleepless, stoned and flogged many times, and shipwrecked 3 times. He never gave up despite his trials and suffering.

We are in a hurry to step into Gods purposes and plans but God seems to have a timing all of his own. When we look back at Pauls life we see his amazing missionary journeys and all that he achieved to see the Good News established with the Gentiles, we don't look back and say that Paul wasted 13 years after his conversion.

What made Paul the man he was – Christ, Gospel, & Grace

Before his conversion on the road to Damascus, the law and the temple meant everything to Paul. After his encounter, A passion for Jesus Christ, a passion for the Gospel message and a constant reminder of the Grace of God, meant everything to him instead.

Passion for Christ: He absolutely lived for Christ, totally absorbed with Jesus. He said "For me to live is Christ". He said "if I die I am better off, because I long to be with Christ". He called himself the slave of Christ. He said "he bought me". He also called himself an Ambassador of Christ. Occasionally he talked of Christ being in him, but dozens of time, he says I am in Christ. Wherever he was, his address was in Christ.

Passion for the Gospel: He was passionate for the Gospel, he took it wherever he could, even in prison he spread the message. He saw it as a debt he owed people, an obligation to share the Gospel. If you found a cure for cancer, you would feel that you owed it to the world to share it with them. It was a future gospel (a kingdom to come, but one we can enjoy know) and an ethical gospel (one that was moral and changed the behaviour of people for the good of society). He died to self, so that he could in be the place of intercession for others to be saved.

Passion over Grace: He was also passionate about the Grace of God, because he knew that what he had he didn't deserve. He had been the persecutor of Gods son, and what he had now become was completely undeserved. He had been an enemy of Christ Jesus, and deserved eternal punishment, but instead he had been forgiven by this wonderful grace of God. This Grace produced a deep gratitude in him.

Jesus and Paul shared a similar fate in which they were both initially accused and persecuted by the Jewish people, not the Romans. Pilate could find no fault with Jesus, and Paul was acquitted after his first imprisonment in Rome. Though of course both were finally executed by the Romans, Jesus crucified as Jew, but Paul finally made the ultimate sacrifice for those he loved, and was beheaded as a Roman citizen, after which his dream of being with Jesus was fulfilled.

Our own uniqueness

Paul was unique, his complex cultural mix and die hard dedication, but you are also unique.

You **are** unique, and complex, of our Father Gods design. You are loved by Jesus and purposed for good works, through the power of his Holy Spirit. This is who **you** are.

God sees in each one of us, what no-one else sees, and even things we do not know ourselves. The scriptures of full of the Fathers knowledge of us and his intimacy for us through his son Jesus..

Here is a collection of truths about how special you are taken from the Old and New Testaments:-

You may not know me, but I know everything about you. (Psalm 139:1)

I am familiar with all your ways. (Psalm 139:3)

Even the very hairs on your head are numbered. (Matthew 10:29)

I knew you even before you were conceived. (*Jeremiah 1:4-5*)

I knit you together in your mother's womb and brought you forth on the day you were born. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. *Ps 139:13-14 & 71:6*

My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore. *Psalms 139:17-18*

I desire to establish you with all **my** heart and all **my** soul. *Jeremiah 32:41*

If you seek me with all **your** heart, you will find me. *Deuteronomy 4:29*

My plan for your future has always been filled with hope, because I love you with an everlasting love. (*Jeremiah 29:11 & 31:3*)

I will never stop doing good to you. *Jeremiah 32:40*

For you are my treasured possession. *Exodus 19:5*

Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart. *Psalms 37:4*

For it is I who gave you those desires. *Philippians 2:13*

I want to show you great and marvellous things. *Jeremiah 33:3*

I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine. *Ephesians 3:20*

You might look in the mirror and see someone that looks incapable of doing great things for God, but the good news is that God sees things differently.

Our own conversion

Whilst we are wonderfully designed and made by our creator God in this unique way, we have a big problem, because this body is born with a human nature, and is born into a fallen world, which prevents us from fully being what we were designed to be. As we progress through the years, we take on more and more things into our bodies and minds which harm us and keep us away from God's purposes. Like Paul we grow up opposed to God whether we know it or not. We need a conversion experience, whether this is dramatic, or gradual, each one of us needs to be born again.

So just like in Paul's conversion experience, we too need a Revelation, a conviction and commitment.

No matter how unique and wonderful you are, you need God to be revealed to you, you need an encounter with Him. You then need to be convinced of what you have done wrong and ask for that Grace of God, for forgiveness. You need to accept the Holy Spirit into your life so that this new spiritual nature helps and guides your human nature along the right paths. Your passion for worldly things, should become a passion for Jesus. Your uniqueness can then be put to the purposes and plans that were destined for you, if you decided to follow Jesus and be empowered by His Spirit.

Hearing our mission statement.

Paul had a mission statement. He fulfilled his calling that was passed on to him by Ananias, to make the name of Jesus known, not just to the people of Israel (which he did by always going to the synagogues first) but also to the Gentiles and to kings. In pursuing this mission he became known as the apostle to the Gentiles.

This is not your calling, so what are you called to? What is it in your uniqueness that God wants to use to further his purposes on earth? What does he want you to be known for? What will your reputation be, not your reputation on earth, but the one you make in the heavenlies by doing God's work.

Some of you will know what you are called to do, or at least what the next few steps are, and some of you will not. To fully become what you were designed for you need to pursue Jesus with your life. Make pleasing him your top priority. To do this you need an insight into the plans and purposes he has for you.

Robert Fidler spent years building a 1 million pound mock castle hidden behind hay-bales. But he did not have planning permission and after a long legal battle had to tear it down or go to prison. God has the authority over us when we become Christians, and he sets out what we should and should not build with our lives.

Paul heard the voice of Jesus, and his mission statement confirmed through a believer Ananias who had also heard from God. It is your **birth right** as a Christian to hear Gods voice. To hear those promptings in your head that are from Him.

But first we have to find some space to be with him, ask him what he wants from us and listen for his voice. We need to find the mission statement that God speaks over our lives that we were uniquely designed for.

Our Christ, Gospel and Grace

This Roman, Greek, Jew called Paul was transformed by his encounter with Jesus into being the unique missionary to the Gentiles, that he had been designed and purposed for. In the same way Jesus loves you too much to leave you the way you are, he want that encounters with you that will make the unique you step into fulfil the purposes intended for you and be made complete in that calling. Whatever your age, God has not finished with you yet. You don't retire from being a Christian, we are always being transformed in his image if we let him, and still have purposes to fulfill to help his purposes on Earth.

We should seek after our mission statements with a passion, and keep Pauls example in mind. A man that loved being in the presence of Jesus so much , that it became his address. "You can find me in Christ". Like Paul, understand the importance of the gospel message to a lost world, and whatever your calling, be ready to share this love of Jesus with others. But always remember like Paul did,that all we are, that we become, all that we have and do, is by the GRACE of God. We deserve none of it, and without him we are nothing.

I'll say it again - You **are** unique, and complex, of our Father Gods design. You are loved by Jesus and purposed for good works, through the power of his Holy Spirit. This is who **you** are.

Seek after Gods mission for your life and become the individual that you were uniquely designed to be, one that is fulfilled in the person and the purposes of Jesus Christ. Amen.

· _____