



Sermon Discussion Questions

04-21-2024

Rev. Trevor Johnston (LOX); Pastor Brandon Weaver (LW); Pastor Kurtis Alva (WPB); Rev. Efrain Silva (ESP)

Series: Restored

Week 3: Restored from Self-Righteousness

1. ICE BREAKER: Pastor Trevor referenced the movie *Back to the Future* in his message today. If you could time travel and go back to any era of time, when would it be and why?
2. Read our Scripture for this week, Acts 9:1-19:

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 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.

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹¹The 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. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to 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.

What thoughts do you have after reading this passage of Scripture? If you've read it before, pretend you're reading it for the first time. What stands out to you? What questions do you have?

3. When people put their faith in Christ, they often come to that decision very gradually, like a light being turned on with a dimmer switch. Some people can't even pinpoint a specific moment of conversion. Others experience something dramatic, like a light switch being flipped completely from off to on.

Do you consider your experience of becoming a Christian as a light switch or dimmer switch story? Explain which one applies to you more, and why.

4. Read Philippians 3:4b-11. These verses describe, in Paul's own words, the reasons why he was self-righteous. He had all of the credentials and knowledge, and did all of the things that a "righteous person" should do.

What are Paul's external qualifications that he is listing? Why does he say that he now considers them "loss" or "garbage"?

5. Today we defined self-righteousness as "comparing ourselves to someone else and finding ourselves to be morally superior." Although self-righteousness is something that religious people are often accused of, it's actually an attitude and posture that can be found in religious and non-religious people.

Describe self-righteousness in your own words. What does it look like or sound like when you are being self-righteous, or when others are? What are some examples of things we can be self-righteous about? Do you agree with the idea that comparison is the root of self-righteousness? Why or why not?

6. Reread Acts 9:4-6. In the first movement of restoration in Paul's life, we saw that God wants to restore us from self-righteousness to humility. Often humility occurs when we realize what we may be wrong about.

What was Paul wrong about? How did God humble him? Share about a time when you have been humbled, and what that was like.

7. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus identifies himself as "gentle and humble in heart." God loves humility! Read these two verses about humility:

- James 4:6b, *"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*
- Luke 18:14b, *"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

Why do you think humility is so important to God? How does our pride and self-righteousness get in the way of what God wants to do in our lives? What are some practical ways that we can humble ourselves? What does that look like in our everyday lives?

8. Reread Acts 9:11-15. God doesn't just restore Paul from self-righteousness to humility. He used Paul's life to transform the world. In Acts 9:15, God says to Ananias that Paul is his "chosen instrument."

Talk about the impact that Paul had on the world. How do you think Christianity may have been different if 'Saul' hadn't become 'Paul'? How would you have felt if you were Ananias, receiving God's instructions to pray for Paul, even when you knew what he had been doing? Would it have been easy or hard for you? Why?

9. Finally, we see that Paul has been restored from self-righteousness to the righteousness of Jesus. Reread Philippians 3:9, *"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 on the basis of faith."* Again in his own words, Paul wrote in Romans 3:23-24, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*

What does it mean to you personally that when you have faith in Christ, you have righteousness that comes from God? What does it mean that we are justified freely? Why is this good news for us?

10. PRACTICE: Take a few quiet moments as a group, and really consider how God used Paul's life.

- First, think about Paul's "before" - specifically searching for followers of the "Way," in order to persecute them. Spend a few minutes here thinking about how much harm Paul may have caused to the early church.
- Then, think about Paul's "after" - his missionary journeys, his contributions of letters to the New Testament, the number of people he led to Christ. Spend a few minutes thinking about how God used Paul to grow and strengthen the church.
- Now, consider your own life. If God could do that with Paul, what might He do with you? Ask God to give you a vision of how He wants to use your life.