

## **“I Am Jesus” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Easter 3 – May 4, 2025**

- I. **Acts 9:5** – <sup>5</sup>And [Paul] said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus”
- II. **Think back to an event that changed the trajectory of your life.**
  - a. Many of us can remember times in our lives that became a turning point, or a big change took place.
    - i. Entering into a new career field, changing majors in college, meeting someone, having a child, experiences in the military, finding out about a disease or health condition... these are just some of the things that might happen to a person that changes the direction of their lives.
  - b. I suppose we can name multiple places that a big change took place, but I usually remember one specifically.
    - i. Since I was 8-10 years old, a person here or there might ask me if I had considered being a pastor when I grew up.
    - ii. I didn’t really like going to church much, and I was pretty shy, so it didn’t appeal to me.
    - iii. In my twenties, I was heading to a job fair at a new Walmart and happened to see a resort that had an opening, so I applied for a front desk / housekeeping position... thus beginning a career in resort and hotel management.
    - iv. But that wasn’t the event that changed my life... in my thirties, I was asked to be an elder at my church, and I began spending more and more time in God’s Word and in service to Him... but that wasn’t the event.
    - v. The event came when I signed up for a class at our church on spiritual gifts called Network.
      1. We did a few classes and got to the point where the workbook was helping us to figure out what our passion for ministry might be.
      2. I wrote answers for a couple of questions, and then I came to this one... “If you could snap your fingers and know that you wouldn’t fail, what would you do for others?”
        - a. In a moment of clarity, I knew that the only answer was, “Be a pastor.”
        - b. It was from that point on that I began the process of enrolling at Concordia Seward to complete my bachelor’s, and the rest is history.
    - vi. Looking back on that moment, I can see how so much changed in my life – and the inspiration from the Holy Spirit to simply write the words, be a pastor, altered the trajectory of my life and my family’s life too.
  - c. Maybe you have similar experience, or maybe you had something happen that was small at the time, but it changed everything for your future.
- III. **When it comes to events that change everything, Paul is the winner.**

- a. The man called by his Hebrew name, Saul who we know by his Roman name Paul, was a Pharisee who wanted to stop the Christian movement from gaining any momentum.
- b. We read in some of his other writings that he was a zealous Pharisee, and people who were teaching about Jesus had to be stopped.
  - i. At the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, it says in Acts 7:58, "Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul," and in Acts 8:1, "And Saul approved of his execution."
- c. Saul's purpose at that point was to find Christians and lock them up or have them killed... and so he headed to Damascus after he oversaw the stoning of Stephen.
- d. You can imagine Saul with this singular focus of getting to his destination and rounding up Christians... when out of heaven comes a bright light, and a voice asks him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." (vv 4-5)
  - i. Jesus told him to go into Damascus for further instructions, and as Saul gets up to go, he can't see a thing.
  - ii. After three days of fasting, Saul is sent Ananias, who would heal him of his blindness as the scales fell from his eyes... and then Ananias baptized him as well. (v 19)
- e. Immediately, Saul made his way to the very places he intended to round up Christians and drag them back to Jerusalem in chains... and he began preaching the Good News about Jesus Christ the Savior.
  - i. From the singular focus of destroying the thought of Jesus, to the singular focus of spreading the name of Jesus to all nations.
  - ii. In fact, the name Paul becomes his regular name later in the Book of Acts as he uses his Roman name that would connect better with all the Gentiles he would reach.
- f. The trajectory of his entire life was changed the moment Jesus came to him and said, "I am Jesus."
  - i. Paul was no longer the one to arrest people, but he would now be arrested.
  - ii. Paul was no longer making others suffer, but he would be the one to suffer.
  - iii. Paul would no longer be the prideful one in charge of his life, but he would become dependent on Christ alone to lead him.
  - iv. Paul would no longer be a zealous Pharisee bound by the law but would be an Apostle of Christ, free to live in God's grace.

IV. **Although none of us had Paul's experience, we did have a similar one.**

- a. Most of us were baptized as little babies and came to faith at that time – so we didn’t have a conversion experience we remember – but it doesn’t really matter because we still had the conversion of St. Paul.
- b. The old Saul was drowned in the depths of baptism’s waters, and the new Saul... or Paul arose to life in faith and the Holy Spirit.
  - i. You see, Paul was on a trajectory of unbelief and separation from God until the direct intervention of Jesus in his life.
- c. Every human being, even from conception has the sin and brokenness in them that separates them from God.
  - i. Paul writes, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23)
  - ii. King David writes, “Look, I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5 NET)
  - iii. So regardless of who we are or how old, we must have the intervention of God to bring us the Word... to bring us baptism and faith as a gift that transforms us.
- d. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we also are raised from spiritual death to life... as Ephesians 2:1 says that before faith we were dead in our trespasses and sins...
  - i. Yet, after the gift of faith and our baptisms, we are brought to life in Christ – which means we never die.
  - ii. Paul was given this gift in a dramatic way... but even babies have this gift as we bring them to the font... it’s just as amazing and just as powerful as what Paul experienced in Damascus.
- e. Each of us has a change of trajectory as Jesus came to us at some point in our lives and said, “I am Jesus.”
  - i. Jesus changes everything for us...

V. **Let’s take a moment to remember our baptisms.**

- a. Whenever we have a baptism in the church, we follow the Rite of Baptism, as I did with Arlo this morning.
- b. I invite you to think of your full name... “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”
  - i. At the moment of your baptism, you met Jesus.
  - ii. In some versions of baptism, the pastor gives the child a white robe as a symbol of the righteousness of Christ that now covers them, so there is no fear of judgment when Jesus comes back on the Last Day.
  - iii. We also give a burning light that shows that you now walk in the light, not the darkness.
  - iv. Finally, you were welcomed as a brother or sister in Christ by the congregation... in fact, your congregation on that day might have even said out loud to you, “We welcome you in the name of the Lord.”
- c. So it is with each of us—when Jesus comes into our lives, He doesn’t merely adjust our path; He raises us from death to life.

- i. The same voice that called Saul by name now calls us His own, clothing us in righteousness and empowering us to walk as children of the light.
- ii. Because Jesus lives, our old selves are buried, and we rise with Him into a new life that will never end. Amen