

Proof: Transformed Lives

Loving Our Magnificent, Invincible Savior

The evidence keeps mounting up. You may already be one whose transformed life is evidence to your friends and family that something or Someone has powerfully been at work in your life. Let's hope that you've told them (in so many words) that Jesus is Alive—that's what's changing you! A changed life can be tremendously convincing. The testimony of changed lives after the resurrection of Jesus is just as powerful a witness today as it was then.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. 2
Corinthians 3:18 ESV

Radically Changed

We all know people who have changed for the worse as they got older; few change for the better. What accounts for genuinely positive transformation? The reasons for corrupting changes are as wide as the world and just as easy to understand: It's only natural for fallen nature to take people down.

However, the gospels and Book of Acts show us, not a lone individual, but a whole group of people who changed radically for the better, then helped countless others change for the better, too. That couldn't have happened by chance. There had to be a reason, a powerful something, that caused such widespread and lasting transformation. What was it?



First, the Disciples

On the eve of Good Friday, the disciples, under the pressure of mounting opposition from the religious establishment and the looming death of their beloved leader, were already spiraling down into discord, arguing over who would come out on top even during Jesus' farewell supper with them. Later that night they fled from the Roman soldiers in the garden of Gethsemane. Then Peter denied even knowing Jesus at the high priest's house. All of them except John (and the women!) abandoned Jesus at the cross. Apparently, their fears compounded with their grief and sense of failure, for on Easter evening when the risen Lord visited them, He had to enter through a door that was locked "for fear of the Jews."

Before we feel too smug, we should all wonder if we would have done any better. On the whole these were poor, uneducated working-class men with little or no standing in the "proper" Jewish society which ruled in Jerusalem. Not only that but they were far from their own small, rural communities and the usual support that family and friends provide. They were Galilean fish out of water. The religious and civil leaders—those who had possessions, power and privilege—



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were vehemently united against Jesus and, therefore, also against them. If Jesus couldn't survive that onslaught, how could they?

Fifty days later everything has changed. The disciples are bold, even aggressive, in promoting their faith. They show no hesitation, no fear. Religious and civil opposition no longer intimidates them. Instead, we see them standing up to the authorities and to huge crowds of people saying things that are guaranteed to infuriate anyone who isn't willing to repent for putting Jesus to death. In a stunning reversal the Jewish leaders are now the ones on the defensive, wondering how to silence a movement that has found its voice and its courage.

What Changed Them?

If we were to ask them what made the difference, they would unanimously say that they had seen the Risen Lord, that Jesus had triumphed over death for all our sakes, had ascended to heaven, was seated at the right hand of the Father, and was still with them by His Spirit. That was their story and they stuck with it! Through thick and thin, in all parts of the empire, under all manner of temptation and persecution, they never wavered, until the world was "turned upside down." The post-resurrection disciples emerged on the world scene, claimed the entire playing field and never left. If this was a "scripted" conspiracy, as some would have us believe, it was one that was maintained by every last one of them to their dying day, an inconceivable possibility. Blaise Pascal put it this way:

The hypothesis that the Apostles were knaves is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end and imagine these twelve men meeting after Jesus' death and conspiring to say that he had risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be. The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to change, to promises, to bribery. One of them had only to deny his story under these inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, tortures and death and they would all have been lost.

This unreversed transformation of character in the apostles continues to stand as an unanswerable proof that they had indeed encountered Jesus raised from the grave just as they claimed. But what about those who had never walked with the Lord, who never knew Him in the flesh? Could they too encounter the risen Lord and be transformed in ways that give further proof to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave? It's time to call in Paul as Exhibit A for the defense!

Then, Came Paul

Paul represents the other side of the divide. He was of the wealthy upper class, a brilliantly educated, young, cosmopolitan Jew of the Diaspora, studying in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, one of the most sought after rabbis of his day. By his own description he was of a long, proud line of devout Pharisees, a true zealot for the Law of Israel and an unabashed upholder of religious orthodoxy. Unlike the disciples he had no previous connection to Jesus. He, therefore, had no reason to want to believe that Jesus had survived the crucifixion in any form. Just the opposite! He was energetically persecuting and imprisoning anyone who made the blasphemous claim that Jesus was Lord. He wanted to crush the heretical "sect of the Nazarenes," not become one of them!



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I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. Acts 22:4-5 ESV

With the disciples we noted their fear and inner divisions, but we might just as well have praised their expressions of genuine goodness. After all, they had been helping Jesus serve the lost, diseased and demon-possessed people of the land for three years. They had been engaged in a true ministry of compassion and had even participated directly in supernatural works of healing and deliverance. They were on friendly terms with the Lord of the Law, not acting as self-righteous paragons of the Law, "lording it" over others. Unlike Paul they weren't building their careers on the backs of people they had bloodied and imprisoned. They were altogether more likeable than Paul before his conversion. Around Peter and John, you could relax, go fishing and enjoy a good meal; Paul would have kept you on edge.

What Changed Paul?

Paul tells us no less than four times in scripture that it all began for him when he received a totally unsought revelation of Jesus Christ. That was the last thing he expected to happen! So brilliant was the light of Christ that it literally knocked him off his mount and blinded him. Dazed, he asked who he was encountering. Jesus answered him directly, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting." This reported encounter didn't just make a "lasting impression" on Paul. His entire life was changed! He became an entirely new man who championed both the resurrection of Jesus and the full reality of spiritual transformation from that point onwards to anyone who would listen.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 ESV

True to form Paul once again became a zealot, but of a wholly different kind than he had been. Whereas before, he was willing to make others die for the sake of his own beliefs, now he embraced death to self in order to live for Christ, eventually dying as a martyr for the sake of "birthing" his faith in others. Paul, the persecutor, faced persecution countless times in his journeys—without once wavering in his new-found faith. Paul, the self-righteous Pharisee, saw himself as the "chief of sinners." Paul, the privileged scion of a proud heritage, counted all that he once esteemed "as rubbish" that he might gain Christ. Paul, the hated and feared religious bigot, became one of the greatest lovers of humanity the world has ever seen. How do you explain that, if not by the reality of the resurrection appearance he says he received?

The Rest of the Story

Those first apostles were eyewitnesses. For them the resurrection was not hearsay, speculation, wishful thinking, or even an article of instructed belief. It was an established FACT of their experience. They saw Jesus after death and the grave had taken their best shot. They saw Him with their own eyes, heard Him with their own ears and touched Him with their own hands. In the presence of the Risen Lord they received the gift of saving faith and the indwelling Spirit. This gave them something to shout about!



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Even with all this, they don't seem to have found the courage to make their "discovery" public until after Pentecost. In truth there were two things that turned the fearful band of disciples into valiant witnesses for the Lord. We cannot put it all down to the resurrection appearances alone. Jesus Himself didn't leave it at that. In His parting instructions He commanded them to pray for a [Baptism of Power](#) that He desired to send them. When it came at Pentecost this "baptism of the Spirit" helped propel them with boldness into Jerusalem itself and then out to the world beyond.

Nevertheless, what the disciples received at Pentecost was not faith in the resurrection, but the power to proclaim it successfully in the "faith-hostile" environment of Jerusalem. This was a gift of power at two levels. On the one hand the disciples' fears were overcome. They now had "boldness" to proclaim the name of Jesus and witness to His resurrection amidst many of the very people who had demanded His death only seven weeks earlier. On the other hand, their words received divine enabling to break through the barriers of unbelief. The Holy Spirit inspired them with the right words and then anointed their words to reach the multitudes.

What Changes Us?

The same holds true for us. Pentecost (the baptism in the Holy Spirit) follows Passover (faith in our Resurrected Savior), but it was never meant to be separated from it or—God forbid!—left out entirely (See [Passover, Pentecost and Booths](#)). If you have had your spiritual eyes opened to see Jesus as Lord, then be sure to seek the empowerment He also wants to give you!

Explore More about Jesus

[His Glorious Ascension](#) This one gets overlooked. It seems almost like an afterthought, appended to the earth-shaking events of death and resurrection: a lovely way for the Lord to make an exit. Don't underestimate how important it is that Jesus ascended! Suppose He had stayed down here. Wouldn't you? Why didn't He? There is something crucial in this to know; even more, it is vital that we learn to live by it.

[His Coming Again](#) You don't have to wait for Jesus to return to experience the peace and power of His reign. His Kingdom comes whenever we trust and obey Him as Lord. Yet even that can't hold a candle to what it will be like when the Light of the World returns to establish His Kingdom on earth forever. There are incontrovertible signs that the long-awaited Day is closer than you might think. Prepare to be very excited by this...Jesus actually expects us to discern the "signs of the times."

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[pdf Jesus: His Death and Resurrection \(x-page eBook\) \(272 KB\)](#)

Scriptures on Transformed Lives

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." John 20:19 ESV

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. Acts 5:27-29 ESV

For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:12 ESV

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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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