

Change In Vision Series

Contributed by Dr. Madana Kumar, Phd on Jun 20, 2022

Scripture: Acts 9:1-22, Acts 22:17-21, Acts 23:11, Romans 1:8-15, John 14:1-4, Luke 10:17-20, John 15:16

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: When we have an encounter with God, changes happen. The first thing to change is our vision, our purpose in life. It is fascinating to study how the vision of Paul changed every time he had an encounter with God. It can happen to you. It will happen to you.

Encounter with God Series

Part 3

Your Vision Changes when you encounter God

A Video version of this sermon can be found at https://youtu.be/FftAW4i9e_Q

Good morning and welcome.

This is the third sermon in the series of sermons on encounters with God. We started the series by looking at four biblical perspectives of encounters with God. Just as a reminder, we discovered that

1. If we are not watchful, we might miss an opportunity to encounter God
2. Having an encounter with God is entirely upto us (Because He is always there and always ready)
3. God encounters are for everyone
4. God encounters are not a one time experience. It needs to be had over and over again.

Last week we looked at the deeply personal nature of the encounters. The encounters are always one-to-one with the maker. We also saw that every encounter results in significant changes in our lives. These changes could be drastic as it happened in Paul's life or gradual as it happened in Jacob's life. But change will happen.

As I indicated last week, in my book Not-So-With-YOU, (https://www.menorahleadership.com/not-so-with-you_book/) I have categorised these changes into three imperatives. These imperatives are Vision, Character, and Relationships.

Today we will dig deeper into the imperative of Vision. Vision is usually associated with leadership. But it is required for each one of us. Each one of us need to be able to answer the question of what is the purpose of my life on earth? So while visioning is an important aspect of leaders, it is equally important for each one us. Let us see what happened to Paul and his vision, his purpose in life when he had the encounter with Jesus.

A change in vision is very evident in the life of Paul after each of His encounters. His first encounter on the road to Damascus, completely changed vision and his purpose in life. The opening verses of Acts Ch 9 describes his vision before the encounter. Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the

disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2, NKJV). And then on the road he has the encounter. His change in his vision for his life is immediate and dramatic. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. 21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ (Acts 9:20-22, NKJV). Please note that immediately after the first encounter with Jesus, Paul is still confounding the Jews. He is still preaching in Synagogues. His vision changes from persecuting Christ to preaching Christ, but he is still narrow in his new found vision.

This changes during his second encounter. Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance 18 and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' 19 So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' 21 Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles' (Acts 22:17-21, NKJV)." We can see here that even though his vision/ his purpose took a 180 degree turn, Paul still wanted to witness in familiar surroundings. He is making a strong case for himself to stay in Jerusalem and preach the gospel there. He thinks that his previous connections with Jews will work and might be in his favour. In other words, he is reluctant to expand his horizons and impact. That is where Jesus makes it very clear to him that His purpose for him is to witness to the Gentiles and not to the Jews. Paul's vision changes from witnessing to familiar crowd to witnessing to the unfamiliar crowd. This is the impact of his second encounter.

As we saw last week, his third encounter confirms his vision to go to a different environment again. But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome. (Acts 23:11, NKJV) ." Let us analyse this again. By Paul's own statement, Paul had wanted to go to Rome many times. Those of you who have studied the timelines of the different epistles will know that the Book of Romans was most probably written when Paul was in Corinth, in Acts Chapter 20. In that letter, written much before he reached Jerusalem in Acts 22 and 23, Paul confirms his desire to visit Rome and to witness to them. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, 10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.13 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. 14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. 15 So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also (Romans 1:8-15). So Paul had a personal vision to witness in Rome, but many hurdles came his way. It is in Jerusalem , after facing the mob fury, and after surviving a division in the Sanhedrin, and when he was the most in danger of losing his life either to the mob or to the Sanhedrin, that Jesus encounters him and confirms Paul's vision of going to Rome. But after the confirmation of his vision, things begin to

happen. It is fascinating to read the circumstances that keep changing around Paul to make this vision come true. God takes him through a tumultuous journey filled with accusations, trials, procrastinations, dangers, famine, tempests, shipwrecks, snakebites etc., These are described in Acts Chapter 23:12, immediately after his third encounter with Christ, till Paul lands at Rome in Acts 28:16.

So, we see Paul's vision getting changed every time he had an encounter with Christ. Actually, it does not just change, it becomes bigger every time he has an encounter. After the first encounter he started witnessing to the Jews. After the second encounter, he broadens the scope and impact of his ministry to include the Gentiles. After the third encounter, he becomes more determined to witness in Rome.

This is what an encounter with Jesus will do to you. Jesus does not ask us to be happy with small victories nor be sad with present difficulties. He asks us to look beyond present setbacks and present victories.

In John 13, Jesus demonstrates the Servant Leadership act and then talks to the disciples about His own death (John 13:31-35). On hearing about His sufferings and death, the disciples are troubled and sad. That is when Jesus turns the table around, in: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know" (John 14: 1-4, NKJV).

They are very comforting words for us too, aren't they? But for a moment, I want you to go beyond those comforting words and see another message beyond those words. Jesus is telling the disciples to look beyond the immediate issue troubling their hearts. He is asking them to look at the big picture. He is asking them to consider the future. He is asking them to conceptualise the vision that He has for them. Jesus is asking them to dream BIG.

This is not the only time Jesus tells the disciples to do so. Let us look at another instance. Let us turn to Luke 10. We have here the sending forth of seventy disciples, two by two, into different parts of the country, to preach the gospel, and to work miracles in those places which Christ himself desired to visit, to make way for His visit and ministry. Jesus empowers them to heal the sick while spreading the Gospel and gives them detailed instructions on what to do and what not to do (Luke 10: 1-16). The disciples return triumphantly and say excitedly to the Lord, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name" (Luke 10:17). I want you to pause here for a moment and think about the excitement that is there in their minds. These are ordinary men, normal workers, carpenters, fishermen etc., and they were sent out on a hard task. They see that when they work in Jesus' name, they can do amazing things, things like healing the sick, and driving out demons. They have every reason to be excited about. They are doing wonderfully well. In today's corporate jargon, we would know them as top performers in the organisation. But hold on. Let us look at Jesus' response to that excitement. He replied,

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." " (Luke 10:18-20).

What is Jesus telling them? Hey, you have achieved great things. That is because I have empowered

you. Haven't I told you, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12)? So, you sure have done some great things. But do not delight over these. This is nothing compared to what I offer you. I am offering you eternal life. I am offering you a permanent place where I am going. Do not rejoice because of these minor achievements. Rejoice because your names are written in the Book of Life. That is the ultimate. Once again, Jesus is telling them to see beyond the immediate, He is asking them to see what lies ahead. He is asking them to be excited about the future. He is asking them to dream BIG.

In both these incidents, Jesus' message is this. Do not be satisfied with immediate positive results or do not be disheartened by immediate disappointments. Do not narrow your vision because of today's successes or today's failures. Keep the big picture in mind. Keep the higher purpose in mind. Dream big.

That is the beauty of an encounter with God. It changes your vision for good. Paul's vision changed every time he had an encounter with Jesus. From persecuting to witnessing to jews, to witnessing to the whole world. And the highlight of this that it was all per God's vision for Paul. God's vision fro Paul was told by Jesus to Ananias, the Damascus disciple. But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake (Acts 9: 15-16, NKJV)." You will see that Paul's change in vision was very much in line with God's vision for him. Paul did just that. He became Christ's vessel to bear Christ's name to the Gentiles. He preached among all the gentile groups. He witnessed to kings like King Agrippa. He continued witnessing to the Jews even though his primary target was the Gentiles. He was literally living out the vision God had for him in Acts 9:15-16.

Let me close with my own testimony. I told you my conversion story in the past two weeks (<https://youtu.be/tvpxU6D-asM>) This morning let me tell you how Jesus encountered me even after I accepted Him as my Saviour and Lord. My immediate reaction after my conversion was delight, joy, happiness. But I was also very proud. I was very proud that I did the right thing. I chose the right God. I chose the right faith, I chose to be part of this Christian Club etc. I was proud about what I did. And I would have been very happy to rest on my laurels and do nothing more about it. Hey, I converted right? I went against my family's wishes to join the Church. I risked being excommunicated by my mother (who I loved much). I risked being ridiculed by my friends who were all of a different faith. I did all that. I made my sacrifices. Nothing more could be asked from me. Well!! Jesus had a different plan for me. He encountered me through the Bible once more. He told me "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you (John 15:16, NKJV)." He hit me hard with that verse several times before I realised what it meant for me. It gave a life mission. It made me get up from my comfort zone and do something with all the talent that He had given me. It gave me an entirely different vision for my life.

This morning, I want you to ask yourselves. What change is God asking you to make in your vision/ in your purpose in life? Did He give you a vision? Have you sought one yet? Is your vision too narrow? Are you happy to rest on today's laurels or are you constrained by today's troubles? If so , it is time for us to seek a fresh encounter with Jesus.