

BOOK OF GALATIANS

“Who Once Persecuted Us”

Scripture Reading: GALATIANS 1:18-24

-) **SLIDES 1-6.** Bible Jeopardy!
-) **SLIDES 7-8.** Read today’s Scripture text.
-) **SLIDE 9.** We continue, once again, in our expository study of the Book of GALATIANS. This is message #9. Today’s message I have titled *“Who Once Persecuted Us.”* (v23)
-) Last week we spent time talking about Paul’s 15-day visit with the apostle Peter (Cephas). But we spent the majority of our time talking about this other man Paul met named James.
-) **SLIDE 10.** We concluded he was 1) Meets Paul (GAL 1:19); 2) Half-brother of Jesus (MATT 13:55); 3) Jesus appeared to him after the Resurrection (1COR 15:7); 4) Leader of the Jerusalem Council (ACTS 15:13); 5) Wrote the Book of JAMES.
-) This morning I want to focus on the reaction of the people he met on that visit to Jerusalem. And I want to look at this in two different ways.
-) **SLIDE 11.** Some people will not trust you because they do not **BELIEVE** you are a changed person.
-) **SLIDE 12.** ACTS 9:26-30 gives us more insight as to what happened on that visit. Here are verses 26 and 27. Read.
-) It’s safe to conclude from this text that the other disciples were afraid of Paul (Saul). How would you be reacting? This man was persecuting the church—throwing Christians in prison and even killing them. Would you trust him?
-) **SLIDE 13.** In ACTS 7 a young man named Stephen was stoned to death. And now he wants to become part of us?

-) Can a person with the heart of Saul be changed that much?
-) Word got around back then rather quickly even without email, newspapers, telephones, and the internet. And the word was Paul was a dangerous man. But another disciple, Barnabas, who the other disciples trusted, spoke in favor of Paul. Barnabas and his testimony about Paul helped soften the blow and gain the favor of Paul with the other disciples.
-) **SLIDE 14.** A second reaction. Some people will not like you because they **KNOW** you are a changed person.
-) **SLIDE 15.** Let's look at this second reaction from the people in Jerusalem from the Book of ACTS. Here are verses 28 thru 30. Read.
-) It's safe to conclude from this text that some other Jews in the area did not like the fact that Saul defected from his Jewish beliefs and jumped on the Christianity bandwagon. This man was one of us. And now he friends with these Christians?
-) **SLIDE 16.** What is a Hellenistic Jew? Read. These Hellenistic Jews wanted no parts of Paul. He was a traitor to the Jewish faith.
-) **SLIDE 17.** Luckily for Paul, his new friends, his new brothers in Christ, came to his rescue. Read.
-) **SLIDE 18.** And what read here in ACTS 9 that the brethren sent him down to Caesarea and then away to Tarsus, corresponds directly with what we see in v21 of our text today. Read. The brethren sent him away for his own safety.
-) **SLIDE 19.** This persecution by the Hellenistic Jews and the sending away of Paul to the area of Syria and Cilicia, would actually become the starting point of Paul's first missionary journey. Explain chart.
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-) God always has a plan. Notice that in this Book of GALATIANS, Paul does not elaborate on the circumstances surrounding his moving on from Jerusalem. It just says that from Jerusalem he went into the area of Syria and Cilicia.
-) **SLIDE 20.** But he does talk about this departure in a very positive way. He concludes with verses 22-24 explaining the reaction of the people during his visit to Jerusalem.
-) Let's talk about Paul's reputation. We have all heard the saying, "*Your reputation precedes you.*" The people in these churches in this area were primarily all Jewish and they had all heard about Saul. And what they heard about him was not good. He once persecuted the church! They could be put in prison or their lives could be at stake.
-) But now he is no longer Saul. He is Paul. He is a changed man. And he is now preaching the faith. And the people are glorifying God because of that transformation. They see the mighty hand of God at work in changing lives.
-) **SLIDE 21.** A **TRANSFORMED** heart is the reason God gets all the glory. Glory never goes to the transformed person.
-) **SLIDE 22.** Looks like there were some brothers and sisters in Christ in the area of Jerusalem and Judea who got this right. We should never expect or demand any kind of glory towards ourselves for the work God has done in our lives.
-) I have been on the face of this earth for over 66 years. Over those years, I have met many people. Some of these people I still know and associate with today. Some I don't. Some people only know me from growing up on Beechdale Street.
-) Some people only know me from my high school years. Some people only know me from working with me at GE/Genicom. And then I have friends I have met through the different churches I have attended. That list goes on.

-) But what I may have been at a previous point in my life, is not who and what I am today. Some believe I have changed for the better. Like the people Paul talks about in GAL 1:22-24. And they praise God for my transformed heart.
-) **SLIDE 23.** For others, however, they do not like the new Mike. Like the Hellenistic Jews Paul talks about in ACTS 9:29. I don't feel like my life is threatened (yet), but I do know feelings have changed once others found out I became a Christian.
-) A lot of the old Mike is still a part of me today. But I prefer to think of myself now as a new creation in Christ—the old has gone and the new has come. Does any of this sound familiar with you and your transformed life?
-) When were you transformed by God? At an early age? When you were 40 like me? What are others saying about you now that they know you are a Christian? Are they glorifying God because of you, like they did Paul? Are you now called a hypocrite because you affirm a faith you cannot follow 100%? Or maybe you're not the brand of Christianity they want you to be because you are not just like their brand of Christianity.
-) Or do others think you have become some wacko nutcase who really needs a good shrink and not some imaginary religious crutch? Do they really prefer the old you?
-) When our lives are transformed by God, there will be those who will accept us into the church and into the body of believers like Peter and James and many of the other disciples accepted Paul into the church.
-) And there will be those who reject us and think we are some wacko nutcase and think we have gone off the deep end.
-) Should we care about rejection? We are not what we used to be. But, like Paul, we cannot care what others think about us. We are now children of God. Now we only care about what God thinks of us. And He loves us.

-) This world is no longer our home. Those who want to accept us, will. And those who want to reject us, will. And that's gotta be OK with us. Because it was certainly OK with Paul.
-) What did Paul do after his conversion? It's time to spread the good news. And for us, too, it is time to spread the good news. Sure, we may not be taking 4 missionary journeys like the apostle Paul, planting churches, and traveling 10,000 miles on foot doing so.
-) But there is a dark world that needs to see our transformed lives. Let's allow our light to shine bright. And leave all the results up to God. We plant, we water, but God makes it what? Grow. Amen.
-) The truth isn't always easy, but it does matter. And the truth will set you free!

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