

Series: destiny

September 30, 2018

Title: Enlightened

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Text: Ephesians 1:15-18-21

Blinded by the Light

High Noon:

It was high noon and the sun blazed down relentlessly on a small band of travelers. Behind them loomed the multiple peaks of Mt. Hermon. Before them a vast plain and the ancient city of Damascus.

Their leader was a young rabbi named Saul. Saul had come to Jerusalem to study under the leading religious teacher of his time. He had risen in the ranks, taking a leading role in the suppression of a new heresy that had sprung up around a Galilean prophet named Jesus of Nazareth.

In his own words:

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Acts 26:10-11 NIV

"On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities."

And that was what he was doing now. In a few hours he would arrive in Damascus and continue his witch hunt. Or so he thought.

Vision Quest:

N.T. Wright points out that ardent Jewish men like Saul meditated on visions in the ancient Scriptures in an effort to know God better. One of their favorites was the prophet Ezekiel's vision of God. In his vision, Ezekiel found himself gazing into Heaven. He saw four creatures whirling about in constant praise to God. And then a voice came from above the creatures.

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Ezekiel 1:26-28 NIV

Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man.

*I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; **[Slide 4]** and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.*

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

For Saul, nothing mattered more than knowing God. Could it possibly be that – if he were faithful enough to God’s commandments – God would grant *him* a vision like Ezekiel’s? Could he one day be given a glimpse of the LORD Himself?

Blinded by the Light:

It may well have been that Saul was reliving Ezekiel’s experience that morning on the road to Damascus. First, he pictured the windstorm and the whirling creatures. Then, as the ancient vision swirled in his head, he dared to look up above the creatures toward God’s throne.

“Oh Lord, please reveal Yourself to me more deeply! I want to know you more and more!”

Then, there it was: a throne with a human figure seated on it. He dared to look more closely. Yes! From the waist down the figure was fire and light. From the waist up the figure glowed like molten metal. And all around: brilliant rainbow radiance! Did he dare to look higher? Would he dare to see the very face of God? Was he worthy? Was this the time he would break through to full, face-to-face relationship with the God He served?

This was the time. He looked up to the face of the One on the throne. To his utter horror it was the face of a Palestinian Jew.

Then, like Ezekiel, he heard a voice from the throne:

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Acts 26:14-15 NIV

"We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice say to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

"Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied."

In that instant, all the jumbled pieces of the puzzle came together. A crucified messiah, those crazy stories about Jesus' resurrection, the unexplained miracles performed in Jesus' name, a host of ancient prophecies that pointed to Messiah's suffering for sin, and now the revelation that this crucified messiah was seated at God's side as King of Heaven and Earth.

Saul, and our world, would never be the same. Saul, better known by his Latin name, Paul, would become God's apostle to the whole wide world.

Enlightened**Paul's prayer:**

It's no wonder, then, that Paul prays so fervently that we might experience the life-changing revelation of God's presence and power:

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Ephesians 1:18-21 NIV

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

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That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

This is what Paul himself had experienced:

- Paul had come to know the **hope** to which God had called him: Jesus had called him to be His ambassador.
- Paul had come to see that God's people – God's **inheritance** – was now enriched by the inclusion of Gentiles as well as Jews. God's promise that He would bless all peoples through the Jews had been fulfilled.
- And most of all, Paul had *come to know the **power** that raised Jesus from Death*. It was this power that exalted Jesus to the throne in Heaven at God's right hand. It was this power that changed Saul the persecutor to Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ. It was this revelation power that fulfilled Paul's deepest yearning to know God better.

Enlightened:

What God did for Paul He promises to do for you, because more than anything else, God wants *you* to know Him better. He wants you to know *your destiny, your calling*. This isn't something that you have to discover or invent. God is calling you to your unique purpose in His world.

God wants you to know what it means to be part of *His inheritance*. You are now part of His family, His new creation. You have a whole new identity, a brand new family name. To know God means to know how you fit into His family.

And more than anything else, God wants you to know *His power*. He wants to work through you to change not only you, but the world in which you live. He wants the power of His love to transform lives. He wants the power of His truth to dispel lies. He wants the power of His forgiveness to destroy the chains of bitterness and resentment. He wants the resurrection life of Jesus to shine out of you in a dark and confused world.

All of this happens when we focus on Jesus. When we see Him, like Paul, we see God.