

Extreme Faith Makeover!

I love this TV Show! I don't watch much TV, but this one I really enjoy! I tune in whenever I can. And I am not alone. Each Sunday night 16 million Americans turn in to *ABC's Extreme Home Makeover*. In its five year run, the show has won two Emmy Awards for Outstanding Reality Program, the People's Choice Award and the Family Television Award. America loves the idea of "Before and After." – and this show has it in spades. It is the story the transformation of a run down house – small, leaky roof, cracked foundation, poor wiring; and the house is demolished and built again in 7 days into a Better Homes and Garden's masterpiece – the newest styles, appliances, flat screen TV's. It's amazing!

But the real appeal of the show is not the transformation the house, but the family *in the house*. A deserving family, usually with a sad story. The new house, we are told, will change their lives forever – a new start, fresh hope, a rosy future. And each show is a tear-jerker. Do you remember the one where they built a house for the family that ran a camp for disabled children? I cried like a baby.

Isn't transformation what we need in the church? Transformed lives? Isn't that what we pray for in our unsaved friends and family. *Lord, May they experience spiritual transformation* - the life they lead now, as an unbeliever someday be only a "before" snapshot, in contrast to an "after" picture of their new life in Christ. And don't all believers need to be transformed. Are you tired of hearing how the lifestyles of believers are essentially the same as the world? Same divorce rate, same addiction rates. *Lord, may we experience spiritual transformation!* I wonder...what transformation do you need? Imagine a spiritual construction crew wakes you out of bed one morning and says, in 7 days we are going to transform your life spiritually. We are going to tear

down the old and build up the new. What would be in the “before picture” for you? Over here “the old you” - anger, impatience, greed, selfishness, materialism, dishonesty. The new “you” – kindness, patience, contentment, love, a good attitude? Now I know that we will never get rid of our sin nature – but are you planning on being as angry as you are this year for the rest of your life? Are you planning on being as selfish as you are right now, for the rest of your life? Lord, *May I experience spiritual transformation.*

Transformation – Before and After. This morning we are continuing our sermon series on Living by Faith. We’ve looked at what faith is, and today we want to see faith in action – to explore the connection between faith and transformation.

I want to study this morning the most radical life transformation I could find in all 66 books. Who? I’m talking about James the Brother of Jesus. His is an amazing and often overlooked story. We will look at two transformations – James’ transformation from a hostile enemy of the gospel to one of the greatest leaders the church has every day, and second James’ transformation from a legalist to a grace giver. And we will see that both transformations have one cause - “faith.” Living faith, changes lives.

Transformation from Enemy to Leader of the Church

Our first glimpse of James is as an unnamed “brother” of Jesus. All four Gospel writers include an account of the family of Jesus opposing his ministry. Theologically, they represent “unbelief” – in contrast with the true brothers and sisters of Christ – those who believe in Him. We only have time to look at one of the accounts, in the gospel of John, chapter 7. This is the “before” picture of James – an enemy of Christ. Chapter 7, verse one. **And after these things Jesus was walking in Galilee; for He was unwilling to walk in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill Him.**

Notice the plot and the geography. The Jews are seeking to kill Him in Judea. Jesus and his disciples are up North in Galilee where they are relatively safe. Verse two: [John 7:2](#) Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was at hand. Ok – feast of booths – remember that is one of the three festivals where you would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Where is Jerusalem? In Judea. [John 7:3](#) His brothers therefore said to Him, “Depart from here, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing. [John 7:4](#) “For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.”

So...Jesus’ brothers – again with James likely leading the group speak to him – Hey why don’t you go to... Judea! Now if Jesus knew that the Jews were plotting in Judea that the bothers did is also likely and the repetition of the geographical location also hints at this. You might say – but it sound like the brother wan to expand Jesus’ ministry – so all can hear the good news. Not so – the brothers do not believe. They are embarrassed by Christ and seriously think he is crazy. This supposed public embrace of Jesus is not to be taken as sincerely – it is said with sarcasm and a hidden agenda. Look at verse 5 – lest we misinterpret the passage John says: [John 7:5](#) For not even His brothers were believing in Him. [John 7:6](#) Jesus therefore said to them, “My time is not yet at hand. What is Jesus saying his time is not yet at hand? The time for his death! “But your time is always opportune.” Jesus is saying my time is coming – but why don’t you put your faith in me today. It is a great time for that!

I believe based on these verses that the brothers at best wanted to publicly embarrass Christ leading to him being silenced. At worst – it may be an attempt to ensnare Christ with the Jewish

authorities – so he would be killed. But James and the others not only do not believe but are portrayed as an enemy of the Gospel.

We know that is not how the story ends. James becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and pens the book of James, one of the most beloved books in the NT. *What happens to transform his life?* Turn to 1 Corinthians 15:6-8. What Paul is doing in 1 Cor 15 is presenting eye-witness accounts of the resurrection? Why, because the resurrection is the cornerstone of the gospel – The Faith. He says in verse 17. **If Christ has not been raised from the dead your faith is worthless.** Notice, how he demonstrates the reality of the resurrection, verses 6-7: **1Cor. 15:6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 1Cor. 15:7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.**

Isn't that interesting! Only one person is listed by name here – he went to this group and that group and then... – **“He appeared to James.”** Paul tells us that Jesus in a great act of *hesed* love went to his brother. Oh, how I wish I were a fly on the wall when that happened. Because Paul highlights James so clearly – it is very likely that James, in light of the evidence of the resurrected Christ finally turns from unbelief in belief. James is transformed because the resurrection convinced him to finally put his faith in Christ as God the Son, Messiah.

And when you decide to put your faith in Christ, everything changes. Ben Allen Young – he went by Allen - was a troubled teen. It started with his parents. His mom had been married three times. His dad left the home early in his life - an alcoholic. Allen, was kicked out of his house at age 14. He was on the streets of Phoenix, Arizona, living a destructive life. He did drugs – crystal, coke, pot, acid. He was put in a Juvenile Facility, where he orchestrated a break out, and was on the run for three weeks. He was then put into another Correctional facility where he was put in the worst section for the most dangerous boys. He still managed to instigate a riot within the facility. He was a fearsome, angry and violent young man. On each of his four knuckles he had curse words

tattooed, so that when he hit someone; he would be cursing them at the same time. He was considered so dangerous that after he got out, when he tried to go see his mom, she called the police on him. This is all between the ages of 14 and 18. He was 18 when I met him. I was in college doing a high school internship at our church. We had revamped our Wednesday night program to be an outreach – rock music praise band. Allen knew someone in our church and one night I saw him in the crowd and went over to him and introduced myself. He was with a tall friend name Eric, who sported a punk rock look – tall green Mohawk. I had a Bible study and invited him to attend – to my surprise he came.

We were the oddest pair. Here I am I knew nothing about gangs, or fighting, or drug addiction. But I did know how to share the gospel. And so I did, and as simple as that Allen placed his faith in Christ. A few days later he called me crying, and asked me to come over to the place he was staying. He was reading in Romans 8 – that nothing can separate us from the love of God – not height or depth, or breadth or width, angels, principalities, things in heaven things on earth. He said through tears – is that really true? Have my sins really been forgiven? What a joy to see Allen’s life transform over the rest of the summer. He led the green mohawk guy to Christ, and two other friends. He started having his tattoos removed, going to church. The impact on the other high schoolers was profound. It was a true revival – **because the gospel has the power to transform.** The power of the gospel really does move people from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom!

Let’s talk for a minute about application: (1) The connection between faith and transformation is a great motivation for us to share the gospel. The fourth purpose of our church is sharing the good news, and we must take that purpose seriously. This Thursday, we will have a booth at Rowlett’s Taste and Trade community event. Why? So that we might be available to be used by God to share the good news of Jesus Christ. If you can I urge you to attend that event and to talk with someone about Christ. You don’t have to work the booth to be used by Christ. Pray for a divine appointment.

If I had not gone up to Allen and introduced myself, the chain of wonderful events would not have happened. Engage someone in conversation and tell them about our church, encourage them to visit the book – ask them whether they have a church home.

Also, (2) starting November 25th our adult Sunday School class will begin a new study in the area of Evangelism – a study called “Becoming a Contagious Christian.” This is an excellent curriculum that will equip us to share our faith. In the workplace, it can be a painful situation to assign a person a responsibility but not to train them. We don’t want to do that at LCCC. If I am calling you to share your faith and the love of Christ, I also want to provide you the training so that you are equipped to do that work. If you are not otherwise engaged in the nursery or teaching Sunday School, I urge you to attend this important Sunday School class.

Transformation from Legalism to Liberty

Let’s now look briefly at James’ second major transformation; from legalism to liberty. Please turn to Galatians. Here we will see the before picture. In Galatians, the concern is about the integration of Gentiles into the faith. Do they need to adopt Jewish practices? To be circumcised – to follow the dietary laws, etc. How about fellowship between Jews and Gentiles? Look at the passage – Paul says in Gal 2:11 - **But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. Gal. 2:12** For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. **Gal. 2:13** And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

Ok what is going on here? Peter had been fellowshiping with the new Gentile believers. But then James sends men to Antioch. Peter feared James he was the most important Christian leader of the day – so then Peter withdrew from the new believers, and Barnabas too. Why? Legalism.

Setting up artificial rules that separate us from so-called undesirable people or things.

That is the before picture of James. He is saved – he has been transformed from lost to found, but must continue to be transformed in his character and maturity. And so as the first century church progressed, the questions about how Jews and Gentiles were to relate to one another became acute. Specifically do Gentiles need to adopt Jewish practices? A council was established in Jerusalem to work through the problems – and guess who presided over the counsel? James. As the leader, what will James decide? After much discussion, James speaks in verse 19. [Acts 15:19](#) “**Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,**

Wow! What a turn around – a transformation. From legalism to liberty! Don’t put pressure on these Gentiles to adopt Jewish practices. The conflict is solved, and forever in church history, James becomes known as James the Just for his wise decisions. As one commentator says, Christianity is turned from a Jewish Sect into a global religion with James’ judgment. Why the turn around? Look at verse 15. Just before he makes his proclamation he says...[Acts 15:15](#) “**And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,**

Do you see – it is James’ faith is expressed in obedience to God’s Word. We can imagine that after soul searching, and listening to the debates, James goes to the prophets that he knows so well, and sees in them the promise of God to bring the good news to the Gentiles, who are not Jews, but a new movement of God. The mystery of the church. James is transformed from a legalist to a grace-giver. He submits his former view to the truth of God’s word. Faith is unleashed through obedience to God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

He was a Christian but still needed to change his thinking and actions to conform to God’s Word. Let me give you an illustration. I enjoy taking Hudson to cello lessons on Monday afternoons. He is in a group class with about 10 kids that play cello together under Donna Davis, the

cello teacher. The ages are from about 4-7 years old. This past Monday they were learning how to work their first and fourth fingers on the strings – just moving them over and over. “Why are we doing this?” The teacher asked? “What song will we use this for?” The little kids could not guess. “Because, one day”, the teacher said, “You will need to move those fingers like that when you play Etude. Etude is a song that is beautiful much, much more difficult than these beginners could even dream to attempt. The teacher played it for the students – beautiful tone, vibrato, fast fingers flying over the strings.

As soon as she ended, one little guy – probably five years old said confidently, “I can do that!” The parents all chuckled at his optimism! Hearing the laughs, he added a little sheepishly, “I’ll be able to play that once I learn how!”

This is what the Christian life is like – it is a process – we don’t go from being a child to a virtuoso in a day or even a year. Transformation happens over time, years, as we are mentored or disciplined by people further along than us – as we submit ourselves to obeying God’s Word and His commands. As the Spirit works in our life we are transformed into the image of Christ.

The church is the divine training ground for this of transformation. This is why I have given my life to minister in the local church. This is the central place of God’s working to shape people and change people. Right here. This is where the action happens. The Church. Tammy and I have been involved in Crown’s Financial ministry for many years, and we have seen people’s finances literally transformed as they learn biblical truth about finances. We have been involved some very good parenting studies and have seen parent’s parenting transformed as they study God’s word in this area. In the last three months, people in our church have been transformed in how they look at conflict – in our peacemaker’s class. As we submit ourselves to God’s word – His Spirit changes us – as we put our faith into action – we say God I believe in the Truth of your Word – Help me to live

it – that is living by faith. That is why our tag line is Living Faith. Changing Lives. As we live out our faith in obedience with God’s word, we are transformed.

Conclusion:

James experienced spiritual transformation by faith transforming from lost to a leader. From a legalist to a grace-giver. In conclusion, think again about the extreme home makeover show. Their assumption is that by changing something on the outside, they will be able to change the person on the inside. The assumption is: New house – new person. Does it work that way? Although I love the show, the skeptic in me starts to wonder – Will these people really have a better future, because of a new house? If they allowed their first house to fall into such a state of disrepair, why should I think they will take care of this one? Have the people really changed?

As Christians, we have the only faith system that changes people from the inside out. That has the power to transform people - from lost to found and to continue that transformation all the days of our lives as the Spirit molds us into the image of Christ. *Living faith, does change lives.*