



# Sunday Reflection

## Season of Epiphany

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 24 January 2021

# Conversion of Paul

## Epiphany 3

Through God's grace, Jesus appeared to Saint Paul on the Damascus road and called him into his Kingdom. When Christ makes himself known to us, may we to submit to his lordship comma and allow him to transform our lives .

### Reflection for this week's Gospel

**Jesus said, " everyone who was left houses or mothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life."** Matthew 19:29

### An Illustration to set the scene

When the Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoffer left Germany for America in 1939, he did not expect to return. His Homeland was heading inexorably towards war under the tyranny of the Nazi regime.

Yes, scarcely had Bonhoffer crossed the Atlantic, when he was gripped by the conviction that Christ was



calling him back, to “share the trials” of his countrymen.

Bonhoffer had no illusions about the cost of his discipleship as he returned to Germany.

As a conscientious objector who served the *Prince of Peace* – *Jesus Christ The Prince of Peace* - and opposed Hitler's rule of violence and injustice, Bonhoffer suffered imprisonment and was eventually executed.

Yet in these circumstances, his Christian life made a profound impact. A fellow prisoner Buchenwald described how Bonhoeffer's "*soul really shone in the dark desperation of our prison ... he seemed to diffuse an atmosphere of happiness*".

Bonhoeffer's humble confidence of his place in Christ's loving purposes kept him steadfast in hope, and he died at peace as one who had run the race of faith to the end.

## **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

When Jesus called Peter, he responded immediately, leaving his life as a fisherman in the family business by Lake Galilee. Yet the insecurities of life on the road made discipleship feel difficult.

Peter's losses in this world felt real, whilst the gains of the Kingdom seemed elusive. *What, he asked Christ, was for him when he had left everything he knew and owned behind?*

Paul was already on the road when he encountered Christ. His call also involved ***change and loss***, *from the status of his scholarly Jewish pedigree, to the lonely life of a travelling Apostle; from wielding power against Christians, to losing face by joining them in proclaiming Jesus is Lord.*

Such changes were especially challenging for Paul: He had been so sure he was doing God's will by hounding these followers of a “false Messiah”.

But Jesus warns against making assumptions about people's eternal destiny based on human values and judgments.

Paul assumed he was one of God's foremost: he tells the Galatians he was *advancing in Judaism beyond many of his peers*.

Yet his confidence in his religious authority was cut to shreds when Jesus revealed himself as the true Messiah on the Damascus road.

His commands now evaporated, Paul had to be led into the city, blind, powerless and humbled. And, he ended up preaching the gospel - the last message he had planned to proclaim when setting out from Jerusalem 150 miles away.

Paul would travel many more miles on different roads, spreading the word *he once strove to silence*, and it would mean further suffering for his faith, as Paul was uprooted from his background to become rooted in Christ and his call.

Only knowing Jesus and trusting in his power wider purposes could sustain Paul in such circumstances: in Galatians he talks of God *having set him apart for his task at birth*. And Jesus reigns over our future as well as our past: in our passage he declares that *for those who put him first, the priceless gift of eternal life is assured*.

## **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

We may assume we are going the right way, but the risen Christ can still face us with *the challenge to change our lives*.

Responding to his call involves loss as we *leave our past priorities behind*, let go of *old loyalties* and move in a *new direction*.

This can make us feel vulnerable and insecure as we move out of our comfort zone to follow the Saviour.

When we are aware that the way we live - *our use of money, time and Kingdom priorities* - sets us apart from those around us, who seem to be living the comfortable life, we may be tempted to *see the losses* rather than the gains in our Christian choices.

We need to focus on Jesus, who has faithfully promised us the joys of eternal life with him.

Neither Peter nor Paul could have predicted the encounters with Christ that began their life-changing journeys of discipleship. The Lord may also lead us out into unexpected new ventures of faith with him.

Will we respond, knowing he has planned wider purposes for our good and his glory than we can possibly imagine - no matter how things look from the road?

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Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)