**Thesis:** Where does your sense of righteousness come from? Is it your work? Your personal life? Your health? The things we do well make us feel good about ourselves. But when it comes to our spiritual life, there is one way that leads to righteousness. Jesus tells us in *Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”* Jesus is the only way that leads to righteousness, and thankfully He shows us the way.

**Introduction:** Welcome to The Jesus Podcast, a year of stories showcasing the depth of Christ’s love and the glory of God’s truth. I’m \_\_\_\_ your host from Pray.com. Today’s episode is part 1 of 2 that takes us through the life of Saul before and after he encounters Jesus. Follow the podcast so you don’t miss out.

**Context:**

If you want to get somewhere specific in life, you have to know the path it takes to get there. Paul had spent his entire life striving down the path he thought would lead him to righteousness. Little did he know he was headed in the opposite direction. His zeal and religiosity had formed a life of pride and selfishness that would do anything to bring him a sense of self-righteousness. After Jesus’ death, His gospel message took off as thousands were being saved by the day. What the Jews thought would be the end of Christ and His mission was only the beginning. The way to eternal life had been opened and there were many choosing to take this path. But this wouldn’t stop a man like Sual, determined to stand victorious against this perceived attack against the God of the Jews. But what Paul thought was a mission to eradicate the sinful Nazerenes was all part of Jesus’ plan to eradicate the sin in Saul’s heart.

**Message:** Saul, sometimes referred to as Paul, is one of the most influential figures in Christendom. Over the course of 13 years of ministry, he traveled over 7,000 miles and planted at least 14 churches along the way. He singlehanded authored more books than any biblical author and is considered a key figure to the early church. But this wasn’t always the case for Saul. Before his conversion, Paul was an enemy of the church and someone to be feared by those who followed Jesus. He threatened the well being and lives of many on his road to personal glory. Looking at Saul’s life gives us a radical idea of the transformative power of the gospel and reminds us that no one is too far gone to come to saving faith in Jesus.

Before salvation, Saul is self-consumed, conceited, and concerned only with the work that gives him a sense of self-righteousness. As a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, he had much to boast about. And as the early Church began to flourish, it made him vulnerable to lose everything he had built up. Taking a closer look at the actual persecution caused by Saul is terrifying. Civility had been thrown out the window as he stood by to watch men and women dragged from their homes to be put on trial and punished. There was no tone of remorse as children wept in fear. All that remained in Paul’s heart was a devotion to his plans to maintain power. Sasul wasn’t only willing to hurt others to accomplish his goals, he was happy to do so. He’s content leaving tragedy in his wake on his mission of self-righteousness. In order to maintain self-righteousness, we must focus on ourselves. If we want to feel like we’re number one, we have to make ourselves number one. While this was Saul at one point in life, we see a drastically different picture after he’s saved. Once a man ruled by selfishness, the new man Saul would become would preach on humility and selflessness, practicing it daily himself.

Saul would write to the church in *Philippians 2:1 “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

This is a far different perspective on life. All because Jesus transformed his heart.

As a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, Saul played a major part in defending Jewish law and exacting the subsequent judgment against Jewish Christians. While Paul said he was defending God, we learned in our study of Malchus that God doesn’t need us to defend Him. In reality, Paul was defending himself and his power. He was defending everything he had built his life upon. He was defending a false sense of righteousness. The irony is that what Paul was doing to supposedly defend God was having the opposite effect. But God saw the potential in a powerful man like Saul. Once he was converted, Saul would get to use his influence and incredible intellect for a greater purpose. The same mind and resolute spirit that drove Saul in his persecution of the church would be the same tools God would use to build it up. God would transform Saul to defend the gospel. Saul would go on to be an influential church leader, helping to develop other leaders. One of these people was Timothy.

As Saul writes to Timothy in *2 Timothy 2*, he says, *“24 And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

Through listening to the Spirit, Saul learned what it really meant to defend the gospel. In our defense, we shouldn’t seek to harm others, but seek to be kind as servants of the Lord. We have to be gentle, with the hope that in our work, God would lead them to repentance through a deepened understanding of the truth of His word. While once Saul was the one taking Christians captive, he was transformed to be a part of the work in seeing them set free to follow Jesus.

Before his conversion, Saul and the other religious leaders would say Jesus and His followers were blaspheming against God. These men know the Scriptures better than anyone else, and because of it the people listened to them when they dictated what was sinful and what wasn’t, even if it wasn’t in line with the word of God. But God doesn’t contradict Himself. The message and work of Jesus wasn’t opposed to the Scriptures, they were a fulfillment of them. Every word that had been held so dearly by the Jews of generations pointed to the humble Rabbi from Nazareth. But Saul’s self-righteousness blinded him to what sin really was, especially the sin that was residing within himself. But after he was saved, Saul sees himself and his sin in a different light.

We read his words penned in *1 Timothy 1:15 “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”*

Before coming to Jesus, Saul thought of himself as an incredibly holy man, a Jew of Jews. But after seeing Jesus for who He truly was, Saul became aware of the sin within himself. And the closer he got to Jesus, the more he allowed the Spirit to search his heart and reveal the areas that needed to change.

One of the greatest changes we see in Saul is a change in his motivation. Everything Saul previously did in the name of righteousness was all a facade for the deep anger in his heart. Anger at the influence Jesus had even after His death. Anger at the people over whom he had no control. Anger over a movement that threatened to rob him of his sense of righteousness. But all of this hatred is converted to love after his encounter with Jesus. Love for the One who saved him from his sins. Love for others regardless of who they were. Love for the Church as the bride of Christ.

Saul writes this in *1 Corinthians 13:1 “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”*

In seeing the power of Jesus’ love, Saul understood that it didn’t matter what he did if he did it apart from Christ’s love. He could do anything he thought was right in the name of God, but if he did it apart from God’s love and in a way that contradicted God’s love, it was worthless.

God’s love changes lives. There is no one who is too far deep into sin who cannot be pulled out and rescued by Jesus. The depths of God’s love is far greater than the depths of our sin. Transformation is available to everyone, and it all begins by simply having an encounter with Jesus.