

From Hit Man to Holy Man

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[0 : 00] Kim Shin-Jo, a pastor from South Korea, used to be a trained killer. In January 1968, Joe and a group of 31 commandos made their way slipping through the woods in South Korea, and their mission was to kill, to assassinate the president of South Korea.

As Joe and these 31 commandos were making their way through the woods, they met three woodcutters who were South Koreans, and they thought that everything was lost.

Joe, Kim Shin-Jo, began speaking to these three South Korean woodcutters, and he was trying to teach them, indoctrinate them on the glory of communism, and he was trying to pull them over to the side of the Communist Party.

Eventually, what they did was, he said, if you will commit to coming over to the party, we will let you go if you will promise us that you will not let anyone know that we're here.

Well, these three woodcutters, fearing for their life, obviously, told them that they would go ahead and join the party. Kim Shin-Jo and his group of commandos continued to make their way down toward the president's home.

[1 : 26] Well, these three woodcutters made their way to the authorities and told them what had happened and what was going on. Well, Joe and his party of 31 commanders made it to within just a few meters of the president's home, and there they met the South Korean soldiers, and all 31 of these soldiers, these assassins, except for one who escaped, and Kim Shin-Jo, who was captured, were killed.

For many months, Kim Shin-Jo was interrogated, and he was kept in prison. Kim Shin-Jo was befriended by a South Korean general who showed him compassion.

And after a period of time, Kim Shin-Jo ended up moving over to the South Korean way of thinking. He renounced his communist ties, and after a period of time, he was released, and for three decades, Kim Shin-Jo served the army, and he later, after about six months after his release, married a South Korean woman who had become his pen pal while he was incarcerated, and Kim Shin-Jo was led to faith in Jesus Christ by his wife.

And he later became a pastor. Kim Shin-Jo said that it was those within the South Koreans who showed him love and who showed him compassion and that there was hope.

And he came to know Jesus Christ. And Joe said, on that day, Kim Shin-Jo died. And he said, I had a brand new life. And even today, Kim Shin-Jo is still pastor in Seoul, South Korea, one of the largest churches in South Korea.

[3 : 41] It was a miraculous conversion that this commando goes from a hit man to a holy man. It's amazing how God can change the entire trajectory of a person's life.

A person can be going their way thinking that everything is great, thinking that everything is fine, and then suddenly they realize that they missed the bus.

Or it can be just the opposite. Maybe your life seems like nothing is going right, and maybe it seems like everything is in shambles, and there is no hope whatsoever.

But then suddenly, you meet Jesus. And when Jesus comes in, and when Jesus shows up, things change.

He can get people's attention. And so there's hope for anybody. No matter how far someone has gone, no matter what a person has been through, no matter how deeply they are, how they reject God, there is no one, and there is no distance that a person can move from God that they are without hope.

[5 : 08] If God can turn a hit man into a holy man, there's hope for any man. Now, I'm not just talking about Kim Shin-Jo. I'm talking about the subject of our message this morning.

And that is the man who would one day become the Apostle Paul. And we know him as Saul. Let's take your Bibles this morning and turn to the book of Acts.

We are in Acts chapter 9 this morning. And we're starting in verse number 1. We heard about Saul earlier in chapter number 7, where Saul was in the synagogue of the Hellenists.

And Stephen, one of the seven men who were chosen to take care of the food ministry that would be providing food for the widows.

And Stephen ends up going to this Greek-speaking Hellenist synagogue, and he's talking about Jesus. And he gets into this discussion about who Jesus is, a discussion about what the temple meant, and how that Jesus was the one who was the Messiah.

[6 : 24] And these Hellenist Jews rejected what he had to say. And then what they did was they went out, they found men who would lie, and they brought him before the high council, and they decided to stone Stephen.

Well, Saul, the man that we're going to see this morning in chapter 9, we're told in chapter 7, we're told in chapter 8, that Saul was there, and he stood by, and those who were killing, who were stoning Stephen, put their cloaks, put their clothes at the feet of Saul, and it even goes on to say that Saul was behind them all the way.

Saul consented to Stephen's death. Then we come up to chapter 9, and we see Saul again, verse 1, then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and verse 2, asked letters from him to the synagogue of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

So what we see first is, Saul is totally opposed to Jesus. Saul is one that is going out, and he is on his self-imposed mission of eradicating this brand new sect of Judaism.

And he is the self-appointed arrestor. He is the self-appointed one who is going to go out, and he is going to take care of Christianity once and for all.

[8 : 20] We see here that Saul is still breathing out threats. The word that Luke used here for breathing is the word that means to inhale.

Have you ever gotten to the point where you're just so mad that you're so consumed with something that you're like, if I could only get my hands on them?

And so Saul is that consumed with eradicating those that goes on to say that he said, if I could go and find, I want to arrest those who were followers of the way.

You see, Christians were not called Christians until Antioch, until Acts chapter 11, verse number 26. So far, up to this time, the followers of Jesus were called followers of the way.

This is probably referring to Jesus. Do you remember what Jesus said? If not, Jesus said at one point during his earthly ministry, he said, I am the way.

[9 : 30] I am the truth. And I am the life. No man comes to the Father except through me. And so Saul is on his self-appointed mission to take care of eradicate, arrest, and probably even kill or have killed those who were the followers of the way.

He is bent on going out and taking care of all of these Christians, and what he wanted to do was he wanted to silence them. He wanted to stop it.

Saul's mission reminds us of the inspector who had made it his life's mission to find and imprison Jean Valjean from the play *Les Misérables*.

And it's amazing that both Saul and the inspector thought that they were the purveyors of righteousness, that they had the right behind them.

But in reality, their goal, their self-appointed mission was to put into prison those who were more righteous than they.

[10 : 49] And so Saul is bent on taking care of all of these Christians, getting them out of the way because Saul was opposed to Jesus. In Saul's mind, this Jesus was a fake.

He was a fraud. He was a blasphemer saying that he was a son of God, that he would rise again one day. And in Saul's mind, Jesus is dead. These misguided followers of the way, all they're going to do is they're going to hurt, they're going to harm pure Judaism.

And so he's out on his mission to eradicate Christianity. So what he does in verse 2 is he says he asks for letters, he goes to the high priest, and he wants to get arrest warrants.

He's out to get letters of extradition, and he sets out on the road to Damascus. Now Damascus was a larger city about 160 miles north of Jerusalem.

And so here he goes with his posse, and he's going up to Damascus to catch as many Christians as he can, whether they were on horseback or donkeys or walking, whatever, they were on the road.

[12 : 04] That was their mission, and he was going to get men, women, it didn't matter. He wanted to bring them back. So Saul is setting out to eradicate Christianity because he didn't believe, he didn't agree.

A number of years ago, a lawyer by the name of Frank Morrison set out to disprove Christianity. What Morrison said was, he says, there are two things that we must set out to disprove if we can eradicate Christianity.

One is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And number two, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He said, if I can disprove those two events, we can topple Christianity.

So Morrison set out to, in his research, to disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

But what Frank Morrison found during his research, he found that all of the evidence was for the resurrection of Jesus Christ and for the miraculous conversion of Saul.

[13 : 22] Frank Morrison, the atheistic attorney who sets out to topple Christianity, surrendered his life to Jesus Christ and trusted Christ as his Savior.

And just like Frank Morrison, we're going to see that Saul of Tarsus has an unlikely conversion. Let's move on. Let's continue.

We see in verse number three, as he journeyed, Saul was on his way. He's still traveling up north on that road. And just outside of Jerusalem, if you stand on one of the mountains there, you can see this road that makes its way up toward Damascus.

And he's on his way and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

So what we see here is that Saul, who was out to imprison, out to arrest all those who were followers of the way, suddenly has a come-to-Jesus meeting.

[14 : 43] And so he sees a light, it knocks him, and later in chapter 26, as he's before King Agrippa, all of the rest of his entourage, his posse, falls to the ground along with Saul, and all of a sudden, Saul's misconceptions about Jesus are shattered.

It says, suddenly, a light shone around him from heaven. It was a bright light.

Think about it. It was noon. We know that from chapter 22 and chapter 26 when Paul is standing before King Agrippa. and he's giving his defense.

And he says, okay. He said, I was, it was midday and a light shone around me brighter than the sun.

Saul is on his way, breathing out threats, consumed with his self-appointed mission to eradicate Christianity, humanity, and Saul meets the very one that he was set out to persecute his followers.

[16 : 04] Saul was extremely sincere. Saul was the self-appointed guide, judge.

He was the one that wanted to keep Judaism pure. he wanted to keep their orthodoxy pure. So much so that he couldn't see reality around him.

You know, we can be the same sometimes. Sometimes we are so bent on thinking that we are the ones who are protecting orthodoxy that we become blind to the needs of people all around us.

And so Saul has his come-to-Jesus meeting, and I believe that Saul saw Jesus that day. There's a number of other places in the New Testament where it talks about, and he says about this event where it says, he says that he saw Jesus.

So Jesus shows up, whether he did or not, the light, so bright, can you imagine a light in the Middle East, midday, a light brighter than the sun.

[17 : 35] So Jesus shows up, knocks Paul to the ground. Imagine Paul, always in control, Saul, this type A personality, is humiliated and dropped to the ground.

Saul was sincere in his beliefs. But I want you to know that sincerity is never enough. A person can be misguided and sincere.

I've heard it said, you know, there are a lot of religions in the world. And there are a lot of people that are sincere. And if they're sincere and they're trusting in what they believe, then I believe one day they're going to get to heaven.

Well, some people don't even believe in heaven. And some people are so sincere. Well, I'm here to tell you that sincerity does not save.

because Jesus said, I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. No one. When Jesus said no one, he means no one.

[18 : 46] No one comes to God except through not Allah, not Muhammad, not Buddha. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is the only way to God the Father. Trust, faith and trust in Jesus Christ is the only way. And you say, well, pastor, what right do you have to say that?

Well, Jesus himself said it. And if it's a lot, if it's not true, then one of two things.

Jesus was a sham, he was misguided, or he was a charlatan and a liar. Do you realize that there is more, excuse me, there is more evidence to the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

There is more evidence that Jesus Christ lived than there is even evidence that some of our former presidents even lived. There is more written about Jesus.

[19 : 54] there are even historians that did not trust Jesus who wrote about Jesus and wrote about what he said and wrote about some of the things that happened and even that there were witnesses, eyewitnesses to Jesus appearing after he rose from the dead.

So Saul was sincere, but Saul was sincerely wrong. So we notice, as we continue, he falls to the ground and he hears a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

He says, verse 5, who are you, Lord? So Saul, the interrogator, is now the one being interrogated.

So he says, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Who are you? Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

Right at this point, Saul comes to a brand new realization. Two things Saul realizes.

[21 : 20] Number one, Saul realizes Jesus is alive. I thought he was dead.

Jesus is alive. Now a brand new realization. Jesus lives. And if Jesus lives, what he said was true. And here I am.

I thought I was sincerely trying to keep Judaism pure. He really is the Messiah. He really is the one Jehovah sent to us.

And what he said was true. So Saul comes to the realization that Jesus is the Son of God. He comes to the realization that everything that Jesus said was true.

But there was a second realization that I believe Saul understands. And that is Jesus is inextricably intertwined with his people.

[22 : 22] Because what does Jesus tell Saul? Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Saul was out trying to arrest, imprison, ultimately, probably have executed all who were the followers of the way? And Jesus says, why are you persecuting me?

Jesus is inextricably intertwined with his followers. I want you to understand something. The next time that you hurt someone who is a follower of Jesus, the next time you have an argument with someone and you say hurtful words to someone who is a follower of Jesus, guess what?

You just hurt Jesus. It's been said that even the slightest blow on earth is felt in heaven. Jesus feels every hurt that you and I experience.

Think about that. That's so profound. That God and our Savior Jesus Christ is not some God who is far off, who is not connected with us, who is not concerned about us.

[23 : 47] He says, I will be with you even up to the end of this age. so Saul realizes Jesus is alive and he realizes that, you know what?

I've been persecuting the followers of Jesus and Jesus says, you've been persecuting me. Saul realizes this and he goes on, Jesus goes on to say, it's hard for you to kick against the goats.

Now this was a very agricultural society and so what we see going on is Jesus is telling Paul, he said, you've heard the gospel and you have had all these opportunities to trust me and you've seen Stephen, you were even complicit in his death.

he said, Saul, he said, you're really just kicking against me and he says, that's all that you are doing and so he goes on to say that you are kicking against the goats and we do have a restroom in the back here if you need or we do have a nursery.

Yeah, the restroom is in the back on the right. Thank you. he said, it's hard for you to kick against the goats.

[25 : 24] Now, a goad was sometimes when someone was working a team of oxen, they got stubborn sometimes and they didn't want to move and a goad was just a long stick that was sharpened on one end to a very sharp point.

And when the oxen didn't want to move fast enough, the person whether they were plowing or whether the oxen was pulling a cart, they would take that goad and they would poke that oxen in the behind.

And if they stopped and wouldn't move, they would take that goad and they would poke them in the behind again. And ultimately they would get the point.

And sometimes if they got really stubborn, they would kick back against that goad and what would happen sometimes they would kick that sharp point and hurt themselves even more.

So Jesus is saying, Saul, you can rebel against me, you can reject me all you want. But he says, you're going to get the point.

[26 : 38] He said, it's hard to kick against the goads. Saul, this was the most unlikely conversion that you can imagine.

Saul is one who was going to try to eradicate those who were followers of Jesus. and Saul falls to the ground and surrenders to Jesus Christ.

I want you to know that there is no one that is too far gone, that their life cannot be arrested and grabbed hold of by Jesus Christ, and he can change their life.

you know, everybody knows someone that you would say to yourself, that person never in a million years would they surrender to Jesus.

You know, we all know someone that we say, you know, they are so hard-hearted and they are so hard-headed that they would never trust Christ as their Savior.

[27 : 55] I want you to imagine, I want someone's face to come to your mind right now, someone in your life. It could be, it could be a spouse, it could be a son, it could be a daughter, it could be a neighbor, it could be a co-worker, and I want you to see their face.

And I hope that by the end of our message this morning that you're rethinking your thinking. because of what happened to the Apostle Paul. And to understand that no one is too far gone, that Jesus Christ cannot come into their life and change the entire trajectory of their life.

Jesus can get our attention. Saul most likely heard the gospel. There's even the possibility that Saul might have heard Jesus.

For sure, Saul heard the message of Jesus and the gospel when Stephen was speaking because he was part of that synagogue. And Saul heard the gospel and Saul rejected the gospel.

Saul heard about who Jesus was and Saul rejected Jesus. and then suddenly. I like asking people about how they came to know Jesus.

[29 : 29] And everybody's conversion story is different. There are some who tell me, well, I grew up in church and I sort of made a commitment to Jesus. Then I made more of a commitment to Jesus and then finally I made a real commitment to Jesus.

So for some people it's a process of revelation. But for others it happened suddenly. Might be a catastrophe. Might be the death of a person that was dear to them in their life.

It might be the result of a biopsy. It might be the loss of a job. It might be something that happens in their life. And it's like an epiphany.

The light goes on and it's I get it. I understand. Jesus died on the cross in my place.

And there's hope. And they trust Christ as their Savior. So Saul had one of these miraculous unusual conversions that it was immediate.

[30 : 34] He realized who Jesus was. He realized the error of his ways. Because we go on and so trembling and astonished verse number six.

He said, Lord, what do you want me to do? Lord, what do you want me to do?

The transformation begins. And the Lord said to him, arise and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.

So the transformation in the apostle Paul's life begins. I don't have it up on the screen, but turn with me, if you will, to the book of Philippians chapter three.

I want to go forward. Paul talks about his conversion experience two or three times in the New Testament. But in Philippians chapter number three, I'd like to begin in verse number 10.

- [31 : 42] And in verse number 10, as Paul is writing to the Philippian believers, he says that I may know him, capital H, Jesus Christ, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Now, verse 12, not that I have already attained, he says, I'm not there yet, I'm not perfect yet, haven't made it to heaven yet, but, he says, I press on that I may lay hold of that for which he said that I may hold, let me go back, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

He says that one day, he says, I am working, I am sharing the gospel, I am doing whatever it takes to reach people for Jesus, and he says that one day, he says, I am doing all of this one day that I may lay hold of that for which Jesus Christ also laid hold of me.

That word laid hold in the language that Paul was writing in and that Luke was writing in is the Greek word katalambano.

It means to arrest, it means to seize, to lay hold of. And I believe the apostle Paul, in his mind as he was writing this letter to the Philippian believers, thought back to that very day that he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

- [33 : 45] Paul, the one with those letters of extradition, those arrest warrants, going out to arrest followers of the way, Paul says, I was arrested, I was apprehended, I was laid hold of by Jesus Christ.

He says that I may lay hold of that katalambano for that which Christ Jesus also laid hold katalambano of me.

Verse 13, brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upper call of God in Christ Jesus.

So what was Paul saying? Paul was saying that everything he was doing was for the mission of sharing the gospel with all who needed to hear about Jesus Christ.

So we come back to Acts chapter 9 and Saul is, apprehended, Saul is arrested, if you will, by Jesus Christ and he begins to understand and he says, Lord, what do you want me to do?

- [35 : 15] Remember, Saul came to the point where he realized who Jesus was. We come to the point in our life where we must realize and understand who Jesus is and we have the choice, do we accept him or do we reject him?

Verse 7, the man who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground and when his eyes were opened, he saw no one but they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

and he was three days without sight and neither ate nor drank. An unlikely conversion.

Saul realizes who Jesus is. He is knocked to the ground. I believe Jesus will nudge people to trust him.

I believe that he will bring things into our lives to help us to understand that he is God, that he is our Savior. But there may come a time where he will stop nudging and suddenly don't wait until you're knocked to the ground, you're knocked down, you're pinned to the ground and Jesus says, now, have I got your attention?

- [36 : 52] There's hope for anyone. I want you to see that face again that you envisioned a moment ago. It could be a brother, a sister, a parent, a child, a neighbor.

And I want you to remember that if God could take a trained killer like Kim Shin Jo and have him surrender to Jesus Christ, if God could take a self-proclaimed murderer as Saul and get his attention, and Saul comes to trust Jesus Christ as his Savior, and he becomes a follower of the way, that if Jesus can do that for Joe, if Jesus can do that for Saul, Jesus can do that for that person in your life that you thought was too far going.

I want you to understand that if God can turn a hit man into a holy man, there's hope for any man, woman, or child. God can go from this building today and realize we hold, just as Peter, we hold the keys to the kingdom.

You know what the keys to the kingdom are? It's the gospel. We have the keys to unlock the door of people's hearts by sharing the gospel, and God's word is living, it's powerful, it's sharper than any two-edged sword, and when we share the word of God with others, we need to do the work, we need to do everything we can, but then it comes to a point where it's God's job to do the only thing that He can do.

The Holy Spirit will open up their hearts, open up their minds to the gospel. No one is too far gone to come to the point where God can completely change the trajectory of their life.

[39 : 09] What did Jesus do when He was on this earth? He went to the people who really needed Him. Kim Shin-jo said it was the love and the compassion that was shown to Him by His South Korean captors that began to melt His heart.

love. When Jesus Christ went to those who really needed Him, He showed unconditional love.

And we see a pattern in the ministry of Jesus. When He goes to lost sinners, He did not judge them for where they were or for their sin.

Because they couldn't help it. But what did He show them? He showed them not how they had sinned, but He showed them that they were sinners.

He showed them that they were separated from God. He showed them that they needed a Savior. And once they trusted Him, then He expected their life to change.

[40 : 26] He didn't expect them to stay the same. Just like He told the woman that was caught in adultery. He says, now go and sin no more.

There's hope for everyone. Let's show love, the love of Jesus, the unconditional love of Jesus, share the gospel, and make disciples. Let's pray. Father, this morning we come to You thanking You for who You are.

We thank You that as the God of the universe, that You are ultimately powerful enough to get the attention of anyone.

You will not force us, but You will give us every opportunity to trust Christ Jesus as our Savior. So Father, I pray this morning if there's anyone here in this building or under the sound of my voice, that if they do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior, if they've never yet placed their faith, their trust in Jesus alone and what He did on the cross of Calvary to be the full payment for their sin.

Lord, I pray that right now they would trust Christ and Christ alone. Father, we pray that You would help us never to give up on anyone that there's always hope.

[41 : 49] Hope for any man, any woman, any boy, or any girl to come to the point where they surrender to You and trust Jesus as their Savior.

Father, we thank You for what You're going to do. Father, we pray this in the name of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen.