Community Group Discussion Guide

Ekklesia, part 5, Rich Barrett

Observation

1. There is perhaps no more dramatic conversion story in the New Testament than that of Saul, persecutor of The Way. Take a few minutes to read his conversion story in Acts 9:1-19a.
   a. What stands out to you from this story? Any new observations?
   b. Is there any parallel to your own conversion?
2. Read Paul's own description of his actions in Acts 26:9-11.
   a. Why do you think God chose Saul/Paul to lead the movement of Jesus followers?
   b. Do you think Paul ever wrestled with feeling like he was worthy of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice for him?
3. Read Romans 5:6-11.
   a. What does it mean to you that God demonstrated his love for us "while we were yet sinning?"

Interpretation

1. Why do you think persecution caused the early church to scatter, yet also became a catalyst for spreading the gospel (Acts 8:1-4)? How does this challenge modern assumptions about "success" in ministry?
2. Rich emphasized that the church is a "movement, not an institution." How does Acts 2:42-47 support or contradict the idea of church as an outward-facing, multi-ethnic, multiplying community?

3. Paul's letters often stress mutual care (e.g., "bear one another's burdens"). How might his past as a persecutor have shaped his emphasis on grace over law-keeping? [45:30]

Application

1. The ability to gather openly, own Bibles, and share the gospel is described as a gift that can become routine. What practical step could you take this week to rekindle gratitude for these freedoms? [30:10]
2. The early church prioritized meeting daily and sharing resources. What would it look like to prioritize "outward-facing" habits in your own life (e.g., serving neighbors, inviting others into community)?
3. Saul's transformation led him to preach immediately, even when it risked his reputation. Is there a situation where fear of judgment has kept you silent about your faith? How could grace reframe your courage?
4. Rich asked, "Has wonder dimmed in your life?" Identify one area (workplace, family, etc.) where intentionally marveling at God's mercy could reshape your interactions. What small action could reflect that wonder? [01:03:16]
5. Paul's letters call believers to "out-serve one another." Who in your life needs tangible support right now, and how could you quietly meet that need without expecting recognition?