

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

PAUL SALUTES A NEW CAPTAIN

“**Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?**” (Acts 9:6)

Paul, immediately before his conversion, had reached the pinnacle of sheer fanaticism in his expressed animosity toward Christ. Never had a Philistine so plagued the people of God. Though small of stature, he was a Goliath of opposition. However, one pebble from the greater David felled him. It was not a stone in the cup of a sling which wrought his undoing; it was the force in the crook of a question:—“**Why persecutest thou me?**”

He quickly capitulated. He had been treacherous in his aversion to Christ and His disciples, but the question terminated his antipathy. The inquiry made him an inquirer and prompted his momentous plea—“**Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?**”

At the time of this query, there was a pronounced inward reaction, more spiritual than psychological. His whole emotional life was thrown into a state of quickened action. He was trembling as he spoke. Those who knew him before and after observed him as one who was not easily frightened. On the contrary, he was recognized as an unusually fearless type of individual, and perhaps for this reason mainly was assigned to the task of carrying out the proposed Damascus persecution. Now, he trembled as he sought different marching orders from a new authority.

The account reveals that he not only trembled but was profoundly astonished. It was not an ordinary bewilderment, but an enlightening disillusionment.

- He was amazed that anything, or any one, could thwart the fulfillment of his determined effort.
- He was stunned by a challenge so convincing in its presentation.
- He was surprised at the spectacular suddenness of this transforming experience.
- He was overwhelmed above all that Christianity, so utterly despised by him and his erstwhile colleagues, should so completely arrest his inquiring attention.

It should be kept in mind that Saul of Tarsus was not an illiterate man and by no means an obscure personality. He was not a psycho-neurotic or a vacillating weakling. He was not one to be easily daunted or deterred.

There is sufficient proof that he was well educated for his day, that he was a public figure, a man of prestige, of determined character and of marked valour. His meeting with the Christ of God wrought miraculous changes. His planned undertaking was permanently disrupted. It was, in all probability, the only unfinished assignment of his life. The natural emphasis of his philosophy was to see a job to its completion.

He bade farewell to his present endeavors and humbled himself at the feet of a new Master. Even as Peter, James and John left their nets, and Matthew the receipt of custom, so Saul resigned his post at once. The search warrant in his pocket became utterly useless. There is no record of its actual disposition, but we know the legal document of condemnation was exchanged for the message of divine salvation. His threats of slaughter vanished forever.

Soon he became filled with the Spirit, changing from a maddened state of bloodthirstiness to the making of melody in his heart unto the Lord. What a miracle of grace! Furthermore, he completely lost sight of his unholy aim. It disappeared as a bubble bursting in the air.

“Now his thoughts were for the souls of men;
He had lost his life to find it again.”

The question was primary in importance.

This query, “**Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?**” was directed to the Supreme Issuer of commands. In a sense, it was the surrender signal of a treacherous enemy who thereby conceded defeat. It was prophetic of the day when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11). All the blaspheming antichristian characters who ever lived will bend the knee and make the confession in that hour of sad disillusionment.

The salutation “**Lord**” was indicative of putting the Saviour first, of giving Him His rightful place, of owning Him as the proper one to exercise lordship. It was a salutation that never lost its appeal for Paul. He employed it with frequency in prayer, in praise, and in preaching. His soul was subdued by all it meant to a helpless, earthly pilgrim and by all it promised to a raptured or resurrected saint. Even the privilege of inquiring of Him for an explanation of His will was a distinct honour, and to be His very own was unspeakably glorious.

This was the surrender of triumph, the victory of meeting the One Who alone can take a poor lost sinner, save him from his sins and set him free.

There seemed to be no hesitance whatsoever in his acceptance when once the identity was made clear. His eyes were closed in blindness but his ears were open in willingness. He had heard a voice saying, “**I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest.**” There was no argument, no self-justification, no procrastination. There was a deep repentance which at once softened a hardened heart and sweetened a bitter soul, so that he could, with tender reverence, acclaim Jesus as Lord.

This was the first reverential articulation ever elicited from his lips for Jesus, Who, from henceforth and forever, would be everything to him.

The question was particular in specification.

So complete was the transformation in Paul's life that he was immediately disposed to direct all his energies into the service of his newfound Lord. "**WHAT wilt Thou have me to do?**"

If there was to be a change, and that was now assured, then he must get started on the right foot. This whole thing was new to him. He was honest in his previous conclusions that there was nothing worthwhile about Christianity. He considered it a favour for God and man to silence those who were spending their time in its propagation.

In this moment of a definitely changed attitude, he must inquire for some specific directions.

It meant that he was confessing that his whole religious life had been a mistake; but when the glory of Christ so floods the soul of a man, no confession, however humbling, is too difficult. What Paul was there requesting was the promise of some occupation to fill the dismal void which was occasioned by the abrupt eviction of all the old things from his life.

So active a person as he must have something to do. Little did he know that the answer to that pointed question would lead him through such great perils as were before him. It would not have mattered, no, not an iota. He now belonged to Christ whose grace would be amply sufficient for any eventuality, and no hardship could be too great.

In putting the question, there was displayed confidence that this new voice of authority could give him the proper directions which he so specifically sought. That confidence was never violated. That which Paul gave to others was always derived from the Lord (I Corinthians 11:23). Step by step, the Lord's directions were received until he finished the course. That he was obedient to those directions is indicated by one of his last earthly utterances, "**I have kept the faith.**"

The question was personal in application. "What wilt Thou have ME to do?"

The one applying for instructions certainly had a disqualifying record. True, he had suddenly undergone a change. He was a different man entirely, but had he proved it? No, he had not as yet the opportunity of doing so. This question was propounded right on the scene where the new birth transpired.

Somehow, Paul must have understood that this One, to whom he was applying, knew all things and could penetrate into the secret chambers of a man's soul. Peter, one morning about a frugal meal with his Lord, commented, "**Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest I love thee**" (John 21:17). Paul did not use the same words, but they are inferred.

If he received an assignment, then he could, through faithfulness, prove to others that he had met the Lord. He wanted to get established. He meant to be useful. He was ready to sign on the dotted line, willing to suffer reproach, if need be, as a true and faithful follower of the Lord of glory.

The question was pressing in challenge. “What wilt Thou have me TO DO?”

It was a challenge first of all to his own soul. Whatever the Lord might answer would command and receive his best.

- He would so run as to win; so press as to gain the prize of his high calling;
- He would so live as to provoke the Jews to jealousy;
- He would so walk as to guard against being a castaway (disapproved); and, by supporting grace, never become weary in well-doing.

Those colleagues who journeyed with him toward Damascus “**stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man**” (Acts 9:7). If they heard the Lord’s voice, they must have heard Paul’s. They were not offended because he had pledged allegiance to another for “**they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.**”

It would not be difficult to believe they received his first sermon. It would be most interesting, indeed, to know about the details of their conversation during the remainder of the journey, to learn just what were their several reactions and to determine whether or not any of them accepted Christ as their personal Saviour.

That they were noticeably affected is stated; but to what extent Paul was able to capitalize on such an advantage, remains for us to discover when we meet in glorified array to know all things as we are now known. They could not have escaped the challenge of Paul’s surrender to Christ, nor can we escape.

While we read his life and rejoice in his triumphs, let us remember they were the outcome of wholehearted yieldedness to the Lord. He was no more promising as an evangel of the gospel than the average individual today. In fact, he was neither impressive in appearance nor pleasing in speech (II Corinthians 10:10), but a yielded person in the hands of the Holy Spirit always becomes a potent instrument for the cause of Christ.

The question was proof of his readiness to enter the new life.

Meeting Christ always produces dissatisfaction with the old life, for

*“the things of earth grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.”*

He had been satisfied up to this point. In simple but expressive language, he did not know what he had been missing.

- Those born blind cannot appreciate the sunset, for they have never seen it.
- Those born deaf cannot appreciate the harmony of music, for they have never heard it.
- Those born in the heart of the jungles cannot appreciate the comforts of civilization, for they have never had them.

The people born in a state of depravity, and remaining there, cannot appreciate Him Who is the Lord of glory, for they have never known Him. Paul had met Him and heard His voice. That made every difference. He fell in love with the Lover of his soul.

“When you know Him, when you know Him
You’ll love Him just as others do;

A glorious morn will dawn for you,
When you know our Saviour, too.”

Paul did not get ready to enter this new life; he was made ready by the impact of Christ’s power upon his soul. He was born again, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, accepted in the Beloved and received into the family of God. Night had departed and the morn had dawned. It was as wonderful as it was sudden. He died but began living at once. In the twinkling of an eye all opposition ceased in his soul and all bitterness disappeared. All he needed was this revelation of the Lord and he was ready to enter by the Door into the sheepfold.

There was something very definite about his question, something so meaningful. It showed the earnestness of his soul. If his voice could be heard, he perhaps would sum it up in these words;

“I have seen the vision,
And for self I cannot live;
Life is less than worthless
‘Till my all I give.”

The question was prompted by his willingness to begin properly.

Poor beginnings are seldom promising of success. Experience has taught us that wrong starts not only thwart growth but are difficult of correction. Jeremiah contended that **“it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”** (10:23).

Paul could have reasoned, as so many do, that time was required for a better understanding of the situation before any commitment could be made, something of a breathing spell to get his feet on the ground. Any move just then could have been construed as an emotional reaction. Nothing of this nature was entertained. Paul had met the Saviour and had definitely believed on Him. It was to be an eternal relationship and he could not begin too soon to acquaint himself with the means whereby he might walk in close fellowship with his blessed Lord. He wanted to begin properly. The course he followed is an apt example of accurate procedure. James taught it in the following words, **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given unto him”** (1:5).

There was, of course, not only willingness to know but willingness to do. No one can begin to live properly for Christ until obedience is learned, and obedience is not learned until Christ is owned as **“Lord.”** That salutation prefacing Paul’s question embraced all the basic essentials of a good beginning.

It was a quit-claim to all his earthly aspirations and a disowning of all personal rights. It was a forsaking of all attachments and a turning from all past designs. It was the implicit reposing of himself upon the recognized authority of another without mental reservation or qualification. It meant that what his Lord said was indisputably right. From this attitude he never deviated but rather grew stronger in the conviction as the years passed by. No one can fail who trusts Christ absolutely nor can one go astray who follows His counsel. A Christian is one who trusted Christ and keeps on trusting.

The question was proffered in eagerness to please Him Who had called.

Some simply take for granted that their lives are pleasing to the Lord; others are definitely unconcerned; while countless numbers make not the slightest pretence.

This was not satisfactory to this new convert. He must know for certain and the information must come directly from the Lord. Jehovah had explained to Israel, through Moses, what was acceptable to Him and what was decidedly unacceptable. These forbears of Paul's became increasingly indifferent to the wishes of the Lord and brought offerings that were lame and blind and torn. With grief, Jehovah said to them "**Offer it now unto thy governor, will he be pleased with thee?**" (Malachi 1:8).

Such an attitude by the people shows a pathetic lack of love. Paul's whole Christian life stands in marked contrast. He displayed intense eagerness to live in all well-pleasing before the gaze of heaven.

He attempted to please the Lord in purpose, for his purpose was positive. "**Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him**" (II Corinthians 5:9). Some commentators explain that the word "**labour**" means "*ambitious.*" The same word employed elsewhere by Paul has been translated "**study**" and "**strive.**" By putting all three words together, we might sense something of his bent toward a heaven-approved behavior. His purpose was not only positive but manifestly pressing. He tried to redeem the time, pushing ever onward, praying and planning, travelling and teaching, witnessing and working, in order to account for as many converts as possible in the brief and uncertain period of time which he had, and to propagate the gospel as widely as privilege would permit.

He also sought to please the Lord in purity. Calling upon his fellow-believers in Corinth, he appealed, "**Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord**" (7:1).

Surely Gamaliel had taught Paul about the manner of the priests in the old order, since the books of Moses gave prominence to such matters. It is written, "**And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office**" (Exodus 40:13).

As a believer-priest, how could a New Testament servant pay less attention to cleansing since God is the same yesterday, today and forever?

The question was put to procure knowledge.

It was knowledge he was requesting that he might intelligently do God's will. Jesus attested the fact that **“if any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine”** (John 7:17). The willingness of Paul qualified him thus to be informed. His first lessons were difficult.

The Lord hinted to Ananias of what they would consist, **“For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake”** (Acts 9:16).

Thus, his initial teaching concerned hardship rather than happiness, heaviness instead of heaven, trial instead of triumph, **“but Saul increased the more in strength . . . proving that this is very Christ”** (Acts 9:22). Then came the deeper things, revelations which had been withheld from all others such as the mystery of the Ephesian letter.

Paul unqualifiedly believed in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, for he later said, **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”** (II Timothy 3.16).

In the sacred presentations, then, were authority and utility and sufficient enlightenment to fully furnish every true servant of the living God. His knowledge of the divine economy was exceedingly extensive. He was the most eminent teacher of doctrine—at home in any branch of the subject.

Some of his greatest treatises consisted of:

- The matter of justification in Romans four and five,
- His thesis on the security of the saints in Romans eight,
- His description of the Lord's table in First Corinthians eleven,
- His dissertation on love in First Corinthians thirteen,
- His classic on the resurrection in First Corinthians fifteen,
- His delineation of new things in Christ in Second Corinthians five,
- His plea for separation in Second Corinthians six,
- His distinction between law and grace in Galatians,
- His revelation of **“the mystery”** in Ephesians,
- His belief in the blessed hope in First Thessalonians,
- His unmasking of end-time entities in Second Timothy.

The question was productive of opportunity and privilege.

Even in the secular realm, willingness and initiative are precursors of promotion. It must have been most gratifying to the Lord to hear this chosen vessel, standing in his blindness along the Damascus road, asking if there was something he could do.

Paul lost no time in offering himself for service and he was sincerity personified. Right then and there, he was ready to become a bondsman of Christ.

There are countless opportunities for men of that stripe who have been so few in number down through the years. The Lord can trust them with extra privileges; for in them all, such godly men would give Him the glory.

God permitted Paul to reveal truth heretofore hidden from others; to become the first real missionary of the church; to preach to kings and to visit heaven, where he experienced, for a moment, such blissful enjoyment that no earthly law of understanding could permit a revelation of his experience. No other man was allowed to hear the words he heard in paradise. How singular are the privileges of a man in any age who will, like Paul, place himself entirely at the disposal of the Lord!

Space precludes the possibility of delineating in much detail the almost endless array of opportunities which were granted this true and worthy soldier of the cross. His life was crowded with activity, but his opportunities were no greater or more numerous than ours. He better knew how to see them and how to capitalize on them.

An opportunity only becomes a privilege in this way.

Being cast into prison was not a catastrophe, but a chance to evangelize. God allowed his servant to be bound so He could blast open the gates. Then the power would be known as of Him and not of man; and those who required a sign would believe.

A hair-raising voyage through an unprecedented storm was not such a sad experience when he could win more than two hundred to Christ, thereby causing rejoicing in heaven. He had learned in whatsoever state he was, therein to be content, and to find grace under all circumstances to rejoice; but in alert watchfulness, he welcomed every opportunity to snatch men as brands from the burning.

It all began when he asked the Master for his first assignment and never ended until he closed his eyes in a martyr's death.

The question was the precursor of responsibility.

Upon entering the service of the King of Kings, he would become either a stepping stone or a stumbling block. His life would not be his own. He would be standing in Christ's stead, reconciling men to God, standing between the living and the dead, a place that even an archangel in glory could not assume. The responsibility therefore, was most *pronounced*, and no one has ever recognized that fact more than Paul; but, even in this respect, there is no evidence of fear or strain.

He knew that the Holy Spirit would lead him daily in acquitting himself acceptably, so he majored in perfecting a yieldedness of spirit, soul and body to this ever faithful Guide.

His responsibility was not only *pronounced*, but it was also *extensive*.

Because he so thoroughly dedicated himself to Christian service, he was granted a wide field of privilege. Every privilege was a responsibility. He was an evangelist, a teacher and a missionary. His much travelling gave him contact with a great host of people who needed special assistance. Since he was a called apostle, the various local churches looked to him for a solution of internal difficulties. The number of calls upon his time must have been exceedingly great, but he firmly leaned upon the unfailing promise, “**As thy days so shall thy strength be.**”

His responsibility was *accountable*. He taught much about the time when the Righteous Judge would assay the value of believers’ works according to His unerring standard of justice. This indicated that the matter was prominent in his own mind, but all believers are equally concerned (II Corinthians 5:10). Our works will be judged, tried as by fire (I Corinthians 3:13). How definitely, like the beloved Apostle, should we earnestly contend for the faith.

The Lord has entrusted to us the “**talents and the pounds**” and He expects some return, something to show for our faithfulness. We will be held accountable.

If any stand in shame before the Lord and suffer loss, it will not be because that blessed servant of the early church did not discharge his responsibility in waving us on to an abundant entrance.

Down through the ages, piercing the din of man’s turmoil and Satan’s disruptions, comes the voice of that venerable Apostle to spur us on, shouting, “**Quit you like men, be strong!**”

A prayerful look upon his record of triumphs should elicit a personalized use of his question, “**Lord, what wilt Thou have ME to do?**”

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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