

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PAUL FOUND FELLOWSHIP

“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles . . . and he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:27, 28)

In recounting some of his experiences at a later date, Paul spoke about being in perils of his own countrymen. The first such experience, which was a serious one, took place at Damascus soon after his conversion. He had outwitted the Jews there in a discussion about his Lord, **“proving that this is very Christ.”**

To overcome their chagrin and to give vent to their inherent antichristian bitterness, they produced some legal technicality whereby they could demand his life. Machinery was quickly thrown into operation, plans were drawn up, and all that remained to put an abrupt end to this new **“perverter”** was to apprehend the culprit. That was all, but that was much when God was on the side of the man sought.

Moved by the same prompting that caused Mary and Joseph to take Jesus as a babe from Bethlehem to Egypt, the few believers at Damascus effected an escape for Paul by placing him in an improvised elevator made of a basket and a rope and letting him down over the wall. Doubtless their hearts still feared for his safety as he left the basket and disappeared into the darkness of the night unarmed and unescorted, but the Lord was with him and brought him to Jerusalem where he sought contact with other believers.

Of the numberless affiliations enjoyed by those of **“like precious faith,”** none was ever more heavily freighted with the element of surprise than when Saul of Tarsus came to the apostles at Jerusalem. Perhaps none ever produced greater concern. The psychological reaction was pronounced and the opposition at first was unanimous.

Fear for the welfare of the local church was quickly evidenced and bewilderment was readily apparent. Ostensibly, they thought, these new tactics by this human arch-enemy of Christianity were a subtle means for a quick and telling blow—a clever plan to nullify their testimony. Regardless of the reports about his conversion, they could not be deceived so easily. Somehow, they seemed to think that something was begun by this move which a refusal on their part would not entirely counteract.

Their old foe was pounding at their door, so it seemed.

Paul's failure to find fellowship.

It was the most likely thing in all the world for this new Christian to seek fellowship among those of like precious faith. Any earnest Christian would do likewise. Immediately upon his arrival, **“he assayed to join himself to the disciples.”** His approach was met with instant refusal.

This was hardly surprising to him, nor was he perturbed. He was ever one to take matters in his stride and to let God work out the problems. Their refusal to fellowship him in their midst was caused, first, by their distress at his presence. Verse 26 states, **“They were all afraid of him.”** That seems like a bona fide objection. It hardly seems possible, however, that Peter could have been included in the **“all”** yet he cowered once before a damsel who pointed him out as being a friend to Jesus.

Yes, it is very likely that Peter was in the group which was afraid of this erstwhile persecutor; but, in fairness to Peter, it must be explained that he was no longer the cowardly one who once denied his Lord. Perhaps it was caution more than fear, but they, nevertheless, refused to associate with Paul. Who knew better than these Christian leaders at Jerusalem what a constant threat this man had been to the lives of any and all who dared to witness for Christ? He had made atrocious attempts to exterminate that small coterie of witnesses at Jerusalem which formed the nucleus of the whole church militant. It was a literal fear they possessed which seemed most justifiable. His presence in Jerusalem, they reasoned, was a cause for great concern and constituted a danger of the first order.

They could not for a moment even think of receiving Paul into their company because of their disbelief in his profession. They **“believed not that Saul was a disciple.”** This was due either to a lack of known proof concerning his new birth or an underestimate of the transforming power of the Lord. It must be remembered that this was not very long after Paul had met the Lord, perhaps a matter of months. News, of course, had filtered in from various sources but they had looked upon it askance. They attached little value to statements coming indirectly through believers in other parts.

What reaction had been occasioned in Jewish officialdom at Jerusalem through the loss of this deputized persecutor could have been construed by the cautious apostles as propaganda in a strategical plan for the furtherance of their cause. The disciples knew about fifth columnists because of Judas. They remembered the admonition of the Lord about wolves coming in sheep's clothing, and had they not, hardly two years previously, seen Ananias and Sapphira stricken in death before their very presence because of misrepresentation? No, the evidence was not sufficiently convincing. They could not welcome him.

It was not an attitude of reluctance among the apostles because of Paul's past record; it was an act of rejection because they lacked the proper knowledge concerning his present status. What sincere body with the proper Bible standard could have done otherwise? Had they been present along the Damascus road when the Lord intercepted him in his journey; had they seen the little roaring tiger humbled as a tractable lamb; or had those who were present been competent discerners of the Lord's operations, then would it have been different. As it was, the risk involved was too alarming.

Of course, not one of those spirit-filled men would question for one moment the greatness of God's power in transforming the worst of sinners.

Had they not been eye witnesses to the phenomenal display of the Holy Spirit's work on the day of Pentecost when three thousand souls were brought from their hopelessness into the reality of transforming grace? Had not Peter and John, in particular, seen the whole city of Samaria set aglow with the joy of Christ through Philip's one message? Could not God save such as Saul? Could He not make the wrath of man to praise Him? Of this fact, there was not so much as a shadow of doubt, but whether this noted Pharisaical antagonist had exercised faith in the provisions of the cross was a matter that utterly lacked confirmation. Thus, they were not disposed to offer the right hand of fellowship.

Paul was befriended by Barnabas.

While Acts 9:26 plainly states that “**all**” were afraid of Saul, the following verse opens with the words “**but Barnabas took him.**”

These words by no means contradict the previous verse. They clearly prove how God can cause a person to move in the midst of fear and in the face of danger to accomplish His will. Why did God single out Barnabas in preference to any other man in the company? Was it because he was more discerning or more valorous than the others? No, these were hardly the reasons.

It is a well known fact that certain types of personalities fit into certain situations when other types would inevitably fail. Peter would not have been a likely one to meet a man like Saul in his Christian infancy and held in suspicion as he was. Barnabas possessed traits not noticeably found in any of the others, including the beloved John. When the apostles first met this devout son of a Levite from Cyprus, they were so impressed with his sweet Christian disposition and his quiet, even temperament that they changed his name from Joses to Barnabas which meant “**the son of consolation**” (Acts 4:36).

Here is a definite clue as to why he was commissioned for this important duty—something of a liaison officer or an intermediary. There was Saul, a new Christian, compelled to flee Damascus for his life because he had become a Christian and yet barred from the company of Christians. This son of consolation was a friend indeed to a man in need.

Barnabas did two things after establishing the contact.

First, he listened to Saul's testimony which was related in detail with vividness and convincing force. Another might have thought of it as a fantastic “Rudolph Hess stunt” and that he still retained a loyalty to those who sought the lives of faithful Christians. Not so with Barnabas. His emotions were greatly stirred as the unfolding story confirmed the fact that this man had, in truth, come to grips with the Christ of Calvary and that the nature of God had been stamped upon his soul. It was a complete coverage of the facts incident to his conversion and commission. It is not difficult to imagine the reaction of Barnabas when the testimony was terminated.

His very countenance was indicative of his pleasure. His heart was overwhelmed. All the doubts relative to the genuineness of this man's conversion were at once and forever dissipated. He must have said, “*With Ananias, I, too, salute you as ‘Brother Paul.’ You are one with us in the bonds of Christ. Make ready, and grant me the privilege of escorting you to the brethren.*”

The next thing that Barnabas did is evident. He led Paul to the apostles.

How symbolical was the sight. So recently the steps of these two men had followed in vastly divergent courses, their aims had been diametrically opposite; their philosophies had been dissonant; their religious ideas had been incompatible, and the one had threatened the life of the other. Now, they walk together, reconciled, one in Christ, rejoicing in a common salvation. Paul no longer filled this disciple's heart with fear nor troubled his mind with suspicion; and Barnabas was no longer a despised religionist who had no right to live. Everything was different now as two men, one slight and the other tall, negotiated the distance as quickly as possible to meet the apostles on that most memorable occasion.

Paul was received on profession of faith.

The humble meeting quarters where God's anointed few assembled for prayer and praise and study had become a hallowed place. However drab and unsightly the surroundings, there had been unmistakable verification of their Lord's precious promise, "**Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.**"

Their hearts were knitted together in love and their souls were rapturously joyful as their testimonies blended into a concert of doxology. They spoke about God's boundless mercies in salvation and the transcendent riches of His grace. The atmosphere was most elevating. Now, into their assembly room, into their very presence, came the one who, above all others, had tried strenuously to destroy all that they held transcendentally dear. The atmosphere was at once tense with apprehension.

Whether they were still fearful of him or not, he stood before them. He was in their midst. Saul of Tarsus was in their meeting. The only alleviating factor was that Barnabas, a most trustworthy member of their company, had brought him.

At the most opportune moment, prompted by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas arose to make the introduction. "***My beloved Brethren in Christ,***" he began with all the graciousness that had so greatly endeared him to their hearts, "***it is with the most extreme pleasure that I commend to you Brother Paul.***"

These words were like the Balm of Gilead to relax the strained nerves and fearful hearts of a people who already had been hounded by a most unscrupulous adversary. The fact that Paul was accepted as a brother by Barnabas and commended by him to their fellowship brought to them sweet assurance and much joy. What else could they require?

But Barnabas spoke on, saying, "***Brother Paul saw the Lord and was blinded by the brilliance of His effulgent glory and he heard the Lord speak. The proof of his conversion inheres in the fact that he preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus; and for this cause, he had to flee for his life for the Jews had sought to kill him.***"

Much is left for our imagination, the corroboration by Paul of all that Barnabas had related, a brief personal testimony, the handclasps, the greetings, the praise and thanksgiving.

This was indeed the doing of the Lord and it was marvellous in their eyes. There was no further formality. There was no need for it. Paul was one of their company and he was their newest brother in Christ.

Paul enjoyed a new association.

“And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.” This was a new realm of conduct, a new sphere of companionship. He was with them.

This signifies more than social relationship. He was with them positionally. The same power that had wrought so wonderfully in his life had worked in theirs. The conditions were different but the accomplishment was the same. They were journeying with new hope to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. He was travelling the same path of faith. They were accepted in the Beloved and numbered among the children of God. He was a member of the same heavenly family. What Calvary had done for them, it had also done for him. Their hope was his; all aims and anticipations were the same; they shared alike in a common salvation where seniority rights and favoritism are both foreign and unacceptable.

Paul soon found to his joy that he was with them practically, **“coming in and going out at Jerusalem.”** This was, of course, divinely intended and was there humanly endorsed by discerning men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

While the Christian acknowledges no supreme spiritual authority but that which comes from heaven, there was a sense in which Jerusalem was acknowledged as the headquarters of the early Church.

Then, Paul qualified as being one of the official staff. He went out on preaching assignments and came back to the Jerusalem assembly for fellowship. The invaluable contribution made by him was unquestioned by the other apostles and surely appreciated as well by them, but the blessing it was to his own life and his establishment in the ministry to which he had been called remained to be seen.

Throughout his Christian career, Paul guarded carefully against any propensity to indulge in matters pertaining to his own self-enjoyment. From the very commencement of his ministry he was determined to glory only in the cross of Christ. The disciples quickly reposed confidence in him, cherished his brotherly affection, respected his ability and greatly admired his ministerial accomplishments. Barnabas, in particular, was to become an intimate associate of the one who was Christianity's greatest apostle.

Paul became the first Christian apologist.

A very familiar description is used with frequency concerning the character of Paul's oral ministry. **“He spake boldly.”**

Sooner or later this kind of preaching stirs up the active enmity of Satan and some of his emissaries make vocal his objections. Being the very embodiment of pride, too much pressure cannot be endured without retaliation.

God's people too frequently forget that the enemy of all that is high and holy is active and will prevail if we are not in the place where God can grant the victory. This fearless advocate of the gospel preached with power, proving the truth of his message, and this became most provocative to many of his day.

The Grecian Jews (v. 29), like their forefather Cain, were too refined to place any credence in a religion based upon the shedding of blood, so they challenged Paul to a debate. Whatever may have been the extent of his training in polemics or his experience in argumentation, nothing about Paul is clearer than his ability to defend the faith. Judges were not necessary in his debates. The outcome was always certain. His opponents almost invariably displayed their acknowledgment of defeat by crying for his life.

At Damascus, his message of Calvary ran counterwise to their creed and they sought to kill him. Then, the preaching of the cross conflicted with Grecian culture; and, failing to silence their accused fanatic in oral combat, they tried to slay him.

To have one of Paul's academic training, supported by spiritual depth and animated by unexcelled fearlessness, was a great asset indeed to the young church at Jerusalem, and they blessed the day that Barnabas led him into their midst. He was an inspiration of rare proportions to the other apostles, and the devil had to dip deeply into his repertoire of deceptive schemes to play his cards against this new figure in the field of Christian activity. One by one, his cohorts fell before the unflinching attacks of this dauntless personality who refused to be controverted in his arguments or thwarted in his actions. It was the invincible power of Christ through one who had yielded himself fully, and no one recognized this more than Satan. He could not destroy the power, but he sought to dispose of the vessel.

Paul returned to Tarsus. **“Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him forth to Tarsus”** (v. 30).

Once again, by protecting Providence, his life was spared; and, through this means of expulsion, the Lord dispatched him to another assignment. This move brought Paul to the place of his birth. Tarsus had given to the world the most prominent personage since the days of Moses, but it required the “dark room” of time to develop the portrait of greatness. An oil painting is not nearly so pleasing to the eye that is close to it. His return was that of a victor but how unaware were the townsfolk. There were no ceremonies, no medals, no citations. Nor would Paul have had it so. He had seen the garlands of leaves awarded the Olympic winners which faded and crumbled so soon, even as the glory they betokened. His awards were of the Lord. They would never lose their luster but would shine as the stars forever. And even though the whole of Tarsus were unaware of the significance of the change that had been wrought in the life of this one citizen, all the world would know, in due course, and even eternity would re-echo the account of a sinner saved by grace and used to the blessing of countless numbers.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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