

# CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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## CHAPTER TWO

### PAUL'S VISION VITALIZED

**“And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received sight forthwith” (Acts 9:18)**

Divine optometry is hardly a fitting term for the clearing of impaired spiritual vision, yet the Great Physician performed just such operations. Of the Emmaus sojourners, it was said, **“Their eyes were opened and they knew Him.”** It is a glorious fact, prolifically substantiated by Scripture, that this is precisely what the Lord desires to do for each one, even in this our day. Patiently He waits for eager hearts to cry, **“Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law [word].”**

In the experience of Paul, when the scales fell, there was new light for a new life. His vision was at once majestic and grand in its sweep. There was a broad horizon with new values and countless opportunities. When the scales fell, three facts became distinctly obvious. There was a New Character, a New Course, and a New Concern.

### A NEW CHARACTER

*With relation to the Saviour, Paul was a “**chosen vessel**” (Acts 9:15).*

In the divine economy, this new convert was called of God to bear the name of Christ **“before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel.”**

In each case, the assignment, humanly speaking, was most difficult of performance. The Gentiles, or the heathen (*goyim*), were looked upon with much disfavor by the Jews, and that natural aversion had to be overcome.

Jonah fled from such a task. Nineveh was a Gentile city, and it was, in all probability, for this very reason that Jonah proceeded in another direction. Paul was of the strictest sect, a Pharisee, one of that company of Hebrew religionists who thanked God publicly that they were not as other men.

They could not preserve their sacred standing and fraternize with Gentiles; and to make it doubly hard in the fulfillment of this new commission, he had been indoctrinated with a hatred for Christ and a bitterness toward His message.

However, immediately upon coming to grips with the Saviour, he received his assignment. This was it—bearing before the Gentiles that Name which is above every name. How else were they to receive hope? Jesus was born to be **“a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Israel”** (Luke 2:32).

Not only that, **“Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

But what could a name mean to a people who were outside the sphere of covenant privilege? What could one name mean to such a countless number? What could a name mean to a people who had so long worshipped idols? Much every way, when it represented the Lord of Glory through Whom cometh salvation. With all that it meant, with all that it promised, that Name had to be borne by human agency, and Paul was a transformed vessel called for this very purpose, even to minister its message and meaning to the Gentiles.

The coverage of his commission was extensive. It ranged from the most degraded to the most elevated. Kings as well as commoners are lost without Christ and there is no hope for anyone apart from the Name that came from heaven. True, not many noble are called (I Corinthians 1:26). It is equally true that not many noble are evangelized. Few of God’s servants have had the boldness, through the Spirit, to preach Christ to the nobility of the earth.

With all of Paul’s culture and refinement, education and training, he never seemed to recognize nobility apart from the earthly dignity of the office which always elicited an appropriate salutation. The royal robes of regal elegance were as paupers’ apparel compared with the robe of righteousness. He thought more of a man’s destination than of his distinction. He was an ambassador of the King of Kings. Gaining an hearing was more difficult than giving the message, but an entre through legal proceedings, instituted by others, on more than one occasion brought him before governmental officials where he capitalized on the slightest opportunity to bear a witness for Jesus the Christ.

While Paul was especially the apostle to the Gentiles, the divine commission included a ministry among his own people according to the flesh; and, hardly had he received his sight, until **“straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God”** (Acts 9:20).

But the Jews of Paul’s day were no more receptive to the message of God than were their forbears in the day of Ezekiel when they were said to be impudent, stiff-hearted and rebellious scorpions. The Apostle confessed, **“but even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart”** (II Corinthians 3:15).

This faithful servant made an earnest, honest effort to break through their defenses, but to little avail. Cosmopolitan assemblies to hear the gospel were not unusual,

**“but when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.**

**“Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, ‘it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles’”** (Acts 13:45, 46).

*With respect to other saints, Paul was a new brother.*

Paul reached Damascus, the point of his planned destination; but, instead of entering the city as the ringleader of a hostile band of special deputies, he came with all the docility of a little child, being led by the hand. It was a triumphal entry, nevertheless, as time was to prove so irrefutably.

There he remained three days in blindness and without nourishment, having found refuge in the home of a certain man by the name of Judas on Straight Street.

His new experience was so cataclysmic, so transforming, that even three days were hardly sufficient to properly appraise this sudden turn of events. There was a blackout of his ambition, a blasting of his hopes and a bewildering mental state as to the next step and the direction in which it would lead him. What would the members of the Sanhedrin think after his public boast of a successful roundup of Christian men, women and children in Damascus?

Paul was just beginning to perceive that, in a changing world, man is the greatest migrant and that definite plans are smashed by hands we never see, bringing the most unusual changes upon us suddenly and when we least expect. Could he go back and rejoin his former colleagues? Never!

He was a new character. With whom would he now cast his lot? would the Christians welcome into their midst a person who had been so hostile? Even if they did, could one whose training had been so foreign to this new faith feel at ease in such a fellowship?

Such considerations may have filled his mind those days, and perhaps were occupying his thinking when two sturdy hands fell upon his shoulders. It is generally conceded that one who is abruptly cast into blindness is very sensitive to approaches. How dramatically true this must have been of Paul!

He was a definitely displaced and unestablished individual; and in this handicap of blindness, which group would be the first to take advantage of him? Humanly speaking, he had ample cause for fear. Now, he was in someone's grip. He was pathetically defenseless—an object of pity indeed—but not for long.

In the kindest manner, surprising as it was sudden, he heard the salutation, “**Brother Saul.**”

This was the first time in his career he had ever been so greeted. A brother!

What manner of people were Christians who could so quickly forgive an erstwhile persecutor and accept him so affectionately? Any one may be a perpetrator of evil, but one must be born again to be a brother. Ananias claimed him as a brother because God had called him to be a son, and, together, they were members of the family of the redeemed.

*With regard to himself, Paul was a new creation.*

One cannot refrain from wondering whether this student of Gamaliel had ever heard, up to this time, the story of Nicodemus, a former ruler of the Jews. Yet one may know about the power of the gospel without experiencing its force, and about transforming grace without being changed.

**“The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”**

Paul had contacted a power and was transformed. Of this, he never, through all his subsequent years, had reason to doubt. Accounting himself the chief of sinners, he knew that if he could be saved, then salvation was possible for all. He knew it brought a newness of life. This conviction moved him to assert, **“Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.”**

“How silently, how silently  
God’s wondrous gift is given,  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven.

No ear may hear his coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him still,  
The dear Christ enters in.”

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus brought a complete reversal in his life. The things he once loved became detestable, and the things which once he lacked became predominant. He quickly became accustomed to Christian procedure, received his knowledge from the Lord and hastened to enlighten others.

Using the various means of grace, he grew strong in the Lord and encouraged others to develop **“till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:13).

The newness of his Christian experience stood in marked contrast to his past. His present joy in service was exceeded only by his contemplation of the future, when he would stand face to face with the One Who rescued him from so great a death, there to be like Him and with Him eternally.

## **A NEW COURSE**

*The new course led Paul to preach Christ explicitly.*

It was the Lord who dispatched Ananias to Straight Street in Damascus where the new convert was staying.

After finding the little man with the blinded eyes and saluting him as a brother, Ananias explained that the Lord, even Jesus, had sent him that his sight might be restored and that he might be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Immediately,

- He received his sight, which *suggests illumination*;
- He arose, which *symbolizes resurrection*;
- He was baptized, which *portrays identification*;

- He took meat, which *denotes sustentation*;
- He was strengthened, which *indicated edification*;
- He preached Christ, which was *proclamation*.

These factors illustrate the successive steps in the divine economy for the development of believers. From the time his eyes were opened, he saw the closed eyes or the multitudes and he knew that the preaching of Christ, Who is the light of the world, could bring people out of sin's darkness.

It is interesting to follow his procedure from the practical point of view.

He did not build an edifice or rent a hall. He went straightway to the Jewish synagogues. Since he had so completely renounced Judaism, does it not seem strange that he would venture into Jewish places of worship? It was not that he had received any official invitation. That would have been utterly contrary to their rules and regulations. Insofar as Judaism was concerned, Saul of Tarsus had died. In reality, that is precisely what had happened.

A new man had come forth, but Judaism never accepted him. Yet he went boldly into their synagogues. He knew that people needed, more than anything else in the world, the experience which had so revolutionized his own life. It was worth the attempt. His Lord would be pleased. He might meet with some embarrassment, but, then, he was willing to become a fool for Jesus' sake, and into the synagogues he went.

The substance of his message was Christ. This was not a matter to be treated reverently there. Christ was from the little town of Nazareth and it was colloquially popular to say in that day, **"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"** Besides, the crucifixion was over and the whole matter of Christ and His teachings was thought of as a dead issue. The **"perverter"** of their nation had been dealt with, and that with their approval, for they had said, **"His blood be upon us and upon our children."**

Could they tolerate a new intrusion? Could they believe any message from one who so lately had turned **"from their faith?"** The Holy Spirit did not see fit to give us all the details. We only know that Paul preached in the synagogues and that Christ was the substance of his preaching. If it is amazing to us that a new convert, under such strange conditions, would go boldly into the midst of Jews with the Christian message, then it is a matter of further wonderment when we note the theme of this novice preacher's first sermon.

It was this, **"Christ, the Son of God"** (Acts 9:20).

If there is one statement relative to Christ that is most difficult for Jewish minds to grasp, it is the fact that He is the Son of God.

Was it that Paul believed in doing things the hard way? Was it because he desired to convince them on this difficult matter? Or, was it because this glorious truth had so filled his own soul with joy that he felt constrained to labour this particular point before them? Of course, we do not know of a certainty apart from our belief that he was Spirit-led.

This was his theme, and a great theme it was.

We can well imagine him citing John 3:16 and explaining how and why God gave His Son to become our Passover and our Mercy Seat, how the Son was the Meat-offering and how Calvary was the place of the Sin-offering. How stinging the indictment must have been when this fearless preacher concluded, **“Had the princes of this world known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.”**

*The new course taught Paul to prove Christ implicitly.*

**“But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ”** (Acts 9:22).

Paul may not have excelled in the general field of polemics; he may not have at all enjoyed argumentation; but if any one raised a question against his Lord, he was the apologist of the hour. The Jews at Damascus were no match for him. Their arguments were quickly refuted. In fact, according to the original, they were thrown into utter confusion. Their defensive structures collapsed utterly under the barrage of convincing truth from a man who spoke not by theory but from experience. He proved Christ.

If He were not the very Christ, then who intercepted that irate, determined, blood-thirsty creature that was forging his way toward innocent and unsuspecting worshippers? Who else could have wrought so mightily in a man’s life as to send him through a spiritual metamorphosis? Who else could catch him away to the third heaven to receive a glimpse of glory? In fact, who else could so completely satisfy every longing of his life, giving him **“a hope that maketh not ashamed?”**

It was because Paul had proved Him that he could say **“Christ is all.”**

In the Old Testament,

- He was the hope of the patriarch’s longing,
- He was the blessing of the priest’s serving,
- He was the message of the prophet’s dreaming,
- He was the theme of the Psalmist’s singing,
- He was the subject of the poet’s writing.

In the whole fiber and framework of prophecy, He was then as He is now: **“Christ is all”** (Colossians 3:11).

It was in a dark hour of apostasy, with a nation sadly disintegrating, its moral standards deteriorating, and spiritual precepts practically discarded, that God appealed to the people, saying **“Prove Me now”** (Malachi 3:10).

Conditions cannot affect His power if His people will only prove Him. He will not forsake however dark the hour and we should not forget Him however bright may seem the day.

He proves the constancy of His care; we are to prove the sincerity of our love.

Paul called upon the Christians at Rome to **“prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”** (Romans 12:2).

Addressing the Corinthians, he exhorted them, saying, **“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves”** (II Corinthians 13:5).

In a summation of the matter, from a practical point of view, he said **“Prove all things”** (I Thessalonians 5:21).

However, no one can appraise values properly who has not first proved Christ. He is the true standard of measurement, for with Him there is **“no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”** Christ cannot approve in the twentieth century what he disapproved in the first. He cannot countenance in one age what He had discountenanced in another.

If a different moral gauge is applied today, and it would seem that such is the case, then Satan has deceptively struck a telling blow. If the norm of Christian conduct is below the demand of the thrice-holy God, then is the life, with all its good intentions, most displeasing to the Lord. Never was there a time when it was more imperative for God’s people to prove Christ, to learn His will, to know His way, to do His work.

*The new course prompted Paul to praise Christ with simplicity.*

It is just as natural for a Christian to learn that praise is comely as it is for a babe to recognize its parents. Praise is the expulsiveness of gratitude, the fragrance of appreciation.

**“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ”** (Ephesians 1:3).

This is a typical expression of praise. It was not a wild demonstrative outburst, but a heart-prompted transmission of gratefulness, carefully assayed and most appropriate. Praise is a coronary concert beamed heavenward—**“making melody in your heart to the Lord”** (Ephesians 5:19).

- Praise is to be perennial, **“giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Ephesians 5:20).
- Praise is a divinely devised means and a Spirit approved way of saying **“thanks”** to the Lord for all His benefits so profusely bestowed.

It has a soul-enriching effect and a contagious result.

A praising soul solicits company, making a symphonized presentation of heart rejoicing to Him Who is worthy.

**“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together”** (Psalm 34:3).

Paul was ever grateful to God for His bountiful goodness and his expressions of appreciation were simple and sincere.

## **A NEW CONCERN**

*The new concern gave Paul the proper perspective.*

With his new birth, there naturally came a shift of emphasis in his life. He termed it a crucifixion of self and chose to forget the things that were behind. The old order had changed; yielding place to the new, and God had fulfilled Himself in many ways. Unlike Ephraim whom God called a **“silly dove”** (Hosea 7:11) because he was destitute of a sense of direction, Paul quickly perceived that in all things Christ should have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18). This was primary.

This was vastly more important than soulwinning, as vital as that is. It was wider in meaning and significance; it was all-embracing. He belonged to Christ now and what he did no longer pertained to himself, only, but definitely affected the One Who loved Him and gave Himself for him. How well he recognized this fact is seen in his Roman epistle, for he taught that **“whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord’s”** (14:8).

*Christ was preeminent in Paul’s love.*

His heart’s affection was bound about his Saviour and Lord with the threefold cord of devotion, desire and delight.

Love is variously affected. It can be gained, lost, stimulated, suppressed, strengthened, weakened, deepened, deserted, but Paul’s love for Christ was both constant and consistent.

- The Father makes love reciprocal—**“We love Him because He first loved us”** (I John 4:19).
- The Son makes love constraining—**“The love of Christ constraineth us”** (II Corinthians 5:14).
- The Spirit makes love possessive — **“The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit”** (Romans 5:5).
- Christians make love assuring—**“We know we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren”** (I John 3:14).
- Service makes love challenging—**“Charity [Love] suffereth long and is kind”** (I Corinthians 13:4).
- Prayer makes love tender—**“Pray for them which despitefully use you”** (Matthew 5:44).
- The Scriptures make love intelligent—**“Herein is our love made perfect”** (I John 4:17).
- Praise makes love expressive—**“I found Him Whom my soul loveth”** (Song of Solomon 3:4).

It was Paul’s great love for Christ which sent him through unspeakable trials with never a complaint and no thought of the cost.

*Christ was preeminent in Paul’s learning.*

Inconsistencies in the lives of believers brought from him the statement, **“Ye have not so learned Christ”** (Ephesians 4:20). On the contrary, learning Christ is to acquaint oneself with the highest principles of proper behavior. Learning Christ is to become familiar with His attributes. **“Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls”** (Matthew 11:29). His yoke is easy but not elastic. To learn Christ is to become cognizant of His desires which serve as a practical guide for those who would walk in all things well pleasing before the Lord. This was the consuming passion in Paul’s life; for, with deep heart emotion, he cried, **“That I might know Him and the power of His resurrection”** (Philippians 3:10).

*Christ was preeminent in Paul's life.*

If any one utterance that came from the lips of the Apostle could be construed as a motto, surely it would be, **“For to me to live is Christ; to die is gain”** (Philippians 1:21).

When one can veraciously make a statement such as this, he has, in truth, died unto self, and the life of another becomes apparent. It was not an imitation of Christ in this instance, but an expression of Christ through a thorough personal dedication. It was not of the servant's doing but of the Lord's design. He will reflect His own life of purity through any one who will meet the conditions. Then others see Him and are attracted to Him, and such an one is a channel of untold blessing to an unrevealed number. A most profitable kind of self-examination may be imposed, when one sincerely wants God to have His wonderful way. by asking, “Can others see Jesus in me? Do others take knowledge that I have been with Him?” Paul lived Christ and Christ graciously lived through him. This is a challenge to all who claim to be partakers of the divine nature.

*The new concern filled Paul with an urge to evangelize.*

It has been said that we only need to be concerned about three men as we journey through life—the Man at God's right hand, the man within and the man out yonder. When the man within comes to grips, as did Saul of Tarsus, with the glorified Man at God's right hand, then the man out in sin's enthralling darkness pulls heavily upon his heartstrings of compassion. Consider something of Paul's varied experiences and his emotional reactions.

He was **“in labors abundantly, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often and in diversified perils, in weariness and painfulness, in hunger, and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness”** (II Corinthians 11:23-27).

In all of these trying ordeals, there was no complaint and no tears. Yet when he introduced the subject of men dying without Christ, he was greatly moved: **“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction”** (Philippians 3:17, 18).

No tears in trial, but grave concern for the lost made Paul the Jeremiah of New Testament fame.

Sadly enough, there has come a reversal among Christians, they shed tears in trial but are largely unperturbed by the sorrowful end awaiting those who know not God.

Paul's prayer for Israel was coupled with desire (Romans 10:1).

The desire was their soul's salvation. His prayer was fervent and his desire strong; hence, he had the joy of winning many to Christ. He called them his **“crown of rejoicing”** (I Thessalonians 2:19).

It was always a pressing concern. He felt himself a debtor to the whole world. It was a restlessness from which he never sought surcease.

As long as there were men to be won, and as long as he was in his earthly tabernacle, he pressed on and on, day by day, in quest of souls for the Saviour, so tireless and true was he in his high calling. He did not punch a clock each morning, but he knew that one day he would stand at the judgment seat of Christ to give account of his deeds done in the flesh, his use of opportunities and his discharge of duty.

Yes, the scales fell. He saw clearly the course for his life, and the new concern so completely obliterated every other ambition and aspiration that he ran well the race that was set before him. Of the number of God's servants, there have been many; but of the kind that never vacillates, deviates or fluctuates in a whole course, but majors in self-effacement and divine magnification unceasingly, there was but one.

From the moment his eyes were opened to behold a new life and a heavenly home, to know the constraining love of Christ and the crying need of men, that tireless servant of God's choosing became a champion of truth without equal, an imitator of Christ without rival, and a challenge to our faith without comparison.

Surely, if earnest, longing Christians were to pray with soul sincerity, "**Open thou my eyes that I might see,**" the scales would fall. The vision resultant would be both majestic and grand, giving proper proportion and accurate perspective concerning spiritual values. Toward such, the Lord would not be compelled to direct the indictment, "**Eyes have they, but they see not.**"

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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