

Mission Impossible

By Tom Stephens

“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry My Name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name sake. I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name” (Acts 9:15-16).

“Not Him, Lord: that’s impossible. Saul would never become a Christian!”

Paul never exaggerated his past performances.

Scripture first reveals Saul as the archenemy of the young Christian church. He stood watching while Stephen was stoned to death, greatly approving of it (8:1). From house to house, Saul arrested and imprisoned Christian men and women (8:3). He was still crying out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples (9:1).

Paul also testified against himself. *“Many times I went from one synagogue to another to have the Christian punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme against God”* (26:11). *“I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison”* (2:24). *“I too, was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth”* (26:9). *“I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it”* (Galatians 1:13).

But that was yesterday.

Today Saul has gone to see the high priest to request letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus asking their cooperation in the arrest of every follower of this Jesus. He desires to bring every one of them back to Jerusalem in chains! Saul was so zealous in his own Jewish beliefs that he conducted his personal persecution campaign against all who believed in the Way of salvation.

As the story unfolds in Acts 9, Saul, and those with him were nearing Damascus about noon when Saul found himself awash in a brilliant heavenly *light*.

Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, *“Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”*

“Who are You, Lord?”

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

“Lord, what do you want of me?”

As Saul lay there in the dust, he must have been reeling from this revelation.

“Incredible! The One true God has spoken to me!”

He did not yet realize the full impact of Jesus’ meeting with him. Yet a million other things went through his mind...all at the same time. The fear of his situation and the amazement of what was really happening was beginning to sink in.

“You really are the Lord!”

“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

At this moment Saul received a brief vision of his future as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16-18), while, at the same time, the men with Saul stood speechless, for they did hear the voice, but saw nothing.

“Friends, I cannot see. The light of the Lord has blinded me. Therefore, you must show me the way.”

Finally, in Damascus, Saul waited for three days, fasting. No food and no water, period. Saul was shaken. Nothing, except God Himself, could have succeeded in turning around Saul of Tarsus! Certainly no man! Saul had wanted to see the Church of Jesus Christ perish, this despicable, cursed body of pagans!

But it was real. God had met with him...fully and completely by His Spirit...and changed him from inside out. As David cried out to God to *“create within me a new heart, a heart of flesh”*, Saul witnessed the most incredible answer to that cry.

He wept, maybe not the same way Peter wept after denying the Lamb of God. But he wept. And with the tears flowing also came the bitterness and hatred that only a few days earlier had been the source of his life. Saul saw at last the markings of the enemy. He then determined in his heart to serve the God Who gave His Son on Calvary. This fasting period for Saul brought him to the very feet of Jesus, in deep humility.

Ananias.”

“Yes, Lord. I am here.”

“Go over to Strait Street, to the house of Judas. Ask for Saul of Tarsus. He is praying to Me at this time. I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias laying hands on him that he might receive his sight.”

“But Lord, I have heard the horrible things this man has done to believers in Jerusalem! And we hear that he is authorized by the leading Priests to arrest all the believers in Damascus. Lord, he laughed while watching Stephen, filled with the Holy Ghost, be slain.” (Italics statement added).

“Go! This man is to be used as an instrument in My hands to carry My Name before the Gentiles and their kings, and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name.”

Recklessness will cause us to miss it. *“I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name.”*

Funny how so many Christian folks figure sufferings to be from the devil to hurt, torment, and even to destroy. It makes me think of James, when he said, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations: knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”* And in Luke 10:19, when Jesus said, *“Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing by any means shall hurt you.”*

Persecutions and trials are growing pains for the Christian. Paul saw his share of them; but he stood tall to the very end shouting Christ’s victories over the enemy and his (Paul’s) sharing these same victories with Jesus, claiming his eternal crowns. Let Paul himself tell you:

²³Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. ²⁴Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. ²⁵Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; ²⁷In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. ²⁸Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I

burn not?³⁰If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.³¹The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. ³²In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: ³³And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands (2 Corinthians 11:23-33).

Saul, now Paul, reveals just what the Lord meant when He said, *“I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.”*

To confirm to you that this is true, read in Acts 26, Paul’s account of the revelation he received at the moment he fell from his horse on that day.

“Now arise and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes. And turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Then Apostle Paul is prepared to meet his Saviour:

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Apostle Paul’s whole mind-set and belief system were turned upside down when he realized that Christ was not dead, but alive! Christ was not merely a Nazarene rabble-rouser; he was the Messiah, the Son of God!