

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

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Question: Is it possible that Paul was weakly and blind, and still be a most powerful man of God?

"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." 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 Christians 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" (22:4). "I too was convinced 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).

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 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. 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 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."

Carelessness 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."

Read any of Paul's epistles against the backdrop of his previous life and the change in more than just his name becomes readily apparent. In Galatians 1:1, he described himself as an apostle. He accepted the role Jesus had called him to when He appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He recognized this as a Divine calling from God alone. God's calling was neither "from", or "by" man.

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:

"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly bum? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor or under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through 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 this is true, *read in Acts 26*, Paul's account of the revelation he received at the moment he fell from his horse.

"Now get up 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."

"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."

Saul'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, God's Son!

*Please do not fall into the trap in believing Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was his weaknesses because of his *inability to see*. The "thorn" was the listing above stated by Paul himself. (2 Cor 11: 23-33).

Further proofs:

- In Verses 11-12, Jesus said to Ananias, *Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.*
- In Acts 9: 15,16, Jesus made the following statement to Ananias (when he complained to Jesus concerning the reputation of Saul): *Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.* (2 Cor 11:23-33)
- And In verses 17-18, *And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightiest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized (in water).*

Paul, in Galatians 1 testifies many powerful characteristics he obtained through the ministry to himself by the Holy Ghost shortly following his salvation. . .to include the fact that, though he was taught the Old Testament scriptures by the highest scholar, Gamaliel, he stated specifically that he was not taught any New Testament scripture by any man; and, in fact, avoided returning to Jerusalem where the Apostles would be. Instead, the Lord sent him out into the desert of Arabia, then to Damascus for three years. Continuing, he stated that he then (after 3 years) returned to Jerusalem and spent 15 days with Peter, but saw no other Apostles save James, the brother of Jesus. He said, "about the things I am telling you, I lie not."

Paul was amazing. Why? Because those three years in the desert with the Holy Spirit produced much of the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ (see Galatians 1:11-13).

Watch for my next question/answer paper revealing why Romans 7 was "Saul", and Romans 8, "Paul". In the meantime, read the two chapters carefully...and maybe figure it out for yourself!

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