

THE LIFE OF SAINT PAUL

by

Professor James Stalker, D. D.

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CHAPTER 1

HIS PLACE IN HISTORY

Paragraphs 1-12.

- 1,2. The Man Needed by the Time.
- 3, 4. A Type of Christian Character.
- 5-8. The Thinker of Christianity.
- 9-12. The Missionary of the Gentiles.

1. The Man for the Time - There are some men whose lives it is impossible to study without receiving the impression that they were expressly sent into the world to do a work required by the juncture of history on which they fell.

The story of the Reformation, for example, cannot be read by a devout mind without wonder at the providence by which such great men as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Knox were simultaneously raised up in different parts of Europe to break the yoke of the papacy and republish the Gospel of grace. When the Evangelical Revival, after blessing England, was about to break into Scotland and end the dreary reign of Moderatism, there was raised up in Thomas Chalmers a mind of such capacity as completely to absorb the new movement into itself, and of such sympathy and influence as to diffuse it to every corner of his native land.

2. This impression is produced by no life more than by that of the Apostle Paul. He was given to Christianity when it was in its most rudimentary beginnings. It was not, indeed, feeble, nor can any mortal man be spoken of as indispensable to it; for it contained within itself the vigor of a divine and immortal existence, which could not but have unfolded itself in the course of time. But, if we recognize that GOD makes use of means which commend themselves even to our eyes as suited to the ends He has in view, then we must say that the Christian movement at the moment when Paul appeared upon the stage was in the utmost need of a man of extraordinary endowments, who, becoming possessed with its genius, should incorporate it with the general history of the world; and in Paul it found the man it needed.

3. A Type of Christian Character - *Christianity obtained in Paul an incomparable type of Christian character.* It already, indeed, possessed the perfect model of human character in the person of its Founder. But He was not as other men, because from the beginning He had no

sinful imperfection to struggle with; and Christianity still required to show what it could make of imperfect human nature. Paul supplied the opportunity of exhibiting this. He was naturally of immense mental stature and force. He would have been a remarkable man even if he had never become a Christian. The other apostles would have lived and died in the obscurity of Galilee if they had not been lifted into prominence by the Christian movement; but the name of Saul of Tarsus would have been remembered still in some character or other even if Christianity had never existed. Christianity got the opportunity in him of showing to the world the whole force it contained. Paul was aware of this himself, though he expressed it with perfect modesty, when he said, "**Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting** "

4. His conversion proved the power of Christianity to overcome the strongest prejudices and to stamp its own type on a large nature by a revolution both instantaneous and permanent. Paul's was a personality so strong and original that no other man could have been less expected to sink himself in another; but, from the moment when he came into contact with CHRIST, he was so overmastered with His influence that he never afterward had any other desire than to be the mere echo and reflection of Him to the world.

But, if Christianity showed its strength in making so complete a conquest of Paul, it showed its worth no less in the kind of man it made of him when he had given himself up to its influence. It satisfied the needs of a peculiarly hungry nature, and never to the close of his life did he betray the slightest sense that this satisfaction was abating. His constitution was originally compounded of fine materials, but the spirit of CHRIST, passing into these, raised them to a pitch of excellence altogether unique.

Nor was it ever doubtful either to himself or to others that it was the influence of CHRIST which made him what he was. The truest motto for his life would be his own saying, "**I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.**" Indeed, so perfectly was CHRIST formed in him that we can now study CHRIST's character in his, and beginners may perhaps learn even more of CHRIST from studying Paul's life than from studying CHRIST's own. In CHRIST Himself there was a blending and softening of all the excellences Which makes His greatness elude the glance of the beginner, just as the very perfection of Raphael's painting makes it disappointing to an untrained eye; whereas in Paul a few of the greatest elements of Christian character were exhibited with a decisiveness which no one can mistake, just as the most prominent characteristics of the painting of Rubens can be appreciated by every spectator.

5. A Great Thinker - *Christianity obtained in Paul, secondly, a great thinker.* This it specially needed at the moment. CHRIST had departed from the world, and those whom He had left to represent Him were unlettered fishermen and, for the most part, men of no intellectual mark. In one sense this fact reflects a peculiar glory on Christianity, for it shows that it did not owe its place as one of the great influences of the world to the abilities of its human representatives: not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of GOD, was Christianity established in the earth. Yet, as we look back now, we can clearly see how essential it was that an apostle of a different stamp and training should arise.

6. CHRIST had manifested forth the glory of the Father once for all and completed his atoning work. But this was not enough. It was necessary that the meaning of his appearance should be explained to the world. Who was he who had been here? what precisely was it he had done? To

these questions the original apostles could give brief popular answers; but none of them had the intellectual reach or the educational training necessary to put the answers into a form to satisfy the intellect of the world.

Happily it is not essential to salvation to be able to answer such questions with scientific accuracy. There are tens of thousands who know and believe that JESUS was the Son of GOD and died to take away sin and, trusting to Him as their Saviour, are purified by faith, but who could not explain these statements at any length without falling into mistakes in almost every sentence. Yet, if Christianity was to make an intellectual as well as a moral conquest of the world, it was necessary for the Church to have accurately explained to her the full glory of her Lord and the meaning of his saving work.

Of course JESUS had himself had in his mind a comprehension both of what he was and of what he was doing which was luminous as the sun. But it was one of the most pathetic aspects of his earthly ministry that he could not tell all His mind to His followers. They were not able to bear it; they were too rude and limited to take it in. He had to carry His deepest thoughts out of the world with Him unuttered, trusting with a sublime faith that the HOLY GHOST would lead His Church to grasp them in the course of its subsequent development. Even what He did utter was very imperfectly understood.

There was one mind, it is true, in the original apostolic circle of the finest quality and capable of soaring into the rarest altitudes of speculation. The words of CHRIST sank into the mind of John and, after lying there for half a century, grew up into the wonderful forms we inherit in his Gospel and Epistles. But even the mind of John was not equal to the exigency of the Church; it was too fine, mystical, unusual. His thoughts to this day remain the property only of the few finest minds. There was needed a thinker of broader and more massive make to sketch the first outlines of Christian doctrine; and he was found in Paul.

7. Paul was a born thinker. His mind was of majestic breadth and force. It was restlessly busy, never able to leave any object with which it had to deal until it had pursued it back to its remotest causes and forward into all its consequences. It was not enough for him to know that CHRIST was the Son of GOD: he had to unfold this statement into its elements and understand precisely what it meant. It was not enough for him to believe that CHRIST died for sin: he had to go farther and inquire why it was necessary that He should do so and how His death took sin away.

But not only had he from nature this speculative gift: his talent was trained by education. The other apostles were unlettered men; but he enjoyed the fullest scholastic advantages of the period. In the rabbinical school he learned how to arrange and state and defend his ideas. We have the issue of all this in his Epistles, which contain the best explanation of Christianity possessed by the world. The right way to look at them is to regard them as the continuation of CHRIST's own teaching. They contain the thoughts which CHRIST carried away from the earth with him unuttered. Of course JESUS would have uttered them differently and far better. Paul's thoughts have everywhere the coloring of his own mental peculiarities. But the substance of them is what CHRIST's must have been if He had Himself given them expression.

8. There was one great subject especially which CHRIST had to leave unexplained - His own death. He could not explain it before it had taken place. This became the leading topic of Paul's thinking - to show why it was needed and what were its blessed results. But, indeed, there was no aspect of the appearance of CHRIST into which his restlessly inquiring mind did not penetrate. His thirteen Epistles, when arranged in chronological order, show that his mind was constantly getting deeper and deeper into the subject. The progress of his thinking was

determined partly by the natural progress of his own advance in the knowledge of CHRIST, for he always wrote straight out of his own experience; and partly by the various forms of error which he had at successive periods to encounter, and which became a providential means of stimulating and developing his apprehension of the truth, just as ever since in the Christian Church the rise of error has been the means of calling forth the clearest statements of doctrine. The ruling impulse, however, of his thinking, as of his life, was ever CHRIST, and it was his lifelong devotion to this exhaustless theme that made him the Thinker of Christianity.

9. The Missionary of the Gentiles - *Christianity obtained in Paul, thirdly, the missionary of the Gentiles.* It is rare to find the highest speculative power united with great practical activity; but these were united in him. He was not only the Church's greatest thinker, but the very foremost worker she has ever possessed. We have been considering the speculative task which was awaiting him when he joined the Christian community; but there was a no less stupendous practical task awaiting him too. This was the evangelization of the Gentile world.

10. One of the great objects of the appearance of CHRIST was to break down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile and make the blessings of salvation the property of all men, without distinction of race or language. But He was not Himself permitted to carry this change into practical realization. It was one of the strange limitations of His earthly life that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It can easily be imagined how congenial a task it would have been to His intensely human heart to carry the Gospel beyond the limits of Palestine and make it known to nation after nation; and - if it be not too bold to say so - this would certainly have been his chosen career, had he been spared. But he was cut off in the midst of his days and had to leave this task to his followers.

11. Before the appearance of Paul on the scene, the execution of this task had been begun. Jewish prejudice had been partially broken down, the universal character of Christianity had been in some measure realized, and Peter had admitted the first Gentiles into the Church by baptism. But none of the original apostles was equal to the emergency. None of them was large-minded enough to grasp the idea of the perfect equality of Jew and Gentile and apply it without flinching in all its practical consequences; and none of them had the combination of gifts necessary to attempt the conversion of the Gentile world on a large scale.

They were Galilean fishermen, fit enough to teach and preach within the bounds of their native Palestine. But beyond Palestine lay the great world of Greece and Rome - the world of vast populations, of power and culture, of pleasure and business. It needed a man of unlimited versatility, of education, of immense human sympathy and breadth, to go out there with the Gospel message - a man who could not only be a Jew to the Jews, but a Greek to the Greeks, a Roman to the Romans, a barbarian to the barbarians - a man who could encounter not only rabbis in their synagogues, but proud magistrates in their courts and philosophers in the haunts of learning - a man who could face travel by land and by sea, who could exhibit presence of mind in every variety of circumstances, and would be cowed by no difficulties.

No man of this size belonged to the original apostolic circle; but Christianity needed such an one, and he was found in Paul.

12. Originally attached more strictly than any of the other apostles to the peculiarities and prejudices of Jewish exclusiveness, he cut his way out of the jungle of these prepossessions, accepted the equality of all men in CHRIST, and applied this principle relentlessly in all its issues. He gave his heart to the Gentile mission, and the history of his life is the history of how

true he was to his vocation. There was never such singleness of eye or wholeness of heart. There was never such superhuman and untiring energy. There was never such an accumulation of difficulties victoriously met and of sufferings cheerfully borne for any cause. In him JESUS CHRIST went forth to evangelize the world, making use of his hands and feet, his tongue and brain and heart, for doing the work which in His own bodily presence He had not been permitted by the limits of His mission to accomplish.

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