

# **PAUL: A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST**

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## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **“ALWAYS LED IN TRIUMPH”**

(II Corinthians 2:14-16)

“Christ! I am Christ’s! and let that name suffice you;  
Ay, and for me He greatly hath sufficed;  
So, with no winning words I would entice you;  
Paul has no honor and no friend but Christ.”  
- Myers

WHILST Saul was tarrying in Tarsus, where he remained some four or five years, he appears to have concentrated his energies in the direction suggested by two references in Acts 15. In the 23d verse, the Apostles and elder brethren address their circular letter expressly to the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. And in the 41st verse we learn that Paul, with Silas as his fellow-traveller, went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Evidently there were infant churches scattered throughout Saul’s native province; and the conclusion is almost irresistible that they were born into existence beneath the fervid appeals and devoted labors of the new disciple.

Perhaps at this time Saul’s kinsmen, Andronicus and Junia, Jason, Sosipater, and others, were brought to Christ; but his father, deeply mortified at the blasting of his hopes by the conversion of his son from the old faith, cast him off (Romans 16:7; Philippians 3:8).

His work, however, was chiefly concerned with the synagogues, which, since the Dispersion, had been established in most of the large cities of the empire. As with the earliest churches in Judaea, the main constituents of these would be converted Jews and proselytes. It is doubtful if the Apostle would have felt himself justified in receiving the Gentiles, as such, into the Church. He was feeling his way in that direction, and was being prepared for the full acceptance of the commission with which he had been entrusted on the way to Damascus, and when worshipping in the Temple.

It has been supposed that some of his deep experiences of privation and peril must have taken place in the course of his efforts to spread the Gospel during these years. We all remember that marvellous enumeration labors more abundant, stripes above measure, deaths oft, five times the forty stripes save one; thrice beaten with rods, thrice shipwrecked, a night and day in the deep; in perils, labor, travail, watchings, hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness (II Corinthians 11). There is positively no room in his life, as narrated by the chronicler of the Acts of the Apostles, for many of these, especially when we call to mind that the Second Epistle to Corinth was written before his expulsion from Ephesus, and therefore before the long series of trials with which the Book of the Acts closes.

It is, therefore, more than probable that we are to conclude that from the very hour that he began to follow the Saviour he became identified with His sorrowful progress through the world. Hated, resisted, despised, and crucified, but pursuing his triumphant progress to his throne.

This conception was closely associated in the Apostle's mind with his unprecedented experiences, as will appear to any thoughtful student of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Mark especially the second chapter and fourteenth verse: **"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish."**

THE METAPHOR was gathered from the scene of a Roman Triumph, one of the most notable events in the old world, when some great general, a Caesar or Marius, returning from distant scenes of triumph, ascended the Capitoline Hill, amid the plaudits of the assembled citizens and the fragrance of sweet odors. Before his chariot were paraded captive kings and princes; after it came long lines of prisoners laden with the spoils of war. About this time Claudius was celebrating his victories in Britain, and among his captive princes marched the brave Caractacus.

To the vivid imagination of the Apostle always more prone to use metaphors borrowed from the life of men in camps and cities, than from scenes of natural beauty it seemed as though the pageantry of the scene, which so often stirred Rome to its heart, was a meet emblem of the progress of Christ through the world: Hades and death bound to his chariot wheels, his arms filled with spoils, his trains composed of the thousands whom He had conquered, and amongst whom Paul was proud to count himself.

Is not this an apt picture of every age? Each great crisis in the past has helped to advance the glorious reign of Christ.

- Was the fall of Babylon a crisis? It gave man kind a universal speech the language spoken by Alexander and his soldiers the delicate, subtle Greek in which the New Testament was written.
- Was the fall of Rome a crisis? It opened the way to the rise of the northern nations, which have ever been the home of Liberty and the Gospel.
- Was the fall of Feudalism, in the French Revolution, a crisis? It made the splendid achievements of the nineteenth century possible.

And we may look without dismay on events that cast a shadow on our hearts. They, also shall serve the cause of the Gospel. In ways we cannot tell, they shall prepare for the triumph of our King. Through the throes of the present travail the new heavens and earth shall be born. The agony is not as the expiring groan of the dying gladiator, but as the sigh of the mother bringing forth her firstborn. These things, said our Lord, must needs be; and they are the beginning of travail (Matthew 24:8). And amid all Jesus rides in triumph to his destined glory and the crown of all the earth.

## **THE APOSTLE'S PERSONAL POSITION**

in his Master's procession was clearly apprehended and perpetually accentuated. He never wearied of describing himself as the slave of Jesus Christ. "**Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God.**" He had been a rebel chieftain. With fire and sword he had ravaged the flock of God. He had measured his strength with Jesus of Nazareth, but had met more than his match. The Stronger One had come upon him, taken away his armor, and bound him with fetters from which he could not get free. He would not, if he could; nor could he, if he would. From that hour in which he had been smitten to the ground on the road to Damascus, he had been content to be led from city to city, from continent to continent, in the triumphal progress of his Lord, a trophy of his mighty power to bring the most stubborn under his yoke. "**Thanks be unto God,**" he cries, "**who always causeth us to triumph in Christ.**"

Is this your conception of your life? Captured! Apprehended by Jesus Christ! Set apart for Himself! Do you realize that you are bound by the most sacred fetters to your Conqueror, and are following his chariot through the earth? Life would assume a new aspect if you realized this, and that all you are in your person, and own in your property, has become Emmanuel's.

Those whom Jesus leads in triumph share his triumph. They may be a spectacle to angels or to men. Sometimes in the stocks; often accounted the offscouring of all things; yet, in the spiritual realm, they are made to triumph always. Conquered, they conquer; enslaved, they are free; last in this world, but in the front rank of heavenly society. Poor, beaten, vanquished soul, lift up thy head and rejoice; for if thou art conquered by Jesus, thou shalt be always made to triumph!

## **THE INFLUENCE OF CHRIST ON THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM**

is also clearly delineated. The metaphor is changed, and the Apostle deems himself no longer a slave, but a freed servant, a citizen, a friend bearing a bowl of incense from which redolent vapors steal into the air.

God makes manifest through him in every place the sweet savor of the knowledge of Jesus. Wherever he went, men knew Jesus better; the loveliness of the Master's character became more apparent. Men became aware of a subtle fragrance, poured upon the air, which attracted them to the Man of Nazareth. The world became purer, the tone of society healthier, the morals and manners of men more refined.

What an ideal this is for us all, so to live that though we are unable to speak much or occupy a commanding position, yet from our lives a holy savor may be spread abroad, which will not be ours, but Christ's! Let us live so near Him, that we may absorb his fragrance; and then go forth to exhale it again in pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, and in the power of God. Just as a piece of clay or sponge may become so impregnated with some aromatic spice, that it will scent the drawer, cupboard, or box in which it lies, so we may become impregnated with the sweetness of Jesus, and spread it by an irresistible influence in every place where we are called to live or work.

### **YET ONCE AGAIN THE THOUGHT CHANGES**

The Apostle imagines himself to be no longer the hand that swings the incense-bowl, but the incense itself. He says, "**We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ.**" How marvellously scent awakens memory! In a moment it will waft us back through long years to some old country lane, garden, or orange grove, summoning to mind people and events associated with it in the happy past.

When, therefore, we are told that we may be to God a sweet savor of Christ, it must be meant that we may so live as to recall to the mind of God what Jesus was in his mortal career. It is as though, as God watches us from day to day, He should see Jesus in us, and be reminded (speaking after the manner of men) of that blessed life which was offered as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.

What a test for daily living! Is my life fragrant of Jesus? Do I remind the Father of the blessed Lord? Does He detect Jesus in my walk and speech? and that there are in me the sweet savor of that daily burnt offering, that delight in God's will, that holy joy in suffering for his glory, that absorption in his purposes which made the life of the Son of Man so well-pleasing to God?

At the foot of the Capitoline Hill the ancient triumph divided. Some of the captives were led off to the dark precincts of the Tullianum, where they were put to death. Others were reserved to live. The same fragrance was associated with the perishing on the one hand and the saved on the other. Thus it is in all Gospel preaching and holy living. The sun that melts wax hardens clay; the light that bleaches linen tans the hands which expose it; the cloud is light to Israel, and darkness to Egypt. Those who have life are helped to intenser life, and those who lack it are only driven to further excesses of sin. To one we are the savor of life unto life, to the other of death unto death.

It was in such a mood that Saul of Tarsus spent the years of preparation which preceded the great opportunity of his life. It was in the cultivation of such virtues that he awaited the coming of Barnabas.

**~ end of chapter 8 ~**

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