

The Power of Christ

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” Romans 1:16

It is truly wonderful to witness the transformation that takes place when someone comes to know the Lord. I for one have seen the undeniable evidence of many lives dramatically changed to the glory of God. For years, I worked at a Christian conference center and addiction recovery ministry whose motto is: “Where God speaks to hearts and transforms lives.” There has been no other place in my Christian journey where I have seen so many lives so powerfully changed. They walked through the doors of that place and then through the main Door – Christ (John 10:7) and were wonderfully saved.

When Saul of Tarsus is introduced in Acts 7, we see him consenting to the death of Stephen, the first martyr of the early Church. He must have had quite a reputation that the townspeople laid down their garments at the feet of this young upstart. Soon he is *“breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.”* His hatred of the followers of the Way, was intense.

But on his journey to Damascus to further persecute believers, he had a dynamic encounter with the risen Savior that would forever change his life. It was an encounter like none other. Some believers, like the Ethiopian treasurer come to know the Lord through the personal witness of others (Acts 8:35), others through the public preaching of the Word (Acts 10:34). Still others like Saul, come to know the Lord without personal intervention. Saul’s conversion began with just two questions: *“Who are you, Lord?”* and *“What would You have me to do?”* One deals with salvation and the other deals with service, both of which would be answered in short order. The first answer was that it was Jesus whom Saul had been persecuting, connecting the Church, the Body of Christ, with its divine Head in Heaven. The second answer would be equally amazing: that he would someday stand before kings, Gentiles, and the nation of Israel (v. 15) as a witness for the Lord in a ministry that would span the known world at the time.

What happens next is nothing short of exciting as the events of Acts 9 unfold. They would validate the conversion of this once insolent man, and avid persecutor of the Church (1 Tim. 1:13). Enter Ananias, sent by the Lord to confirm that *“Brother Saul”* (v. 17) was indeed a fellow believer. Imagine what that must have sounded like in the ears of the one who had previously made *“havoc of the church”* (Acts 8:3)! What a change had taken place in this man’s life! When Ananias was told who to look for, it would be the one who was praying – praying not as before, but genuinely communing with the living Christ.

As a further proof of genuine faith, Saul was then baptized, spent time fellowshiping with the disciples, and then witnessing of his newfound faith as he preached Christ in the synagogue. All of this underscore the genuine expressions of new life in Christ and substantiate the things that accompany salvation. We often sing, “What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought

since Jesus came into my life” and indeed this is what happened with Saul of Tarsus and will happen to anyone whose heart is opened to allow Christ to enter in.

A lot would occur in the intervening years of ministry that the Lord entrusted to this once staunch persecutor of the church. He would be sent out to regions beyond along with Barnabas (Acts 13); he would be used of the Lord to establish many local assemblies in his missionary journeys. He would receive an abundance of opportunities to preach the Word and an abundance of revelations to share with others. But with these many privileges, he would also suffer many things as the Lord told him at His conversion. With the abundance of revelations, came a thorn in the flesh to keep him in place and to accentuate the power of Christ (2 Cor. 12:7-10). He would also have “*fightings without and fears within,*” describing the external and internal pressures of ministry.

Yes, Paul suffered much for the Lord, but he was also mightily used of the Lord. They often go hand in hand. The Lord had gotten a hold of him in a powerful way, and it demonstrated the power of the gospel and through it, the power of Christ. May it be that way for each of us also.

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