

# The King's Highway

## An Advocate of Scriptural Holiness

And an Highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness—Isa.

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### CLIMAX AND ANTI-CLIMAX IN PAUL'S LIFE AND EXPERIENCE

(By Rev. W. Edmund Smith)

In the life and experience of St. Paul the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, the rational and the mystical, are so blended that one cannot tell where one of these characteristics ends and another begins. But Paul believed there was a glorious superintending providence in all things that came into his life. No minor detail was excluded when he triumphantly shouted "For we know that ALL things work together for good to them that love God."

But Paul weighed things, measured things, estimated and appraised things, not by the standard of Wall Street or the reckoning of material values. This made him the master of paradoxical, or apparently contradictory statement; in fact it made his own life a seeming paradox. What the world called loss Paul called gain; what carnal people called victory, Paul called defeat; what they called light he called darkness and vice versa.

I wish to briefly call attention to what I call the climax and the anti-climax in Paul's experience. To those who delight in the spectacular, the crucial, and decisive, there is much in Paul's life to satisfy them. His conversation was miraculous. A light above the brightness of the sun smote him; a voice from another world sounded in his ears: Paul was instantly changed from a bitter persecutor into a saint and called to do a special work for Christ he once hated.

We might have expected that he would be immediately flung into the conflict, for the need of efficient workers seemed so imperative. Instead, we see him going into seclusion in the desert of Arabia. Why did he not go up to Jerusalem at once and there at the fountain of Pentecostal revelation be instructed in the things of God. But Paul always gloried in the fact that not from men—not even the other apostles—did he receive this Gospel. God gave it to him and made him the great master theologian of the New Testament, so doctrinal, practical, and experimental.

Altho' in touch with divine resources Paul never ignored nor despised practical means to reach a desired end. When he found the city in which he dwelt—Damascus,—encompassed by enemies, who sought to destroy him, he jumped into a basket and was let down by the wall and thus escaped. Now such an escape looks tame to those who think God works only by eruptive and cataclysmic methods. Some may think that it did not look very dignified that a great apostle—called to be—should have to go through such a humiliating experience as to crouch in an old basket, and perhaps be covered over with a blanket, and when let to the ground run for his life. That looks like an ordinary jail escape of which we read today. But Paul saw the hand of God in that deliverance as much as he saw it in trembling earth and bursting doors.

There seems an anti-climax in the experience of a man who could take a dead boy and bring him back to life, and yet, after praying thrice to be himself delivered from a physical disability, to have his petition denied. There seems another anti-climax when Paul said "Trophimus have I left at Militum sick." "Paul, why didn't you heal him." Paul could answer "for the same reason that I could not get healing for myself. God had a higher purpose for me in my infirmity and for Trophimus in his illness than merely that we should get well." It may seem like the climax of divine power to see a lame man rising and leaping and praising God; the anti-climax may seem to be seen in the person lying on a bed of anguish and distress suffering for years with no hope of recovery. But when I bend low and hear that poor wasted sufferer breathing out praise and adoration to Jesus; never murmuring nor complaining beneath the chastening rod, I have to say, here is the climax of faith and love, and this is the experience Paul emphasized and this is the spirit in which he majored.

We are, naturally thrilled when those two bleeding and suffering missionaries, in that dark prison cell in Philippi, with their feet fast in the stocks and prayed so triumphantly that God shook the doors open, and their bands loose and brought them out and made them triumph over their enemies. O we say, "This is power! This is God vindicating his own! This is the climax of faith and grace! This is the indubitable evidence that these men are the chosen of God, and God smites those who would do them harm." O we say, Paul is here on the crest of his power and intimacy with God. Who can stand before him? What can't he do? We are apt to make signs and wonders the basis of faith.

But we see this same man held in prison for two years at Caesarea, carried to Rome for trial, and on the journey thither tossed by the storm for fourteen days, and then had to scramble ashore perhaps on a piece of board. He was carried to Rome and there he languished for many months. Some say there were two imprisonments, but of this we are not sure. But for a long time Paul lay in that dark dank Roman cell when it seemed the need of such a man in the field was so imperative.

It may seem that God had changed his attitude against Paul, since his miraculous deliverance at Philippi. Why did he allow him to lie there apparently inactive and less effective than he could be going up and down the land preaching a full and a free salvation? I fail however to find in any of the letters Paul wrote during his confinement, any suggestion or intimation that he felt any doubt of his being in the perfect will of God. In all those epistles he magnifies the power, and might, the love, and goodness, the superabounding grace of God, that made him more than a conqueror. Call it an anti-climax if you will for him to be held by the manacles of Rome instead of being released by spectacular power; but "blind unbelief is sure to err and

scan his works in vain: God is his own interpreter and he will make it plain."

Paul's apparent helplessness gave no offence to the church at Philippi, for which Paul had a peculiar affection, and which was abundantly reciprocated by the Christians there. But how easy it would have been for them to say "Why does Paul have to stay in that prison? Is not his God the same as He was when He sent the earthquake to this city? There must be something wrong! I tell you Paul has slipped a cog somewhere. Think how God needs men in a time like this; it is an insult to the intelligence of thinking men that this should be. This is an awful reversal of form. It is a testimony that the devil is stronger than our God, or that Paul is not on as good terms with God as he was then." O how easy to believe that Paul's life must be a succession of miraculous deliverances, the last more wonderful than the former.

But I believe in Paul in prison we see a glorious climax of grace and manifestation of divine power. "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." "I know how to be abased and how to abound; I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Such a testimony does not sound like that of a backslider; it does not intone the disillusionment and discouragement of one who feels that he is on the failing and the receding end of things. It does not intimate that Paul thought for a moment that heaven was less interested in him than when he was dominating men and situations by the power of God working through his dynamic personality. Paul's testimony is not a diminuendo but a glorious crescendo when he is led forth from the cell to lay his head upon the block.

That was coronation day for Paul. Unbelief however, saw in it defeat, abject and humiliation. But down through the ages has echoed and re-echoed Paul's swan song, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

I can imagine two of Paul's old university companions after one had heard of the sad ending of Paul at Rome, talking it over. One asks the other, "Have you heard what ever became of Saul of Tarsus who was with us in the classes of Gamaliel? and was by far the most brilliant man in his class? I always thought that he would one day take the chair that Gamaliel would vacate and become a marvelous teacher."

The other replied: "Have you not heard the tragic of Saul? Why he once was very bitter against the new sect, the Christians, and persecuted them to death. But he experienced what he called a great conversion, and then threw in his lot with them. Yes he went far and wide preaching the new heresy and causing trouble in the church. Finally he was arrested and carried to Rome for trial. After two years there he was condemned to death and I have been recently

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