

An Intersect with Grace

“By the grace of God I am what I am...” I Cor15:10

Oftentimes I find myself unable to constrain my thoughts to the well-traveled paths. From time to time over my life I have found myself wondering what Paul’s little Jewish mama thought about her boy. The scripture does not allow us to peek through this window, but my mind is, nevertheless, beguiled.

At one time, in his relative youth, Paul had been a son of distinction. He was one of Israel’s brightest young men. We are warranted in this surmise because we are told that he had a seat at the feet of Gamaliel - Israel’s greatest teacher. One has to expect that this access and relationship was not granted to just any young sheep-shearing son of Jacob. These students were the brightest and most promising in a nation disproportionately populated with the bright and promising.

A pharisee, Paul’s religious zeal was consonant with that of his people: They had mercilessly slain The Christ and subsequently had come to wage a cold and relentless war of annihilation against His followers. Paul had access to the nation’s religious leadership, and they trusted him. They had speedily endorsed and enabled his most fearsome, important, and sensitive initiatives.

One day, in pursuit of the fulfillment of his malignant intentions, he found himself before the walled city of Damascus. He had authority and he had a plan: He would enter the city. He would round up the nascent Christian church. He would send them all to Jerusalem. There they (both men and women) would recant, be imprisoned, or die. Paul was, however, unaware of all the forces that were at play. He viewed himself as the “seeker”. He did not know that he was actually the “Sought”! Paul had a plan for his day but did not know that his Creator also had a plan. The Creator’s plan involved Paul. Something would have to give!

In the process of resolving the planning discrepancies, Paul was humiliated, unhorsed, blinded and, one might suppose, made to suck up a lot of sand. He was brought to experience an intersect with grace! The struggle left Paul a changed man! He had been redirected. Old things were left in an abandoned pile beside the Damascus Road. He would certainly never again be the priest’s “fair-haired boy”. Instead, these old friends would slander him. They would never forgive him. They would seek his ruin! They would hate him, and if a way could be found, they intended to bury him!

If Paul’s meteoric rise in the nation had before been a source of pride and particular mention when his mother had occasion to lunch with the ladies, the delight and associated deference would certainly be gone forever after the product of her son’s meeting with Jesus became widely known. It would not be regained. Her boy had irrevocably exchanged celebrity for infamy. Chalk it up to grace!

The scripture is silent, and tradition is mixed related to Paul’s eventual worldly fate. We are not left to wonder, however, about how Paul felt related to the transaction effected that day before the Damascus gate:

Philippians 3:4-11

⁴... If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count

everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The start of a new year is a fitting time to assess the impact of grace upon our lives and upon our eternity. If that exercise is properly accomplished, it will leave us upon our knees and struggling with an inexpressible gratitude!

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