

The apostle wrote: *"I know of a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven..."* Who was this man?

He was so zealous for the religious traditions of his fathers that he was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age among his own people. He was running the religious race very well. Not just a member of the Adelsverien; his family went back much farther than those 500 Germans who came with Carl in 1845. He was a Jew's Jew, a Hebrew's Hebrew from the most zealous tribe. His father had him circumcised on the eighth day of his life, the proscribed day. Like his father before him, he was a religious lawyer, a Pharisee, thoroughly trained in the laws of Moses. He was also highly educated, intelligent, and fluent in several languages. For many legitimate reasons, he sat tall in the religious saddle of himself. Who was this man?

His name was Saul... and he was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He patrolled the land looking for Christ followers so he could bring them bound in chains for trial at the religious headquarters in Jerusalem. This was Saul.

But then Jesus got hold of him, "**caught him up**" the Bible says, not by his own volition or decision... But against it. The Lord acted upon him; breaking in against the law... like the Divine Thief... without Saul's consent. So completely passive was Saul's role in his conversion, that all he could do was fall to the ground when he heard The Voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

His eyes were open, but he was left blind. Faith comes not by sight, but by what is heard... And what is heard is the preaching of Christ. **Dearly beloved, trust not your eyes nor your religious resume, nor your own voice; but the Lord's word on your hammer, anvil and stirrup.**

This man was Saul... large and accomplished in the law. Righteous and blameless before the face of man, *coram hominibus*; but like all flesh, small, guilty and yet beloved before the face of God, *Coram Deo*. In print, it's only the difference of one letter, the exchange of an "S" for a "P", but in reality - in time and space and flesh - it is the preaching of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ that converts him from BIG, PROUD SAUL to **small, little Paul**... that kills old Saul and births the new man, Paul.

What Saul wore as merit badges, as reputation... Paul counted as rubbish, "skubala" in Greek: feces... but in the vernacular☺. Big Saul persecuted sinners; little Paul confessed: *"Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost"* (I Timothy 1.15). All that Saul had gained by his religion, Paul counted as loss because of the surpassing worth of relationship with Christ Jesus his Lord. For Christ's sake, Paul suffered the loss of all his precious skubala in order that he might gain Christ... Not having any righteousness of his own that came from the law, but the righteousness which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on Christ, not on the self. This man was Paul, our namesake. Let's pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, “catch me up” daily; drown my old, proud self... and each day make of me your new creation... to live humbly with you in righteousness and purity now and in eternity. Amen.

Your brother in Christ,

Pastor Paul

MORE RESOURCES FOR LENT:

Join us on Wednesday evenings for dinner, worship, and service. The schedule for Lent is as follows (March 7 and 14): Dinner at 5:45 p.m.; Worship at 6:30 p.m.; and Open Gym at 7:15 p.m. For March 21, we will go outside our walls... and deliver Easter barley soup in a jar to our neighbors. A perfect companion to our lent sermon series is the book “Paul, A Novel”, by Walter Wangerin. This book combines the very best of Wangerin’s skills: biblical knowledge, a sense of drama, unobtrusive scholarship, and the ability to tell a crackling good story.

<https://books.google.com/books/about/Paul.html?id=G8wKAQAAMAAJ>

On Easter, the feature film “Paul... Apostle of Christ” will be released in theatres. Cast includes William Faulkner as Paul, and Jim Cavaziel (Jesus in “The Passion of the Christ”).

<http://www.paulmovie.com/site/>