

ARRESTED BY JESUS

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Where would we be if it were not for the grace of God? I am so thankful that God turned me around when He did. Who knows what would have become of me? Yet I came so close to living a life that surely would have ended in hell.



I think of the miraculous conversion of the great apostle Paul and how he almost made it to destruction. Saul of Tarsus was just about as wrong as a person could be. A zealous Pharisee determined to stamp out Christianity, what he thought to be a cult. Believing he was doing God's work, he persecuted the Church with the passion of a man on a

mission. Determined to eradicate all those who believed in Jesus of Nazareth, breathing out threats, and with murderous intent not satisfied with purging Jerusalem, he pursued the believers to the city of Damascus.

Saul asked the high priest for permission to capture and bind any followers of Jesus and bring them to Jerusalem for judgement. He almost made it, for the Scripture says, **as he journeyed he came near Damascus** (Acts 9:3a). It was then by the wonderful grace of God that the Lord Jesus Christ arrested him. He was wonderfully converted and became the great apostle Paul, missionary to the Gentiles. **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain** (1 Corinthians 15:10a).

His conversion is a marvelous story and part of a wonderful apologetic that testifies to the reliability of the biblical

accounts of Christ's resurrection. Paul's dedication and the wonderful triumphs of his ministry have caused many to view him as the greatest Christian minister who has ever served the Lord Jesus. Yet what strikes me most in his story is that he almost made it to his ghastly destination to accomplish his dreadful goal. He surely would have, had Jesus not stopped him in his tracks (Acts 9:3-6). Such blessed apprehension! Such gracious detention!

Some folks come perilously close to destruction. They do not realize how near they are to the edge. None of us know how long we have to live or how far we will be allowed to travel down the path to hell. I fear for those who play games with the grace of God. I have seen men and women stubbornly determined to have their own way. They pigheadedly insist on walking the broad path that they desire rather than the narrow road the Lord would have them walk upon. The tragic truth is that some of them succeed. **"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it"** (Matthew 7:13).

I am so glad that Jesus stopped me in my tracks. I was blind and hopelessly lost, headed in the wrong direction until Jesus arrested me and turned me around. Sometimes I look back and think of the times I almost made it to a life that would have been to the destruction of my soul. I was in a rock band before I was saved. An opportunity arose for us to go to Hamburg, Germany, to play the same clubs The Beatles did before they were well known. Who knows what would have happened if we would have gone? I was so angry at my lead guitarist because he refused to go, and the opportunity slipped away. So close. He left the band, and I replaced the uncooperative guitarist with a brilliant young guitar player, 15-year-old Alwyn Wall. Later he and I left the band and formed a duo, Malcolm and Alwyn. We started writing our own songs. It's a long story, but Beatle

George Harrison arranged a meeting for us with the director of The Beatles' newly formed Apple record label to listen to our songs with the hope that he would sign us to their label. We played our music for him, and he turned us down. So close. Oh blessed rejection! We almost made it. Where would we be today had we been successful? Instead Jesus grabbed us, and we had the great joy of giving our talent back to Him and singing for His glory.

Oh, but had it not been for His grace, it could have been so different. I am so thankful for His grace, but let's not fancy that it does not include the operation of our will. Let us not imagine that Saul was left with no will with which to choose or that God's grace is irresistible. Many years after his conversion, Paul was giving his testimony before King Agrippa. When he shared his experience on the road to Damascus, he said, **"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision"** (Acts 26:19).

Jesus did not take away Paul's free will. Paul chose to walk in obedience to Jesus Christ from that point on and every day thereafter. When Jesus appeared to him on that Damascus road, Saul asked, "Who are You, Lord?" When he found it was Jesus, his next question was, "What do You want me to do?" Total and full surrender to the Lord.

Those two questions sum up the whole Christian life. "Who are You, Jesus?" We need to know Him. Then ask, "What would You have me to do?" We need to serve Him.

So Saul was wonderfully converted, saved by the grace of God just before he made it to the place of disaster. What about you? Are you kicking against the goads? Are you going your own way? I hope you don't make it. God has given you yet another day to turn around and turn to Him. Be sure to avail yourself of His glorious grace. ☞

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