

“Interview with Paul of Tarsus” Knox Ahi Ka based on Ephesians 6: 10-20, 26 August 2018

**Continuity announcer: Lachlan Crumpton** [from lectern]

Good morning everyone.

We bring to you now a special *youtube* sensation like no other you’ve ever witnessed!

*TedXtalk host*, Jack Hanan, will interview, in front of you, a live audience, the enigmatic, famous- in- the- Middle -East, Paul (formerly Saul) of Tarsus.

Direct from the first century, time travelling to our morning worship here in the third millennium. Over to you, Jack...

[seated at table in sanctuary.. one at each side sharing microphone]

**Jack**

Good morning Paul.

A warm welcome to Knox Church, Paul.

First of all, can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and background in the ancient city of Tarsus in Eastern Turkey?

**Paul**

Thanks, Jack, for your welcome here.

It is very good to be here.

Yes, my family were part of the *diaspora* (or immigration) of Jews.

We had to move north from the Holy Land to a place of safety.

Something like it happened after World War 2, when European Jews fled in large numbers, some to America and others, to Balaclava in Melbourne, not far from here.

Tarsus was a very interesting Greek city to grow up in.

A crossroads on the frontier of the Middle East, a major trading city, a centre of migrations.

I trained as a Pharisee, so I’m deeply grounded in the Hebrew scriptures and the prophets and how to interpret them.

**Jack**

You got around key spots in the ancient world.

Did you have to pick up Greek language as well as your traditional Hebrew as a Pharisee?

And a bit of Aramaic too?

Aramaic was the language Jesus spoke wasn’t it?

You had been persecuting his followers up till those strange happenings on the road to Damascus?

Can you tell us something about that?

**Paul**

Yeah, you’ve done some homework!!

That’s all in the Book of Acts.

Dr Luke nailed it all there for you to read. [hesitating]

I can only say that- like John Newton’s hymn Amazing Grace... (*sing?*) *I once was lost but now am found, was blind and now I see.*

**Jack**

So why *did* you persecute Jews who had become Christian?

**Paul**

I was so blinded by rules and keeping the commandments of my religion, I become very angry at those who believed Jesus was the Messiah.

I regarded him as a threat, and as his followers were multiplying rapidly - all were a menace to the purity of Judaism.

**Jack**

So you really wanted to stamp out any trace of Jesus and his teachings?

**Paul**

Yes!

I was so angry I hadn't been able to sleep.

People here may remember that verse earlier in Ephesians - *"Do not let the sun go down on your anger!"*

I had become so eaten up by my hatred of Christians.

Out of the blue, Jesus, whom I believed to have been killed, came to me on that road in a most astonishing, unbelievable way.

I was totally blinded and then cared for in Damascus until my eyes were opened.

Something about this Jesus guy made me realise he *was* who he *said* he was!

The Son of God! Incredible!

My vicious anger and hatred were replaced by an **amazing** love like I had never experienced before.

Amazing...Grace!

**Jack**

And the name change?

**Paul**

My name, after Saul the first King of Israel, was a name of power.

I was abusing that power.

I began to understand that if I followed this Jesus of Nazareth, Saul had to become less important, and Jesus was everything.

The name Paul meant that none of this was about me anymore.

**Jack**

So you changed your name to the Latin version Paulus which means "small and humble"?

**Paul**

Well done! You've done more homework!

**Jack (looks bashful)**

Then what did you do?

**Paul**

Missionary work, conferences in Jerusalem, setting up churches all over the place... Antioch, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, and Ephesus which became my most important base in those years around 50 – 55 AD

**Jack**

OK.

Today I want to ask you finally about all this "whole armour of God" stuff in your letter to the church in Ephesus.

The whole armour of God? **(beginning to sound slightly exasperated and a bit cynical)**

You use all these military images - Gear you put on for war!

We learned in Sunday School that God is a God of love, not war. (even more cynical)

And we've just sent our Sunday School children out to make shields and swords, helmets and breastplates...???

**Paul:**

Remember I was writing the letter from prison in Rome.

Every hour of the day and night I was aware of Roman soldiers each bearing a shield and sword, wearing a helmet coming, going by my cell.

I can still see them in my mind's eye, and smell the dungeon smells... Ephesus was experiencing the beginnings of Roman occupation then.

You know Jack, hatred spreads so easily which is why the military imagery I use is quite dangerous and could be misused to justify violence.

I was consumed by hate and that was catastrophic for the people I terrorised.

Hate festers and eats us up inside.

It hurts others big time if we don't deal with it.

*What I was writing to the Ephesians was of a more **subversive** nature - I used this imagery to **undermine** the violent and warmongering ways of the Roman Empire.*

**Jack**

So were you speaking in the language of Isaiah of a warfare against evil.

Evil powers which can destroy individuals as well nations?

Were people in your time expressing their fears against so many forces far beyond their control even then?

**Paul**

Yes indeed.

There are always evil forces at work in our world beyond any one person's control.

Systems of power and control.

Systems of injustice and abuse.

Of genocide and torture.

Certainly Hitler could be called evil.

But in most cases politics are complex and simply not black and white as to what is "evil".

Even the worst leaders may genuinely believe they're doing good.

**Jack**

So putting on "the whole armour of God" in your letter to the Ephesians protects us and helps us have courage to resist these destructive dynamics which threaten humanity?

For example when truth is the first casualty of war?

**Paul**

Yes you are right!

Truth – think of truth like a belt, all the way around you, where your top half of idealism meets with your bottom half of reality!

Righteousness – think of it like a breastplate.

You may want others to admire your biceps, your shapeliness or your coat hanger shoulders!

What others are looking for is whether your life is as truthful as your words.

Peace – your shoes. The most important clothing of all.

Shoes need to be sturdy and hard-wearing, but flexible and comfortable.

Peace is like shoes that will walk a very long way.

Faith – think of faith like a shield.

It doesn't stop bad things happening, it doesn't prevent you being attacked, but it does keep your heart pumping and your life going and your spirits thumping even when slings and arrows of favour and fortune would otherwise destroy you.

Salvation – think of faith like a helmet.

It's about forgiveness, healing, eternal life all wrapped up in one.

It's too hard to keep in your head, so you have a helmet to keep these most precious fruits of faith safe.

A helmet is like a shield.

They can't be used as weapons against others.

They are the gifts God gives us to let us know we are always kept safe God's love.

**Jack**

That's five... our protection and clothing. How does the Spirit fit in?

**Paul**

Spirit – think of Spirit like a sword.

A sword is the only part of a Roman soldier's outfit which does something active.

A Roman soldier's armour for me was a description of how the Spirit's power worked in the lives of early Christians.

Think of the Spirit like a sword exposing truth, sharp and terrifying, dynamic and exciting.

The Spirit of Jesus looks carefully at injustice, opens it up, to identify and expose the hurt and pain and the attitudes which cause them.

*Love responds, not in order to hate, but to love and restore.*

**Jack**

Well we thank you very much for being with us today, Saul, now Paul, the "small, humble" follower of Jesus.

We trust all of us will be challenged and helped by our conversation this morning.

For Jesus to increase in our lives, our own selves, flawed as we are, must diminish...

thank you for being with us this morning.

*(Both freeze where you are sitting and as soon as Lachlan speaks become yourselves again and return to your seats as...Jesse, son of David, and Jack, also son of David! The Hebrew Jesse was father of King David just FYI! 😊)*

**Lachlan**

Our programme continues with some music to sing...the next hymn please!

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