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## I SAW HIM, TOO

*"And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8).*

To that long line of distinctive eyewitnesses who take their stand in defense of the resurrection narrative we add the illustrious character, Saul of Tarsus.

This young man comes to the scene as the outstanding figure on the negative side of the controversy. He was not willing to be only a passive dissenter. His aggressive nature inspired him to the task of stamping out every vestige of that "spurious error."

When Saul first came into prominence as a protagonist in the affair, it is evident that the dispute had literally rocked Jerusalem and had gained thousands of adherents.

To counteract the original story, the priests had consorted with the sentinels who guarded the grave to prefabricate a simple solution: "The disciples stole the body away while we slept"-just this, nothing more. Any elucidation at this point would have created embarrassing and unanswerable questions.

It stands to reason that Saul was familiar with the situation as it existed. The rapid daily increase of the believers in the city of Jerusalem, together with the undeniable phenomenon of the

empty tomb in such close proximity, drove the authorities to drastic action.

The credibility of the story of the stolen body seemed to carry no weight with the average person. Therefore, the Sanhedrin had to resort to swift and violent persecution to stem the growth of the Christian party.

They doubtless insisted that the populace ignore the testimonies of the disciples, but the disappearance of the body of this first-class political prisoner could not be brushed aside so easily. If there had been the slightest possibility that the body of Jesus could have been found, they would have spared no effort to do it.

There is absolutely no evidence that any search was ever made to find the body. Their first strategy was to promulgate the big lie and to ignore the rumors. Since this did not work, they attempted to frighten the disciples by prison and punishment that they might cease and desist.

Very subtly, but decisively, the condition of the grave itself was one of the final arbiters in the matter. Either it contained the body of Jesus, or it did not. If it did not contain the body, the question on the lips of everyone was, "Where is it?" This was the question that Caiaphas and Annas must answer if they were to put a stop to this story of the resurrection. We may be sure that old Annas would have employed the combined efforts of the Jewish hierarchy together with all the Roman legions stationed in Palestine to find the body, if there had been a chance. Their hesitancy here reveals that the hostile Jewish authorities believed in their own hearts that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

The only recourse left to them to stamp out the ignorant heretics was to resort to persecution.

By some authoritative persuasion, they secured a young, zealous, intellectual giant, fresh from Tarsus, to spearhead their infamous scourge, but they did not employ this full-time persecutor until they had suffered chagrin and humiliation by a public encounter with Peter and John.

The usual procedure of establishing legendary events as historic facts is to begin with evasive suggestions as to its possibility. Thereafter each successive generation adds more credence to the events until they become emphatic.

This is not the case with the resurrection of Jesus. Matthew and Mark, who by universal consent reach further back to the origin of the phenomenon, are most "sharply cut in their outlines" and describe the empty tomb with the "coldest objectivity."

There is no lack of eyewitnesses to the risen Lord Himself - eyewitnesses whose character and integrity goes unchallenged after two thousand years, eyewitnesses who sealed their testimony with their own blood, eyewitnesses whose "hallelujahs" drowned the noise of flashing flames of martyrdom, eyewitnesses who leaped joyously to their death, counting themselves happy to be able to suffer for Jesus' sake.

It was Saul of Tarsus who challenged the Christian party to the first and greatest fight of its existence. It was he who vowed to suppress and destroy the movement, but was himself suppressed and assimilated by it.

The first time that Saul was introduced to the caliber of men he was set to destroy was the day that Stephen died, with his countenance shining like the face of an angel. I believe that in this experience the man from Tarsus realized that men

like Stephen never die, and the truth they live for and believe in can never be destroyed.

Though unfamiliar with the many and varied events that culminated in the crucifixion of Jesus, we may be sure that the problem of the empty tomb and the glory of God shining in the face of the dying Stephen hammered at the conscience of Saul of Tarsus and prepared him for that crisis experience on the Damascus Road.

From that momentous hour, human history changed its course. The light that blinded the mad fanatic from Tarsus on the outskirts of Damascus became a torch in his soul that was destined to light the world. From that moment he became the champion exponent of the resurrection story. Because of his impassioned zeal to tell the world that Christ was risen from the dead and was the first fruit of all the dead, he was arraigned before the Sanhedrin, then before Felix, next Festus and then Agrippa.

In the presence of the king he bristles with an unmatched eloquence before whose cutting blasts the ruler quails, "At midday, O King," he cries, "I saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun shining round about me, and I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' and I said, 'Who art Thou Lord?' and He said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.' "

Again and again, he told his story. He based every promise, every hope, every vestige of faith on the fact of the Resurrection of Christ. It was the promise of God to the fathers. It was the nation's hope. It was the indisputable, eternal fact that had sent Him out on life's rugged road to die for its propagation.

In the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians Paul documents each historic event, giving that long list of witnesses. Hear him build his case like a master lawyer. "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; . . . he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, . . . he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. . . After that, he was seen of James, then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

We do not doubt the testimony of the white-clad figure who sat on the stone in Joseph's tomb and said, "He is not here, he is risen!" We believe implicitly in the veracity and integrity of the men and women who knew Him, who loved Him, who lived with Him for more than three years, who saw Him die, who kept that rendezvous in Galilee after the Resurrection, who communed with Him off and on for forty days.

Yet somehow we feel drawn a little closer to the man who never knew Him on this side of the grave, but who caught a glimpse of Him in the glory of the heavenly world in that noonday vision, and who on the strength of that vision and faith in Christ, built the superstructure of scriptural truth that will outlive time and shine in undimmed brilliance to all eternity.