**WHAT’S MY LINE?**

***The Incredible Life of Paul***

Before Jeopardy. Before The Price Is Right. Before Wheel of Fortune. Before Family Feud. Before Who Wants To Be A Millionaire. From 1950 to 1967 the most famous game show on TV was the CBS primetime #1 rated “What’s My Line?” John Daly was the host, along with four famous panelists who would take turns asking questions of the “mystery” guest. During the show the guest would sign in and be questioned as to what their occupation was, like a female rocket scientist, a circus lion tamer, a pogo-stick tester, or a snake milker. But then the last guest would be someone famous, requiring the four panelists to blindfold themselves before he or she signed in. Using a disguised voice the panelists quizzed the well-known mystery guest until they discovered Andy Griffith, Elizabeth Taylor, Jackie Gleason, Paul Newman, Sophia Loren, Billy Graham, Eleanor Roosevelt, Willie Mays, or Frank Llyod Wright. It was fun viewing. I loved it.

But what if that game show had been on the air in Jerusalem after Paul returned from his third missionary journey and just before his Jewish beating and the arrest by the Roman legion in 57 A.D.? (Acts 21). Imagine a blind-folded panel of four known personalities named Gamaliel (Pharisee and Headmaster of a famous school), Caiaphas (high priest and ruler of the Sanhedrin Council), Festus (Roman procurator of Palestine), and Agrippa (the Idumean grandson of Herod the Great who was appointed a ruler by Caesar). While they are blindfolded a bent-over old man shuffles in and signs his name on the parchment in very large letters, likely due to his bad eyes. He then scoots slowly over to the emcee and falls into the chair.

Can you imagine the line of questioning from this elite panel in order to determine his true identity? Gamaliel and Caiaphas would ask him questions from the Jewish perspective, while Festus and Agrippa would probe and prod from the Roman viewpoint. Eventually they would undoubtedly determine he was of the “*sect of the Nazarenes*” known now as Christians (Acts 24:5; Acts 11:26). From there they would keep questioning until Gamaliel would probably ask, “Did you ever attend my school as a pupil?” and Caiaphas would ask, “Did I ever issue you arrest warrants against these people?” When forced to answer “yes” they would knowingly smile and announce they knew this man’s identity: “Sir, are you Saul of Tarsus?” Everyone would clap. They would then unmask themselves so they could happily see their former student and diligent hitman. But they are stunned by the obvious change in appearance from how they had known him as a young man. He had been totally transformed from a proud, healthy-looking Pharisee to a gaunt, stooped-shouldered, scarred and ugly old man. They would then ask, “Saul, what on earth happened to you?!”

Paul, never missing an opportunity to tell his story, would tell this panel why he now looks the way he does, and why he now bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:17).

He would start from where they had first known him as a rising star in Judaism (Ac. 22:3; Phil. 3:5-6), explaining what they remembered about him as “*one who persecuted the church of God beyond measure*” (Gal. 1:13). He then proceeds to explain how his life had taken a 180-degree turn on that fateful business trip to Damascus (Ac. 9, 22, 26), gaining the reputation as “*he who formerly persecuted saints now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy*” (Gal. 1:23). Told by Jesus that he would “*suffer many things for My name’s sake*” (Ac. 9:16), He begins to recount one by one all the trials he had been through since they had last seen him as a young man.

1. He had fought with beasts at Ephesus (I Cor. 15:32)
2. He had received 195 lashes by the Jews (2 Cor. 11:24)
3. He had received countless lashes by rods from the Romans (2 Cor. 11:25)
4. He was stoned and left for dead in Lystra (2 Cor. 11:25; Ac. 14:19)
5. He had been shipwrecked and nearly drowned three times (2 Cor. 11:25)
6. He had spent at least 36 hours floating in the Sea (2 Cor. 11:25)
7. He had journeyed approximately 6,000 miles over the past 21 years (11:26)
8. He had faced drowning several times (11:26)
9. He was threatened by robbers many times (11:26)
10. He was accosted by Jews more times then he could remember (11:26)
11. He was attacked by Gentiles and Romans many times also (11:26)
12. In large urban centers he received death-threats and violent mobs (11:26)
13. Out in the rural places his life had been in danger over and over (11:26)
14. While on board ships he faced pirates and sea-storms (11:26)
15. Even in the churches he was constantly threatened by brethren (11:26)
16. He had worked his fingers to the bone in 24 hour shifts without sleep (11:27)
17. He had gone days without water, and some weeks without food (11:27)
18. He had been exposed to extreme weather conditions without clothing (11:27)
19. He felt the powerful burden of dozens of churches needing him (11:28)
(NOTE: all of this happened from 36 to 57 A.D. – 21 years. If he could now tell
 of his next 11 years from 57 to 68 A.D. here is what he would add:
20. He was arrested and beaten in Jerusalem (Ac. 21)
21. He faced an assassination plot while in prison (Ac. 23)
22. He was accused of sedition and stood trial (Ac. 24)
23. He sits imprisoned in Caesarea for two long years (Ac. 26)
24. He endures a harrowing shipwreck and poisonous snake bite (Ac. 27)
25. He sits in a house-arrest in Rome for two more years (Ac. 28)
26. After release he has more “journeys” “robbers” “attacks” “death-threats” etc
27. He is re-arrested and stands trial before Caesar, being executed by beheading.

The panel would all turn to each other and shake their heads. They would then in unison say to this beaten down old man, “Paul, you are mad! Why would you give up a secure, successful future for this life of misery and torture?” To which this 60-something little man, who looks more like he’s 80, would reply,

*“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*”

*What’s My Line?*

We now know Paul’s. What’s your story? What’s mine? – Rick