



AND Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, ² And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. ³ And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: ⁴ And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* ⁵ And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* ⁶ And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, *Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* ⁷ And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. (Acts 9:1-7 (KJV))

There are times during which even the committed Christian takes a wrong turn and is lost to himself, but never to God. God has His immutable will to rule in the lives of men, and He exercises that will in the life of every man who is drawn by the Holy Ghost to the Throne of Mercy.

In the leading text, Saul (later renamed, Paul) is on a feverish mission to destroy whatever remnant of Christ's Church he can uncover. But God has His finger on Saul. He has known Saul from before his conception in his mother's womb, and He knows him now! He will use Saul even if Saul is not so disposed to be used. If necessary, God will draw Saul with tongs of steel to do His will and perform His work. What an unlikely candidate for the ministry – a murderer complicit in the stoning of Stephen and many other martyrs. But do you feel that you are somewhat better than Saul and far more worthy of the Call? You are NOT! And neither am I, or any other to whom the Lord issues the Call to follow Him. But be assured, to whatever role the Lord calls you, either as a Lay Person or a minister, He will make you worthy of the Calling. Saul, later Paul, would become one of the most fervent of all of the apostles in preaching the Gospel of Christ – the very Christ whom he had so wrathfully persecuted ere the Lord blinded him on the Road to Damascus.

We have all begun our life's journey as sinners. The sinner is most apt to try to run away from initial the prompting of the Holy Ghost. This inclination is bred into the heart of man through the sin-disease inherited from Father Adam. In fact, Adam sinned against God willfully, and then attempted to hide himself from His presence. In the cool of the day, the Lord called out to Adam, *"Where art thou?"* And he said, *I heard thy voice in the*

garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (Genesis 3:9-10) How preposterous of Adam to believe that he could hide from the One who made Him.

The first child born on earth was a murderer – Cain. He murdered the first prophet, Abel, and tried to hide himself from guilt. But God sought him out. He asked two questions – God never asks a question for which He does not already know the answer – “*Where is thy Brother?*” and “*What hast thou done?*”

“WHERE ART THOU?” God will ask this question of every sinner, either those accounted righteous by the imputed righteousness of God, or those dead in trespasses and sins. This is a very critical question. Why? Because if we do not know where we are, how can we know where we are going? Until the Holy Ghost opens the blind Saul, and every other sinner, to his own guilt and unrighteousness, how can he find his way home to the Lord?

God does not always ask this question in the audible tones which He employed in His question to Saul at Damascus. He sometimes asks the question in a “*still, small voice*” echoed from the deep sea of the soul as He did when the Prodigal Son “*came to himself;*” or by the boisterous waves of the sea that sought out the fleeing prophet, Jonah. So, Jonah believed that he could escape the Lord by taking a wrong direction – DOWN! Jonah’s efforts to hide himself from the presence of the Lord were just as futile as those of you and me. Jonah, instead of arising UP, went DOWN to Joppa; he went DOWN into the ship; he went DOWN into the sides of the ship; he went DOWN into the deep blue sea; DOWN into the belly of the whale; and DOWN to the very seabed itself.

Where would you expect to escape the notice of God? Let us examine the possibilities: “*Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.*” (Psalm 139:7-16)

One of the greatest Odes in poetry ever written in the English language is “*Hound of Heaven*” by Francis Thompson in 1890. Francis was born into an upper middle class family but lost his moorings early in life. He ended up begging for food and addicted to drugs. Though he had some inkling that there was a sovereign Lord overseeing his misadventures, he did all in his power to escape that persistent hand and power that pursued him everywhere. The poem is 182 lines in length, therefore, I will quote only a few lines from which you may gather parallels in your own personal experiences as, at some point, a refugee from God.

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.*

*But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'*

GK Chesterton wrote of the poem and Francis: *"That is the primary point of the work of Francis Thompson; even before its many-coloured pageant of images and words. The awakening of the Domini canes, the Dogs of God, meant that the hunt was up once more; the hunt for the souls of men; and that religion of that realistic sort was anything but dead In any case, it was an event of history, as much as an event of literature, when personal religion returned suddenly with something of the power of Dante or the Dies Irae, after a century in which such religion had seemed to grow more weak and provincial, and more and more impersonal religions appeared to possess the future. And those who best understand the world know that the world is changed; and that the hunt will continue until the world turns to bay."*

Francis did eventually surrender to the Hound of Heaven after many years of futile attempts to evade Him. I am appending an incident which will emphasize the nature of the Hound of Heaven in pursuing those whose scents He has identified as His own:

The Hound of Heaven and a Young Russian Agnostic

Andrea Wolfe, on staff with the CoMission office in Raleigh, North Carolina tells the following story:

In the 1930's Stalin ordered a purge of all Bibles and all believers. In Stavropol, Russia, this order was carried out with vengeance. Thousands of Bibles were confiscated, and multitudes of believers were sent to the gulags-prison camps-where most died, unjustly condemned as "enemies of the state."

The CoMission once sent a team to Stavropol. The city's history wasn't known at that time. But when the team was having difficulty getting Bibles shipped from Moscow, someone mentioned the existence of a warehouse outside of town where these confiscated Bibles had been stored since Stalin's day.

After the team had prayed extensively, one member finally mustered up the courage to go to the warehouse and ask the officials if the Bibles were still there. Sure enough, they were. Then the CoMissioners asked if the Bibles could be removed and distributed again to the people of Stavropol. The answer was "Yes!"

The next day the CoMission team returned with a truck and several Russian people to help load the Bibles. One helper was a young man-a skeptical, hostile agnostic collegian who had come only for the day's wages. As they were loading Bibles, one team member noticed that the young man had disappeared. Eventually they found him in a corner of the warehouse, weeping.

He had slipped away hoping to take a Bible for himself. What he did not know was that he was being pursued by the "*Hound of Heaven.*" What he found shook him to the core.

The inside page of the Bible he picked up had the handwritten signature of his own grandmother. It had been her personal Bible. Out of the thousands of Bibles still left in that warehouse, he stole the very one belonging to his grandmother - a woman, who throughout her entire life, was persecuted for her faith.

No wonder he was weeping - God had powerfully and yet tenderly made Himself known to this young man. Such was his divinely appointed meeting with the sovereign

Lord of the universe, the "*Hound of Heaven*" who had tracked him down to that very warehouse! Remember Jeremiah's words: "*Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.*" (Jer 23:24)