

Episode 19. "The Life and Death of Paul."

Tuesday, August 17, 2021. 38 Minutes Long.

The incredible story of Paul, possibly the most Spiritual apostle. Reveals the source of his Spiritual power, and how a rabbi named "Saul" from Turkey became the apostle Paul. Tells how he escaped the Great Fire of Rome, and how he was beheaded in a meadow beside an Italian road.

Owen Allen (00:00):

Owen Allen opens the episode by saying:

Owen (00:14):

Well, "hello," friends! As they used to say when I was a child, "And all the ships at sea!" This is Episode 19 in our bi-weekly series of "Saving Christianity," coming to you every-other-Tuesday from Christian Family Online. I'm Owen Allen, your host for today. John Shields, my co-host is out of town today. And, but in many of our previous episodes, we've briefly mentioned two *very important* people in First Century Christianity. You'll recognize them. Their names are Paul and Peter. They're usually called "apostles." We'll talk about that in a moment. And most Christians have heard their names mentioned by their pastor from the pulpit. But you know, many of us – starting with me – (inaudible) didn't know who Paul and Peter were. Or more importantly, what their significance is in Early Christian history. So my co-host John Shields, and I, decided that we'd devote *two* of our podcast episodes to telling you who these two Early Christian people were, and why they're so important in Christian history.

Owen (01:32):

I think you're going to enjoy discovering these two – quotes – "apostles." And discovering their miraculous lives in First Century Christianity. Now, we've decided to tell you about *Paul* first. So the title of this episode is ... Episode 19 here ... is: "The Life and Death of Paul." (Repeats.) Unless I'm badly mistaken, you're about to hear some unusual facts that you've probably never heard before. But let's get started! The first thing you should know about Paul is that he's truly, absolutely, a Spiritual "giant" in Christian history. Now, he's not a giant because he had any political power. Or any military power. Or any financial power. Because he didn't. He's a "giant" solely because he had *Spiritual* power. And more importantly – and this is a biggie – because he taught that *all* of us, all other *Christians*, are supposed to have that level of Spiritual power, too.

Owen (02:48):

So in today's episode, we have two missions. Our first mission is to give you these facts about Paul that you may not know. But more importantly, our second mission is to tell you some facts about Spiritual power itself that you may not have thought about. Now starting with Paul,

originally he was known as "Saul of Tarsus." ("TAR'-suss") That was his Jewish name. In Bible times, he was Jewish, and he was named after Israel's first king. You may have heard of him: King Saul. But Paul was born in 1 AD in Tarsus, a seaport town in Southern Turkey. And that's *important* to the story. We shouldn't even maybe mention that. But it's important to remember because Turkey was a Roman province at the time, and what that meant was that everybody born there was automatically a *Roman citizen* by birth – a birthright Roman citizen. And so Paul *was*. And this saved his life many times during his travels, as we'll talk about, because Roman citizens could not be arrested, and could not be tried, without due process and a fair trial.

Owen (04:13):

And most importantly, they couldn't be executed without an absolutely complete and fair trial. And these laws played a big role in Paul's life, as we're about to see. But to continue, it was because Paul was a Roman citizen that he eventually became known by his Latin – a Roman name – "Paul." And interestingly enough, the word Paul in Latin, *Paulus* in Latin, means "small" or "little." And we'll see that Paul was a short man, a little petite man. But Paul's father, back in Turkey, was a *Pharisee*. That was a strict group, as you probably know, in the Jewish religion that believed in strict obedience to the Ten Commandments as well as over 600 other Jewish laws. So, at the tender age of 13, if you can imagine, Paul's father shipped him off to Jerusalem in Israel to start his training to become a Pharisee, too.

Owen (05:24):

And so he did. And the years passed, and after graduating as a Pharisee, Paul had the equivalent of what we would call today a doctor's degree. He was fluent, too, in three of the main First Century languages: Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. And after graduation, though, he boarded a ship, left Jerusalem, thinking probably that he would never go back. And he sailed home to Tarsus, where he became a rabbi in a local synagogue. And he stayed there until age 31, thinking, I guess, that he would be there the rest of his life. But at age 31, Paul's life changed dramatically, and was never the same. Well, *why* was that? Well because while he was still serving every day as a rabbi in the local synagogue, he began to hear very strange rumors that back in Jerusalem, where he had gone to school, there was a strange *new group of people*.

Owen (06:30):

And these people had mysteriously appeared – nobody's exactly sure how or why – and they called themselves, "Followers of The Way." And they were so strange that people back in Jerusalem were calling them "a new race of humans." Imagine! But as a loyal Pharisee, this enraged Paul. He decided these new "Followers" were committing blasphemy – *blasphemy!* – because they openly used the *Name* of God, which Jews did not do. And they openly said that Jesus was the *Son* of God which, totally, Jews did not do. So completely enraged, Paul left home. Left the synagogue, left his duties as a rabbi, boarded a ship, and set sail for Jerusalem, determined to help the Pharisees in Jerusalem wipe out – *wipe out!* – these blasphemous "Followers of The Way." And so it comes to pass that this is when we see our first mention of Paul in the Bible.

Owen (07:44):

He was present at the execution of the first "Follower of The Way" to be publicly executed. His name was Steven. He was a Spirit-filled Follower who performed miracles every day in the city. And so the Pharisees charged him with *blasphemy* because he was doing that, and sentenced him to death by stoning. And the record of that event ... the record of Steven's death ... says that Paul was present. Of course, they called him "Saul," his Jewish name. But Paul was present at that stoning. And he not only approved of it, but he actually *helped* by holding the coats of the people who were throwing the stones. Apparently, for whatever reason, he didn't throw a stone. But he held their coats. Now, we can see two important things in this story.

Owen (08:55):

First, we need to notice *Steven's* incredible Spirituality. He had the kind of Spirit-filled Spiritual power that was common among *all* Early Christians. Think about that for a minute. And the second thing to notice, though, is the word "approved" in the record. Remember, it said that Paul "approved" of the stoning. Well, that's actually a weak translation of the original Greek word in the record. Because that word really means – check this out – that Paul took *pleasure* in the stoning. It *gratified* him. He *liked* it. And he had an *appetite* for more. Can you imagine? He was a bloodthirsty character! So the Pharisees in Jerusalem got excited, and they appointed Paul the Chief Prosecutor of this Christian group. And they gave him a commission to arrest ... torture ... and execute ... as many of these weird Followers as he could catch. You remember, of course, from earlier episodes, that we Christians were *originally* called "Followers of The Way." And so these were the people, the Early Christians, that Paul was trying to catch.

Owen (10:03):

Well finally, after dealing with all the Christians in the city of Jerusalem that he could locate, Paul's thirst for vengeance still was not satisfied. (Chuckles.) He decided to form a posse and to travel to the city of Damascus in Syria, to see if he could catch any Christians there. See, Damascus was a major city like Jerusalem. And there were a lot of these strange "Followers" there. But Paul had a problem. Because travel was dangerous in those days. There were deep rivers to ford, with no bridges. There were gangs of bandits to fight. And facilities for sleeping and eating were rare or even non-existent on most roads. They didn't have Holiday Inns like we do today. But anyway, in 33 AD, Paul started out for Damascus riding a strong horse, and being led by a posse of armed men on horses who were surrounding him for protection.

Owen (11:13):

And so it was there, on the Damascus Road, that Paul's life changed forever. Because ... it's weird ... just as he and his posse came within sight of the city, something incredible happened. *Jesus* suddenly appeared to Paul in a vision, right there on the road, with such *power* that Paul fell off of his horse and went blind. A blinding Light surrounded him. And he heard Jesus say to him, "Why are you persecuting me?" Imagine that. "Why are you persecuting me?" And Paul's lying on the road blind.

Owen (11:58):

But, he had enough wits about him to ask, "*Who* are you Lord?" Imagine that. "*Who* are you Lord?" And Jesus said, "I'm Jesus, whom you're persecuting. Now get up. Go into the city. And you'll be told what to do next." Well, the members of Paul's posse had actually heard the voice and witnessed this whole event. So they helped Paul get up, and they took him into the city and they found a house for him to stay while he recovered. And to make a long story short, Paul fasted and prayed in that house for three days.

Owen (12:42):

And then suddenly, a local Christian of the city was sent by the Holy Spirit to pray for Paul. Now, if you read the record, he was afraid to go. (Chuckles.) Because he knew how bloodthirsty Paul was. But the Holy Spirit said, "You'll be safe, go anyway." And that's actually how Paul himself became a Spirit-filled Christian. So here we have Paul – who had been the Chief Prosecutor of Christians – was now a Christian himself. Now *he* was the one who was going to be persecuted. But before we talk about how Paul was persecuted, let's first talk about his *Call* to service in the Christian community. This is known in Sunday school classes and sermons as Paul's famous "Damascus Road Experience." (Repeats.) But that was only the beginning of Paul's incredible supernatural servanthood, or servanthood, in Christianity. You know, we don't have the time here to tell that full story of his amazing journey. But instead, let's just pick up Paul's story ten years after the "Damascus Road experience."

Owen (14:08):

He's now living ... he went back to Turkey ... he's now living in Antioch, Turkey. Where he was serving the Christian community there – get this now – as a *teacher*, and as a *prophet*. So here this bloodthirsty torturer of Christians ten years earlier, was now a beloved teacher and prophet in the Christian community at Antioch. Now notice, Paul had a *double* Call to Christian service already, as we pick up the story. But then – and this is what we want to see here – another incredible supernatural miracle occurred. And here's what it was. Right there in Antioch, one day while the group was praying, the Holy Spirit appeared *again* to Paul, and this time the Spirit gave him his *third* Call. This time, his Call was as an *apostle*. And that's why we call him "the apostle Paul." Imagine. Can you see this? As far as I know, Paul is the only New Testament character that had a *triple* call.

Owen (15:24):

Numbers of them had *double* calls. Like Peter, we'll talk (about him) in another episode. But Paul had a *triple* call as a teacher ... as a prophet ... as an apostle. And that, I believe, is the first reason why he was what we call a Spiritual "giant." He had this triple supernatural Call to service on his life, with all that that would imply. And by the way, it's important to know that a Spiritual Call from the Spirit is different from Spiritual Fruit and from Spiritual Gifts of the Spirit. Think about it. *All* Christians don't have a Call from the Spirit like Paul did. But all Christians *do* have Spiritual Fruit and Spiritual Gifts from the Spirit. But having said that, let's pause just a second to talk about this word, "apostle." I said earlier, most Christians have heard this word used by their pastor in the pulpit. But many don't know exactly what it means.

Owen (16:30):

The word "apostle" in the (inaudible) Bible comes from the Greek noun, *apostolos* ("uh-PAH'-stuh-lahss"), meaning a person sent out from some group as an ambassador, with an important message for other people. Think about that. That's an "apostle." And so that's why Paul, and Peter, and John, and Luke, and so many more of the best known Bible characters were all "apostles" – *apostolos*. They were called by the Holy Spirit to go out to other cities as ambassadors with the wonderful message of Christianity. But check this out now. This is important. More than all that, these apostles were also recognized for their strong expression, or manifestation, of the *Fruit* and the *Gifts* of the Spirit. And that's the second reason why Paul was a Spiritual "giant" in Christian history. He expressed so many Spiritual Gifts from the indwelling Holy Spirit within him.

Owen (17:44):

The Bible says clearly, and here's the statement: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul." Let's read that again. Think about that. We should be seeing that today, shouldn't we! "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul." Can you imagine? Well, just to be clear, let's name a few of those. What were some of the *Gifts* of the Spirit that the Holy Spirit expressed through Paul? We see a number of them in the Bible. We won't list them all. But of course, he had incredible *healings*. He *recognized* evil spirits. All kinds of *miracles* were done in his presence. He had *evangelism*. He had *resurrection* power. The Bible says he had *visions*. He had many other supernatural abilities. We think of the *angels* appearing and guiding him and telling him what to do. And all of that brings us to the third reason why Paul was a Spiritual "giant" ... I don't really like that term ... but it's one that everybody uses.

Owen (18:51):

It was because he had so many Spiritual *Experiences*. So let's add that to the *Gifts* and the *Fruit* and the *Call*. He had four of these big supernatural experiences. We saw earlier, he was knocked off of his horse on Damascus Road. That's not a Gift. That's not Fruit. That's a Spiritual Experience. Later in life, he had what today we call a Near Death Experience in which he went to heaven and returned. That's not a Fruit and that's not a Gift. That's a Spiritual Experience. And then, as I mentioned, angels appeared to him constantly with messages, with guidance. And those are Spiritual Experiences, when an angel appears to you. Poor Paul was in several shipwrecks. But he was unharmed. If that wasn't enough, remember in one case, a deadly snake – a fatal snake – bit him. But he was unharmed. And the list of incredible miracles and events goes on and on. And all of these were Spiritual *Experiences*.

Owen (19:55):

So, the fourth reason ... I know I've already mentioned it ... that I call Paul a Spiritual "giant" is that he had such deep and profound Spiritual *Behavior*. Spiritual Behavior or Spiritual Emotions. This is what the Bible calls the "Fruit of the Spirit." In the original Greek, that noun "fruit" means *behavior* that the *Holy Spirit* produces in us. There are about 20 of these supernatural behaviors, or emotions, inside us, that the indwelling *Holy Spirit* produces. And the record of Paul's life lists many of them. And they include, of course, supernatural – hold it a second – these are *supernatural*, now. These cannot be produced by human nature. So let's start again. They include

supernatural, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. Paul had all of these. The important thing is, *all* of us, all *Christians*, should have them, too. And are supposed to. Imagine if all the world had supernatural love and joy and peace and patience, what a place it would be.

Owen (21:18):

Well, let's slow down just a second. We've been talking about Spiritual "power" since the top of the show. So now let's define it. The word for "power" in the Bible is the Greek noun *dunamis* ("DO'-nuh-miss"). And briefly, *dunamis* means:

The supernatural ability or supernatural potential. It means us allowing God to work through us supernaturally, with the Spiritual Calls ... Fruit ... Gifts ... and Experiences ... that we've been talking about.

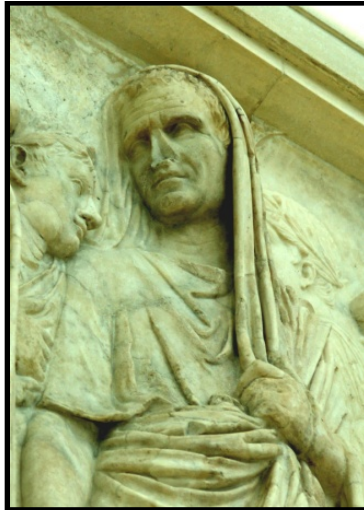
So, old Paul, God worked through him all *four* ways: With Calls, Fruit, Gifts, and Experiences. And that can happen to *all* of us, if we'll just let the Holy Spirit do it. Well, so now as we come toward the end of the episode, let's return to the life of Paul, and let's pick up the thread of his story. And since our time is limited, let's jump ahead again. And now let's pick up the story where Paul was 58 years of age. Because this is the age at which *he* himself was finally arrested and imprisoned by the Sanhedrin – that was the ruling Council of Jerusalem.

Owen (22:42):

And this happened in 58 AD. Now, this council of Jewish elders held Paul in prison for two years in the capital of Israel, which at that time was the seaport city of Caesarea Maritima in Northern Israel. And they did that, mind you, *without* due process, *without* a trial and, as we said earlier, that was totally illegal, because Paul was a Roman citizen. But they did it with armed soldiers, and what chance or hope did Paul have? So here he is, he's in prison in Caesarea. And interestingly enough, the record shows that he was questioned by two different Roman governors: Felix and Festus. Because they changed governorship while he was in prison. And even ... even a year later in 59 AD ... he was even questioned by the king of Israel. At that time, King Agrippa. And Agrippa said that Paul was innocent and should be released.

Owen (23:56):

And at that point, he would have been. Except for one problem. He had appealed. He had filed a formal appeal to Rome that as a Roman citizen he wanted a formal trial. So they couldn't release him. They had to put him on a ship and send him to Rome. And of course, that's what they did. And by the way, let me just say here that the good thing about the Bible is that it's *true*. If you've ever thought about that, we know the Bible is true because so much of it has been verified by scientific research. For example, we know that King Agrippa was a real person. Why? Because a statue of him still stands in Rome today. I've studied it, and I'm including a picture of Agrippa here in the script. I hope you'll open the script on our website at: www.goSCpod.com, and look at King Agrippa – a picture of the man who questioned Paul, and found Paul innocent.



The Jewish King Agrippa, who questioned Paul and declared him innocent

Owen (24:56):

But Paul still wasn't released, of course. And so to continue, Paul arrived by ship in Rome in 61 AD. And what did *they* do? They held him in prison there for *another* two years. Finally, his appeal was heard by the emperor of Rome – who that at that time was Nero. And he also declared Paul innocent, and *he* did release him in 63 AD. And Paul immediately left town to continue his apostleship to worldwide Christians. And by the way, the fact that he left town so quickly temporarily saved his life. Why? Because a few months after Paul left town, the first great persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire broke out and, among other things, it caused the apostle Peter to be executed as we'll see in a later episode. But this persecution of Christians is called in the history books, "The Great Fire of Rome."

Owen (26:11):

Here's what happened. One night – and it was actually July the 18th, 64 AD – a small accidental fire broke out in a shop in downtown Rome. Everybody was asleep and didn't notice it. And the fire quickly spread. Now, mind you, the emperor, Nero, was on vacation at the time. (Chuckles.) He was at the beach and had nothing to do with this fire. But this fire got away from them. They had an excellent fire department, by the way, in Rome. But the fire got away from them, and it burned for six days and six nights. And it destroyed half of the city of Rome. Imagine. And that left 200,000 citizens homeless. Well, Nero obviously came back from vacation. He opened emergency shelters. He distributed emergency food. But there was nothing else he could do. And then he made a big mistake. Nero had been planning for months, maybe years, to build himself a new palace. But he had never started it.

Owen (27:21):

And so after the fire, he decided *now* he would start his new palace. And he would put it on some of these flat, burned-out lots in the city. And he called his new palace, "The Golden

House." (Repeats.) But Nero had political enemies, and they wanted to stop him. So they spread the lie that Nero *himself* (chuckles) had started The Great Fire of Rome, and he had done it on purpose, so he would have room for his crummy new palace. (Chuckles.) Imagine. And so citywide protest marches broke out. And this scared Nero. And to protect himself, he started a counter-lie. He spread the counter-lie that it was the *Christians* – it was the *Christian* community in Rome – who had started The Great Fire. And nobody ever said *why* the Christians would want to do that, or what they would gain from that.

Owen (28:26):

But that's the way with all lies, isn't it. When you look at them, they don't make any real sense. But in October, 64 AD, Nero's counter-lie triggered the first great Christian persecution of the empire, as I've already mentioned. And thousands of Christians were rounded up like sheep, and tortured to death in horrible ways – men, women, and children. We won't even talk here about what was done to them. But since Paul had left town earlier to continue what we call his "Missionary Journeys," he was safe. And he escaped this great persecution ... at least for awhile. So this great persecution, that started in 64 AD, lasted for three to four long years until late 67 AD. And here's one of history's great mysteries. Nobody knows why this happened. But for some reason, the apostle Paul *returned to Rome*, if you can imagine, in 67 AD, while the great persecution was still going on. He must have known the danger. But he came back anyway.

Owen (29:45):

Why? There are a lot of theories. Maybe it was to encourage some of the persecuted Christians. Maybe it was to try to find out what had happened to Peter. We don't know. But of course, Nero's soldiers soon recognized Paul on the street. He was very recognizable, as we'll see in a moment. And they arrested him and they threw him in prison again. Now it's interesting that the chains that these soldiers used to bind Paul, and the cell that they put Paul in, still exist in Rome today. I've studied them, and I'm including pictures of Paul's chains and his prison cell here in the script. But this is where the amazing life of the apostle Paul and his incredible Christian service came to an end. The emperor Nero proclaimed Paul *guilty* this time, and sentenced him to death. Now remember, Paul was a Roman citizen. So the soldiers couldn't torture him, or crucify him, or subject him to any kind of a shameful death.



The Chains that the soldiers used to bind Paul in this death cell



The death cell that the soldiers put Paul in while he waited to be executed. Note center block where he was chained

Owen (31:02):

Under Roman law, the only thing they could do to (Paul) was behead him in a clean, sharp way. And so on a bright and sunny morning in June – it was on June the 29th, in fact, in 67 AD – Paul was marched out of the city by a troop of soldiers, and marched out to the third milestone on the Ostian Highway. Now it's interesting, a group of loyal Christians followed the procession at a safe distance to watch and see what was going to happen. And Paul was led off the road into a grassy area and beheaded there with a sword. And today, the place where he was beheaded is the site of a monastery in Italy, outside of Rome there. And a picture of that place – that monastery – is included here in the script. And you can see in the center of the picture a stone *column* is visible in the courtyard. And this is the exact place where Paul was beheaded.



The place at the third milepost on the Ostian Highway in Italy where Paul was beheaded. The white stone column in the courtyard is the exact spot

Owen (32:14):

Now as it happened, there was a small private family cemetery right near that place where Paul was beheaded. And it was on the land of a wealthy, politically connected, loyal, Christian woman named Patrona Lucilla ("loo-CHEE'-lah"). Her husband was an influential person in the Roman government, and so she was safe from persecution and wasn't hunted down like the other Christians. And she had in fact used her husband to get permission to take Paul's body after he was beheaded. And she did. And she had him buried in her private family cemetery on her estate. And Paul's grave has been there ever since, as a pilgrimage site for pilgrims – Christian pilgrims. Now this is important. Under Roman law, *graves* could not be moved or disturbed in any way. So today, Paul's body is still there in Lucilla's family cemetery.

Owen (33:38):

But to protect it from any kind of vandalism, or grave robbers, or anything that might happen ... in the Four Century the Roman emperor, Constantine, *bought* that cemetery. And he placed a heavy marble slab over Paul's grave. And he built a huge Basilica – a so-called "church" building – over the grave with the altar directly over Paul's grave. And that's where Paul lies today. And I'm including pictures of that marble slab, and the altar, here in the script. So as we come to the close of this episode on the life of death of the apostle Paul, let's ask ourselves one last question: What did Paul *look* like? (Repeats.) People didn't have cameras in those days, right? So all they could do is paint pictures of people or carve statues of them. And that was only done for the rich and powerful. So we don't know what very many, if any, of the First Century Christians looked like.



A replica of the large marble slab that Constantine put over Paul's grave. The inscription says in Latin, "Apostle Paul, Martyr." The holes were cut during the Middle Ages by pilgrims to drop in flowers and coin offerings



The altar over Paul's grave in the huge basilica ("church") that Constantine built over the grave

Owen (34:58):

But we do know from the Early Christian letters that Paul was 67 when he was beheaded. We know that he was a small man. We know that he was terribly scarred from his many tortures and beatings. So we know more about Paul ... the way he would have looked ... than any of the other Bible characters. But here's the kicker. We're also very fortunate that a *carving* was made of Paul, and *that* still exists today. It's in a vault in Rome. It's guarded by armed guards because it's priceless. And very few people are allowed to even see it. But I've studied it, and I'm including a picture of it here in the episode. And you can see in this carving of Paul the terrible scarring from his many beatings. It even appears that his right eye has been put out. And you can see that he had a beard. That he was short and stocky. And that he was actually deformed. And so we do know a lot about this wonderful man.



The only image of Paul known to exist. You can see his horrible scars, his beard, his right eye missing, and his scarred and deformed body. He's the only apostle of whom

we have a "picture"

Owen (36:06):

In closing, what message can we draw from Paul's dramatic life? What principles from his life could still apply to us today? Well, Paul taught that the supernatural Fruit ... and Gifts ... and Experiences ... that flow out of us – all of us Christians – from the indwelling Holy Spirit are valid and are needed in *every* generation. He taught that they're *The Normal Christian Life*. And that all of us should be expressing them in our lives daily. He taught that we can't live a successful Christian Spiritual life without them. And personally, I've found that to be absolutely, factually, true. And I'm praying that *you*, out there in Podcast Land, will find it factually true in your life too. But for now, I can see from the big clock on the wall that my time is up in this episode. I hope you've enjoyed learning about the life and death of the apostle Paul, and that his story has inspired you to do – *what?* To go *deeper* in your own Christian walk!

Owen (37:26):

Remember, this is Episode 19. And a script and recording of it are on our website at: www.goSCpod.com. And that's especially important with this episode because of the rare and interesting pictures of Paul's life and death. Now, in an upcoming episode, I'm going to tell you about the life of death of another famous apostle: The apostle Peter. His story is every bit as interesting and fascinating as Paul's story. So I'm looking forward to sharing that with you.

Owen (38:02):

But for now, this is Owen Allen speaking for myself and for our Intrepid producer, Shannon Wolfe ...

Owen (38:09):

... saying: May the God of our fathers bless you, and keep you, and guide you, and protect you, until we meet again.

Owen (38:20):

Owen ends the episode.