

THE LIFE OF SAINT PAUL

by

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163. Return to Jerusalem - After completing his brief visit to Greece at the close of his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Jerusalem. He must by this time have been nearly sixty

years of age; and for twenty years he had been engaged in almost superhuman labors. He had been traveling and preaching incessantly, and carrying on his heart a crushing weight of cares. His body had been worn with disease and mangled with punishments and abuse; and his hair must have been whitened, and his face furrowed with the lines of age. As yet, however, there were no signs of his body breaking down, and his spirit was still as keen as ever in its enthusiasm for the service of CHRIST.

His eye was specially directed to Rome, and, before leaving Greece, he sent word to the Romans that they might expect to see him soon. But, as he was hurrying toward Jerusalem along the shores of Greece and Asia, the signal sounded that his work was nearly done, and the shadow of approaching death fell across his path. In city after city the persons in the Christian communities who were endowed with the gift of prophecy foretold that bonds and imprisonment were awaiting him, and, as he came nearer to the close of his journey, these warnings became more loud and frequent. He felt their solemnity; his was a brave heart, but it was too humble and reverent not to be overawed with the thought of death and judgment. He had several companions with him, but he sought opportunities of being alone. He parted from his converts as a dying man, telling them that they would see his face no more. But, when they entreated him to turn back and avoid the threatened danger, he gently pushed aside their loving arms, and said, **"What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."**

164. We do not know what business he had on hand which so peremptorily demanded his presence in Jerusalem. He had to deliver up to the apostles a collection on behalf of their poor saints, which he had been exerting himself to gather in the Gentile churches; and it may have been of importance that he should discharge this service in person. Or he may have been solicitous to procure from the apostles a message for his Gentile churches, giving an authoritative contradiction to the insinuations of his enemies as to the unapostolic character of his Gospel. At all events there was some imperative call of duty summoning him, and, in spite of the fear of death and the tears of friends, he went forward to his fate.

165. Paul's Arrest - It was the feast of Pentecost when he arrived in the city of his fathers, and, as usual at such seasons, Jerusalem was crowded with hundreds of thousands of pilgrim Jews from all parts of the world. Among these there could not but be many who had seen him at the work of evangelization in the cities of the heathen and come into collision with him there. Their rage against him had been checked in foreign lands by the interposition of Gentile authority; but might they not, if they met with him in the Jewish capital, wreak on him their vengeance with the support of the whole population?

166. This was actually the danger into which he fell. Certain Jews from Ephesus, the principal scene of his labors during his third journey, recognized him in the temple and, crying out that here was the heretic who blasphemed the Jewish nation, law and temple, brought about him in an instant a raging sea of fanaticism. It is a wonder he was not torn limb from limb on the spot; but superstition prevented his assailants from defiling with blood the court of the Jews, in which he was caught, and, before they got him hustled into the court of the Gentiles, where they would soon have despatched him, the Roman guard, whose sentries were pacing the castle-ramparts which overlooked the temple-courts, rushed down and took him under their protection; and, when their captain learned that he was a Roman citizen, his safety was secured.

167. But the fanaticism of Jerusalem was now thoroughly aroused, and it raged against the protection which surrounded Paul like an angry sea. The Roman captain on the day after the apprehension took him down to the Sanhedrin in order to ascertain the charge against him; but the sight of the prisoner created such an uproar that he had to hurry him away, lest he should be torn in pieces. Strange city and strange people! There was never a nation which produced sons more richly dowered with gifts to make her name immortal; there was never a city whose children clung to her with a more passionate affection; yet, like a mad mother, she tore the very goodliest of them in pieces and dashed them mangled from her breast. Jerusalem was now within a few years of her destruction; here was the last of her inspired and prophetic sons come to visit her for the last time, with boundless love to her in his heart; but she would have murdered him; and only the shields of the Gentiles saved him from her fury.

168. Forty zealots banded themselves together under a curse to snatch Paul even from the midst of the Roman swords; and the Roman captain was only able to foil their plot by sending him under a heavy escort down to Caesarea. This was a Roman city on the Mediterranean coast; it was the residence of the Roman governor of Palestine and the headquarters of the Roman garrison; and in it the apostle was perfectly safe from Jewish violence.

169. Imprisonment at Caesarea - Here he remained in prison for two years. The Jewish authorities attempted again and again either to procure his condemnation by the governor or to get him delivered up to themselves, to be tried as an ecclesiastical offender; but they failed to convince the governor that Paul had been guilty of any crime of which he could take cognizance or to persuade him to hand over a Roman citizen to their tender mercies. The prisoner ought to have been released, but his enemies were so vehement in asserting that he was a criminal of the deepest dye that he was detained on the chance of new evidence turning up against him. Besides, his release was prevented by the expectation of the corrupt governor, Felix, that the life of the leader of a religious sect might be purchased from him with a bribe. Felix was interested in his prisoner and even heard him gladly, as Herod had listened to the Baptist.

170. Paul was not kept in close confinement; he had at least the range of the barracks in which he was detained. There we can imagine him pacing the ramparts on the edge of the Mediterranean, and gazing wistfully across the blue waters in the direction of Macedonia, Achaia and Ephesus, where his spiritual children were pining for him or perhaps encountering dangers in which they sorely needed his presence.

It was a mysterious providence which thus arrested his energies and condemned the ardent worker to inactivity. Yet we can see now the reason for it. Paul was needing rest. After twenty years of incessant evangelization he required leisure to garner the harvest of experience. During all that time he had been preaching that view of the Gospel which at the beginning of his Christian career he had thought out, under the influence of the revealing Spirit, in the solitudes of Arabia. But he had now reached a stage when, with leisure to think, he might penetrate into more recondite regions of the truth as it is in JESUS. And it was so important that he should have this leisure that, in order to secure it, GOD even permitted him to be shut up in prison.

171. Paul's Later Gospel - During these two years he wrote nothing; it was a time of internal mental activity and silent progress. But, when he began to write again, the results of it were at once discernible. The Epistles written after this imprisonment have a mellower tone and set forth a profounder view of doctrine than his earlier writings. There is no contradiction, indeed, or inconsistency between his earlier and later views: in Ephesians and Colossians he builds on the

broad foundations laid in Romans and Galatians. But the superstructure is loftier and more imposing. He dwells less on the work of CHRIST and more on His person; less on the justification of the sinner and more on the sanctification of the saint.

In the Gospel revealed to him in Arabia he had set CHRIST forth as dominating mundane history, and shown His first coming to be the point toward which the destinies of Jews and Gentiles had been tending. In the Gospel revealed to him at Caesarea the point of view is extramundane: CHRIST is represented as the reason for the creation of all things, and as the Lord of angels and of worlds, to whose second coming the vast procession of the universe is moving forward-of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.

In the earlier Epistles the initial act of the Christian life - the justification of the soul - is explained with exhaustive elaboration: but in the later Epistles it is on the subsequent relations to CHRIST of the person who has been already justified that the apostle chiefly dwells. According to his teaching, the whole spectacle of the Christian life is due to a union between CHRIST and the soul; and for the description of this relationship he has invented a vocabulary of phrases and illustrations: believers are in CHRIST, and CHRIST is in them: they have the same relation to Him as the stones of a building to the foundation-stone, as the branches to the tree, as the members to the head, as a wife to her husband. This union is ideal, for the divine mind in eternity made the destiny of CHRIST and the believer one; it is legal, for their debts and merits are common property; it is vital, for the connection with CHRIST supplies the power of a holy and progressive life; it is moral, for, in mind and heart, in character and conduct, Christians are constantly becoming more and more identical with CHRIST.

172. His Ethics - Another feature of these later Epistles is the balance between their theological and their moral teaching. This is visible even in the external structure of the greatest of them, for they are nearly equally divided into two parts, the first of which is occupied with doctrinal statements and the second with moral exhortations. The ethical teaching of Paul spreads itself over all parts of the Christian life; but it is not distinguished by a systematic arrangement of the various kinds of duties, although the domestic duties are pretty fully treated. Its chief characteristic lies in the motives which it brings to bear upon conduct.

To Paul Christian morality was emphatically a morality of motives. The whole history of CHRIST, not in the details of His earthly life, but in the great features of his redemptive journey from Heaven to earth and from earth back to Heaven again, as seen from the extramundane standpoint of these Epistles, is a series of examples to be copied by Christians in their daily conduct. No duty is too small to illustrate one or other of the principles which inspired the divinest acts of CHRIST. The commonest acts of humility and beneficence are to be imitations of the condescension which brought Him from the position of equality with GOD to the obedience of the cross; and the ruling motive of the love and kindness practised by Christians to one another is to be the recollection of their common connection with Him.

173. Appeal to Caesar - After Paul's imprisonment had lasted for two years, Felix was succeeded in the governorship of Palestine by Festus. The Jews had never ceased to intrigue to get Paul into their hands, and they at once assailed the new ruler with further importunities. As Festus seemed to be wavering, Paul availed himself of his privilege of appeal as a Roman citizen and demanded to be sent to Rome and tried at the bar of the emperor. This could not be refused him; and a prisoner had to be sent to Rome at once after such an appeal was taken. Very soon, therefore, Paul was shipped off under the charge of Roman soldiers and in the company of many other prisoners on their way to the same destination.

174. Voyage to Italy - The journal of the voyage has been preserved in the Acts of the Apostles and is acknowledged to be the most valuable document in existence concerning the seamanship of ancient times. It is also a precious document of Paul's life; for it shows how his character shone out in a novel situation. A ship is a kind of miniature of the world. It is a floating island, in which there are the government and the governed. But the government is, like that of states, liable to sudden social upheavals, in which the ablest man is thrown to the top. This was a voyage of extreme perils, which required the utmost presence of mind and power of winning the confidence and obedience of those on board. Before it was ended Paul was virtually both the captain of the ship and the general of the soldiers; and all on board owed to him their lives.

175. Arrival in Rome - At length the dangers of the deep were left behind; and Paul found himself approaching the capital of the Roman world by the Appian Road, the great highway by which Rome was entered by travelers from the East. The bustle and noise increased as he neared the city, and the signs of Roman grandeur and renown multiplied at every step. For many years he had been looking forward to seeing Rome, but he had always thought of entering it in a very different guise from that which now he wore. He had always thought of Rome as a successful general thinks of the central stronghold of the country he is subduing, who looks eagerly forward to the day when he will direct the charge against its gates. Paul was engaged in the conquest of the world for CHRIST, and Rome was the final position he had hoped to carry in his Master's name. Years ago he had sent to it the famous challenge, "**I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also; for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.**" But now, when he found himself actually at its gates and thought of the abject condition in which he was - an old, gray-haired, broken man, a chained prisoner just escaped from shipwreck - his heart sank within him, and he felt dreadfully alone.

At the right moment, however, a little incident took place which restored him to himself: at a small town forty miles out of Rome he was met by a little band of Christian brethren, who, hearing of his approach, had come out to welcome him; and, ten miles farther on, he came upon another group, who had come out for the same purpose. Self-reliant as he was, he was exceedingly sensitive to human sympathy, and the sight of these brethren and their interest in him completely revived him. He thanked GOD and took courage; his old feelings came back in their wonted strength; and, when, in the company of these friends, he reached that shoulder of the Alban Hills from which the first view of the city is obtained, his heart swelled with the anticipation of victory; for he knew he carried in his breast the force which would yet lead captive that proud capital.

It was not with the step of a prisoner, but with that of a conqueror, that he passed at length beneath the city gate. His road lay along that very Sacred Way by which many a Roman general had passed in triumph to the Capitol, seated on a car of victory, followed by the prisoners and spoils of the enemy, and surrounded with the plaudits of rejoicing Rome. Paul looked little like such a hero: no car of victory carried him, he trode the causewayed road with wayworn foot; no medals or ornaments adorned his person, a chain of iron dangled from his wrist; no applauding crowds welcomed his approach, a few humble friends formed all his escort; yet never did a more truly conquering footstep fall on the pavement of Rome or a heart more confident of victory pass within her gates.

176. Imprisonment - Meanwhile, however, it was not to the Capitol his steps were bent, but to a prison; and he was destined to lie in prison long, for his trial did not come on for two years. The

law's delays have been proverbial in all countries and at all eras; and the law of imperial Rome was not likely to be free from this reproach during the reign of Nero, a man of such frivolity that any engagement of pleasure or freak of caprice was sufficient to make him put off the most important call of business. The imprisonment, it is true, was of the mildest description. It may have been that the officer who brought him to Rome spoke a good word for the man who had saved his life during the voyage, or the officer to whom he was handed over, and who is known in profane history as a man of justice and humanity, may have inquired into his case and formed a favorable opinion of his character; but at all events Paul was permitted to hire a house of his own and live in it in perfect freedom, with the single exception that a soldier, who was responsible for his person, was his constant attendant.

177. Occupation in Prison - This was far from the condition which such an active spirit would have coveted. He would have liked to be moving from synagogue to synagogue in the immense city, preaching in its streets and squares, and founding congregation after congregation among the masses of its population. Another man, thus arrested in a career of ceaseless movement and immured within prison walls, might have allowed his mind to stagnate in sloth and despair. But Paul behaved very differently. Availing himself of every possibility of the situation, he converted his one room into a center of far-reaching activity and beneficence. On the few square feet of space allowed him he erected a fulcrum with which he moved the world, establishing within the walls of Nero's capital a sovereignty more extensive than his own.

178. Even the most irksome circumstance of his lot was turned to good account. This was the soldier by whom he was watched. To a man of Paul's eager temperament and restlessness of mood this must often have been an intolerable annoyance; and, indeed, in the letters written during this imprisonment he is constantly referring to his chain, as if it were never out of his mind. But he did not suffer this irritation to blind him to the opportunity of doing good presented by the situation. Of course his attendant was changed every few hours, as one soldier relieved another upon guard. In this way there might be six or eight with him every four-and-twenty hours. They belonged to the imperial guard, the flower of the Roman army.

Paul could not sit for hours beside another man without speaking of the subject which lay nearest his heart. He spoke to these soldiers about their immortal souls and the faith of CHRIST. To men accustomed to the horrors of Roman warfare and the manners of Roman barracks nothing could be more striking than a life and character like his; and the result of these conversations was that many of them became changed men, and a revival spread through the barracks and penetrated into the imperial household itself. His room was sometimes crowded with these stern, bronzed faces, glad to see him at other times than those when duty required them to be there. He sympathized with them and entered into the spirit of their occupation; indeed, he was full of the spirit of the warrior himself.

We have an imperishable relic of these visits in an outburst of inspired eloquence which he dictated at this period: "**Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet**

of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." That picture was drawn from the life, from the armor of the soldiers in his room; and perhaps these ringing sentences were first poured into the ears of his warlike auditors before they were transferred to the Epistle in which they have been preserved.

179. Visitors - But he had other visitors. All who took an interest in Christianity in Rome, both Jews and Gentiles, gathered to him. Perhaps there was not a day of the two years of his imprisonment but he had such visitors. The Roman Christians learned to go to that room as to an oracle or shrine. Many a Christian teacher got his sword sharpened there; and new energy began to diffuse itself through the Christian circles of the city. Many an anxious father brought his son, many a friend his friend, hoping that a word from the apostle's lips might waken the sleeping conscience. Many a wanderer, stumbling in there by chance, came out a new man. Such an one was Onesimus, a slave from Colossae, who arrived in Rome as a runaway, but was sent back to his Christian master, Philemon, no longer as a slave, but as a brother beloved.

180. Still more interesting visitors came. At all periods of his life he exercised a strong fascination over young men. They were attracted by the manly soul within him, in which they found sympathy with their aspirations and inspiration for the noblest work. These youthful friends, who were scattered over the world in the work of CHRIST, flocked to him at Rome. Timothy and Luke, Mark and Aristarchus, Tychicus and Epaphras, and many more came, to drink afresh at the well of his ever-springing wisdom and earnestness. And he sent them forth again, to carry messages to his churches or bring him news of their condition.

181. Of his spiritual children in the distance he never ceased to think. Daily he was wandering in imagination among the glens of Galatia and along the shores of Asia and Greece; every night he was praying for the Christians of Antioch and Ephesus, of Philippi and Thessalonica and Corinth. Nor were gratifying proofs wanting that they were remembering him. Now and then there would appear in his lodging a deputy from some distant church, bringing the greetings of his converts or, perhaps, a contribution to meet his temporal wants, or craving his decision on some point of doctrine or practice about which difficulty had arisen. These messengers were not sent empty away: they carried warm-hearted messages of golden words of counsel from their apostolic friend.

Some of them carried far more. When Epaphroditus, a deputy from the church at Philippi, which had sent to their dear father in CHRIST an offering of love, was returning home, Paul sent with him, in acknowledgment of their kindness, the Epistle to the Philippians, the most beautiful of all his letters, in which he lays bare his very heart and every sentence glows with love more tender than a woman's. When the slave Onesimus was sent back to Colossae, he received, as the branch of peace to offer to his master, the exquisite little Epistle to Philemon, a priceless monument of Christian courtesy. He carried, too, a letter addressed to the church of the town in which his master lived, the Epistle to the Colossians.

The composition of these Epistles was by far the most important part of Paul's varied prison activity; and he crowned this labor with the writing of the Epistle to the Ephesians, which is perhaps the profoundest and sublimest book in the world. The Church of CHRIST has derived many benefits from the imprisonment of the servants of GOD; the greatest book of uninspired religious genius, *the Pilgrim's Progress*, was written in a jail; but never did there come to the Church a greater mercy in the disguise of misfortune than when the arrest of Paul's bodily activities at Caesarea and Rome supplied him with the leisure needed to reach the depths of truth

sounded in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

182. His Writings - It may have seemed a dark dispensation of providence to Paul himself that the course of life he had pursued so long was so completely changed; but GOD's thoughts are higher than man's thoughts and His ways than man's ways; and He gave Paul grace to overcome the temptations of his situation and do far more in his enforced inactivity for the welfare of the world and the permanence of his own influence than he could have done by twenty years of wandering missionary work. Sitting in his room, he gathered within the sounding cavity of his sympathetic heart the sighs and cries of thousands far away, and diffused courage and help in every direction from his own inexhaustible resources. He sank his mind deeper and deeper in solitary thought, till, smiting the rock in the dim depth to which he had descended, he caused streams to gush forth which are still gladdening the city of GOD.

183. Release from Prison - The book of Acts suddenly breaks off with a brief summary of Paul's two years' imprisonment at Rome. Is this because there was no more to tell? When his trial came on, did it issue in his condemnation and death? Or did he get out of prison and resume his old occupations? Where Luke's lucid narrative so suddenly deserts us, tradition comes in proffering its doubtful aid. It tells us that he was acquitted on his trial and let out of prison; that he resumed his travels, visiting Spain among other places; but that before long he was arrested again and sent back to Rome, where he died a martyr's death at the cruel hands of Nero.

184. New Journeys - Happily, however, we are not altogether dependent on the precarious aid of tradition. We have writings of Paul's own undoubtedly subsequent to the two years of his first imprisonment. These are what are called the Pastoral Epistles - the Epistles to Timothy and Titus. In these we see that he regained his liberty and resumed his employment of revisiting his old churches and founding new ones. His footsteps cannot, indeed, be any longer traced with certainty. We find him back at Ephesus and Troas; we find him in Crete, an island at which he touched on his voyage to Rome and in which he may then have become interested; we find him exploring new territory in the northern parts of Greece. We see him once more, like the commander of an army who sends his aides-de-camp all over the field of battle, sending out his young assistants to organize and watch over the churches.

185. But this was not to last long. An event had happened immediately after his release from prison which could not but influence his fate. This was the burning of Rome - an appalling disaster, the glare of which even at this distance makes the heart shudder. It was probably a mad freak of the malicious monster who then wore the imperial purple. But Nero saw fit to attribute it to the Christians, and instantly the most atrocious persecution broke out against them. Of course the fame of this soon spread over the Roman world; and it was not likely that the foremost apostle of Christianity could long escape. Every Roman governor knew that he could not do the emperor a more pleasing service than by sending to him Paul in chains.

186. Second Imprisonment - It was not long, accordingly, before Paul was lying once more in prison at Rome; and it was no mild imprisonment this time, but the worst known to the law. No troops of friends now filled his room; for the Christians of Rome had been massacred or scattered, and it was dangerous for anyone to avow himself a Christian. We have a letter written from his dungeon, the last he ever wrote, the Second Epistle to Timothy, which affords us a glimpse of unspeakable pathos into the circumstances of the prisoner. He tells us that one part of his trial is already over. Not a friend stood by him as he faced the bloodthirsty tyrant who sat on

the judgment-seat. But the Lord stood by him and enabled him to make the emperor and the spectators in the crowded basilica hear the sound of the Gospel. The charge against him had broken down.

But he had no hope of escape. Other stages of the trial had yet to come, and he knew that evidence to condemn him would either be discovered or manufactured.

The letter betrays the miseries of his dungeon. He prays Timothy to bring a cloak he had left at Troas, to defend him from the damp of the cell and the cold of the winter. He asks for his books and parchments, that he may relieve the tedium of his solitary hours with the studies he had always loved. But, above all, he beseeches Timothy to come himself; for he was longing to feel the touch of a friendly hand and see the face of a friend yet once again before he died.

Was the brave heart then conquered at last? Read the Epistle and see. How does it begin? **"I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."** How does it end? **"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love His appearing."** That is not the strain of the vanquished.

187. Trial - There can be little doubt that he appeared again at Nero's bar, and this time the charge did not break down. In all history there is not a more startling illustration of the irony of human life than this scene of Paul at the bar of Nero. On the judgment-seat, clad in the imperial purple, sat a man who in a bad world had attained the eminence of being the very worst and meanest being in it - a man stained with every crime, the murderer of his own mother, of his wives and of his best benefactors; a man whose whole being was so steeped in every namable and unnamable vice that body and soul of him were, as some one said at the time, nothing but a compound of mud and blood; and in the prisoner's dock stood the best man the world contained, his hair whitened with labors for the good of men and the glory of GOD. Such was the occupant of the seat of justice, and such the man who stood in the place of the criminal.

188. Death - The trial ended, Paul was condemned and delivered over to the executioner. He was led out of the city with a crowd of the lowest rabble at his heels. The fatal spot was reached; he knelt beside the block; the headsman's axe gleamed in the sun and fell; and the head of the apostle of the world rolled down in the dust.

189. So sin did its uttermost and its worst. Yet how poor and empty was its triumph! The blow of the axe only smote off the lock of the prison and let the spirit go forth to its home and to its crown. The city falsely called eternal dismissed him with execration from her gates; but ten thousand times ten thousand welcomed him in the same hour at the gates of the city which is really eternal. Even on earth Paul could not die. He lives among us to-day with a life a hundredfold more influential than that which throbbed in his brain whilst the earthly form which made him visible still lingered on the earth.

Wherever the feet of them who publish the glad tidings go forth beautiful upon the mountains, he walks by their side as an inspirer and a guide; in ten thousand churches every Lord's Day and on a thousand thousand hearths every day his eloquent lips still teach that Gospel of which he was never ashamed; and, wherever there are human souls searching for the white flower of holiness or climbing the difficult heights of self-denial, there he whose life was so pure, whose

devotion to CHRIST was so entire, and whose pursuit of a single purpose was so unceasing, is welcomed as the best of friends.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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