

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PAUL'S INTRIGUING TRAVELOGUE

“I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19)

The Lord kept Paul's diary. He commissioned Dr. Luke to write it, and then preserved it where records never become soiled with years. While other institutions lie buried beneath the ruins of earth or wax latent in the corrosive rust and moss of age, the Bible remains unaffected by the elements of time. Because of this fact, the movements of this great pioneer missionary, the eminent messenger of God, possess freshness and rare contemporary value. They are studied with more widespread interest in this far removed present-age than the mighty global military operations of recent years. This daring, dauntless, driving evangel, ever blazing new trails with the old faith became the unchallenged symbol of obedience, determination and perseverance.

The farewell accorded Barnabas and Paul by the famous Antiochan church in Syria was simple, but solemn and sincere. Their departure was felt deeply by the saints there, yet they acceded willingly to the call of the Holy Spirit and assembled to bid farewell to this valorous vanguard of Christian missions. **“And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away”** (Acts 13:3).

The first Christian missionary journey had begun. Where it would lead and how it would end were not of material concern to men who were being led by the Holy Ghost. Their first stopping point was Seleucia, one of the most northerly seaports on the Levant, and a prominent one. Their direction was westward. Thus, the gospel was beamed toward the lands of the western hemisphere, ultimately to give to those of us who were fortunate enough to be born in such territories the advantages which divine illumination always affords. It is hardly likely that much of a delay was occasioned at this embarkation port, for these travelers were in no wise particular about the kind of accommodations they received. Soon they were sailing the Mediterranean.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Arriving at Salamis, on the easterly side of the isle of Cyprus, they began at once to preach the Word of God, frequenting the synagogues. Whether John Mark preceded or accompanied them to Cyprus is not clear, but he was in their company, making for the time, three sturdy witnesses bearing a faithful testimony to the natives.

They trekked the whole distance through the island, without incident, sowing the Good Seed as they went, and reached Paphos where Satan put up some noticeable resistance. There a vulgar magician tried strenuously to hinder Sergius Paulus, the wise proconsul of the country, in his desire to hear the gospel. When Paul **“set his eyes upon him,”** he boldly exclaimed, **“O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?”** (Acts 13:10).

Immediately upon receipt of this stunning rebuke, Elymas, the sorcerer, was stricken with blindness. Through it all, God honored His Word and the proconsul was wonderfully saved. John Mark, refusing to go farther, returned to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas sailed north to Perga, thence over land to Antioch in Pisidia.

Their presence was usually soon discovered, but rarely had the door so readily opened for their ministry. On the Sabbath day, the Jews in one synagogue dispensed with their preliminary matters; and after the reading of the law and the prophets, sent for these visiting men, explaining, **“If ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on”** (Acts 13:15).

Can the reader imagine Paul declining an opportunity such as that? With the utmost eloquence and accuracy, he refreshed their minds on points in sacred history, beginning at Moses, and delineating in rapid succession facts concerning the wilderness journey, the judges and the prophets. Each point in his discourse was a stepping stone to the glorious theme of his every presentation, that of Christ, his Saviour and Lord.

When he made reference to John the Baptist, it was then most opportune for him to introduce the wonderful One whom John called the Lamb of God. Then, he drove home the message of Christ, Israel’s rejected Messiah: **“And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath”** (Acts 13:42).

Thus, there was an amazing response to the gospel, with multitudes giving audience. Of course, it would be unusual if some Satanic opposition had not been registered. Envious Jews openly contradicted and blasphemed, so the men of God turned to the more receptive Gentiles. A revival began to sweep throughout the region, until religious and otherwise respectable women were stirred up, together with the civic leaders, and Barnabas and Paul were expelled from that general territory (Acts 13:50). They turned toward Iconium, not far distant to the southeast, totally unperturbed and undismayed; for, as they took their departure from the presence of the angered townsfolk, we read, **“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost”** (Acts 13:52).

A fruitful ministry was awaiting them at Iconium where they remained for an extended effort, with many conversions resulting among both the Jews and the Greeks. This gave them added courage to preach with boldness and God confirmed the Word of His grace by granting signs and wonders through them. Soon the devil’s divisive agents began to operate; but not until the Lord had given His co-labourers the hearts of many people, so much so, that the division showed an imposing number on the side of the disciples.

Increased pressure was brought to bear by the forces of evil, and plans were laid to assault and stone these inoffensive itinerants who were obliged to flee to the cities of Lyconia.

Not far to the south of Iconium, they entered a place called Lystra. Just inside the city gate, they espied a man with deformed feet who had not walked from birth. Paul perceived that this poor unfortunate individual had faith to be healed; so, shouting with a loud voice, apparently to attract the passerby, he commanded, **“Stand upright on thy feet!”** (Acts 14:10). The man joyfully leaped about the street. Of all his varied experiences, none ever matched what transpired here.

The extremes of unbelief may be both sad and amusing, for the people nearby began to exclaim with unrestrained excitement, **“The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men”** (Acts 14:11). Crowds began to assemble; and, as the erstwhile begging cripple continued leaping with rejoicing, the people rather unceremoniously would have crowned their visitors as gods, Barnabas inheriting the title of Jupiter and Paul being honoured with Mercurius.

While some were thus engaged, others hastened for garlands, and still others for oxen in order to offer a sacrifice. When the disciples finally extricated themselves from the frenzied mobs, Paul disillusioned these would-be worshippers, saying, **“Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God”** (Acts 14:15).

In the meantime, the rabble Jews from Antioch and Iconium had followed the missionaries. They soon changed the people’s coronating inclinations into a crucifying propensity, and Paul was stoned, dragged from the city, and thrown by the roadside for the vultures to consume. In all probability, it was through this experience that the Apostle was transported to the paradise of God (II Corinthians 12:2-4). It is hardly to be wondered that the attackers left Paul for dead when the Apostle himself did not know whether or not he left the body; but what were a few stones with their ugly bruises when such an unspeakable compensation was his! If he ever forgot other points in his extensive journeys, Lystra remained indelibly upon his memory.

At Derbe, which was the farthest point in this first missionary tour, they met with little opposition, or else it was so minor in contrast to the Lystra experience that its omission from the record was warranted. They were very successful there, however, for they **“taught many people.”** The people had to be converted before they could be counseled. Then, to prove his indomitability, Paul returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia. What manner of man was this! Fear was utterly unknown to him on these excursions. He was not ill-advised to thus return for he went **“confirming . . . the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith”** (Acts 14:22). The progress which had been made was most gratifying to Paul and worth all the maltreatment. He and Barnabas ordained elders in **“every church”** and then commended them to the Lord (14:23).

Their return trip to the coast of Pamphylia was somewhat speeded; but instead of embarking at Perga, they swung to the southwest to present the gospel at Attalia in Lycia. Then they sailed back to Seleucia and returned to Antioch, the point from which they were sent by the Holy Spirit. The church at Antioch was soon assembled, and a complete recital of their experiences was rendered before an enthusiastic and appreciative audience.

Paul remained there a long time with the disciples, but it is questionable whether so intense a personality as he could be prevailed upon to take the rest he so much needed (14:28).

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul began his second history-making journey with a different partner, not so much by choice as by necessity. Paul had requested Barnabas to join him, but Barnabas insisted upon taking John Mark whom Paul was not disposed to invite, because he had turned back from the first tour when they had only gone as far as Pamphylia. The difference between them on this particular matter is described as being “**sharp**,” so Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas. This proved to be an extensive mission, and one that was most eventful.

Going by land from Antioch in Syria, the missionary party moved around the Gulf of Issus through Cilicia to Derbe, in all probability, passing through Tarsus, the place of Paul’s youthful years. At Derbe, Paul made the acquaintance of a young man by the name of Timothy who was to prove a great blessing to him in subsequent years. Throughout the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, they evangelized with earnestness, bypassing Bithynia and Asia by Holy Spirit direction, and arrived at Troas on the Aegean Sea. It was at this coastal town that Paul received the oft-quoted “*Macedonia call*.” In a night vision, he heard a man appealing, “**Come over into Macedonia and help us**” (16:9).

The vision was so real and so compelling that they made a quick departure from Troas, going by ship to Neapolis and thence to Philippi. Philippi was one of the never-to-be-forgotten places in the memory of Paul. It was here that Lydia came to know the Lord Jesus as her Saviour, together with her whole household. This was a delightful experience. It was also here that a certain damsel, engaged in soothsaying followed Paul. In spite of her spiritual blindness, she gave a commendable definition of a true servant of God. She referred to Paul and Silas as the servants of the Most High God because “**they show us the way of salvation**” (Acts 16:17).

It was through their dealing with this damsel that they were apprehended and ruthlessly imprisoned and secured in the stocks. At midnight, these men with uncrushable spirits engaged in a season of prayer and praise which brought forth the power of God to blast the prison doors and break the jailer’s heart. His cry, “**What must I do to be saved?**” has echoed down through the ages, but not more so than the concerted answer of the preaching prisoners, “**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house**” (Acts 16:31).

Continuing their course, they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica where the Spirit of God performed a marvelous work through them. For three successive Sabbaths Paul reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews, “**opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ**” (17:3).

Wherever the Spirit works, Satan is quick to counter. Some envious instigators of the opposition hired some vile, unprincipled men to cause an uproar in the town. This finally forced God’s ambassadors to move on to Berea where their hearts were deeply gladdened.

The Bereans received the message with readiness but took pains to ascertain the truth of the missionaries' statements by Scriptural test. Even here, the enemy was on their trail, forcing the brethren of Berea to send Paul away secretly by sea, while Silas and Timothy remained.

When Paul arrived at Athens, he sent for his companions to make haste and join him. In the meantime, his heart was greatly exercised over the appalling and prevailing idolatry among the Gentiles who claimed so much in the way of culture and refinement. He disputed with the Jews and contended with the different philosophers. Dealing with the Jews, Paul could employ Israel's antecedents—her history, sacrifices and prophecies; but coping with the Gentiles, saturated as they were with all kinds of superstitions, was a difficult procedure indeed. Some inquired, **“What will this babbling say?”** In language more in keeping with the day, this meant, “What has this vagrant seed-picker to air?”

Many were the tourists who entered Athens, attempting to build up an appeal on little or no basic authority. Paul, to many of these philosophers, was one such person, and they hardly raised an eyebrow in recognition of his presence. Others mocked. Nevertheless, the ministry here was not fruitless for the Word was preached and certain ones believed (17:34). Acts, chapter seventeen, gives to us a few highlights of Paul's visit at Athens. To the Athenians, the Epicureans and stoics were philosophers; to Paul, they were simply superstitious men (v. 22). They were bitterly opposed to each other in principle, but sweetly agreeable in attacking the servant of God. In every age, those who cannot find any other common ground for agreement will join hands in opposition to Christ.

Titled persons had no intimidating effect upon Paul. He was fearless and bold in the Spirit. His message at Athens undermined every major premise of both the intemperate Epicureans and the haughty, egotistical stoics. With divine unction, he affirmed his belief in creation (v. 24), providence (v. 26), inspiration (v. 28), resurrection (v. 18), repentance (v. 30) and judgment (v. 31).

Concerning this Gospel, some denied (v. 32); others deferred (v. 32); but certain ones delighted (v. 34). Thus, the two predominating practical schools of Athens lost many adherents. The Word wins in every contest.

Faulty philosophy falters when such facts are featured, and flattering philosophers are foiled by the weight of heaven's wisdom. **“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit”** (Colossians 2:8).

The Apostle moved on to Corinth where he made his home with some tentmakers. Being skilled himself in this craft, he worked with them, using every occasion to preach the gospel. He remained in Corinth eighteen months during which time he fellowshipped with such people as Aquila, Priscilla, Justus and Crispus. Had it not been for the unconcern of Gallio, the deputy of Achaia, about the theological terms, Paul might have been detained at Corinth longer than he desired. However, he was free to continue his travels, so he sailed to Ephesus where his visit was very brief owing to his desire to reach Jerusalem in time to keep a feast. From Jerusalem, he returned to Antioch in Syria to make his report to the brethren.

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul's third journey was mainly a return to churches which had resulted from his previous visits. He travelled "**over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples**" (Acts 18:23). The word "**strengthening**" is a complete story in itself.

First of all, it was a great inspiration just to have so mighty a servant in their midst. Then, they had many questions to ask concerning matters pertaining to the faith and were waiting for further instruction in doctrine and advice in practical procedure. No one was so well qualified as Paul to help them in all these respects. The time he spent with each group was golden hours of spiritual fellowship and profit. They were strengthened in the Lord.

The high point of this third journey was unquestionably at Ephesus. Acts, chapter nineteen, suggests the following summary in these statements: The Ephesians revelled in culture, but refused Christ (v. 35); and when Paul planted a pulpit in their city, there was no small stir (v. 23). The craftsmen for mercenary reasons (v. 25) were angered (v. 28) and the religionists confused (v. 29); but the town clerk contended that their precepts were incontrovertible (v. 36). However, Paul spoke boldly, though not bluntly (v. 8), and many believed (v. 18).

While the devil was devising destruction (v. 13), God was working wonders (v. 11).

- His servant was persuading (v. 8);
- His Spirit was pervading (v. 6);
- His Word was prevailing (v. 20).

When the uproar of the assembly subsided (20:1), sinners were still rampant in the city (20:3), but many saints were resting and rejoicing in the Saviour (v. 17). The wonderful Word grew mightily (v. 20) and accomplished what the Lord had intended (Isaiah 55:11).

Going from Ephesus, he passed through Macedonia into Greece where he spent three months in Corinth until the Jews conspired against him. Then he went back through Macedonia to Troas by way of Philippi.

During a seven-day stopover in Troas, Paul preached such a lengthy message that a young man by the name of Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, fell asleep and catapulted from the third loft, much to the distress of the disciples. The next day, Paul set out by foot for Assos where he joined his companions and sailed for Miletus, going by the way of Chios, Samos and Trogyllium. He wanted to visit with the Ephesian elders but found that there was not sufficient time to go to Ephesus and still reach Jerusalem in time for the day of Pentecost; therefore, he sent word for these elders to meet him at Miletus, which they were able to do. To these men, the Apostle delivered one of his most eminent addresses; and "**when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship**" (Acts 20:36-38).

The departure from Miletus started them back to the Levant; stopping briefly at Coos, Rhodes and Patara, they finally arrived at Tyre in Syria. Paul was twice warned against going to Jerusalem, once most dramatically; for a certain prophet from Judea named Agabus took Paul's girdle and bound his hands and feet, saying, **“Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle”** (Acts 21:11).

Those in the company, who were noticeably emotional following this prophecy, evoked an immediate rebuke from Paul.

“What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?” he queried, **“for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”**

He could not be dissuaded. Hardly had he arrived until he was seized; and, but for the intervention of the Lord, he would have paid with his life for this journey.

When once we take into consideration the travelling difficulties of Paul's day and the virgin territories through which he carried the gospel, we know of a surety that the Lord was with him and the ministering spirits hovered near in protecting grace. With such an example of dependence and determination, we should be challenged to launch out into a more daring ministry, trusting Him Who is able to deliver.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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