



# Never Been to Spain

The Journals & Journeys of Paul

## "Stairway to Preachin' "

Occasionally I will use a travel agency to book a trip. Their expertise about both travel and accommodations can really be helpful.

Think of God as a travel agent. Or at least as Paul's travel agent. Paul wanted to go to Rome. God wanted Paul in Rome. In Acts 23:11 we read, "The Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

It was as if God was booking Paul's trip for him. In fact, God would arrange free passage to Rome on a ship.

Then there was the not-so-good news. Paul would be a prisoner on that ship. He wouldn't get to Rome for approximately three years and, once there, he would remain under house arrest another two years.

Did I mention the ship would wreck and Paul be bitten by a deadly viper? Or that this all started when Paul was taken into custody in the Temple after nearly being beaten to death?

Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

I always apply that proverb to God having a different plan for me but I think it's more likely that the difference is in the path I must take to accomplish the plan. God seems to prefer roads less traveled.

I remember when we were first saved Pam's heart was to quit working to stay home and raise a family. A series of providences encouraged her to quit her career. Then, lo and behold, she got pregnant!

Except that first pregnancy was ectopic; a tubal pregnancy in which the child would never be delivered and her chances to get pregnant again were cut in half.

God's path for the plan we had all agreed upon was very different than we were thinking. It took us through pain and grief and the test of faith.

Be encouraged that God wants to give you the desires of your heart, the ones you and He have both agreed upon. Getting to them, seeing them realized, is going to be a journey, an adventure, that often will involve pain and suffering since our Lord was a suffering Savior, and since The Lord wants to refine you.

Tonight we will look briefly at the episode that started Paul's journey to Rome with a special emphasis on something Paul did as he was being taken away by the Roman guards.

The story is in Acts twenty-one and twenty-two. Paul had agreed to participate with four Jews in a ritual of purification in order to calm Jewish suspicions about him. They would literally live in the Temple during the time of their vow. On the final morning they would shave their heads and burn their hair in a sacrificial fire.

Certain Jews recognized Paul and, seeing him with four others, assumed they were Gentiles whom he had brought in to the Temple against Jewish law.

Let's read what happened next.

Acts 21:27 Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,

Acts 21:28 crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

Acts 21:29 (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

Acts 21:30 And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

They dragged him out of the sacred precinct he was in because no blood was to be shed there. I love it that there is a mob-morality. Their gonna kill him; just not there because that would be unlawful.

Have you ever been mugged? We used to call it being jumped when I was in high school. My friend and I got jumped one night leaving a football game too long after the crowd. It's no fun getting pummeled.

Paul didn't know it but he was buying his ticket to Rome. This beating would earn him free passage on the governments dime.

Acts 21:31 Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Acts 21:32 He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

Acts 21:33 Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done.

Acts 21:34 And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.

Acts 21:35 When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.

Acts 21:36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"

Paul had been assaulted, forcibly dragged down some stone stairs, and beaten by multiple assailants. He would be bruised, bloodied, disoriented. No matter his faith and spiritual strength this was unsettling to say the least. We won't get there tonight but as the story continues the Romans plan to flog him as a troublemaker - and he might anticipate it at this point, being familiar with Roman customs and law.

All of this makes what happened next so beautiful.

Acts 21:37 Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?" He replied, "Can you speak Greek?"

Acts 21:38 Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"

Acts 21:39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people."

Acts 21:40 So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language...

Commander Lysias had decided his prisoner must be the illiterate Egyptian who had recently led a tragic uprising, inducing thousands to carry hidden daggers and stab political opponents by stealth, then to camp on the Mount of Olives in expectation of the miraculous collapse of the city walls and the defeat of the Romans. The military had routed the armed rabble, hundreds of survivors had been crucified or sent to the galleys, but the Egyptian had escaped.

At any rate, he was leading the prisoner away according to proper procedure when suddenly Paul talked to him.

I have to call, for lack of a better term, what happened at the top of those stairs a God-moment. It made no sense, logistically, for Lysias to allow Paul to speak. The crowd was clearly inflamed and the best tactical strategy was to get Paul away from it and to safety. It went against all Lysias' training to grant Paul permission to speak to the crowd.

No matter a persons status or rank or position or education or worldly authority, if you are a Christian and he or she is not, you have Heaven's authority when it comes to spiritual things.

We see in this what can only be understood as spiritual authority. From an earthly perspective Paul was the prisoner of the Roman authorities. But truly, from Heaven's vantage point, he was an ambassador with real authority to speak for the King.

We defer to others on the basis of status or position or rank. Normally that's good - but not in spiritual matters with nonbelievers.

No matter a persons status or rank or position or education or worldly authority, if you are a Christian and he or she is not, you have Heaven's authority when it comes to spiritual things.

Maybe even more God-momentish than Lysias allowing Paul to speak was Paul asking to address the crowd. These people had just tried to kill him - and for no good reason. In fact, he was only in the Temple fulfilling a vow so he could show these very people he wasn't against them.

Not only did he want to address them; he wanted to address them about their salvation. He will give them his testimony. He wants them to know about Jesus.

There Paul was, bruised, bloodied, pummeled, arrested - not ashamed one bit about any of it because he knew it was for Christ's sake.

Plenty of Christians are quite literally bruised, bloodied, pummeled, and arrested for Christ's sake all over the world tonight. We read an article just today at the Men's Fellowship that reported Christianity as the most persecuted 'religion' in the world today. It's only going to get worse.

You and I may not face physical persecution but we are attacked in other ways that are no less punishing. The devil is on the assault using folks who are taken captive by him to do his will. Many of us are bruised and bloodied from the attacks against our lives, our families, our character, our walk with The Lord.

If so, if that's you, I encourage you to see Paul standing atop those stairs, demanding to speak in order to give his testimony of Jesus Christ. It was one of his finest moments - made possible by the grace of God.

You might not be quite there yet - not quite to the top of the stairs. You might still be being dragged away... Or beat up... Or taken into custody (spiritually speaking).

You have to go through those things before you can stand at the top of the stairs.

You'll get to the top of the stairs and, when you do, you'll see what joy there is in sharing in the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus.