



# Never Been to Spain

The Journals & Journeys of Paul

## "The Midnight Ride of the Revered Paul "

When we last saw Paul he had been rescued from an angry Jewish mob in the Temple by the Roman garrison. Commander Lysias didn't know what to do with Paul so he arranged for a confrontation between Paul and his accusers. It only made matters worse. Paul remained in custody while Lysias tried to figure out what to do.

Meanwhile some forty Jews took a vow to neither eat nor drink until they killed Paul. Hearing of this plot from Paul's nephew, Lysias sent Paul in the middle of the night to Caesarea, the center of Roman government in that province. He was turning him over to Governor Felix.

The Jewish religious leaders and their lawyer came to Caesarea to press charges against Paul before Felix. Realizing there was no evidence against Paul, but fearing to release him, Felix put him under house arrest.

Two years later, when Festus replaced Felix as governor, Paul was still in custody. The Jews sought extradition of Paul back to Jerusalem; Festus refused but invited them to come to Caesarea as before and press their charges.

After hearing them Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to return to Jerusalem to stand trial. Paul refused and having now spent two years in custody without ever being convicted he demanded his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case directly to Caesar Nero in Rome.

Before he could be sent to Rome King Agrippa visited Festus and, having heard about Paul, asked to have an audience with him. Only then was he sent on to Rome under guard.

During New Testament times Jerusalem and Judea were governed by a variety of different men:

- Direct from Rome through Roman province administrators or governors known as procurators.
- Through the Roman governor of Syria, such as The Decapolis.
- By Roman-appointed Jewish kings, ethnarchs or rulers, and tetrarchs or rulers of a fourth part of a province.

Felix and Festus were Roman governors. Agrippa was a descendant of Herod the Great and was a Jewish ruler, consider king over his region.

Whenever Paul appeared before these rulers he preached the Gospel. What an amazing privilege to be able to share Jesus Christ with a top ranking civil official.

Preaching to these rulers was a rare and wonderful privilege but it was costly. It cost Paul his freedom. He was in Roman custody for over two years and that is what afforded him the opportunity to present Christ to them.

It costs you nothing, of course, to be saved. That is to say, salvation is free - by God's grace alone through faith alone.

But there **is** a high cost for the privilege of serving Jesus after you are saved. Charles Spurgeon, in a sermon from Luke on counting the cost of discipleship, said,

It is clear from our text that TRUE RELIGION IS COSTLY. Far be it from us to create any confusion of thought here! The gifts of God's Grace cost us nothing, neither could His salvation be purchased with money, nor with merit, nor by vows and penances. "If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned." The Gospel motto is, "without money and without price." We are "justified freely by His Grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." **Yet, for all that, if a man will be a Christian it will cost him something.**

Something interesting to ponder. Were you asked to count the cost before you received Jesus? I'm going to guess the answer is "No."

Paul's answer would be "No," by the way. He was saved on the road to Damascus when Jesus revealed Himself. It was only afterward that Jesus told Ananias regarding Paul,

Acts 9:15 ... "... he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

Acts 9:16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Jesus saved Paul and *then* showed him how many things he must suffer serving Him. He didn't stop him on the road and explain the cost and ask Paul if he still wanted to get saved. He didn't describe all his future sufferings and give Paul the chance to opt out.

"Counting the cost," in this sense at least, really means **recognizing** the cost. It means coming to grips with the fact that serving God will cost you something.

**It is the recognition that all you are and all you have is a stewardship from God which is to be used as a means of outreach in this world.**

Let's take a look at Paul in relationship to these three Roman leaders and see what insights we can draw from the texts about recognizing the cost of serving Jesus.

Acts 24:24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

Acts 24:25 Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

Acts 24:26 Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.

Acts 24:27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

For two years the great apostle Paul reasoned with Felix and his wife, Drusilla. For a veteran missionary who had seen multitudes of conversions and who had planted many, many churches, that's gotta be a little disheartening.

And to be preaching on "righteousness" and "self control" but still be being asked for a bribe - you gotta wonder if you're maybe losing your edge.

For lack of a better term let's call this measurable ineffectiveness. You have a congregation of two and after two years, if you measure success by conversions, you're at zero.

I won't speak to Paul's state of mind about this. Maybe he was unaffected by it. I can tell you I'd be bummed - seriously bummed. I couldn't help but feel like a guy who'd been transferred to the worst posting ever as some sort of discipline.

Serving The Lord will take a mental toll on you if you don't recognize the cost of serving Him. He may **want** you to be measurably ineffective for a time.

Let me put it another way. The effectiveness of your service isn't yours to control. All you can do is be faithful to serve. If you are faithful but have little or no measurable success, it's costly but need not take an emotional toll.

Let's move on to Festus. One day, when Agrippa was visiting, Festus brought Paul out to address them. As Paul presented the Gospel, Festus had this reaction.

Acts 26:24 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

It's hard for me to get a handle on exactly what Festus meant. I don't think he believed that getting a PhD. would result in a condition of insanity. I think it more likely that he thought Paul's concentration on only the Word of God had rendered him closed-minded and foolish.

What we can confidently say is that this was a severe personal attack upon Paul. It was slander.

If you take any sort of stand for The Lord, sooner or later you will be personally attacked - maybe even publicly. You need to recognize it as part of the cost of serving Jesus if you're going to overcome it and press forward.

Paul answered Festus then pressed Agrippa for a decision.

Acts 26:27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

Acts 26:28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

Acts 26:29 And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

Paul was bound; in chains. He had been for two years. As mentioned, serving The Lord cost him his freedom.

You and I are probably not going to be bound by chains for our faith anytime soon. Let's think in terms of *boundaries* instead.

Have you ever felt bound for God, or you might say trapped, in a situation? It's part of the cost of serving Jesus. He sets those boundaries to keep you in the very place where He wants to bless you. He knows it is there that He can teach you patience and kindness and acceptance and forgiveness.

It's in the dark that your light really shines; it's where preservative is definitely needed that you can be spiritual salt.

You and I may not have had a Damascus Road type of conversion. But The Lord nevertheless says to each of His dear saints, "I will show you how many things you must suffer for My name's sake."

Next time you are struggling in your service to Jesus, ask yourself if you have forgotten to recognize that there is a cost for the privilege. Then rest in God's plan.