

# A Short Historical Account of the Trials of the Apostle

by Thomas Reade

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*The sermon recounts the Apostle Paul's journey of mercy, his challenges and persecutions, and his triumphs and faith in God, highlighting the spread of the Gospel and the establishment of churches in various cities.*

**Scripture:** Acts 20:24, Romans 8:18, Philippians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 13:5

**Topics:** "Persevering Faith", "Divine Providence"

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## Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the Apostle Paul's journey of mercy, highlighting his selfless dedication to spreading the Gospel despite facing numerous trials, persecutions, and dangers. From Jerusalem to Rome, Paul faced opposition, imprisonment, and even near-death experiences, yet he remained steadfast in his faith and commitment to Christ. Through Paul's unwavering trust in God's providence and divine protection, he continued to preach the kingdom of God, even in the face of adversity, ultimately leaving a legacy of faith, courage, and perseverance for all believers to emulate.

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## Transcript

Let us now trace the Apostle's journey of mercy, as recorded by his fellow-laborer and historian Luke. It is highly instructive to pursue such a tour of benevolence, "to contemplate a man, who renounced the comforts of home, not to amass wealth, or gratify curiosity, or acquire knowledge, which might be ostentatiously displayed on his return; but to perform the unsolicited offices of love to strangers; to impart to them the best of all gifts, the blessings of salvation; to do good to others not only at the expense of time and labor, but at the risk of his life. It was thus that Paul, like his Master, went about doing good." While we travel with him from city to city, we shall find that every where bonds and afflictions awaited him. He was a flame, kept alive in the midst of raging waters. By the preserving care of his Savior, he was immortal, until his work was done.

At JERUSALEM, the theater of his bloody persecutions, he no sooner began to preach salvation through the cross of Christ, than the unbelieving Jews went about to kill him.

At ANTIOCH the people flocked in such numbers to hear the Gospel, that the Jews, filled with envy, spoke against those things which were spoken of Paul, contradicting and blaspheming, until they succeeded in raising a persecution against him, and in expelling him out of their coast. But he shook off the dust of his feet against them, and came unto Iconium, being filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit.

At ICONIUM, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against Paul and Barnabas, so that an assault was made both by the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and stone them.

At LYSTRA, certain Jews, who came from Antioch and Iconium, persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, they drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead; but while the disciples stood round about him, he was miraculously restored. At this place the Apostle gave a striking proof of the purity of his principles. Having performed a miracle upon a cripple who had never walked, being lame from his birth, the astonished multitude cried out, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." It was with much difficulty that Paul restrained them from offering sacrifices unto him, saying, "Sirs, why do you these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach to you that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God." How different was the spirit and end of Herod, who drank in the poison of popular adulation. Being arrayed in royal apparel, and seated upon his throne, he made an oration to the people. They gave a shout, saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten by worms, and gave up the spirit."

At PHILIPPI, when traveling with Silas, the multitude rose up together against them. The magistrates rent off their clothes in anger, and commanded to beat them; and when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely, who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. Here, the Almighty appeared in behalf of his suffering servants; for, while they were singing praises to God during the hour of midnight, suddenly there was a great earthquake; so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. Through the wonder-working power of grace, the jailor was made to cry for mercy, to believe in Jesus, to show kindness to the Apostle, and to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

At THESSALONICA, Paul reasoned with the Jews three Sabbath-days out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that Jesus whom he preached unto them is Christ. And some believed and joined with him and Silas. But the Jews who believed not, moved with envy, took certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar.

At BEREIA Paul had no rest; for when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached by him at this place, they came here and stirred up the people. Yet his visit was not without some fruit; for the Jews at Berea, were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. And the happy consequence was, that many of them believed- also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

At ATHENS, he had to endure the strife of tongues, In the synagogue he disputed with the Jews, and in the market daily with those who met with him. Certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him; while others, mocking, said, "What will this babblers say? You bring strange things to our ears." The opposition which Paul met with from these philosophers, most strikingly shows the holy and humbling nature of the Gospel. The Epicureans derided him, because the pure and self-denying precepts of Christ condemned their loose and exorbitant course of life. The Stoics assailed him, because the meek and lowly spirit of the Gospel was directly opposed to their immoderate pride and love of praise. All, both

philosophers and plebeians, ridiculed him, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection, and exposed, by arguments drawn from Creation and Providence, the folly of idolatry, and their gross superstition in worshipping an unknown God.

At CORINTH, when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat. But here the Apostle received strength and consolation from on high. The Lord spoke to him in the night by a vision "Do not be afraid, but speak, and hold not your peace, for I am with you, and no man shall set on you, to hurt you, for I have many people in this city."

At EPHESUS, a violent tumult was raised by Demetrius, who made silver shrines for Diana. The whole city was full of confusion, and so great was the danger that, when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples did not allow him.

At MILETUS, Paul expressed his feelings to the elders of the church of Ephesus with inimitable tenderness. "And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit has told me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus--the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love. And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again."

At CAESAREA the Apostle manifested a noble firmness. A certain prophet from Judea, named Agabus, took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." When the disciples heard this, they besought Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But was such a man as he to be intimidated, through fear of suffering? Could he, who gloried in tribulation for Christ's sake, be induced to shrink from the cross? Paul answered; "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." And when he could not be persuaded, they ceased, saying- the will of the Lord be done!

Can we thus surrender into the hands of our heavenly Father, without a murmur, whatever is dearest to us? Not daring to cavil at his inscrutable Wisdom, do we cordially acquiesce in all the arrangements of his Providence and rejoice in the manifestations of his glory, even when He requires the sacrifice of our most valued comforts? Under every bereavement, can we say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord?" "The will of the Lord be done?"

At JERUSALEM, the Apostle did indeed experience the full accomplishment of the predictions of Agabus. All the city was upset; and when the people ran together, they took Paul, and dragged him out of the temple, and went about to kill him. The chief captain also commanded him to be bound with two chains. But Jesus did not forsake his faithful servant. In a vision of the night, the Lord stood by him, and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul, for as you have testified of me in Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome." With such divine assurances of support, with such favored manifestations of his Savior's love, he might well say to Agrippa, in his eloquent defense, "I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains." Having appealed to Caesar- Festus said to Paul, "Unto Caesar shall you go." All this was over-ruled, to lead this faithful ambassador of Christ to Rome, that there also he might testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

With such unceasing trials the Apostle might well say to the Corinthians, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." But his hope was founded on the Rock of Ages; his life was

hidden with Christ in God; therefore he was safe and happy.

Being put into a ship at Adramyrium, this faithful minister of Christ proceeded on his voyage to Rome. He, whose way is in the sea, and whose path is in the great waters, was pleased to raise a storm, which should manifest his power, promote the spread of his Truth, and procure respect for his suffering servant. When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest threatened their destruction, all hope that the crew would be saved was taken away.

Any religion will stand in a calm. In a storm, in the moment of imminent danger, the true Christian alone exhibits the strength of his principles. When the worldling is filled with dismay, he is full of comfort, yes, exceeding joyful in all his tribulation. Amid the raging elements, the Apostle stood as the messenger of mercy- "Sirs, you should have hearkened unto me, and not have left from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship alone. For there stood by me this night the Angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, fear not, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God has given you all those who sail with you. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."

Happy Paul! to be thus honored by God, and blessed with his presence! Caesar, surrounded with all the splendors of an imperial palace, was poor indeed, when compared with this despised prisoner of Jesus Christ. We may here learn to form a just estimate of human happiness. It does not consist in the abundance of wealth, the dignity of power, or the fascinations of pleasure; but, in the enjoyment of the Divine favor, and in an uniform loving obedience to the Divine Will.

Can we, like the holy Apostle, in filial confidence declare, "Whose I am, and whom I serve?" To do this is happiness upon earth; to feel this, is the commencement of heavenly felicity. If our hearts assure us that the Lord is our portion, we are truly rich, under every outward privation. Faith is the key which unlocks the store-house of divine bounty. Possessing this gift of grace, the believer can hope against hope, and repose upon the promises under every discouragement. When all is dark around him, and dangers threaten his destruction, he can even then rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation. How sweetly does David sing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble- therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

Faith is a triumphant principle. It supported the royal Psalmist under all his varied trials, and upheld the undaunted Paul amid the storms which every where assailed him. To the affrighted crew, the Apostle manifested its supporting influence, when he declared, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." This is faith in its native simplicity. It is taking God at his word. It is trusting in a naked promise, believing that God will do as he has said. It is confidence in the faithfulness, power, and love of Christ. It is reliance upon the Truth of Him who cannot lie, whose counsel shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure. Such faith, as it honors God, so it brings peace and purity into the soul.

Being cast upon the Island of Melita, the Apostle would no doubt preach among its inhabitants the unsearchable riches of Christ. Publius, the chief man of the island, lodged him three days courteously; to whom he rendered a signal benefit through the power of Jesus, by the restoration of his father to health. The common people also were directed to attend unto the word of salvation, by his miraculous escape from death; for when a viper fastened itself upon his hand, he shook it off without receiving any harm.

Thus they saw in Paul the prisoner, a dignity far surpassing an ordinary character; and they honored him with many honors.

At length the Apostle came to Rome. When the brethren heard of his arrival in Italy, they came to meet him, as far as Appian Forum, whom, when Paul saw them, he thanked God, and took courage. After he had been three days at Rome, he called the chief of the Jews together, to whom he made known the reasons for his thus appearing as a prisoner among them; and when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodgings, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the Prophets, from morning until evening; and some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. Through the preserving care of his Almighty Savior, Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house; and received all that came unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching them those things which concern the Lord Jesus, with no man forbidding him. The same God who quenched the violence of the burning fiery furnace, and shut the lions' mouth, restrained the power of Nero, and the fury of the Jews.

How divine was that principle which enabled the Apostle to undergo such a series of cruel mockings and scourgings. Blessed be God! the same faith is now imparted to every earnest seeker after Christ. We all need it, and we may all obtain it. "Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money. Whoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely. Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth. Incline your ear, and come unto me, hear, and your soul shall live." Such is the freeness of redeeming love. The poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind, are invited; while the proud, who make light of these blessings, are sent empty away.

With these invitations of mercy, the unwearied Apostle went forth into the highways and hedges, seeking out the lost sinners of mankind, and compelling them, through the force of Truth and Love, to come to the Gospel-feast. As a loving heart makes willing feet, so he considered no distance too great, no road too rough, if only he could be the means of saving sinners from the wrath to come. He delighted in his work; his whole heart was engaged in it, and his whole life was devoted to it. But the time now drew near, when this servant of Christ was to seal the Truth with his blood, and to receive the crown of martyrdom; a crown, in his estimation, infinitely surpassing in glory, all the diadems of the world.

From Rome, in what appears to be his last Epistle, Paul feelingly and triumphantly writes to his beloved Timothy; "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner; but be partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel, according to the power of God. I am appointed a preacher, and an Apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For which cause I 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. Remember, that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my Gospel, wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound; therefore, I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. You have fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me."

"All they which are in Asia be turned away from me. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains. When he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day; and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, you know very well. Demas has forsaken me,

having loved this present world. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. I pray God, that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen."

How sweet, how serene, how full of hope are his parting, his almost dying words, "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 to me in that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"

Thus sank to rest this bright luminary of the Christian Church; but he only sank beneath the earthly horizon, to rise, with resplendent glory, in the morning of the resurrection. Like his Divine Master, he was forsaken by his friends in the bitter hour of persecution; and like him, he prayed that it might not be laid to their charge. Thus did Stephen, and so will all who possess the spirit of Jesus, and who feel the influence of that love, which covers, as with a mantle, a multitude of sins.

As Paul felt the blessedness of the promise, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you;" so he could boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me." He was not afraid to die, for he had a desire to depart and to be with Christ. His heart was in heaven, because his treasure was there. When, therefore, the appointed hour arrived which was to convey his waiting spirit into the presence of his God, he cared not by what instrument this blessedness was to be attained, whether by the wild beast, the fire, or the sword; knowing that He, who had never forsaken him, would carry him in safety over every wave of trouble. O! the blessed triumph of the cross! Death is the believer's consecrated road to glory; for Jesus has led the way, he has opened the gate to everlasting life, and ever lives to guide and guard his people through the darksome valley to his throne above.

Happy then is the true believer. The world may smile, or sneer- he heeds it not. His eye is fixed upon an endless glory; he sees the King in his beauty, and the land which is very far off. By faith he brings its glories near. He already enjoys them by sweet anticipation, and can say, "The Lord is mine, and I am his." Is this our delightful experience? If so, then death will be an everlasting gain; we shall hail its approach with gladness, and bless the hour which brings us into the presence of our God.

"O for a martyr's glowing zeal

He fears no danger, shuns no pain;

He stands opposed to earth and hell,

And tells them all their threats are vain

See where the faithful champion stands!

Undaunted by his numerous foes;

He listens to his Lord's command,

And life itself for Him foregoes.

The kindling flames around him blaze;  
His courage stands the awful test;  
The dying saint, no fear betrays,  
Nor does he ask his foes for rest.  
His treasure they can not destroy;  
And while they think to cast him down,  
They do but hasten on his joy,  
And brighten his celestial crown.  
Farewell, he cries, to all below;  
I mount to yonder blest abode;  
To join the saints in heaven I go,  
To dwell forever with my God.  
How blest are they whose work is done  
Who now enjoy the glorious prize;  
Be this our care, the race to run,  
That we may know, and share their joys."

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