

Farewell

The corpse was laid to rest in a meadow through an olive grove, on the northeastern border of Lucina's farm. They wouldn't release the head. Said they had "other plans for that." Luke began his eulogy recalling, "The last time we gathered here and enjoyed Lucina's hospitality, only a short season ago, was a happy occasion. We were preparing to embark on one final missionary adventure with our brother and friend, whom we lay to rest in this beautiful spot.

"Thank you, once again, Lucina," he turned to face her, "for your hospitality. You bid farewell to Brother Paul and his fortunate band of brothers, as we set out to bring the Gospel of the Lord to the Western Shores of the World, in fulfillment of Christ's great testament. But now he journeys alone and we bid him a tearful 'Farewell' as he crosses over to a Happy Shore."

"Our beloved brother we have with us no more. But he is in a better place. He has gone on to his heavenly reward; he has been 'poured out as a drink offering.' But have we *truly* lost him? No. He is still with us, for it was his habit to write the church letters of encouragement, instruction, and exhortation. And by virtue of these letters we know he was ready to be poured out as a drink offering for his faith. He was, in fact, not only ready; he longed for it. So, let us, rejoicing with him, hear his familiar voice, and let us heed it. Let us hear an exhortation from Paul's own hand, regarding the body and blood of our Lord:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he consecrated for us, through the veil, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God;

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And

Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another

"So now let us offer, in Paul's honor, a pleasing sacrifice to God, let us indeed exhort and provoke one another, as Brother Paul wished us to do, to love, and to good works, and to faith, so our hearts do not become hard. These are difficult times and are made even more difficult

because we have lost Brother Paul. So, let us, indeed, assemble together, for we need one another. And let us love one another, as he so often encouraged us, because Christ first loved us. And let us forgive one another, for, and Brother Paul knew *this* all too well—chuckles from the crowd—we are forgiven as we have forgiven.

“When we returned from Hispania, fewer than three weeks ago, standing on the docks at Ostia, Paul made me promise to write a testimony regarding the life of our Lord Jesus of Nazareth. For some reason he thought the church would profit if I were to add my recollections to those of Apostle Mark, whose recent letter has been distributed in the churches from Jerusalem to Corinth. But I vow to you today, literally, on his grave, I will go one step further, in honor of our fallen brother. I pledge to you today, to honor Paul with a history of the early years which recounts his missionary journeys.” The mourners applauded and hearty “Amens” rang out across the meadow. Somebody needed to write of Apostle Paul’s trials and travels as an evangelist of Christ, and Brother Luke was just the person to do it. Nobody had accompanied Paul more than Luke, in fact, in many ways, Paul could not have done what he did without Luke by his side. Those stonings and beatings had taken a toll. Luke resumes . . .

“One of the stories I will recount, one that is particularly appropriate today, happened in the synagogue in Antioch, not the Antioch where Paul went to the aid of our Brother Barnabas, when he went to the town of Paul’s birth, Tarsus, to retrieve him. They labored together there another entire year. [Luke winked at Barnabas, as he quipped, “Did you realize that is where we were first called ‘Christians’?”—polite laughter.] It was in *Pisidian* Antioch. We were traveling through all of Pamphylia and Pisidia, spreading the good news of Jesus and Paul was compelled to visit the synagogue. He was called to preach to the Gentiles, it is true, but he never, ever gave up on his people. They gave up on him.

So, we were in the synagogue on Shabbat, and Paul preached a sermon; did the whole thing in *kai* structure (just to amuse himself, I presume! —more chuckles, but outright laughter from Barnabas, as he remembered). Do you know, he had so much impact in Antioch, the next

Sabbath, nearly the entire city was gathered at that synagogue? It was a miracle of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and contradicted Paul's teaching, even blaspheming. So when they'd had quite enough of their babbling, this is what Paul and Barnabas boldly said unto them:

It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For the Lord commanded us, "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

Some turned and made eye contact with Barnabas, as if to ask, "you actually said that? *To their faces?* While surrounded?" Luke continued, "And so they left that region, but I returned to Jerusalem. The remainder of that trip was quite eventful, as I'm sure we all realize. Paul and Barnabas were worshipped! The crowd nearly sacrificed to them! Ha! Just imagine!" A wave of laughter, barely contained, roiled through the assembly. "Then who shows up but some of the Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, and made a great disturbance. The same crowd who worshipped them, now stoned poor Brother Paul and left him for dead outside the city gate. They gathered Paul and made their way back to their beloved home church in Antioch. It wasn't long afterward that Paul went to Achaia and, despite various trials and hardships, partly in response to a plea from Brother Hierotheus* (Luke gestures in his direction) he resolved to someday go to Spain. And God, in His wisdom, did fulfill Paul's desire to "take the gospel to the Far Western Shore of the World," until this very Spring. (Brother Barnabas, is not with us today, because he is back in Hierotheus' hometown, confirming new members there.) And so, our last meeting at Lucina's, as most of you remember well, we all processed to the port and our band of laborers set sail for Tarraco, to tend God's vineyard in Hispania. They were the most fulfilling thirty days of my life.

* Meinardus notes, "Hierotheus, a convert of Paul's is said to have been baptized in Achaia by Paul and begged him to come share the gospel in his hometown of Astigi," deep in the interior of Hispania, down the *Via Herculea*, in Baetica Province.