An excerpt from

Paul in Spain

by

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Our story opens with a sage old man, hunched over his writing table, in his writer's garrett, suffering a crisis; beside himself with grief at the loss of his wife and two sons (historical fact). Looking for something with which to clean spilled wine, he stumbles upon a scroll of the Letter to the *Romans*, which transports him to the time he first met, at the trial of Naevius Apronianus in Tarraco [historically accurate detail of Quintilian's life,] the author, the Christian traveling preacher, Paul of Tarsus, in the shadows, back in the back of the forum (author's license). Segue to

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Paul and Quintilian talk into the wee hours about rhetoric, ethics, and Paul's manuscript, on the patio, of a beautiful evening, at "Estancia Fabianae," in the hills above Calagguris. They snack on red wine, olives, flatbread, dates, and apricots. Interestingly, Quintilian gives Paul the self-same advice, regarding his manuscript, that Apollos gave aboard ship, only this time, Paul receives it! Inspired by their discussion, Paul works on his letter till just before sunrise.

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After a brief but restful sleep in the mountain air, our friends eagerly resume their conversation over brunch. They conduct a dialectical inquiry into the nature of rhetoric, the difference between homiletics, evangelism, and didactic speaking. Quintilian is curious as to Paul's level of satisfaction with the work he did on his manuscript, which leads to a detailed revision and extensions of, what the reader by now recognizes are specific passages in the Letter to the *Hebrews*. Quintilian's neighbor, Flavius Clemens (significant historical figure in the life of Q) it turns out, is on his way to pick up a load of plants for his vineyard, on a boat bound from Burdigala to Brigantium, on the far shore, a 12-hour journey by ox cart. Paul and Luke ride along. (Zenas is still in CaesarAugusta working with the law clerks and sisters.)

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Paul and Luke accompany Flavius Clemens, to Brigantium (by the way, he returns to Calagguris a Christian!! Ha!) They go for the sake of "taking the gospel to the ends of the earth," which, at that time, would be the port of Brigantium, on the Atlantic shore of Spain.

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This is where the evangelists decide who stays to establish the churches, then leave it in the hands of indigenous leaders. Now back on the dock at Ostia, Paul gives his newly completed manuscript to Luke, for anonymous publication and encourages Luke to compose a "testimony". ABRUPT CONCLUSION HERE . . . Nero had Paul's head within a fortnight. Some days later, Nero fell, and Galba, Praetor of Terraconensis was made Emperor. Quintilian was invited to accompany Galba to Rome because of his value as consul as well as his oratorical skill.

15. ***"Metanoia"*** 160

Paul in Spain concludes with the resolution of Q's crisis—looking back, a passage he had discussed with Paul, from Romans 3, *almost* convinces him . . . only now, he finds a *second* scroll: HEBREWS!! He remembers well the discussions, on his veranda in Calagurris, that beautiful Spring in 68 A.D. ("wait a minute. Did I just utilize Christian dating?" he startles himself.) Much has transpired since, most significantly, the loss of his young wife, and two sons (historical fact). Q finds a note attached to the second manuscript. It was left by Domitilla (who was Flavius Clemens' wife and, history records, a Believer!) Our story concludes just as Quintilian surrenders his will; his vanity, and finds peace at last (author's conjecture). Interestingly, George A. Kennedy speculates, in his slim biography of Quintilian, that the rhetorical pedagogue may have fallen from grace, during Domitian's reign, because of "Christian leanings."

Prelude

Slowly, imperceptibly, his head swayed from side to side, eventually coming to rest in his aged but uncalloused hands. He lay there, straining to form a meaningful thought. But he was so filled with self-doubt and so utterly exhausted, his faculties would not be reigned in. "Why the sacrifice? Why so very much effort? So much sweat?" "What could I possibly gain by writing this overwrought, redundant, and massive treatise?" "It's all been said before. How could I add anything meaningful to a meditation on rhetoric? The bit about pedagogy may be of some enduring value, but it is so pedantic!"

"Beg your pardon, Sir. May I . . ."

"Oh! You gave me a start. Yes. Yes, of course. Water." "No. Make it wine. Last year's Burdigalian blend."

"Very well, Sir."

Head in hands, elbows on the writing desk, he stared long and hard at the manuscript before him. It was tear-stained, again. "Drat," he scolded himself, "Get control of your emotions, man!" "Am I unhinged? I don't rightly know, but at least my self-loathing is focused!" Heh, heh. "Oh, Veronica! She was soooo beautiful! Fates, why have you done this to me? Oh, my boys . . .," he wailed aloud. Moaning, the tears came flooding as he shoved to the side his parchment, protecting it from yet another drenching. "I need you. . . ."

"Your wine, Sir." The master was a pitiful sight. Genuinely inconsolable.

He gestured in the direction of the corner of his writing table, without looking up. He didn't want to be seen in this condition. As soon as the servant retreated, the sobs came. Wave after wave . . .

Now the room is dark. Without lifting his head or clearing his mind, he glanced with one eye only, out the window. The moon was waning. Morning would come in an hour or two. Knowing approximately what time it is had no effect on his being. He was not curious. He was no longer in the throes of overweaning grief. He was no longer overcome with self-doubt about a writing project that had consumed him for more than a year now. He just was. He sipped his wine but did not taste it.

"Veronicahaaach," he yelled her name, blubbering, once again in the merciless grip of demon grief. "Oh, Pieeeetras! Oh, oh, my little Quintilian!" why did I not take more care for your souls?!" "Forgivvvvve me. I was too focused on my own good. I was consumed with ambition. And political pressures . . ." "Idiot! You were warned. 'Time is short,' Clemens said. 'We know not the hour,' he said. I scoffed. And, why shouldn't I have scoffed. It's nonsense!" Grief gave way to rage. He backhanded the goblet to the floor. "It's NONSENSE," he screamed, his voice cracking under the strain of a mind unhinged. I serve the Dieties of my demos! What hath a man of my stature to do with these foreign gods? With this Jesus of Nazareth?! Vanity. I am vain. Veronica was right. My vanity cost me my happiness, my love *and* my children.

"Where is that confounded cleaning rag," he got up from the table, looking aimlessly, unable to gather his wits even enough to clean up after his ridiculous outburst. He hoisted the lamp and shuffled to the corner. No rag. Perhaps it's in that clay jar. He removes the lid and finds, not a rag, but a familiar, prized manuscript. "Ah. Haven't seen this in years. Paul's letter to the Roman Christians." He took up the rag he'd found next to the clay pot and absent-mindedly sopped up the wine that stained the tile floor. But his attention was on the manuscript.

He was immediately transported. "Mmmmm. Ahhh . . . yessss" nodding. "No. It had to be early 68! Wait. What? Did I just utilize Christian dating conventions?" Slow, agonized sigh. "He was dead by the end of that . . . damned Nero." He reminisced further, this time savoring the splash of superb Burdigalian Red that remained in the goblet. His blend was a success amongst his frequent dinner guests. Disregarding the early hour, he drained the goblet.

“Yes. It was only yesterday . . . We were on the veranda. Beautiful sunset. I think he had sought me out in the Provincial Forum. Yes. I invited him to sup. Looking back, he seems almost like an apparition. We met ever so briefly, back in those halcyon days in The Tarraconensis, just before Galba invited me to accompany him to Rome . . . what a mess! Never should have left. He laid his head, or face rather, flat on the desk, not bothering to cushion it with folded hands. Yes, what a good man; an intelligent man, too. I remember him often. Damned Nero.” Although he was behind a closed door, in the middle of the night, his [admittedly dangerous] thoughts unnerved him. His head bolted upright; he looked around, reflexively; bit his tongue.

“It was after a day before the praetor, in CaesarAugus . . . no. Tarraco.” The internal monologue continues. It was Tarraco. Yes. regarding the matter of, of . . . hmmmm. I’ll be -- ”

. . .

“. . . Sabinus?” Marcus Fabianus Quintilianus, the up and coming young patron of the Provincial Courts in Tarraco had to ask a second time: “Did you not understand me the first time? ‘At the time you say you witnessed Naevius Apronianus throw his wife from the tower, did you have an unobstructed view of the window from which he threw her?”

“No.”

“No, what?”

“No, my view was obstructed by the rooftops of the buildings between me and their home. I did not see the window. I saw the body hit the street.”

“Then what did you do?”

“I, I do not remember. I was scared. It is misty in my mind.”

“Sabinus. It is important that you try and remember.”

“I rubbed my eyes because I could not believe what I had just seen. I wished I could unsee it. She looked horrible, with the blood and the skull wide open . . . and . . .”

“That’s quite enough, Sabinus. What did you do next?”

“I yelled for someone to help, then I ran out to the street to offer help.”

“And which window were you looking out of when you saw the unfortunate woman fall to the street?”

“My shop window, on the second floor, above the entry.”

“And how many steps are there down to street level from your shop”?

“Um, one, two . . .” Sabinus closed his eyes and counted the steps out as he rehearsed himself bounding down them to street level. “Ten.”

“With a landing as well, I presume”?

“Yes.”

“And how far from your front door to the scene of this unfortunate circumstance”?

“About, I don’t know, fifteen paces.”

“Sorry, Sabinus. I need you to be more precise.”

“Fifteen, yes, fifteen paces.”

“Walking or running, that is, longer strides”?

“Yes, fifteen long strides.”

“So, from the time you saw the wife of Naevius Apronianus hit the ground to the time you arrived by her side on the street was, maybe 30 seconds”?

“No. Longer. Nearly a full minute. I froze.”

“Okay, thank you. So, nearly a minute later, after you had screamed for help, then run downstairs and out to the scene, whom did you find there”?

“Nobody.”

“Nobody? Really?”

“How can this be? You have nobody else to testify to the veracity of your account”?

“The street was empty. When I looked up, Señor Apronianus was standing in the window. And he looked strange.”

“Wait. We’ll get to that in a moment. Where were the neighbors?”

“Out for the day, I suppose. It was Saturn’s Day, and very sunny and bright. Early.”

“Early, eh? How early?”

“The sun had been up about an hour and one half.”

“So, you have reported to this court that you saw Señor Apronianus push his wife from the window.”

“Yes. I saw him push his wife from the window, and when I saw him standing there, he looked very guilty to me.”

“Did you, and this is very important, Sabinus, justice is our aim here, did you see Naevius, my client, push his wife with his own hands from that window?”

“No. But he did it.”

“Thank you. You admit, now, under cross-examination, that you did not actually see him push her out the window. You say he looked strange”?

“Yes. He had this look in his eye. The eyes of a madman.”

“’The eyes of a madman,’ you say”? So, you saw the victim hit the ground; you ran to the street, looked up and saw Naevius Apronianus standing there with ‘the look of a madman.’ Could you please describe that look”?

“No, not really. It was beyond description.”

“Please try.”

“Well . . .” Quintilian leaned against the edge of the wall section that separated the jury from the patricians. A peculiar gentleman, there in the shadows, between the patricians and his own clerk, sat a stranger. “Yes, do elaborate for the court.” Sabinus was still talking, but saying absolutely nothing.

I don’t think he made a good first impression at all. But, still, there *was* something about him; something in the eyes. Even through the mists of time the image of that shabby looking man . . . Quintilian sat very still, at the table in his writer’s garret, barely breathing, so as not to disturb the image forming slowly, his memory barely able to part the fog of time. “I was drawn to

him," he recalled, mumbling to no one in particular. "He certainly looked silly there, next to the patricians, in his traveling tunic and filthy cape." Ha! A more Hebrew looking gentleman, he thought, I cannot imagine! Still, there was an air of intelligence, a worldliness, about him that piqued my interest.

I'm glad, shaking his head very slightly, I invited him to accompany me to . . . to . . .. His index finger held from pursed lips to the tip of his nose, then dancing across the space in front of his eyes, pointing to a map forming in his fancy. I was pleading the case in *Tarraco*. I spent that weekend at the *estancia*. We got to know one another in *Calagurris*. Yes, it was the estancia. Never have I enjoyed a better, more stimulating conversation. And then, it was off to Rome. "Damned Nero," he exclaimed aloud, quite forgetting himself. "Had his head within a fortnight!"

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 of 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 church that focuses on 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 Ambassador 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 apropos 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 shouldest 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! Imagine the consternation!" 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 Paul and left him for dead outside the city gate. They made their way back to their beloved church in Antioch. It wasn't long afterward that Paul made his way to Achaia and, despite various trials and hardships, partly in response to a plea from Brother Hierotheus* (Luke gestures in his direction) purposed to go to Spain. That was years ago, but God did not allow us to realize Paul's dream, to "take the gospel to the Far Western Shore of the World," until this very Spring. (Brother Barnabas, who is not with us today, is back in Hierotheus' hometown, establishing the church there.) And so, our last meeting at Lucina's, as most of you remember well, we all processed to the port and the missionary group set sail for Tarraco. 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.

Off to Spain

"Blessed be the Name of the Lord! Blessed be the God of Israel! Hear O Israel! Our God is One! Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lamb for sinners slain. Blessed be His Name! Yeshua! Hamasheah! Messiah! I thank You, Dear Father, that You have kept me this night, safe from all harm, that I may serve You yet another day. Place Your holy angel before me. Let all my words and deeds please You this day. Amen."

Hear my cry, O God;
Attend to my prayer.
From the end of the earth I will cry to You,
When my heart is overwhelmed;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

For You have been a shelter for me,
A strong tower from the enemy.
I will abide in Your tabernacle forever;
I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.

"Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done
As in heaven, So on earth.
Supply us this day all we need.
And forgive us as we forgive others.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one. Amen."

Slowly, deliberately, savoring the moment, he opens his eyes. The familiar, dingy ceiling; cracked plaster, cobwebs, damp and soot-stained, greets him as it has each morning for months, with cold indifference. He smiles nonetheless. "We give thanks for the roof over our head" says he, only out loud this time. "Thank You for teaching me to be content in whatever circumstance I find myself." Inhale. Hold it. Slowly, exhale. Rolling, with a little grunt, to a seated position on the rancid straw mattress, he arranges his tunic and sash, slowly straps on his sandals, one at a time, with much difficulty, then, with a bit of a rocking motion, manages to stand. After briefly assessing the likelihood of his remaining in that position he continues the conversation with his Unseen Guest, "Thank You, Heavenly Father, that these old bones still support me after all they've endured! Thrice these old bones were left for dead. Shipwrecked, stoned, . . . well, 'Thank You, Lord'." Theophilus scurries over to help up the wobbly gentleman . . . too late. He manages, by himself, to shuffle to the table and sits on the old, broken down

stool, equally wobbly and decrepit. Theophilus follows, offering subtle support, right hand to his elbow, left hand outstretched, just in case he loses his balance altogether. “Morning, Brother Paul!”

“Morning, Theophilus!”

The guard unbars the door. “There you are,” with a bow and a gesture of the hand. “Free for a time and no place to go, I suppose . . ..” he quipped, with a wink and a nod. “On the contrary!” said the ancient one, rubbing those muscles that ached and working his ankles in a circular motion, squinting in the direction of his warder. “I’ve friends due any minute. Meantime, I’ll wash myself in the fountain just down the way. Please, my boy, tell them where I’ve gone, should they arrive before I return?”

“Certainly.” Luke arrives just as Paul is struggling to get under way, still rubbing his wrists.

. . .

Nearly breathless, from both exertion and exhilaration Timothy managed, “I hope he’s still sleeping! I want to see his expression!” His breath visible on this cool spring morning. “Are you kidding?” chided Barnabas. “He’s likely grown impatient and set out without us! HA!”

“Do you think,” asked Timothy, “he’s expecting such extensive support” jingling the bag of silver and gold coins in his ochre maniakis waistcoat, “such a large number prepared to follow him to the end of the earth?”

“He realizes how generous are the saints in Rome, but who could have imagined . . ..” Both men smiled, shook their heads and picked up the pace. They were positively giddy. As they rounded the corner and crossed the street, a few blocks away, here stood Zenas the Lawyer, leaning against a physician’s rooms, one foot resting against the wall, enjoying the shade and polishing off a cup of tea. “Greetings, Brother Zenas,” both said in unison. He grinned, but never broke his gaze, toward Paul, who was just finishing his morning “bath,” assisted, of course, by Luke the Physician. “Brothers.”

Barnabas yelled, “Brother Paul, you are a sight for sore eyes!” Paul and Luke both chuckled. They walked toward the others, Paul, concluding a thought: “Zenas has done well, brother Luke. Without his help I would never have been departing this day for Spain. Let’s go!”

A full day of briefings ensued. There were ground rules to observe, expectations, and, most important, they learned that the leave was limited to 30-days only. Not much time to evangelize Spain. These restrictions weighed heavily on Paul. He resented the state meddling with the work of God; placing roadblocks. But it was the hand that was dealt.

“Yes, thanks be to God. Still,” replied Paul’s physician, “I wish we’d been granted another 30 days. This pace could kill you.” Luke had other concerns. He placed his hand on Paul’s back, monitoring his breathing and the beating of his heart. Paul muttered, so as not to disturb the physician’s intense concentration, “Or it could help . . ..” He had a bit of a smirk on his face. Glancing to the floor, closing his eyes, focusing, feeling more acutely, Luke muttered, physician-like, “Yes, at the very least, the fresh air will do you good.”

“It’s all the same to me,” Paul voiced, as was his habit, ambivalence. “God’s will be done.”

His readings completed, apparently satisfied for now, Luke picked up his bag, winked and nodded at Zenas, and gestured to Timothy to gather Paul’s things, from where they’d been neatly stacked for several days, in anticipation of this very moment. In the blink of an eye, they were all out the door, some to the briefing, some to the outfitter’s. TO BE CONTINUED . . .