**PAUL’S CHAINS – MY FAITH**

In the spring of 2001, about five months before the infamous 9/11 terrorist attacks on America, I was blessed to travel with my dad to Italy to visit the church in Rome, but especially to renew friendship and fellowship with the Corazza family. My dad had great interest in the Lord’s work in Italy, and helped raise needed support for all three of the Corazzas’ to continue preaching in that ancient land. Alessandro was my dad’s age (at the time 75), and his sons Stephano and Arrigo were about my age (at the time 48). Alessandro and Stephano preached for the church at Via Sannio in Rome, while Arrigo preached for the church in Pisa (where the famous Leaning Tower sits – or leans). My dad and I were both given opportunity to preach in both churches while there.

One day brother Sandro asked if he could give us a tour of Rome, especially the important sites that would be of interest to New Testament Christians. Of course we jumped at the chance. Brother Corazza told us as we walked by the landmark Roman Colosseum that he had been born under its very shadow. It had been built between 70 and 80 A.D. by Emperor Vespasian, father of Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. No doubt many of our brethren in Christ shed their blood in martyrdom in that stadium.

But it was when he took us to the Mamertine Prison that my interest really soared. Both legend and writings of early Christian authors tell us that Paul was imprisoned here and very likely wrote his last letter (2nd Timothy) while awaiting his final trial and execution. This prison was originally built as a cistern for the underground water supply to the city but was converted into a holding cell for prisoners who would appear before Caesar. At the time of his last imprisonment Paul knew he would stand before Caesar Nero, a tyrant who had used Christians as a scapegoat to deflect accusations that he had burned Rome in the infamous fire that burned from July 19-26, 64 AD. Paul would have been a prime target for his wrath, since he had the reputation given to him by Tertullus before Felix: *“we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes”* (Ac. 24:5).

The Mamertine Prison was truly a “House of Darkness.” There were no stairs leading down to this filthy dungeon, so the guards lowered him by rope through a small hole that the Romans historian Sallust called “a place of neglect, darkness and stench.” It is little wonder that Paul begged Timothy to “*come before winter*” and to please bring “*the cloak… and the books, especially the parchments*.” For a man of action like Paul this had to be claustrophobic, very cold, and terribly lonely. A warm cloak, with books to study and parchment to write edifying letters, was how he longed to spend his last days.

While visiting in that dark, damp dungeon I waited for the other visitors to leave. While all alone I asked my dad to sit on the old rock that Paul possibly wrote 2nd Timothy on. I pulled out my trusty pocket New Testament, opened to Paul’s last epistle to his beloved son Timothy, and read the entire four chapters out loud. It was very moving. We both were in tears, especially as we came to chapter four. Read it with me now, imagining Paul as he wrote it while shivering, lonely, but ready to face his impending death with courage. His incredible life’s story, along with his huge heart for Christ, is so perfectly described in what came to be known as Paul’s “Last Will and Testament.” See if you don’t cry too.

1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

9 Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. 12 And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. 15 You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words. 16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. 17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

19 Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. 20 Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick. 21 Do your utmost to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, as well as Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brethren.

22 The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

Do you, like me, need a Kleenex? I’ve never read that chapter, or that book, since that trip with my dad without emotionally weeping, and without spiritually being edified. Whenever I need a kick-in-the-pants when I’m complaining, or because I need to be motivated to “*preach the word in season and out of season*,” I use this text as my go-to inspiration. I nearly always end my reading of Timothy’s epistle by singing this old classic hymn:

“Faith of our fathers living still, in spite of dungeon, fire and sword;
O how our hearts beat high with joy, whene’er we hear that glorious word:
Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to Thee till death!”

Until tomorrow… Be true to Jesus till death, like Paul.

In Christian love,

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