



Paul's Third Journey

Acts 18:23-21:26

"Incoming message! Incoming message!" the computer announced. Lieutenant Ruby Starlight sat up straight in her work station chair on the bridge and watched as the computer screen lit up. A woman with pinkish-gray curls in a blue flowered dress appeared.

"Honey? Baby? Is that you?" The woman moved closer to the camera and tapped on the lens.

"Mommy?!" Ruby exclaimed. A huge smile spread over her face. "Hi, Mommy!"

Mommy sat back in her chair and blew a kiss. "Oh, look at you in your uniform, so beautiful. My little 'Cookie puss,' all grown up."

"Mom, you're embarrassing me," Ruby said in a low voice.

"What? Are you afraid your friends will find out your Mommy loves her little space cadet?"

Ruby's cheeks turned red. "Mom! Stop! I'm on duty. You have to call me Lieutenant Ruby."

"Oh, please. I was the one who took you to tap dance classes every week. You'll always be my little 'Cookie puss,'" Mommy laughed. "So, when are you coming home?"

"Our tour is supposed to last for another two months," Ruby explained.

"Two months?" Mommy gasped. "Your father is going to be so upset. The dishes are piling up and he refuses to wash them when he's got a perfectly healthy daughter who should be doing her chores."

Ruby shook her head. "Dad knows I'm on a mission in space, doesn't he?"

"Your father, he doesn't pay attention," Mommy said, with a wave of her hand. "Anyway, hurry home. I kept your room just like you left it. I even kept all your Star Wars toys and your cute stuffed animals."

"Mom! They are action figures!" Ruby's cheeks turned an even deeper shade of red. "Mom, I have to go."

"Okay. Stay safe. Over and out, my little Space Cadet." Mommy waved as the screen faded to black.

"Goodbye, Mommy," Ruby waved. She stared at the screen for a moment, thinking aloud. "Oh, my mom, she still treats me like I'm five years old, but I really do miss her. I miss my dad and the earth and my action figures, too. I never thought space would be so lonely."

"Hullo, hullo. Anybody here?" Professor von Himmel called down into the engine room.

"Down here, Professor von Himmel," Ruby answered sadly.

The professor climbed down the ladder. "Oh, hullo, Lieutenant Ruby. How are you?"

"Okay," she replied, with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Your mouth says okay, but your eyes say something else. Are you sure you're all right?"

"To be honest, I'm a little homesick," Ruby confessed.

"Sick?" the professor yelped. "Okay, lay down. Let me check your temperature."

Ruby pushed him away. "No, Professor, I'm fine."

"Ah, ah, quiet," the professor grabbed her wrist. "I'm checking your pulse."

"I'm not sick," she protested. "I'm just homesick!"

The professor sat down on the floor next to Ruby and leaned back against the wall. "Oh! Homesick! Why don't you just call your Mommy?"

"She called me," Ruby explained. "That's why I'm homesick. I feel so far from everything I've ever known and the people I love. I feel so disconnected."

"Oh no, Ruby, it's just the opposite. God is using our mission to connect us, just like he did with Paul. Let me get out the Bible and show you." He disappeared up the ladder and returned with the Bible from the Bible box. "I wonder if Paul felt a little homesick when he went on his third missionary journey," he said, after he sat back down on the floor.

"His third journey?" Ruby questioned. "God sent him on three journeys?!"

"Actually there were four journeys. Each time, God sent Paul and Paul trusted Him. Paul went wherever he was called to spread the news about Jesus and to build churches." The professor looked up at the computer screen. "Computer, please show us the map of Paul's third journey."

Ruby studied the map that appeared on the screen. "Wow, look at that, he started in Antioch and went to places like Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and Jerusalem."

"Ah, but you see, Paul didn't want to just preach God's Word and then lose contact. He loved God's people," the professor explained.

Ruby thought about this for a moment. "That's why he always wrote so many letters to encourage God's followers."

"Yes. And, that is why he took the time to go back and visit the people in the churches he had started. Look what it says in the Bible." The professor read, "After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples."

"So, he went back to connect with his friends again," said Ruby.

"And, to connect them back to God!" the professor added. "Paul was always reminding the church that nothing could separate them from the love of God."

"That's sounds familiar," Ruby mused. "Where have I heard that before?"

The professor began reciting, "For I am convinced that..."

Ruby joined him and they said together, "...neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any power, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

"That's our Bible Memory Verse!" Ruby exclaimed.

The professor nodded. "Paul wrote those words in his letter to the Romans."

Ruby suddenly smiled. "I get it! Paul wrote all those letters to the churches to help them grow in their faith and love."

"And to connect us all to God and to each other," the professor added. "All these years later, we are still spreading the same message."

"We are?" Ruby said with surprise.

"Yes, Computer, show us the map of our journey," Professor von Himmel commanded. The computer immediately displayed the map of planets.

"Hey, that's all the planets we visited," Ruby noted.

"Now, show us Paul's map again," the professor requested. The computer displayed both maps side by side. "Now please connect the two maps." The two maps slid together on the screen until they appeared to almost be the same map.

Ruby gasped as she noticed many of the places they had visited had the same names as the places Paul had visited. And, they had visited the places in almost the same order! "Woah! They're almost identical! God is using us to connect His universe!"

Professor von Himmel winked and patted Ruby on the shoulder. "That shouldn't surprise you, 'Cookie puss.' After all, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever!"