

Dearly Beloved of God,

The other day I had the occasion of being taught a valuable lesson by the Port Authority of NY & NJ. This has nothing to do with those brave officers of the Port Authority who gave their lives in service to their fellow man back on 9/11/01. Nope! It has to do with a toll violation.

Back on September 22, 2007 at 3 minutes and 17 seconds before 1:00 AM, I blew right through a toll station at the George Washington Bridge, or so they said. Here i was, a month later, staring at a "Notice of Toll Violation" containing the time (right to the second, the lane number and my license plate number. They must have taken my picture, and now they wanted the \$6.00 toll plus a \$25.00 "Administrative Fee." They said I either went through an E-ZPass lane without having a valid E-ZPass account, or I went through a staffed lane without paying the toll.

Guess what? They were technically right, but they did not know the circumstances. Immediately my self-righteous justification wheels started turning. If I could only craft my story with the right words, they would have pity on me and waive the \$25.00 administration fee. Just 12-1/2 hours earlier my wife and I had witnessed the graduation of our grandson, Andrew, from US Marine boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. We had decided to drive straight through to our home, an estimated 15 hour drive. Things were going wonderfully. These proud grand-parents were sailing along without incident until we hit the approach to the George Washington Bridge from the New Jersey side. We saw the sign, but not before we could do anything about it. The neon warning stated that there were extreme delays on the upper deck and cars were urged to use the lower deck. I barely had time to read the sign, sandwiched in between bumper to bumper columns of 18 wheel tractor trailer rigs. There was no time to maneuver 6 lanes to my right and take the exit to the lower deck. And as soon as we were no more than 100 feet past the exit, the traffic ground to a halt. For over an hour we did not move more than a car length at any one time. We were surrounded by these rigs and when we finally got to the toll plaza, I had to fight to get into a lane that had a green light and didn't have a sign saying E-ZPass Only. And when we got opposite the window to pay, the booth was empty. I had my \$6.00 in my hand, but there was no one to give it to.

There it is - the gist of my story. I'm sure you're all sympathetically on my side now, right? The facts are on my side, but will they believe me. Failure to pay within 15 days (6 of which have passed due to mailing and my procrastination) will result in another \$25.00 fee being added. I better add some emotional appeal here. Finally I was ready to compose my masterpiece. Of course the letter has to be addressed to the right place, so I pulled out the notice again and started looking. This time something caught my eye that I hadn't seen before. Near the top of the notice were the words "**First Offense**" in big bold letters.

So I reread the notice, paying closer attention to details, rather than being side-tracked by thoughts of my defense. Buried there in all the official language were the words, "Since this is the first time.....the administrative fee will be waived, provided the toll is paid within 15 business days of the date of this notice. Wow! It had been right there all along.

All of my preparation to write a good self-defense amounted to "Much Ado About Nothing." I quickly got my check book, wrote a check for the \$6.00 toll and mailed it in. I started to thank God for getting me off the hook, when He reminded me of this spiritual parallel.

God tells us that there is a toll booth along the road of life. More precisely, it is at the bridge which allows us to pass from temporal earthly life to eternal heavenly life. The Bible puts it this way:

**Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

**Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The first verse tells me that a toll (AND FEES) is due; the second verse tells me that the toll is death. Now every one of us is familiar with physical death. Death saddens us. It makes us come to grips with our own mortality. Some of us begin contemplating that there must be something more than 70 years (give or take) and then nothing. We all owe the toll and nobody gets across the bridge without the toll being paid. For years I had been composing my self-righteous letter, explaining why I should not have to pay the toll and fees. Then one day, thank God, I got a revelation of the fact that while no excuse of mine could cause the toll to be waived, someone else had already paid the toll for me. Like it says at the end of Romans 6:23, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I would have been a fool to haggle with the Port Authority. Why argue your case when they say "forgiven." I had a 15 day deadline to meet. I don't know what your deadline may be. Why argue your case with God. If you haven't already accepted the free gift of "forgiven" by placing your trust in what Jesus Christ has already accomplished, I would advise you to do so now. He is the bridge and He paid the toll by dying on the cross. Or you can call me at (860) 376-5278 to speak to a customer service representative.

Yours for His Purposes,

Pastor Les