

LECTURES  
ON THE  
BOOK OF ACTS

BY

H. A. IRONSIDE, Litt.D.

Author of LECTURES ON ROMANS; MESSAGES FROM GALATIANS;  
LECTURES ON FIRST AND SECOND CORINTHIANS;  
IN THE HEAVENLIES; Etc., Etc.



LOIZEAUX BROTHERS, BIBLE TRUTH DEPOT  
19 WEST 21st STREET . . . NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

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WESTERN BOOK AND TRACT COMPANY  
1719 FRANKLIN STREET - - OAKLAND, CALIF.

First Edition, August, 1943 ..... 3,000  
Second Edition, February, 1945 ..... 3,000

**PRINTED IN U.S.A.**

**L. B. PRINTING CO., INC.**  
19 West 21st Street  
New York 10, N. Y.

## PREFACE

*The volume now in the reader's hands consists, as in the case of many recent books of mine, of addresses delivered at the Moody Memorial Church, in Chicago. These were stenographically reported and edited for publication. Because of the fact that they were given to ever-changing public audiences, there are, of necessity, occasional repetitions, which, I trust, will be overlooked and will not weary the reader. Sometimes these may help to give emphasis to the truth set forth. I am firmly convinced that in these days of departure from the faith in so many different ways, we need to give greater attention than ever before to the divinely inspired record of the early days of the Church and the beginning of its world-wide missionary program.*

*Praying that the blessing of God may rest upon the printed message in an even larger measure than when given orally, this book is sent forth with an earnest desire that it may prove helpful to many readers.*

H. A. IRONSIDE.

Chicago, Ill.  
March, 1943.



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## LECTURE ONE

# INTRODUCTION

1 1 1

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen: to whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you [or it might be rendered—ye shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you]: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1: 1-11).

THE book of Acts is the story of early-day Christianity. This book gives us a great many principles that should guide us in Christian effort at the present time. One is reminded of the Lord's word to Moses when He commanded him to build the tabernacle: "Look that thou make them after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount" (Exod. 25:40). God has given us in the book of Acts a pattern of Christian testimony, missionary effort, world evangelism and building of Christian churches—a pattern which we would do well to follow. Certainly we can be assured of this: the closer we come to ordering all things according to this holy pattern, the greater blessing will attend our efforts.

The title of this book as given in our English Bibles is of course not inspired. These titles have been added to the books by editors. Sometimes they seem to have been given with great exactness; in other cases we may question their propriety. Actually this book does not contain the acts of the apostles as a whole. The fact of the matter is, very few of the apostles are even mentioned in it; and so far as their acts are concerned, the book is largely limited to the ministry of two of them—Peter, who was one of the twelve, and Paul, who was an apostle of a different order altogether and not one of the twelve.

He did not know our Lord on earth, but received his commission directly from heaven. Actually the book might be called, as others have suggested, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*; or, if you will, *The Acts of the Risen Christ Through the Holy Spirit Working in the Church Here on Earth*. In this book we have brought before us in a wonderful way the work of that promised Comforter who came to earth to witness to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and to convince men of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

It is always well, in beginning the study of any book, to have an outline of it in mind. The Acts divides readily into two main parts. In chapters 1 to 12 we have the activity of the Apostle Peter; in chapters 13 to 28 the activity of the Apostle Paul. The first division is readily subdivided. In chapters 1 to 7 we have the transitional period in which God was still largely occupied with His earthly people Israel before the Word began to go out to the Gentiles. When I use the term "transitional period" I always like to explain what I mean. There was no transitional period in the mind of God. At the moment the work of Christ was accomplished, salvation was ready to be offered to all men everywhere, and we shall see in this portion that, before He ascended into heaven, our Lord bade His disciples go to the uttermost part of the earth with the gospel. But

God is very gracious. He takes into account how slowly we apprehend things and so He bore patiently with His disciples and the early Christians for years while they confined their ministry exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The second subdivision includes chapters 9, 10, and 11, in which we have the ministry going out to the Gentiles. In chapter 9 we have the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and his commission as the apostle to the Gentiles. In chapters 10 and 11 we have the Apostle Peter going to the house of Cornelius and thus bringing the gospel to the first Gentile family.

Now let us look at these opening verses. Notice the way Luke introduces the book: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." This tells us at once that the book of the Acts is, if we may so say, volume two. This author has written an earlier volume and the story begun in that volume is continued in this one. What is that earlier volume? We have no difficulty in determining that, for we have another book in the Bible which is also addressed to this man Theophilus. If you will turn back to chapter 1 of the Gospel of Luke, you will read this in the four opening verses: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they

delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the Word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed." This shows us that the Gospel of Luke is "the former treatise" to which our author refers as he opens the book of Acts. In the Gospel of Luke we have the things that Jesus began to do and teach, and in the Acts we read of the work He continued to do, after His ascension to heaven, through the work of the Holy Spirit here on earth.

Who was this man Theophilus? We might wish we had fuller information regarding him. We merely have his name; it is mentioned twice, but in such a way as to give us some suggestions at least regarding his station in life. He is called in the introduction to Luke, "most excellent Theophilus." The words translated "most excellent" were used only in addressing a Roman official, generally one set over a country. So that this man Theophilus was evidently an official of the Roman empire, probably a governor of a province, who had an interest in the story of our Lord Jesus Christ. So Luke addressed his Gospel to him and gave him his full title, "most excellent

Theophilus." When he writes his book of Acts he addresses the same person, but you will notice he omits the "most excellent." He simply says, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus." That may be more significant than we think. I like to think it means that this Roman official, as a result of reading the Gospel of Luke, had come to such definite knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ that he had openly proclaimed himself a Christian; and perhaps because of that he had either resigned or was dismissed from his office and so was no longer addressed as "most excellent" but simply as a brother in Christ. His name itself is significant. "Theophilus" means *a lover of God*.

Notice the order of the verbs here. "Of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." *Doing* should always come before *teaching*. If there is anything that we as servants of Christ need to keep in mind it is this: there will be no more power in our messages than there is power in our lives. It is as we live for God that we are fitted to speak for God. We are called upon to do before we teach. We have that in the Old Testament. We read of Ezra, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

Do you know why there is so much powerless preaching today? Because there is so little walk-

ing in obedience to the Word of God. If you and I would be witnesses for Christ we must be careful to see to it that we do before we teach; in other words, that we obey the Word of God ourselves before trying to instruct others. If the Word of God has no power over our own lives, we cannot expect to have power over other lives. If we are selfish, proud, haughty, egotistical, carnal, worldly, or unfaithful to the truth we know, we cannot expect others to be blessed by the message we proclaim. A holy minister is a tremendous weapon in the hand of God. An unholy minister is a disgrace to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our blessed Saviour has set us the perfect example. He came to do and then to teach. Is it not a striking thing, for thirty years His ministry consisted largely in doing! He lived before the Father for thirty years and during all those years there was not a flaw in His life. Then at the appointed time He went forth to teach, and now that He has ascended on high He is still doing and still teaching through the power of the Holy Spirit in men of God sent forth to carry His message to a lost world,

Luke speaks in verse 2 of the period between the Lord's resurrection and His ascension, during which He instructed His disciples. Luke says, "Until the day in which He was taken up, after

that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen." That expression, "He was taken up," occurs four times in this chapter. Look at verse 9, "He was taken up"; verse 11, "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven," and then in verse 22, "Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection." Do you believe that? The Holy Spirit has mentioned it four times here. What does it imply? Our Lord Jesus came forth from the grave, the resurrected Man with the same body that was crucified on Calvary. The body that was laid in Joseph's new tomb was raised from the dead in resurrection power, and in that body He appeared to His disciples, and during the period of forty days gave them necessary instructions as to His program of what they were to do in the months and years to follow. Then when the forty days were ended, He was taken up in His physical body, and He sits in heaven today on the right hand of the Majesty on high in the very body that once hung on Calvary's cross.

That is the teaching of the Word of God. This is the Christ—not some spirit-being altogether different from us, but a real Man in the Glory at God's right hand. "There is one God, and one

Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." And, oh, the blessedness of knowing that that Man is concerned about us, that His tender, loving heart is exercised about the trials that His people are going through. "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, apart from sin and able to succor those that are tempted."

He, our blessed, adorable Lord Jesus, was taken up; but before He was taken up He gave commandments unto the apostles He had chosen. He put before them His program and told them what He wanted them to do when He should go back to heaven. There is nothing haphazard about what their Master expected. "To whom also He showed Himself alive after His resurrection by many infallible proofs." When Luke wrote this many of the people who knew the Lord Jesus on earth were still living. They could back up his testimony and say, "Yes, we saw Him and handled Him; we know He was in the same body and was the same blessed Saviour who died for us on Calvary."

"Being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." He was the rejected King. His own people said, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

When Pilate said, "Shall I crucify your King?" the chief priests answered, "We have no king but Cæsar." But God owns His kingly title and He has taken Him up to Glory and He is seated there on His Father's throne, waiting till His enemies be made His footstool (Heb. 10: 13). God calls upon a world of rebellious sinners to own His authority and thus recognize even now the claims of the kingdom of God. That kingdom will not be set up in full display until Christ returns to earth, but at the present, during His absence, all who believe on Him have been brought out from the authority of Satan into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, and wherever the message of His love goes and men recognize Him as Lord and King, we have the expression of the kingdom of God in its present mystical sense. It is called in Matthew's Gospel the kingdom of heaven. When the Lord comes back, "He shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend" (Matt. 13: 41). Though rejected by the world, He is the absent King and the one we gladly own as our Saviour and our Lord.

But now as they went forth to witness, it was not to be in their own power. We are told in verse 4, "Being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the

Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me." The promise of the Father was the promise that the Holy Spirit should come to earth to endue redeemed men and women with divine power, that they might go forth and proclaim the gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ had told His disciples of the coming of the Comforter. He had told them not to hurry, not to run before they were sent, but to abide in Jerusalem until that Blessed One, who is the third Person of the Godhead, should come to earth. He was to fill them, baptize them, and then thrust them forth to carry the gospel to all men everywhere.

There is no other way of explaining the marvelous results of the apostles' preaching than this—they were endued with the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Just as there was a definite time when God the Son came to dwell on earth for a limited period and Jesus was born in Bethlehem, so there was a time when God the Holy Spirit came to earth, not exactly to become incarnate, but to indwell believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and to empower and preserve them. Christ was born in Bethlehem exactly in accordance with Old Testament prophecy; the Holy Spirit came to earth on the day of Pentecost exactly as foretold in type in Leviticus 23 and in accordance with the promise of the Lord Jesus.

He said, "For John truly baptized with water;

but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." Those to whom our Lord spoke had already been baptized with John's baptism, but they needed this baptism of the Holy Spirit to fit them for their service and, as we shall see later, to unite into one body those who had been hitherto separate units though all children of God. But this was part of the special revelation given to the Apostle Paul.

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" He had spoken of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God and, of course, they as Jews knew from the Old Testament prophets that the day would come when their people would be restored to their land and, as a regenerated nation, be the means of blessing to the whole earth. "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa. 27: 6). They were looking for the coming of the kingdom and the restoration of Israel, and so they put the question to the Lord—a most sensible question to them, though we may not think so. We do not have the background they had. "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Did the Lord say, "No, you have lost your chance; these Old Testament prophecies are canceled and never will be fulfilled." Did He say that? No, indeed.

He simply said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." I wish we could always remember that. The kingdom of God has not yet come, but some day it will be set up on this earth, and men are still trying to figure out the exact time when that will take place. Men persist in endeavoring to ferret out that which is the Father's own secret, and so they attempt by various ways to find out when the King will come. But to all such our Lord says: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." Some day He will make everything plain. When God's time comes prophecy will be fulfilled to the letter. Jesus Himself said, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

But while it was not for them to know the time when the kingdom will be set up—there was something they might know: "You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you and you shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem (now notice the order—Jerusalem, the very city where Christ was crucified, then in the eyes of God the most wicked city on earth; there the grace of God was to be first manifested), and in all Judea (the province of which Jerusalem was the capital), and in Samaria (the next prov-

ince, where there lived a mixed people whose religion was a mingling of Judaism and idolatry), and unto the uttermost part of the earth." That is the divine program laid down at the very beginning. How slow the Church has been in carrying it out!

"When He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel (two glorious beings from heaven itself); which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus." (Oh, I love those three words—"this same Jesus." Don't you? No change in Him—1900 years in the Glory haven't changed Him in the least.) "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (vers. 9-11).

## LECTURE TWO

### THE WAITING PERIOD

1 1 1

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty), Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou,

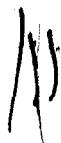
Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1: 12-26).

1 1 1

AS we closed the previous address we stood in spirit with the disciples on the mount of Olives looking after Jesus as He went up, His great commission still ringing in our ears, His words to the apostles still before us. "Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." There was the divine program for the evangelization of the world. There was no cutting it up into separate little dispensations, as some imagine, but the Lord laid out the whole program from the beginning. They were to start at Jerusalem, in God's eyes the guiltiest city on earth, where in spite of Christ's testimony and the fact that they were witnesses to His mighty work, even the raising of Lazarus from the dead, they cried in Pilate's judgment hall, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him" (John 19: 15). The Lord Jesus bade them begin at Jerusalem and tell them of God's grace, even for the guiltiest and the worst. Then when they

had told the gospel story there, they were to go to the surrounding country of Judea, and then move on to Samaria (to that mixed people, who were hated by the Jews and hated the Jews in return). They were to tell them that the Lord Jesus was the Saviour for them, that He had died and risen and was waiting to forgive all who would put their trust in Him. Then nothing was to hold the messengers back, but they were to go on to the uttermost part of the earth. That was the commission. They were slow in carrying out this commandment of the Lord, but as the years have gone on Christian hearts have taken courage, and the work of world-evangelization has progressed in the order given.

We saw Him ascending to Glory. Four times in this chapter we noticed the expression, "He was taken up." Let us never forget that. He, this very same Jesus, was taken up—and in the same body which was once crucified but raised from the dead and is now glorified—and sits exalted at the Father's right hand, the Man in the Glory. We heard the voice of those two wondrous beings who appeared and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."



And so the heavens were closed and there was

committed to the Church the commandment to carry the message of the Evangel into all the world. First Jesus had said, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The new dispensation was to be ushered in by the coming of the Holy Ghost, ten days later.

We are now considering those intervening ten days, and we notice how the disciples occupied them. First, in verses 12 to 14 we find them given to prayer and supplication. We read that they returned to Jerusalem "a sabbath day's journey." That is, a short distance over the brook Kedron.

"And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room." Possibly this was the same upper room in which they had observed the Pass-over, though we cannot be absolutely certain. There the eleven disciples had their abiding-place. "Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James" (distinguishing him from Iscariot, the traitor). We are told they continued in prayer and supplication, nor were they alone. "With the women (the godly women), and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren."

Here are several things of interest. Mary, the

mother of Jesus, was there, but you will notice they were not praying to Mary, nor were they burning candles to her; they were not addressing themselves to her, nor asking her for any blessing; but Mary, the mother of Jesus, was kneeling with the eleven and the women, and all together they prayed to the Father. The Church of God wandered far from that in the centuries that followed when it exalted Mary almost to the place of a female Divinity. Over the portals of a church in South America there is an inscription in Spanish, which, translated into English, reads, "Come unto Mary, all ye burdened and distressed with your sins, and she will give you relief." Our blessed Lord used those words of Himself when He said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." They have put the mother in the place of her Incarnate Son.

It is an interesting fact that this is the last time in the Bible we read of Mary, the mother of Jesus. From this time on she passes out of sight; she takes her place with the rest of God's people who were waiting for Pentecost and for the evangelization of the world to begin. She passes quietly off the scene in her womanly place, probably to find a home with the Apostle John in accordance with the words of the Lord Jesus, for you will remember the Lord committed her to

him. He said, "Woman, behold thy son!" and to John, "Behold thy mother!"

Then, notice the brethren of Jesus were in this prayer meeting, and you will remember when He was here on earth "neither did His brethren believe in Him" (John 7:5). The members of His own household, brought up side by side with Him, did not believe; they could not believe their brother Jesus could be the Anointed of Jehovah and the One of whom the psalmist had sung and the prophets had prophesied; but now that Christ was risen from the dead, His brethren believed in Him, and a little later on we see His brother James as one of the most prominent disciples in the city of Jerusalem.

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. What a beautiful picture! This was the preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. But do not misunderstand. The coming of the Spirit did not depend on their prayer. It had been predicted of old that He must come on the Day of Pentecost. But that being a settled thing in the mind of God, He moved on the hearts of His people that they might be in a prayerful attitude. They were to be endued with power and, you see, when God is going to do some great thing He moves the hearts of people to pray; He stirs them up to pray in view of that which He is about to do so

that they might be prepared for it. The disciples needed the self-examination that comes through prayer and supplication, that they might be ready for the tremendous event which was about to take place, the coming to earth of God the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers and empower them to witness for Him.

In verses 15 to 26 we have the last official act of the old dispensation. The apostles were mourning the loss of one of their number. There were now only eleven and God had chosen twelve. Twelve in Scripture is the number of perfect administration, and Jesus had said, "Ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). But there was one lacking. Would there be an empty throne then? Would there be one less? No; God had provided for that. I know some people think the apostles made a mistake in electing a successor to Judas, and that God meant the Apostle Paul to be the twelfth. But Paul is never linked with the Twelve; in fact there are twelve apart from him.

The Twelve are to have a special place in the coming kingdom in connection with administering the affairs of Israel. Seated upon twelve thrones they shall judge the twelve tribes. Paul

had a unique ministry and will have a special place in the coming kingdom. How then were they to fill the vacancy? Peter evidently acted as the Lord instructed before His ascension. He had told them many things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He explained to them what He wanted them to do, so they were not left to guess at the mind of the Lord. Peter acted in full accord with the instruction received when he stood before the disciples, about 120 of them, and said, "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry."

What a pitiful thing that was! Here was Judas who for three and a half years had belonged to that apostolic company. He walked with Jesus, heard the teaching of Jesus, saw the same marvelous miracles, yet all the time this man was out of harmony with the rest. Jesus, who knew the hearts of men, said as He looked upon them, "Have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). He did not say, "One of you is in danger of becoming a devil." He knew one of them did not believe, had all the time treasured traitorous thoughts, was corrupt and utterly untrustworthy, yet he

had walked with the rest of them, was numbered with them and obtained part of their ministry. How that ought to speak to us!

It is not enough to take the Christian name, become members of Christian churches, submit to the ordinance of baptism, participate with believers in the Lord's Supper or give of our money to further the affairs of Christ—we need to be sure we have definitely opened our hearts to the Lord Jesus, that we have received Him as our own personal Saviour. Judas failed here. I believe Judas thought of Christ as the promised Messiah; I believe Judas thought Jesus would declare Himself King and manifest Himself in the overthrowing of the Roman government. It is one thing to think of Him as Messiah; another to trust Him as one's own Saviour and receive Him as one's own Lord. Judas failed there.

Let us be warned therefore and make sure ours is not just an intellectual recognition that Jesus is God's Son, the rightful King and Saviour of sinners, but that He is our Saviour and our Lord. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart (truly believe) that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10: 9). But He says, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy

name done many wonderful works?" and Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7: 22, 23). Of His own He says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (John 10: 28). Notice that He says of His own sheep, "I know them." He says of those who are lost, "I never knew you." He will never say to any in that day, "I used to know you," but "I never knew you," for they will be manifested then as never having been born of God.

Then in the 18th verse we have the sad end of Judas, so far as this life is concerned. "Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." In the Gospels we are told Judas was overtaken with remorse. Matthew says, "Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself" (Matt. 27: 3). Ordinarily, the word for repentance implies a true change of mind, but the word used here simply means Judas was filled with remorse. When he realized what he had done, he was stricken with horror and brought the money to the chief priests and elders and threw it down, crying, "I have betrayed the innocent One." And they, cold, calculating, religiously hardened, answered with

indifference: "That is nothing to us. See thou to that" (Matt. 27:4). Judas fled from them and we are told he hanged himself. They were so religious and punctilious they said, "We can't put this money into the treasury, because it is the price of blood"; but thereupon used it to purchase a plot of ground in which to bury strangers, those who did not have relatives to claim them.

Some think we have a contradiction here. The Gospel says Judas went out and hanged himself (Matt. 27:5). The book of Acts says, "Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." There is no contradiction. Peter is simply giving us further information. I think even as I read the words I can see the horrid picture. Judas, driven distracted by the awful sense of his guilt, filled with remorse for what he had done, rushes out. He sees a tree perhaps on the edge of a cliff, nooses himself to it and leaps into space. His body is torn asunder and the horribly sickening spectacle lies there for all to see, the end, so far as earth is concerned, of the man who sold the Saviour for thirty pieces of silver!

I know people who are selling Him for less than that! I know people who are selling their hope of heaven for a little worldly pleasure. I know some who are selling the Lord for the satis-

faction of fleshly lusts and carnal indulgences! Judas sold Christ for money. What are you selling Him for, unsaved friend? At whatever price, it is a bad bargain. You are bound to lose out in the end. Judas lost out in this life. What about the life to come? you ask. Can we follow him out into eternity? Yes, with the aid of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ we can follow Judas beyond the tree where he hung, where his body burst asunder. Jesus said, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." What does that mean? It means unending judgment to the utmost limits of eternity. If a time ever came when Judas repented, terrible though his crime, then it would have been a mercy that he had been born—but Jesus said, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." For him there was only an absolutely hopeless eternity, as there is for all who reject the Lord Jesus Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The wrath of God abideth . . . abideth . . . abideth on him!

Now Peter, divinely guided, remembers two passages of Scripture, and, as you will notice, he quotes from the Septuagint version, Psalm 69: 25, referring to the betrayal of Christ, "Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell

there." Peter says that is fulfilled. And in Psalm 109: 8 is another passage, "Let another take his office," or, as translated here, his bishopric.

So Judas, lost, forfeited everything. Now somebody else must take his place among the twelve. "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John (that is when the little company began, when they found each other) unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection." In other words, the number of the twelve must be complete, so they set forth two—Joseph and Matthias—and prayed and said, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." The place of the utterly lost and ruined! So they gave forth their lots and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles, thus making the twelve. Does somebody object to the manner of his election? It was the Old Testament method. In the book of Proverbs we read, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. 16: 33). This was the last of the Old Testament

economy: the new economy began on Pentecost.

And so we read in chapter 2, verse 14, "Peter, standing up with the eleven." That includes Matthias, to make twelve. And in chap. 6:2 we read "the twelve called the multitude"—so God Himself applies the term "Twelve" to the eleven and Matthias, the twelve who are to sit by and by on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

## LECTURE THREE

# THE MEANING OF PENTECOST

1 1 1

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost [Spirit], and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last

days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2: 1-21).

1 1 1

WE are to consider now the next great event following the marvelous things recorded for us in the Gospels. First, there was the incarnation of our Lord Jesus. God became Man for our redemption; the coming to this earth of God the Son to unite man with Deity. Then Calvary, the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He gave Himself a ransom for all, to put away our sins. Next, the physical resurrection of the Saviour. Now we have Pentecost, the coming of another Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, to dwell in the Church on the earth and to empower believers to carry the message of grace everywhere.

Notice the opening words, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." At that time the believers in Jerusalem numbered about 120 and they could all be together, and—more important

—they were all of one accord. But do not make a mistake. Pentecost did not come because they were of single unity and in one place; they were there expecting Pentecost, in obedience to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pentecost was a predetermined epoch in the mind of God and the Word of God. It had been settled from all past ages just when the Holy Spirit was to descend and take up His abode with the people of God on earth. The Lord Jesus had said that the Father would send the Comforter and “He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16: 15). He also said, “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24: 49).

The Holy Spirit was to introduce a new dispensation and God had definitely settled the time when that dispensation would begin—the day of Pentecost. If you turn back to Leviticus 23 you learn there of Israel’s ecclesiastical or sacred year, with the great festivals that belonged to it, among them the Passover in the spring (on the 14th day of the month Nisan), answering to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now when Passover came He died; that is, the appointed Passover. He observed Passover on the evening before His death. The Jewish day began with the evening of one day, as we would count, and went on to the evening of the following day; so on the

first evening Jesus ate Passover with His disciples, and before the next evening He died, the spotless Lamb on Calvary. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:7, 8).

Then if you follow on in Leviticus 23 you will see that on the morrow after the sabbath they were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits. Now we are told Christ has been raised from the dead and "become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). So just as Passover typified the death of Christ, the firstfruits typified His glorious resurrection, the firstborn from the dead.

Again referring to Leviticus 23, we read in vers. 15 and 16, "Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering (that is, the firstfruits); seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat-offering unto the Lord." Now, fifty days had to elapse from the offering of the firstfruits until the feast of Pentecost. Pentecost really means the fiftieth day, so God had ordained that this feast should be observed in Israel as the type of the beginning of a new dispensation when a new meal-offering would be offered to the Lord:

"Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave-loaves . . . baken with leaven." These could not typify our Lord because they had leaven in them, and leaven is a type of sin and He was the sinless One; but they do typify those who through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ are presented to God a new creation, Jew and Gentile, sinners in themselves but their sins judged in the light of the Cross of Christ. Therefore Pentecost was the beginning of a new age, that of the Church, the Body of Christ.

When the day of Pentecost came, the apostles, in response to the command of the Lord Jesus, were with one accord in one place. Just where was that one place? It is not as easy to decide as one might think. A good many take it for granted it was in the upper room where the 120 gathered for prayer, but when we turn back to Luke (which is the first part, if I may remind you, of which Acts is the second part) we read, "And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (Luke 24: 52, 53). They abode in an upper room, but day after day they went to the temple and in the temple courts, where there was a great deal of liberty, they gathered together to praise and bless the Lord. Different groups met among themselves; there a group of Sadducees with

their teacher, and here a group of Pharisees with their instructor. The disciples came there to praise and bless God. It may very well have been there that the Holy Spirit came. That may also account for others assembling there and hearing all that was going on. On the other hand, the upper room may have been in a public place and the sound as of a rushing mighty wind may have commanded the attention of the people and caused them to flock to that upper room. Personally, I feel the likelihood that it was in the courts of the temple that they were gathered when the Holy Spirit came.

“They were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind.” The Lord Jesus had used wind as a type of the Holy Spirit in speaking of the new birth: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). So to these believers came the sound as of a rushing mighty wind. The Holy Spirit could not be seen, but His presence could be felt and heard. “And it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.” The people looked on in amazement. What looked like fire, how-

ever, was not fire; it was the visible manifestation of the descent of the Holy Spirit. Just as when the Lord Jesus Christ came up from His baptism in the Jordan the Holy Spirit was seen descending like a dove and lighting upon Him, so now tongues like as of fire were seen resting upon the heads of the disciples. Doubtless these tongues had special meaning. The hour had come when God was to lift from men the curse of Babel. At Babel God so confounded and divided the one language that men spoke that they found themselves speaking in many languages. Now the Holy Ghost had come with power to enable His messengers to witness in many tongues to the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Immediately were they all filled. The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost for two purposes. He came to usher in the new dispensation, to baptize into one Body all believers. Were they not the children of God? Yes, but they were just so many units; but now when the Spirit of God came they were all baptized into one Spirit, one Body. More than that, they were empowered for testimony. The Spirit had come to take of the things of Christ and reveal to believers the things of God and to unctionize them as they went forth to proclaim the gospel

to others. This is for all nations. There is not a hint here that this is to be confined just to Israel. God gave these Jewish disciples power to present the Word in the languages of all the people who had come to Jerusalem to keep the feast of the Lord.

We read, "There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language." The question has been raised whether the miracle was in the disciples' speaking different languages, or in the ears of the hearers, so that the apostles all spoke in their native Galilean tongue but the people heard in their own languages. Verse 4 makes this very plain. "They . . . began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." These Galileans who may never have learned any other language than their own now suddenly found themselves so laid hold of by the Holy Spirit that their tongues were loosed and they began to speak and preach intelligently in the languages of the people gathered there to listen. These people, amazed, murmured to one another, saying, "Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" Then you

have a long list of the different people represented there; most of them were Jews, many were proselytes, and there were others not listed among either. The last to be mentioned are Cretes and Arabians. These were probably Gentiles and yet as they listened they said, "We hear them speak in our own tongue the wonderful works of God." No wonder they marveled.

But still others there listening to the apostles couldn't understand; they heard what seemed gibberish to them. They said, "These men are full of new wine; they are drunk, uttering nonsensical sounds that mean nothing." This situation was illustrated very clearly to me some years ago in San Francisco when a group of us were in the habit of going down to the worst part of the city every Saturday night where hundreds of sailors from the ships in the harbor would pass. We held a street meeting from eight o'clock until midnight, speaking to all classes of men. One speaker, now a missionary in Argentine Republic, was a Spaniard by birth, yet spoke fluently French, Italian, Portuguese and other languages. When he would see a group of French seamen passing (the name of their ship upon their caps), he would suddenly call out to them in their own language and speak to them for perhaps twenty minutes; and then, as he sighted a group of Portuguese sailors (easily distinguished

by their uniforms) he would swing over and talk to them in Portuguese and they would gather in close. Later he might speak to a group of Spaniards or Mexicans and then perhaps to some Italians. There was rarely a Saturday night when he did not speak in all of these different languages. More than once I have seen persons come up and say, "What is the use of listening? He is drunk. You can't understand a word he says!" They did not know the language, and that is the way it was on Pentecost. Peter and his companions were not acting strangely—that wasn't the point; but as they spoke in different languages, those who couldn't comprehend came at once to the conclusion that they were drunk.

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words; for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day" (that is, just nine o'clock in the morning, and ordinarily folks did not get drunk so early). But this which is taking place today, this power, this manifestation, this Spirit that is working, "this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," and he quotes most accurately from the Old Testament prophecy which, you will see, if you will turn over to the book of Joel and read carefully, refers to the

beginning of the millennium. It has reference to the time when God will pour out His judgment on the nations and when the Lord Jesus will come the second time and establish His kingdom here on earth and the Holy Spirit is to be poured out on all flesh. But Peter quotes that part referring to setting up the kingdom in power and glory, and he says to those finding fault and objecting, "This is the same thing that will take place then. *This is that* which was spoken of by the prophet Joel."


There is a great deal in the prophecy which yet remains to be fulfilled, but Peter is saying that that same Spirit which was working on Pentecost that day is the Spirit which by and by will be poured out upon all flesh. Joel says, "It shall come to pass in the last days I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh." Notice the universality of this. This is something for the whole world in that glorious millennial day, and today this coming of the Holy Ghost, this Pentecostal blessing, is for the whole world. I wonder sometimes at those who tell us that God endued only Israel with such power. He was contemplating the untold millions of Gentiles—those already born and those to be born down through the centuries—when the Spirit of God had come with the message for all of them. "I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters

shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." The coming of the Spirit of God takes hold of a man or woman and gives them an illumination they would not ordinarily have; He opens up to them the Old Testament and reveals the things to come and gives them an understanding of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ and its effects upon human sin and human needs.

"And on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy." To prophesy is to proclaim the truth of God, but you will see how the prophecy from Joel has not all been fulfilled. "Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come." Joel's prophecy carries us on to the coming of the Lord, when He will establish His kingdom and put down all iniquity. But the same Spirit who will work then is the One who came on Pentecost and has been working in power the last 1900 years, and it is He who enables servants of God to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, for we read, "It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Do not try to limit that "whosoever." It is the same "whosoever" that is in John 3:16. "For God so

loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here the message is stated in a different way but the meaning is the same.

"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." And so the Spirit of God has come, the Comforter is here and the saints of God have received the Spirit and have thus been baptized into one Body and in the power of the Spirit are called upon to go forth and proclaim the gospel message to the ends of the earth. Have you called on the name of the Lord? Have you trusted Christ as your own Saviour? Then doubt not, but accept the words of the Holy Ghost Himself, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."



## LECTURE FOUR

### PETER'S SERMON ON PENTECOST

1 1 1

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell (that is, in Hades, the unseen world), neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ; that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said

unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2: 22-36).

1 1 1

**I** SUPPOSE this sermon, which the Apostle Peter preached in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost immediately after the coming of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter to indwell believers and to baptize them into one Body, is the most widely used sermon ever preached. We shall see in our next message some results of it, but it does not hurt us to anticipate, for we know from Scripture the results were 3,000 souls turned to the Lord.

What was the character of this sermon and what was there in it that so appealed to the people? Of course in trying to answer this we need to remember that the circumstances were most remarkable. The Lord Jesus Christ had fulfilled three and a half years of His wonderful ministry in the land of Israel. By His many miracles He had manifested His Messianic power and His character showed that He was the Son of God. A number believed on Him and a great many rejected Him and, by those who had rejected Him, He had been crucified. Three days later He rose again from the tomb, appeared to certain

selected persons again and again for a period of forty days, and then ascended into heaven, after which the Spirit Himself came on the day of Pentecost as predicted and in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. There were gathered at Jerusalem a vast throng of people from all the different countries to which the Jews had been dispersed during the centuries. They had come to keep the feasts at Jerusalem, first the Passover and then Pentecost; and as they listened to this message it came home to their consciences with peculiar power.

Never again will there be such circumstances, and that is one reason we can never expect to see a duplicate of that power or even to see a single sermon used as that one was used; but as we consider the content of it, it will at least suggest to us the type of sermon that God can use to convert sinners. The first thing is simplicity. Not a word was uttered that day that a child of adolescent age could not have understood. Peter did not need someone to explain his words. His hearers did not need to go away to study a dictionary. I remember hearing a good preacher in Birmingham, Alabama, and it happened that the colored ministers had asked permission to sit in the balcony to hear the sermon and were graciously accorded this privilege. (It did not seem very gracious to me, but that is the way

they look at it down there.) As these colored brethren were descending the stairs at the close one of them was asked: "Well, how did you enjoy the sermon today?" "Well," he said, "he sure did speak fine words; and I'm goin' home now to see if I can find out what they all meant." I thought, "What a pity! If only the preacher had clothed his message in such a manner that the simplest, the most illiterate could understand!" Peter used simplicity.

In the second place, Peter's sermon was centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. He held up Christ, crucified and risen, and that is the message God has promised to bless. He has sent His servants into the world to preach the gospel, the good news about His Son. Peter did not argue; he did not go into abstruse theological problems; he told them about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he told of that, it went home to the hearts of his hearers with tremendously convicting power. I am afraid we forget it is the plain, simple story that reaches the people and brings them to the knowledge of salvation.

We sometimes sing,

"I love to tell the story  
Of unseen things above;  
Of Jesus and His glory,  
Of Jesus and His love,"

and yet we spend so much time about other things and so little time on that wondrous story, I shouldn't be surprised if our hearers didn't feel like reminding us of that other hymn,

"Tell me the story often,  
For I forget so soon,  
The 'early dew' of morning  
Has passed away at noon."

That is what the world needs! That is what men and women are crying for. And so we want to see how Peter presented it at Pentecost, and want to ask God to bless it as we present it here.

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words." You see, Christ came in the beginning not to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and while the disciples were to go to the uttermost part of the earth, He distinctly said they must begin at Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was the most guilty city on the face of the earth at that time. Jerusalem had had the greatest privileges and yet it had crucified the Son of God. So this message was to the very people who had rejected Christ—the nation of Israel.

"Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." Jesus of Nazareth.

That speaks of His humanity; it speaks of the lowliness of His character. He, who is over all, God blessed for ever, stooped to become a carpenter of Nazareth.

I listened the other night to that great Japanese evangelist, Kagawa. In speaking of many blessings the gospel brought to the Japanese, he said, among other things, "The gospel has taught the people of Japan, even those who have rejected its saving message, the dignity of the laboring man. Before the gospel came, the laboring man was looked down upon with absolute contempt, but when Christian missionaries came to tell the story of the Son of God who became a carpenter, who shed His blood upon the cross for our sins, it changed the whole conception of people toward the laboring class." That has been true all over the world. The laboring people were hardly more than slaves when Jesus came, and now there is practically no actual slavery left in any civilized land. Some are enslaved by laws cruel and ruthless, but the arrival of the gospel changes completely the attitude toward those who toil and labor. Jesus of Nazareth labored. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth who "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38).

Peter in the beginning does not rise any higher than that. He does not dwell on the Deity of

Christ at first. He tells them, "Here was a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs." In other words, Peter is telling them this Man is the Messiah. God had put His seal upon Him. This was the One whom the prophets had proclaimed and of whom the psalmists had sung, and what have they done with Him? Let me ask you the question, What have you done with Him? You know why He came, why He died. What have you done with Him? Have you opened your heart to receive Him? Have you trusted Him as Saviour? If not, you are as guilty—yes, in some respects even more guilty—than they in those days. What did they do? "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Notice how two things come together here that often trouble thinkers among men. First, God's predetermined purpose and wicked man's free will. God had predetermined that His blessed Son was to come into the world and give His life a ransom for sinners. Jesus came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). But God had not predetermined that men should curse Him, spit upon Him and heap every kind of indignity upon Him. These things were of men's

godlessness led on by Satan. Peter says, "God sent Him; God knew all that would take place; but you are responsible for your sins in that you laid hold of Him and with your wicked hands crucified and slew Him."

When man would do his worst, God gives His best. Man showed the malevolence and iniquity of his heart; he cried, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him," and then the ruthless soldiers nailed Him to that cross of shame. But when man had done all that, God said, "This, My beloved Son, is the great sin offering for the guilty. Even for the men rejecting Him now, for the men who crucified Him and put Him upon the cross, His soul was made the offering for sin." By His death redemption was procured, which God offers freely to all men everywhere. In answer to what man did, we see God acting in power.

"Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it." When sin had been atoned for and the sin question settled, it was righteousness on the part of God that demanded that His Son be brought back again from the dead; and so in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ we have the evidence of God's satisfaction with the work done. So the risen, crucified One is now set forth as the Saviour of all who put their trust in Him.

The Apostle Peter goes on to quote from three Psalms showing how the Old Testament Scripture had opened up to him. Before His ascension Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, "He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16: 15). And so now, guided by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, Peter turns to passage after passage in the book of Psalms and shows how all were being fulfilled in Christ. First he refers to Psalm 16.

"For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before My face, for He is on My right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did My heart rejoice, and My tongue was glad; moreover also My flesh shall rest in hope: because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to Me the ways of life; Thou shalt make Me full of joy with Thy countenance." Now, these words, you say, are expressed by David in the first person. When he wrote that sixteenth Psalm one might have imagined perhaps those experiences were to be his own, but Peter shows it was the Spirit of Christ speaking through David, leading him to write as he did.

These things are not all true of David. David could not say, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer me to see corrup-

tion." David's soul was left in Hades and his body did see corruption. But Peter says, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day." But he was a prophet, and as a prophet was looking forward to Messiah's coming. Therefore knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that his son was to sit forever on his throne Peter declares that it was of Jesus God spake. "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption."

It is very interesting to note how these Old Testament prophecies meet in the Lord Jesus Christ. Prophecies that never could have been fulfilled in anyone else were all fulfilled in Him. He walked in accordance with these beautiful words in Psalm 16. He could say, "I foresaw the Lord always before My face, for He is on My right hand, that I should not be moved." And as He moved forward to death, even as He hung upon the cross, He could say, "My flesh shall rest in hope: because Thou wilt not leave My soul in Hades, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to Me the ways of life." The Apostle Peter was moving on to the resurrection, for the path of life lay through the grave and up to the Throne of

God; and all this was spoken beforehand of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter says, "This Jesus hath God raised up. Therefore (He, the risen One) being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit." (Understand what Peter is saying. The Man Christ Jesus in His human body has gone up to heaven and has taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on High. He is now the Mediator. God has given to Him the Holy Ghost without measure that He might shed forth the Holy Spirit upon men here on earth.) "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Would you need evidence stronger to show you that Peter truly understood the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can you imagine a mere man shedding forth the Holy Spirit in this way? The Holy Spirit in Himself is a Person of the Godhead. Jesus, God the Son, was commissioned by God the Father to give God the Holy Spirit to those who believe on Him.

"For David is not ascended into the heavens." Oh, somebody says, then David's soul is sleeping in the grave. No; that is not what he means. David's body lies in the grave, David is not yet ascended into heaven in his physical body, but

Christ Jesus has gone up into the heavens in His glorified body. David, looking on by faith, speaks again in Psalm 110, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool." Peter says, as it were, "My brethren, the Man who died on the cross was foreseen by David sitting at the right hand of God the Father, waiting for the moment when all creation will be subject to Him, when all His foes will be made His footstool." And this is his climax and upon this he bases his exhortation—an exhortation that I bring you today, those of you who may be out of Christ.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know." Let us stop there and think of the goodness of God. The house of Israel had rejected Christ, and Jew and Gentile had united in the evil act of His crucifixion, yet so great is the love of God that He sent Israel this special message. They had been set aside as a nation. Jesus said some time before, "Your house is left unto you desolate!" (Matt. 23: 38). They were set aside as a nation then; but God was yearning after them still and He speaks in love, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." And the word for Christ, you know, is simply the word for Messiah. "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have cruci-

fied, both Lord and Messiah." And you notice there is no pleading, no begging, no urging to take some stand, but the moment Peter comes to the conclusion, at once there is a move among the people and a great response; and that response, if it please God, will occupy us in our next address.

What is your response to it? God has exalted the Man who died on the cross to His own right hand, to be Prince and Saviour, and has made Him Lord and Messiah. Have you trusted Him and received Him? "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

## LECTURE FIVE

# THE PENTECOSTAL RESPONSE

1 1 1

"Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple (notice the marginal reading there), and breaking bread from house to house [at home], did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (or, such as were being saved)" (Acts 2: 37-47).

1 1 1

**T**HIS brief portion of the book of Acts is one that requires very careful and thoughtful examination. A great deal of controversy has raged around it, and very many serious

misconceptions have been drawn from it, so I ask that you fix your attention very particularly upon the text as I seek to expound it.

The Apostle Peter had just preached his wonderful sermon setting forth the life, the death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had particularly emphasized the fact that the Lord Jesus came to the nation of Israel in accordance with Old Testament prophecy as their Messiah, the One they had been looking for down through the centuries, but they failed to recognize Him when He came. They rejected Him and delivered Him over to the Gentiles to be crucified; but Peter concludes with this triumphant word, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

We need to remember that the word "Christ" means "The Anointed" and is the equivalent of the Hebrew term *Mashiach* or Messiah. Our Lord Jesus is God's anointed King. Men said, His own people said, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). But God has raised up from the dead the One whom the nation rejected and He has confirmed His Messiahship to Him in resurrection. He has declared Him to be Lord and Messiah.

Now the effect of Peter's message was tremendous. We are told "there were dwelling at

Jerusalem Jews, devout men." He was addressing himself not to the ribald crowd that had been in front of Pilate's judgment hall who cried, "Crucify Him, crucify Him"; but addressing primarily the devout Jews who were awaiting the coming of the Messiah, also a number of proselytes from the nations who had the same sincere expectations. And when these honest men heard Peter's proclamation, we read, "They were pricked in their heart." This was the work of the Holy Ghost. He so carried the message home to their hearts that they were deeply stirred.

There was no attempt to deny what Peter said. On the contrary, they accepted the message. Let us be very clear about that. Having accepted the message we can be very sure of this—they were already born of God. The Apostle Peter tells us in the first chapter of his first Epistle, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. . . . And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you." These people had heard the gospel. They were pricked to the heart, they were deeply exercised; they believed the message, and that implies necessarily they had received divine light and were regenerated. They turned to Peter and the rest of the apostles and cried out in sore distress, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Now, I want you to notice this. Their cry was not the same as the question of the Philippian jailor of which we read in the 16th chapter of this book. These brethren did not say to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what must I do to be saved?" That was not in their mind at all; but they said, "Men and brethren" (and you will see from the very term of address used that they recognized their brotherhood with the men who had been preaching)—"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

What is involved in that question? I think it is very easy to understand. These, as I said, were devout men. They had been waiting earnestly, believingly, for the Messiah. Peter has just shown them the Messiah has come. What has happened? The nation has rejected God's anointed King. They have refused Him whom God sent to deliver them. When Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" they answered, "We have no king but Cæsar." These men were troubled—the King for whom they had been waiting had come; He had been rejected. They expected Him to set up His kingdom; but He had gone away to heaven. God had seated Him on His own throne; but what about this nation He was to reign over? What were they to *do*? They really meant to ask, "Men and brethren, in view of the fact that our King has already come and

our people did not realize it and He has been crucified, rejected, what, then, are we going to do?" Do get the point. It was not a question with them simply of their individual salvation. They were not considering that alone. It was a question as to the fate of the nation to which they belonged. What was to happen? What next? What shall we do? Is there any way this dreadful thing can be undone? Is there any way the Christ who has been rejected can appear again and the people be given another opportunity? Is there any way by which the sentence can be revoked? What shall we do?

Peter said, "One thing you can do is repent." Repent! What does that mean? "Repent" means literally a change of mind—a change of mind that involves not only looking at things differently from an intellectual standpoint, but involves complete moral reformation, complete change of attitude. And so Peter says, "Repent, change your attitude." They showed what their attitude was when Christ was presented to them and they spurned Him. Now he says, "Change your attitude." Instead of spurning Him, instead of rejecting Him—receive Him! It is true He has gone away from earth, that He is not here to establish His kingdom, but He still lives and is exalted at God's right hand. Repent. Right about face! Instead of going on as a part of the

nation that rejected Him, change your mind, and separate from the apostate group by taking your stand for Christ.

That is the word we would give today to every one of our dear Jewish brethren everywhere. People do not understand sometimes why we should have Christian missions to the Jews. Do not the Jews have a good religion of their own? Then why should we bother with them? Well, you see, we believe the testimony of Moses and the prophets and we grieve to think that the Jewish people, just as the Gentiles, have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. So in obedience to the word of Jesus Christ we go to them, as to the Gentiles. Peter says to all men everywhere, "Change your attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ; particularly Israel, who rejected and spurned Him." Instead of trampling upon His grace, open your heart to Him. That is what it means to repent, and, thank God, there have been tens of thousands of Jews who have changed their attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ and have crowned Him Lord of their lives whom the nation has rejected. So Peter says, "Change your attitude." He calls on them to do something that will separate them visibly from this nation that is under condemnation: "Be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins."

You see, as part of the nation they were responsible for the rejection of Christ, and now Peter says, Change your attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ and give this outward witness—be baptized in the name of the One you have rejected, and God will look at you standing there and you will no longer be under condemnation as are those who rejected Christ, but you will be under His grace because your sins are forgiven. It was not baptism, but change of attitude toward Christ, that gave them forgiveness. The baptism was the outward manifestation of their hearts' new attitude.

Some people have supposed that because Peter said, "Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ," he is suggesting a different baptismal formula from that the Lord Jesus gave in the Gospel of Matthew. They fail to recognize that in Matthew 28 the Lord is telling them in what name they were to baptize believers. He says, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," and He uses the preposition meaning "baptizing them *unto* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." That is the revelation of God in Christianity. The Jew knew God and in the sense of the Triune God, for the word *Elohim* implies God-Triune, but the Lord Jesus Christ gives the full revelation and

He says, "You go and baptize converts in the name that implies the fulness of Deity." Now they went forth to do as He told them, and as they undertook to baptize they did it in the name of Jesus. They preached in the name of Jesus; they healed in the name of Jesus; they wrought signs and wonders in the name of Jesus; they baptized in the name of Jesus. Being baptized in the name of Jesus implies baptizing as instructed by Him—in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So there is no confusion here. This is not a different kind of baptism. It is not a different name from that given in Matthew's Gospel. This comes out very clearly in the 19th chapter of this book, if I may refer to it for a moment. There Paul came to Ephesus and, talking to certain disciples, said, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, they received the

Holy Spirit. If they had been baptized as Christians before, they would have known of the Holy Spirit, for He is spoken of in the baptismal formula.

So that passage definitely proves the formula of baptism given in Matthew 28 is the one by the authority of, and in the name of, the Lord Jesus Christ. So the apostles say, "Be baptized by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," and the past will no longer be held against you. You will no longer be looked on as part of the nation that rejected the Christ, and in token of this God will give you the gift of the Holy Spirit as He has given it to us. The coming of the Holy Spirit had ushered in the new dispensation, and they were to be brought into all the blessings of the new covenant. Notice the breadth of this: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Now when he uses the term "afar off" he does not mean those in distant lands; but his meaning is essentially moral, spiritual, covenantal. When you turn to Ephesians 2 you learn who these people afar off are. The apostle says in verse 11, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that

time ye were without Christ (he is speaking to the Gentiles, you will see), being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off. . . ." What did Peter say? "The promise is unto you, and to your children (those were the Jews), and to all that are afar off (those were the Gentiles), and to as many as the Lord our God shall call." (That takes in the whole world, Jew and Gentile—"whosoever will.")

Then look at verse 17. He "came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." You see, the Jew is nigh in the point of covenant privilege, the Gentile is a stranger to the covenant—afar off. Peter on the day of Pentecost proclaimed not salvation only to the Jews, as some have ignorantly said, but to the Jews and their children and then "to all afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Oh, my brethren, let us never lose sight of the universal character of the gospel message. Christians have a message for the whole world, and now as God looks down upon men there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither barbarian nor cultured, but all are sinners and all need a Saviour. There is no difference, for

"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"; and again, "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him."

Well, Peter proclaims this universal message, applying it first particularly to those at Jerusalem and, we are told, "with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Why, somebody asks, what did Peter mean by that? I thought one of the first principles is that men cannot save themselves; men are absolutely helpless, dead in trespasses and sins, and yet Peter says to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, "Save yourselves."

Yes, but he did not say, Save yourselves from hell and save yourselves from the wrath of God, but, Save yourselves from this perverse generation. In other words, it comes back to what we have already said. Cut yourselves off by baptism from this untoward generation that is rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, the wrath of God was hanging over that generation. The Lord Jesus had predicted that shortly after His ascension the temple would be destroyed; not one stone would be left upon another. That nation, as a nation, was subject to judgment. Now, Peter says, if you want to escape that judgment,

save yourselves by being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. What was the result? A marvelous response!

"Then they having received his word were baptized." You will notice the Authorized Version reads: "They that gladly received his word were baptized." Some Greek texts include that word "gladly," but since the Authorized Version was translated many older texts have been discovered and they omit the word "gladly." "They having received his word were baptized." You know, I am always rather suspicious of persons who receive the Word with gladness and joy. One wonders if the Spirit of God has really done His probing work in the conscience. We would rather see men facing their sins before God. That is what is involved—a changed attitude toward self, a changed attitude toward sin. That makes people serious, thoughtful, sober; it makes people sad. So, thank God when they have been made serious and faced their sins honestly before God. When they look up to the Lord Jesus Christ and honestly receive Him, then they are made glad.

So thousands of people received the Word and immediately acted in accordance with their faith. They were baptized and their baptism cut them off from the Christ-rejecting nation of Israel and at the same time brought them into a new

fellowship altogether. It brought them into the Christian company.

"The same day there were added about three thousand souls." Added to whom? To the 120 who that very morning had been baptized. Now the Body had grown.

There are four things predicated of these new believers. "They continued stedfastly." They were not the kind that come to the inquiry room, bow down and confess their sins, profess to take the Lord Jesus Christ, take a little copy of the Gospel of John, leave their names with the one dealing with them, walk out of the church and never appear again. These people, having become united with the Christian company, enter into fellowship with them. "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine." They had no written New Testament yet. They depended wholly on the Old Testament and on oral ministry. Since the apostles were divinely taught teachers, the believers continued where they could get the instruction they needed.

If you profess to accept Christ as Saviour, see that you are often found where the Word of God is opened up. We have the whole New Testament today and now God would have His people gather together, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." It is the manner of some to say, "Oh, I do not need to

go to hear the Word. I do not need to go to the gatherings of the people of God. I can go out and worship God in nature." A lot of worshipping you do! As you speed through the country enjoying the passing vista, I am afraid you are not giving many thoughts to God and His testimony. I am afraid it is getting to be the manner of some to lie idly in bed until about 11:30 Sunday morning, and then lazily roll over and turn on the radio. You radio listeners who can't get out, we are glad to preach to you over the air. You who can get out—remember we are not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together."

They continued stedfastly in the apostles' teachings and in fellowship. That is important, we need one another; and because we do, the Spirit of God has come down to knit us together into one Body. You will think of the most frequently quoted verse in the Bible, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." You have heard it perhaps ten thousand times in your life. Have you ever stopped to think what is meant by the communion of the Holy Ghost? It is God working in your heart and mine and helping us to enjoy the things of God together, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

They continued stedfastly in the breaking of bread. Breaking of bread is the sweet and sacred

ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Jesus had said, "This do . . . in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." The early Christians did not neglect this. They continued stedfastly in observance of this sacred ordinance.

The fourth thing is they continued stedfastly in prayer. Don't think that means they continued in prayer and fellowship in their own houses. Prayer is an expression of dependence, and when the people of God really feel their need you will find them flocking together to pray. A neglected prayer meeting indicates very little recognition of one's true need. I wonder how many of us continue stedfastly in prayer? Do you ever attend a prayer meeting? You say, "Prayer meetings are too dry for me." How do you know?—you haven't been to one for so long! Wouldn't it be well to try it and see? Wouldn't it be well to come and see what draws several hundred people together to pray? You will find you are missing a great deal. The early believers continued stedfastly in prayer. And the outsiders noticed it.

"Fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." I wish you would notice that there is no indication that all the believers wrought miracles and wonders. Only those said to have spoken in other

tongues were the twelve apostles, and only those mentioned here who wrought miracles were the twelve apostles. These were the signs God gave in order to convince the gainsayers.

All believers were together in those early days. There was no sectarianism, no strife, no denominationalism. "And all that believed were together, and had all things in common." For a little while they had what some people have set before them as a world ideal—a kind of Christian communism. Very different to modern worldly communism, it was founded on love for one another, as brethren in Christ. Tolstoi said, "You cannot have a brotherhood without brothers."

There were special circumstances that led them to sell all their possessions. The Lord Jesus had predicted judgment on Jerusalem. What, then, was the use of keeping property?

The term "all men" does not mean the unsaved, but the Christian company sharing with one another.

Then look at their habit of life. "They, continuing daily with one accord in the temple (you will see that is still the place where the people met), breaking bread at home, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people." Others saw that something wonderful had taken place. They could not help but see it. "And the Lord

added to the Church\* daily such as should be saved." Oh, if God's dear people could be found walking in joy and peace before Him, with one accord, continuing stedfast in such sacred fellowship, what an effect it would have on the world outside!

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\* Some MSS. omit "the Church," and read simply, "the Lord added to them."

## LECTURE SIX

# THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN

1 1 1

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired

a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before hath showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:1-26).

1 1 1

**I**N this third chapter of the book of the Acts we have Peter's second recorded sermon. These apostolic sermons are of tremendous interest, or should be, to us today because they show just how God chose to present the message of His grace through the early apostles. Their one theme was Jesus Christ Himself, Christ incarnate, Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ glori-

fied. They did not seek to occupy the people with abstruse doctrines, nor did they reason about profound theological problems; but they presented the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in "words easy to be understood." In this they are models for preachers all through the dispensation.

Notice here how the miracle and the message coincided. Miracles were never performed either by Jesus or His apostles simply to amaze the people. These signs were wrought to manifest the grace of God to needy men and women. This comes out here most beautifully.

We are told, "Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour." The temple was still standing in Jerusalem. It was to remain there another forty years, though the vail was rent and the old dispensation had come to an end. But it was still the place where the people gathered together to worship God at the regular hours for prayer. The ninth hour was the time when the evening sacrifice was offered. These sacrifices at the temple had no value now for those who knew the Lord Jesus as the One who had fulfilled all the types and shadows of the law. But we find these two men of God wending their way to the temple to pray.

As they went up their attention was directed to a poor man who lay at one of the entrances.

He was lame and could not walk; he had to be carried daily to the gate Beautiful. There we can see him, holding out his hand, beseeching the more fortunate passers-by to contribute to his support. As Peter and John came along, something about them, perhaps their kindly faces, stirred his heart and made him feel that here were two men who would help him, so he asked them for alms. "And Peter," we are told, "fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us." He was definitely calling the lame man's attention, and the beggar looked up, thinking surely now he was about to receive a coin which would help him supply his temporal needs. But Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

I am sure that to the very end of his days Peter could have said: "Silver and gold have I none." These early followers of the Lord Jesus Christ did not look upon the gospel ministry as a means of enriching themselves. They had taken the place of poverty and were willing to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter what it meant. And as they walked after Him (who, when He was here said, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head"), there was a power in their message that is sadly lacking when men

use the gospel merely as a means of personal enrichment.

In connection with this there is an interesting story of the medieval Church. That great scholar, St. Thomas Aquinas, came to the city of Rome to pay his respects to the one who was then pope. In the course of his visit, the pope proudly showed him all the wonders of the papal palace and took him to his treasury and showed him chests of silver and gold received from every part of the world. With something of a smile on his face, he said, "You see, Brother Thomas, we cannot say, as did the first pope, 'Silver and gold have I none.' (They claim Peter was the first pope.) St. Thomas Aquinas looked the pope in the eye and fearlessly replied, "No, and neither can you say, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.' " Riches had come, but power had gone. With Peter and the apostles there were poverty and power. They were men who walked with God, esteeming it greater riches than all this world could give to be used of Him in a mighty way. There was identification with Christ in His earthly poverty.

As he uttered the words, "Rise up and walk," Peter reached out and "took him by the right hand, and lifted him up," and immediately the lame man felt new life come into that crippled body of his; new strength came into those legs.

Here is a graphic picture indeed. "Immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." Why, you can just see the man fairly dancing with delight, using his new-found strength, like a child skipping along the way. So overcome with joy was he over the miracle that had been wrought that he was not at all concerned with what people might think of him, or of the strange appearance he made as he ran ahead of the apostles. The people who beheld him were filled with amazement too, and were glad for him as they came running, eager to learn more of what had taken place.

Peter said, "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" Then, as you see, Peter used the miracle as an occasion to preach the gospel message. He disavowed any power in himself. He would not have people occupied with him or his devoted companion, the Apostle John. He would turn their eyes away from the servant to the Master of the servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, who had healed the poor cripple.

He began with, "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers." He spoke as a pious Jew, and, oh, I wish that our

Jewish friends everywhere could realize that in Christianity we have the fulfilment of which all the types in Judaism were but the pictures; and we, too, reverence the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—not another god; not some strange god, but the God who of old appeared to the patriarchs. The Lord Jesus is the promised Seed through whom all blessing comes for both Jews and Gentiles.

“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus.” Some manuscripts read, “His Servant Jesus.” It is not exactly easy to decide which term the Apostle Peter used, but it would seem a little more in keeping with his general message to have used the word “Servant”; for the Lord Jesus Christ is that anointed Servant spoken of in the book of the prophet Isaiah, “Behold My Servant.” So he presented the blessed Lord as the One who came into this world to serve Him in making atonement for our sins.

Then he drives home to these people the sin they had recently committed in rejecting Him. “Whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.” One might feel Peter could have dealt with them more gently, and not have

stressed the point that they had denied Him. But let us remember it is ever the work of a good doctor or surgeon to be faithful to his task. So it is never a kindness on the part of a servant of God to gloss over the sins of the people to whom he preaches. God would have men's hearts probed to the very depths. He would have men realize the corruption of their nature, even of their sinful acts which placed them in condemnation before God (and which, after all, became the title to His saving grace). You see, it is my sin that gives me the title to the blood of Jesus, and it is the blood of Jesus that gives me the title to heaven.

And so Peter stressed the sin of which they were recently guilty. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you." When given the choice of either Barabbas or Jesus, they asked that Barabbas be freed and Jesus condemned to die.

Then Peter added, "And killed the Prince of life." One might say, "But they didn't kill Him. It was not the Jews who nailed Jesus Christ to the cross—it was the Gentiles." Yes, but it was Jew and Gentile who together rejected Him and together gave Him up to die. Because it was in the heart of His own people Israel to destroy Him, God spoke, through the lips of the apostle, of His having been slain by them. Actually, no

one could kill Jesus. He said Himself, "No man taketh it [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father" (John 10: 18).

It would have been utterly impossible for either Jew or Gentile to put an end to the earthly life of Jesus if He had not voluntarily placed Himself in their hands and gone to the cross. Even when nailed on the tree He did not die of the physical suffering He endured. We are told that when He cried, "It is finished," He then said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23: 46). And when He had said that, our version says, "He gave up the ghost." Actually it is, "He dismissed His spirit." The work was done.

His death was voluntary. But we are told in another portion of Scripture, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3: 15). So because they had hatred in their hearts they are said to have killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead.

I would like to pause here and put a question to my readers. What is your attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you ever turned to God as a repentant sinner and trusted the Lord Jesus for yourself? If not, you still belong

to that world which God adjudges guilty of murdering His beloved Son. Until you come to the place where you repent of the sin for which the world stands condemned—the death of God's Son—and you take Him as your own Saviour, judgment hangs over you because of man's attitude toward Christ—He who “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4: 25).

Peter says, “God hath raised (Him) from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.” You know, that was very bold. This was only a few days after Pentecost. The Apostle Peter had nothing to cover up. He could have given witness after witness of people who had talked with Christ and walked with Him. God made the resurrection of His Son abundantly evident so that no one who wanted to know the truth need be misled.

So Peter declared it was through this risen One that they could manifest this power. “And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”

Then, having driven home to the hearts of the people their own sinfulness and their accountability before God for the murder of His Son, Peter opens for them a door, as it were, into the city of refuge. You will remember in the Old

Testament God made special provision for any guilty of putting another man to death unintentionally or through ignorance. "And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge." Scripture illustrates it like this: If a man, for instance, is chopping wood and his neighbor is near and the axe head flies off and hits the neighbor and the man falls dead, the one who slew him is not to be treated as a murderer. He is guilty of manslaughter, but is not a murderer. God commanded that there be six cities located at different points, with good roads to them. For the man who unintentionally slays his neighbor is immediately to flee to the nearest city and abide there until the death of the high priest (Num. 35:32), and the revenger of blood is not to seek him out nor treat him as a murderer.

Now as God looked on man as guilty of putting His Son to death, the Apostle Peter shows that He is willing to treat him as a manslayer. Peter says, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." You did not understand; you did not know Jesus was really the Messiah and Servant of God. You thought you were fulfilling God's purpose perhaps in putting Jesus to death. You did it through ignorance. You see, Peter is opening a door to a city of refuge. He is saying, God is ready to

treat you not as a murderer, but as one guilty of manslaughter, and as long as the high priest lives you are safe if you enter the place of refuge. Our High Priest is the Lord Jesus and He lives forever; and those who accept the salvation God has provided are forever secure from the avenger, for God will not permit a charge to be brought against any who are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul says, "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2: 8). So again you see they did not know. Pilate did not know; the Roman soldiers did not know; neither Jews nor Gentiles understood. That is what Jesus meant when He said on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34).

One thinks of those excited Jews in Pilate's judgment hall demanding the death of Jesus. Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" And the Jews cried out, "His blood be on us, and on our children." What a dangerous malediction they were calling down upon themselves and their children! I have heard some thoughtless people say that is why the Jews are suffering today and they should suffer. They say Hitler is right, the Fascists are right, and the anti-Semites are right in causing the Jewish people to suffer. Those who speak like that forget this prayer of the Lord

Jesus Christ on Calvary. Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." So instead of charging His blood to either Jew or Gentile, He is declaring that His very death has opened a city of refuge, a way of deliverance from judgment for all who flee to Him for mercy.

Peter says, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled." Even in the very rejection of Christ, God's own Word was being fulfilled, as we see when we turn to the wonderful fifty-third chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah; and in the light of that, Peter urges their instantly turning to God. "Repent ye therefore." That is, change your attitude. Turn to God. Judge yourselves as sinners before Him. Confess your guilt. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted." Be turned around. That is what conversion implies. When men confess Christ they are turned from the power of Satan unto God, from sin to righteousness.

"That your sins may be blotted out." Again we think of the prophet Isaiah, through whom we hear God speaking to Israel. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee."

It is necessary to draw attention to a slight change of translation, which makes for a clearer understanding of the passage that follows. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you." That is, if Israel will turn to the Lord it will hasten the time when the Lord Jesus will come back again and bring with Him refreshing for all the world. That is still true. The final blessing of this poor world is wrapped up in Israel's repentance. When the people of Israel repent and turn to God they will become the means of blessing to the whole earth.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, . . ." Shall we stop there? If we did it would put us on the ground of universal restitutionalism; it would put us in company with those who say all men eventually are going to be saved.

But that is not what Peter declared. We cannot stop with the comma but must complete the sentence: . . . "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world

began." You see, if you stop in the middle of the sentence and speak of the restitution of all things, that might indeed mean universal salvation; but the sentence as a whole means restitution of all that God has spoken by His prophets. Everything the prophets have spoken will eventually be fulfilled through Christ, for He is the Prophet of whom Moses spoke. In Deuteronomy 18:15, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken." That Prophet is our Lord Jesus. God calls upon all men to receive Him and put their trust in Him.

"And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people." "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days"—days to come when Jew and Gentile would be saved through the death of the appointed Saviour that God was to provide.

Then Peter adds, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy Seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." Oh, look at the heart of God. How it goes out to His earthly people Israel. "Unto you first." If any Jewish friend reads these pages,

I hope he will listen to these wonderful words, "Unto you first." Unto you, God's chosen people Israel! Unto you first! God has set the nation aside, but His heart goes out in yearning love to every individual Jew.

"God, having raised up His Son (or literally, His Servant) Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

And so it is—salvation, full and free and complete, for Jew and Gentile; for everyone who will turn in repentance to our Lord Jesus Christ!

## LECTURE SEVEN

# THE REJECTED STONE

1 1 1

"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the Word believed; and the number of the men was (or became) about five thousand. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them (that is, the apostles) in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could

say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed" (Acts 4: 1-22).

1 1 1

AS we pursue our study in the book of Acts we now find the early Church coming up against decided opposition by leaders of the old religious system, a system which had originally been established by God but had become so greatly corrupted by human additions that it was scarcely recognizable as the Judaism of the days of Moses and the prophets. Our Lord Jesus, you remember, said they had corrupted the Word of God by their traditions, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15: 9).

At this time the Sadducee party was in power in Jerusalem. You remember that the Pharisees and the Sadducees constituted the two leading

sects among the Jewish people. There were several lesser ones. The Sadducees, we are told later on in the book of Acts, denied that man has a personal spirit, or that angels are personalities, or that there is any resurrection after death, whereas the Pharisees assented to all these things.

It was the Sadducees, then, who were incensed with the teaching of the apostles in the beginning, for their entire message had to do with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some people speak of the spiritual resurrection of Christ. The spirit of Christ never died. He committed His spirit to the Father as His body was about to die, but it was the body of the Lord Jesus that lay for three days and nights in Joseph's new tomb; and it was the body of Jesus that was missing when the tomb was empty, and in His body the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples during the forty days before He ascended to heaven. Then He was taken up in that very body, and in that body He sits as the exalted Man on the throne of God. "There is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:5).

The apostolic gospel was the gospel of the risen Christ, and that leads me to say something which I feel has to be said if I am going to be understood, particularly by some who have been car-

ried away from the simplicity that is in Christ, by extreme dispensational views, and who fancy they can discern positive disagreement between the preaching of the gospel by the twelve and the message proclaimed by the Apostle Paul.

These bewildered people insist that there are two different gospels, and that Peter preached one gospel from Pentecost on, and when Paul was converted he preached another gospel altogether.

It seems to me that anyone who knows what the gospel is ought to see at once there was absolutely no difference between the gospel preached by Peter and the rest of the twelve and that preached by the Apostle Paul. Paul tells us what the gospel he preached was, in 1 Corinthians 15: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

Now this—and nothing else—is the gospel! Nothing can be added to that. The apostles preached a great many other things that were

not included in that, but they were not the gospel. The gospel is that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried and that He rose again the third day. That was exactly the gospel which was preached on the day of Pentecost, and that was exactly the gospel Peter preached after the healing of the lame man as recorded in chapter three. Nothing else is the gospel. There is no other gospel.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Did Peter preach another gospel? Was Paul pronouncing a curse on Peter? Surely not, because Peter's gospel was exactly the same as Paul's gospel. Then Paul goes further, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." So you see it would have put Peter in a very bad light indeed if he had been preaching any other gospel than that preached by the Apostle Paul, but he preached Christ crucified, buried and risen. Paul preached Christ crucified, buried and risen. Their messages as to this were identical.

The confusion arises when other things that accompany the gospel are spoken of as the gospel itself. Now Peter told Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost certain things that Paul never

told Gentile believers, but these things were not the gospel; and other things Paul told Gentile believers in addition to the gospel constituted a further revelation which God had given him. If we can get this clear, there will be no further trouble.

When a person believes the message that Christ was crucified and died and rose from the dead, that person is born of God, but after he is born of God there may be a great many other things he needs to know.

Let us continue with the story of the presentation of the gospel to the people of Jerusalem. We are still, you see, in the first part of Christ's command. The Lord had told the disciples, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." They were still in Jerusalem, and it is during the time that they were dealing with the people of Jerusalem that they went up to the temple to participate in the worship of the temple; there Peter and John found the lame man and in the name of the Lord Jesus healed him; and when the people came together, Peter found an opportunity to preach the gospel, and the gospel they preached was Christ crucified, buried and raised from the dead.

The leaders of the people were drawn together and indignantly protested against this preaching of the gospel, "being grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

Notice, not the resurrection of the dead simply, but the resurrection *from* the dead. Scripture teaches both. Scripture teaches the resurrection of the dead. It tells us some day all men will be resurrected. The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead runs all through the Bible. In Christianity we have something new—the resurrection from among the dead. First in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then all believers who will have died up to the time our Lord returns in the air. They will be raised from among the dead. The unsaved dead will be left in their sins.

It was this doctrine—resurrection from among the dead—that stirred these Sadducees and stung them to bitter opposition. They put Peter and John in jail overnight, "for it was now eventide." While they were locked up the Word was still bringing forth fruit, "and the number of the men was about five thousand." It does not mean five thousand more were converted; but that, added to the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost, there were now some two thousand more. Notice how clear it is. They believed, and because they believed were added to the

company. That is Paul's gospel; that is Peter's gospel. Men are saved when they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; when they believe the message God has given concerning His Son they become children of God.

Now on the morrow all the dignitaries, including the high priest and his family, were gathered together at Jerusalem and they brought Peter and John before them and inquired by what authority or in what name they had acted. "Who gave you two men authority to usurp the functions of the ministry? We did not give you authority and we are the chief priests in Israel. In what name and by what power was this lame man healed?" They thought perhaps to overawe these two plain, unlearned fishermen. Little they knew about the Holy Spirit who had baptized them into Christ and now had anointed them for service. "Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost." You will notice that as long as the apostles acted in obedience to what the Lord had told them to do they were filled with the Holy Ghost. Some people have an idea that being filled with the Holy Ghost is a unique experience that comes from going to the mourners' bench and praying a long time until suddenly an overwhelming sensation overcomes them. That is just an emotional experience. It is when people walk in obedience to the Word of God, when they

do the thing the Lord tells them to do, that He fills them with His Spirit and gives them power to carry on in accordance with His commandment.

So Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said, "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead." There you have the gospel! Is there any difference between that and Paul's gospel? No, it is the same glorious message. Christ was put to death, He was crucified, but God raised Him from the dead.

Everything for us depends upon that. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). The minister of the gospel today goes forth to proclaim the living Christ, to declare that the same One who trod the hills and valleys of Palestine so long ago now sits exalted on the throne of God, a Prince and a Saviour, now offering redemption and remission of sins to all who put their trust in Him. God's raising of His Son from the dead was the token of His perfect satisfaction in the work Jesus accomplished on the cross. No one but the risen Saviour could have saved sinners like you and me. We need a power outside of

ourselves; He lives to exercise that power on our behalf. Peter says, through Him "doth this man stand before you whole."

Then he directs their attention to a passage in the 118th Psalm, the psalm to which our Lord Jesus Christ had referred them before He was crucified. Peter says, speaking of the risen Christ, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner."

At the risk of repeating something I have said on other occasions, let me remind you that the Jews had their own explanation of this. Understand me, I am speaking only of a legend, but it is very illuminative. The story goes that when the temple of Solomon was in the course of construction all the stones sent up from the quarry below were practically of the same size and shape. But one day a stone was found different from all the rest, and the builders said, "There is no place for this stone. There must be a mistake." So they rolled it to the edge of the cliff and tumbled it down into the valley of Kedron below the temple area. As the years went on (Solomon's temple was seven years in building) they were finally ready for the chief corner-stone; so they sent down the order for it. They were told, "You must have it there; we sent it to you long ago." Their search proved fruitless.

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And then an old workman said, "I remember now. There was a stone different from the rest and we thought there was no place for it and tumbled it down to the valley below."

So, as the story tells us, they went down to the valley of Kedron and there they found the stone, now covered by lichens and debris—the very stone the builders rejected. So now they had to hoist it to the top of the cliff, then back to the platform and put it into place. It fitted perfectly. The stone the builders rejected had become the head stone of the corner.

Every Jew knew that story and knew what Peter meant when he said, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Jesus was God's Anointed and you rejected Him, crucified Him, but God has raised Him from the dead and in resurrection has made Him the chief cornerstone of the new temple He is building, the Church spoken of in Matthew's Gospel, "Upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

And now Peter drives home to them that it was Christ or nothing, Christ or judgment, Christ or hell; no other way to be saved except through Christ. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Oh,

I wish I could shout that loudly enough to be heard from one end of the earth to the other! None but Christ; God's only Saviour! His precious atoning blood is the only remedy for sin. Have you trusted Him?

A troubled young man went one night to a gospel meeting. His conscience convicting him, he felt he ought to come to Christ, but he said to himself, Some other time—not tonight. Just as the meeting was closing he observed a placard reading, "Remember, it must be Christ or hell, and to neglect the one is to choose the other." The young man, startled, thereupon decided, "I can't neglect Him. I must choose Him." Have *you* settled it . . . taken Him as your Saviour?

We read that they perceived that Peter and John were unlearned and ignorant men. That is, they did not have any college degrees or diplomas. "They marvelled." And "they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." They could see the evidence of their association with Christ in the firmness of their faces, in their boldness and bravery in standing against the people who crucified the Saviour. The more you and I associate with Christ, and the more we spend time with Him in prayer and in reading His Word, the more people will take notice that we have been with Jesus.

Why did they want to say anything against the

manifest holy power of the Lord Jesus Christ? Oh, it tells out the bitter hatred of wicked man's heart toward the Saviour whom God has provided. They desired to explain this thing away because they did not want to repent. They did not wish to face their sins or to get right with God. They said to the disciples, "Go outside a little while, we want to talk this thing over." Can you not see these crafty religionists talking among themselves? "What are we going to do? It is manifest to all in Jerusalem that a miracle has been done and we cannot deny it. We wish we could, but we can't." That is what they meant. There is the living evidence in the man leaping and dancing and praising the Lord. He has a new pair of legs! "Let us threaten them not to speak at all or preach in the name of Jesus." And that is the attitude the powers-that-be in many lands have taken throughout the centuries but, thank God, they have not been able to stifle the message or the messengers. Peter spoke up, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." We were commissioned by God to do this. You see, Peter recognizes Jesus, who commissioned them, as God—manifested in the flesh. Peter says, We must obey God—rather than men.

“So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.” The common people were stirred; they realized a mighty miracle had been wrought among them and knew that Peter and John were God’s servants. “The man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.” He was there to speak for himself and to bear witness to the power of the name of Jesus.

We have listened to Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost. We have heard him preaching after the healing of the lame man. Now we have heard him again as he stood before the Sanhedrin. And in every instance he preached the same gospel as the Apostle Paul preached later on—how Christ died, was buried and rose again from the dead. Somebody may assert the epistle to the Galatians says that Peter is to preach the gospel of the circumcision and Paul of the uncircumcision. It does; but it means that to Peter it was given to preach the gospel to the Jews, and to Paul it was given to preach the gospel to the Gentiles; but it was given to both of them to preach the gospel! That is the point, and there is only one gospel and only one Saviour—and that Saviour is our blessed, risen, glorified Lord.

## LECTURE EIGHT

# THE SECOND PSALM AND THE NEW AGE

1 1 1

"And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. For of a truth against Thy holy Child (or Thy Servant, as the margin puts it) Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy Child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the Word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold

them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4: 23-37).

1 1 1

WE have been tracing out the wondrous way in which God introduced the new dispensation of His grace following the rejection, the crucifixion, the resurrection and the ascension of His blessed Son. We have considered the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to anoint God's servants as witnesses, and to baptize believers into one Body; and from that point on we find that these early saints were no longer acting simply as individuals, but as members one of another. This comes out in the passage now before us, as well as in many other parts of the book of Acts.

In the previous part of the chapter we learned of the Apostles John and Peter being threatened by the leaders of the Jewish people and commanded not to preach any more in the name of Jesus. They of course refused to comply. They said, We have to obey God rather than man. Then, being freed, we read, "They went to their

own company." This Christian company might have looked like another sect. They worshipped in the temple just as the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the other Jewish groups did; although they held different views. Now God was using persecution in order to draw a line of demarcation between those of the new creation and those who belonged to the old dispensation.

"Being let go, they went to their own company." They sought out those who, like themselves, washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, had been baptized by the Holy Spirit; and there they told all that the chief priests and elders had said to them, and the whole company joined in praise and prayer to God.

"They lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." Then the Spirit of God brought to their minds the marvelous prophecy of the second Psalm: they exclaimed, "Who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ."

One of the very first results of the reception of the Holy Spirit by these early believers was that the Old Testament Scriptures, which had

been largely sealed to them before, were now opened up in a very wonderful way, and they had a spiritual understanding which was lacking even when they walked with Christ here on earth. Think back a little, when the Lord tried to make clear to them that He must go to Jerusalem to be crucified and that in three days He would rise from the dead. They reasoned among themselves. "Rise from the dead?" What could that mean? They had no understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. You remember on the resurrection day when those two disciples walked on the road to Emmaus, regretting the loss of their Master and Leader, how Jesus came to them and said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Their eyes had been holden before. They had not realized the implication of these Old Testament prophecies. But after the Holy Spirit came these believers were no longer left to their own understanding. He revealed Christ to them. He takes of the things of Christ and makes them clear and plain. He explains to them the second Psalm. It had been in their Bible all those years but they did not know it referred to Jesus.

Turn back to the second Psalm for a moment. You will notice it is made up of twelve verses divided into four sections of three verses each, and if you look carefully you will notice there is a different speaker in every one of those four sections.

The first section reads like this: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed, saying," (Now you hear the voice of the world. What did the world say, the religious world, the political world; all classes of men united against the Lord Jesus Christ?) "Let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us." That is just another way of saying, as they did in Pilate's judgment hall, "We will have no king but Cæsar."

They said, "Against Thy holy Child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed . . . both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together." Do not try to put the blame on any one particular company. Do not say the Jews were the Christ-killers. The Gentiles were just as guilty. All joined together. They all said, "Let us break Their bands asunder." They all agreed in saying, "We will not have this Man to reign over us."

Let us look back at the psalm. In the second

section you hear God the Father speaking. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." And what voice is heard now ringing down from heaven? "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." That is to say, men may rebel and refuse to bow to the name of Jesus or acknowledge the authority of Christ, but God says, "I will have My way; you shall not spoil My plans for a moment. My King will reign from Mount Zion." Men imagine they can outwit God, thwart His plans; but God is over-ruling in all things and works everything according to the counsel of His will.

"For to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done." They could not go one step beyond the divine mandate. God had settled it. Jesus came into the world; they would not have Him—but they could not change God's plans.

His purpose shall be carried out in spite of man's evil heart. Isn't that a comforting thought as you look out on the world today? Never before has it been in such a condition, and men's hearts indeed are "failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth"; but He sits over the waterfloods and nothing can transpire in the affairs of men and of nations but in accordance with the permissive will of God. He causes the wrath of man

to praise Him (Ps. 76:10) and the remainder (that which would not praise Him) He doth restrain. Men rejected Jesus, but God said, My Son is going to reign. I have set Him on My holy hill of Zion.

So in the next section of the psalm beginning with verse 7 we hear another voice, the voice of the Son Himself. What does He say? "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Here is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking. He says, the Father has confirmed it, the Father has declared that the day is coming when I shall hold the sceptre of righteousness, I shall rule the nation in accordance with the mind of God. He is not doing that yet. He is still the rejected One, but He is sitting on the throne of God now and is receiving in grace all who come to Him. By and by He is coming again and will judge the world in righteousness and set up His glorious kingdom over all the earth.

In the interval, while waiting for Him, another voice is heard—the voice of the Holy Spirit. We have heard the voice of the world in arrogant

defiance of God; the voice of the Father declaring His plans will be carried out; and then the voice of the Son assuring us that all this creation will be subject to Him; and now the Holy Spirit pleads with men to get right with God before the Son returns from the heavens. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son (that is, bow at His feet and kiss His pierced hands, yield obedience to Him) lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little."

Then you have the precious promise, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." How much this psalm has meant to God's people through the dispensations! But it was never understood until the Holy Spirit explained it. Then they could look back and see that part of it was already fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and could afford to commit all to Him, and trust Him for the rest.

They prayed, "Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word." The opposition of the world is not to stop the servant of Christ. The more the world opposes us, the more we are to proclaim God's remedy for sin, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Neither is there salvation in any other:

for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

God gave miraculous signs to authenticate the message in the beginning. He does it sometimes now. He still answers prayer. Do not get the idea that the day of miracles is gone. I have seen wonderful miracles in the fifty years I have known Christ; and many missionaries, especially in foreign lands, have told wonderful things of God's miracle-working power. But ordinarily speaking, He is not working in this miraculous way today. He wrought in His miraculous power in the beginning so men might know that a new dispensation and age had come.

"Grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy Servant Jesus." I have drawn your attention before to the fact that in these early chapters the word translated "child" or "son" here is really "*servant*." It was not until after the Apostle Paul's ministry began that we get the full revelation that the Servant is the Son. This is the suffering Servant in accordance with the prophecy in Isaiah 53 and other passages.

The Holy Spirit who had come upon them at Pentecost as a mighty rushing wind now actually shook the place where they were gathered to-

gether and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit—that is, filled immediately. You see, we are only baptized once, but we may be filled on many occasions; a special filling for all new forms of ministry. “And they spake the Word of God with boldness.”

Then we see how the Spirit of God wrought in their hearts and how wonderfully the Lord's prayer was answered. You will remember how He prayed, “That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee.” Here is the answer to that prayer. For we read, “Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.” That is altogether different from what is called communism today. It was not forcing the people to give up their possessions; but it was love working in their hearts that made these Christians say, I will gladly share my possessions with those who are more needy.

“Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet.” They did not have to do it. No one said, You must sell your property and use your money in this way. But they were moved by the Spirit of God to share with one another.

And so the chapter closes with one outstanding example of Christian love and charity. "Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas." He was given that name because of his character. It means "the son of consolation." I would like to have a name like that. I would like to be the means of consolation to God's people. "Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." Here you see love at work. When we are concerned about our own welfare rather than that of other people, it is because we know so little of the controlling love of Christ. Would that God would give us anew a baptism of divine love that will move our hearts in gracious consideration for all God's people and for all men everywhere!

## LECTURE NINE

# THE SIN OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

1 1 1

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them. And believers were the more

added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women). Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5: 1-16).

1 1 1

I WANT to look particularly at this story of Ananias and Sapphira. We often hear these names mentioned; frequently people speak of them very glibly and suggest that perhaps they were two of the greatest liars that the world has ever known. One of our former Presidents, a man who led a strenuous life and was very straightforward and hated hypocrisy, was in the habit of consigning political associates who made untrue statements to the "Ananias Club"; and so made many people think of these two as outstanding liars. And yet, in what did the sin of Ananias and Sapphira really consist? And to what degree are we in danger of sinning similarly against God and against His Holy Spirit?

As we read the record I am sure nobody is struck with the horror of it on the surface. Nobody feels that Ananias and Sapphira were very much worse than many people we meet with every day. And some of us, if our con-

sciences are active, looked apparently far worse than these two when we last surveyed ourselves in the looking-glass.

What was the offense of Ananias and Sapphira? They pretended to a greater degree of Christian devotedness than they really possessed! That was all; but it was a tremendously evil thing in the sight of God.

We are told Ananias "sold a possession, and kept back part of the price." Now that would not mean anything to us unless we considered what had gone before in the previous chapter—when love was working among those early Christians and they were so concerned about their brothers that all selfishness seemed for the time being to be banished. We read, "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

Now no one told them they had to do this. It was not a rule of the early Church that they were to establish a communistic association of some kind. No instructions were given that if men had property they were to dispose of it. The point is this: the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of unselfishness, was working in such

power in the hearts of the early believers they simply could not consider anything as their own, but held everything they had as a trust from God to be used as a blessing to other people. What a wonderful testimony if that were true to-day! if Christians everywhere regarded that which God put in their keeping as a stewardship from Himself, to be used in alleviating the wants of those in need and in assisting Christians in distress, and getting the gospel out in the shortest possible time to the ends of the earth! But alas, we who profess to follow Him who could say when He was here, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head"—we are so concerned about our own comfort, nice clothing, a home for ourselves and the little luxuries of life, that we often forget the deep needs of those about us.

After all, you do not find the greatest happiness in using God's gifts for yourself. The Lord said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." You do not find that in the four Gospels—it is not mentioned by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John; but the Apostle Paul, in impressing the Ephesian elders with the importance of unselfishness in the Christian life, said, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). How did

they know He said that? Evidently those words had been uttered so frequently by the Lord Jesus that they had been carried by one and then the other throughout the world, and they would say, "Remember when Jesus was here? He used to say, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" It gives us the spirit of the Lord Himself who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20: 28).

You know, many Christians are not even tithers. They take all God gives them and use practically all for themselves and do not think of the needs of others. When it comes to the Lord, an occasional dime or quarter is the extent of their benevolence; and when it comes to the poor and needy, some day when kind ladies standing on street corners pin a badge on them for contributing, they will put a dime in the box! Actually they live for themselves; but when God controls the heart, it is different.

"Neither was there any among them that lacked." I might say, But is it not my own money? Did I not work hard for it? Have I not earned it? Yes, but it was God who gave me the ability to earn it. Of course I have the responsibility of supporting my family, and I need a certain amount to live on myself; but if I am to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am to

use a large measure for the blessing of others.

The curse of God was hanging over Jerusalem. In a little while the city was to be destroyed, not one stone was to be left upon another; so these early Christians said, "We will sell what we have to further the work of the Lord and help the needy." So they sold their possessions and distribution was made out of a common fund to every man as he had need. And we had one outstanding example—Joses, who had property over in Cyprus. Now judgment was not hanging over Cyprus, so there was no real reason for him to sell the property; but he did sell it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. And so those standing by could not help giving him a certain amount of credit. They probably said, "Wasn't that a remarkable thing to do! Isn't he a generous man!" He did it out of love for Christ and His people.

Ananias and Sapphira, no doubt standing by, said, "We had better get in on this, too." Then they put their heads together and said, "After all, it is not necessary to bring in all the money." It wasn't! If they had been honest and straightforward and come to the apostles and said, "We have kept some; here is the balance to be used," it would have been all right. But they said, "We do not need to say anything about it. Others are giving their all, but we will salt down a little for

a rainy day, for a nest egg. Nobody will know the difference. They will take it for granted that this is all, and we will get credit for devotedness which we don't really possess." That was what was in their hearts.

And so they came and laid down their money. No doubt the people looked on approvingly. Isn't that nice of Brother Ananias and Sister Sapphira! Are they not generous? And doubtless Ananias turned away with a bright, happy countenance, pleased to get the others' approbation. But Peter called him back. He did not say, "We certainly do appreciate this. This is a wonderful thing you have done." There was no palaver like that with Peter. "A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet" (Prov. 29:5). He said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Now notice that again and again in this part of the book of Acts you read of men being filled with the Holy Spirit. You read, "They were all full of the Holy Spirit," and, "They were filled with the Spirit," and in the epistle to the Ephesians we are told: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." Well, just as it is possible to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God so that He dominates and controls your whole life, so that selfishness and everything incongruous with the Christian life disappear—

is it possible to be filled with the spirit of Satan, and under the control of Satan be dominated by that which is selfish and evil.

Here is a man who wanted people to think he was thoroughly devoted to the will of God, and Peter said, "Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost." How had he lied to the Holy Ghost? He had not said anything. You do not need to say anything to lie to the Holy Ghost. You see, He was present in the Church. Lying to the Holy Ghost is a sin that has often been repeated down through the centuries. People have come into the Church and acted hypocritically, have pretended to devotedness which was not true, to a surrender of life they have never actually made; they have pretended to be out and out for Christ when ulterior motives lay behind their actions. And the Holy Ghost said, "You have lied to Me." It is a serious thing to be untrue in the congregation of God. God desires truth in the inward part. He wants people to be genuine, absolutely honest before Him.

"Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." Notice the Holy Ghost is God.

Just as the Father is God and the Son is God, so the Holy Ghost is God. Peter says, "You lied to the Holy Ghost." And then he explains it—"You lied to God." Don't forget it. God exists eternally in three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

They had lied unto God. Notice Peter's reasoning. That was your own land, Ananias. God gave it to you and you were entitled to it. After you sold it you could have kept the money, but you came and put it down as though it were all you received, and you gave all these people the impression that you were doing what others had done, making full surrender of what God had entrusted to you.

We talk about being surrendered, wholly yielded to God, and yet after all, how much self-seeking comes out in so many different ways! I am a preacher of the Word—a glorious privilege—and if I have prayed once I have prayed a thousand times and said, "Don't let me be able to preach unless in the power of the Holy Ghost." I would rather be struck dumb than pretend it is in the power of the Spirit if it isn't; and yet it is so easy to pretend. It is so easy to come before men and take the place of an ambassador for God, and still want people to praise the preacher instead of giving the message only for the Lord Jesus. Perhaps He has gifted one with the ability to sing His praises. Perhaps I am the

possessor of a voice that might thrill thousands, and if I say, Lord, I give Thee my voice, and then I sing and people praise and applaud, and I take the praise all to myself—I am guilty of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. Perhaps God has caused somebody else to do the singing and I, who am supposed to be yielded to Him, find those ugly things Envy and Jealousy rising up in my heart, and I feel that others are appreciated where I am not—and yet I talk about full surrender to the Lord! You see, then I am pretending to devotedness I do not possess.

Here is the question of money. Perhaps God has entrusted me with means. When opportunity comes I would like to do a little for the Lord and I think I could, maybe, and so, after fighting with myself, I decide to part with fifty cents or even a dollar. God knows I can give much more than that trifling amount. Somebody says—"Trifling! Brother, if you only knew how much money that is!" I am not talking to you, my dear brother. My Lord appreciates to the full the small coin that comes from the needy purse. How He appreciated the two mites the widow gave! But He would not appreciate two mites from one with \$50,000 in the bank. The way the Lord estimates our gifts is not by the amount we give, but by what we have left; not the impression we are making on others at the time. I am sure if the

Spirit of God applies this to many of our hearts we shall realize that Ananias and Sapphira were not sinners above all others, that others have sinned as much, and perhaps we are among them, and we need to go in the presence of God and cry, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7).

Ananias had nothing to say. Even as Peter spoke he fell down, and gave up the ghost; and those standing by carried out his dead body to prepare it for burial. Three hours later, Sapphira, evidently missing her husband and wondering about him, came. I suppose she expected everybody to greet her with—"My sister, that was a wonderful gift you gave, you and your dear husband. You are doing a lot for the Lord, and you will get a great reward at the judgment-seat of Christ!" But the people are nervous and troubled, eyes cast down, as she comes up to Peter. Peter says, "I want to ask you a question. 'Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?'" And she, taken by surprise but without a moment's hesitation, answers, "Yea, for so much." And they did! Did you sell the land for "so much"? Yes, for so much—AND 50 per cent more, or 100 per cent more. That is what some people call a white lie. My dear friends, there is no such thing as a white lie. A lie is as

black as its father, and the devil is the father. It was true in one sense. They sold it for so much—and so much more.

Then Peter said unto her, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." And in a moment she dropped, smitten by the power of God.

If the Spirit of God were working in that way today, what a lot of work there would be for the undertakers! There would not be enough of them in any of our cities to bury those who dropped dead! In those early days the Church walked with God in holiness and righteousness. Today, alas, the Church has gotten so far away from God, and there is so much sin and hypocrisy and unreality, that God (I say it reverently) does not think it worth while to deal with people like this, for the Church refuses to listen to His voice. Do not let us think of Ananias and Sapphira as so very different from other people. They are like many of us today.

We are told, "And great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things." Well, we too have heard them. God grant that great fear will come upon us. Fear of what? Fear that we shall dishonor the Spirit of God by pretending to be what we are not, by

pretending to be genuinely devoted when we are full of hypocrisy and unreality. Oh, if the Spirit of God speaks to any of us and we are saying in our hearts, I haven't been genuine, I haven't been real—shall we not face God about it today and by His grace put all unreality out of our lives and turn wholly to Him as the one alive from the dead? We sing sometimes—

"I'll live for Him who died for me,  
How happy then my soul shall be!  
I'll live for Him who died for me,  
My Saviour and my God!"

Oh grant that each one of us may renew our consecration to God if we are conscious of unreality and failure in the past (as I am sure most of us are), that we may say, By His grace, I want to be all for Christ. I want to be real, that others may be reached by my testimony and brought to know my Saviour, too.

In the closing verses of this portion we are told of many miraculous signs wrought by the apostles in confirmation of the message given them to proclaim. It is interesting to note that at the beginning of any dispensation (by dispensation we mean a special ministry God commits to men at a particular time) miracles are customary; but as the dispensation moves on and the truth God has given becomes better known,

miracles in a large measure are withdrawn. So here in the beginning mighty works of power were manifested.

We read, "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch." There was blessed unity and God could move in a marvelous way. Of those outside, there was no mass effort to identify themselves with the Christian company. Men were rather filled with fear because of the judgment that had come upon Ananias and Sapphira, so people were slow to take a place in fellowship with the Christians. Would that it had always been so! The curse of Christianity today is that vast numbers of members of Christian churches have never been saved! Their hearts are in the world and they love the things of the world. This mixed multitude has always hurt the testimony of the Church.

Those outside durst not join themselves to the Christians, but the people generally magnified the apostles as they recognized the wonderful way in which God was working through them. So we read that believers, multitudes of men and women, were added to the Lord. I called your attention to the phrase "added to the Lord." What does it mean? Well, you see, a new dispensation had come in when all who believed in

the baptism of the Holy Spirit were joined to the Lord Himself, and though we do not get the doctrine of the one Body until God gave it to the Apostle Paul, we have the facts everywhere. It is implied here where we read of people being "added to the Lord." Multitudes of them. The only way to be added to the Lord is by becoming members of His Body.

"Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." This is a thoroughly Oriental picture and very interesting. Even today in the Orient people imagine a man's shadow carries his influence, and parents will run to draw their children away from the shadow of someone they dislike; while on the other hand, should some honored person pass by, they will endeavor to have the children come within his shadow, hoping thereby to bring good fortune on them. These Orientals were so impressed by the power that Peter possessed that, when he was passing along a certain street or road, they brought their sick into the streets, so that his shadow might fall upon them. We are not told that anyone was healed in that way. Their action shows us their appreciation of Peter. It is suggestive, too, because while in the Orient it speaks of one's influence, it raises the question:

What about our influence? Are we so walking with God that people like to come in contact with us, or is there so little of Christ about us, are we so self-centered and worldly that no one would think of bringing people within our influence to be blessed and helped? There is a shadow influence today.

I have often told how my oldest son at one time had an eclipse of faith until one day several of us were invited to spend an afternoon with William Jennings Bryan in his Florida home, and I was asked to bring my son. During that visit, for two or three hours we discussed the Word of God and exchanged thoughts on precious portions of Scripture. The young man sat apart and said very little, but as we left that place he turned to me and exclaimed, "Father, I have been a fool! I thought I couldn't believe the Bible, but if a man like that with his education and intelligence can believe, I am making a fool of myself to pretend I cannot accept it." So much for the shadow ministry of William Jennings Bryan. I wonder if we know anything of the shadow ministry. As people come in contact with us, even if we do not utter a word, is there something about us that makes them say, The more I see of that person the more I want to know God? I think that is what this beautiful picture here suggests.

We are told, "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." God's power was working mightily. But now this stirred the ire of the leaders of the people again. They take a more stringent stand. So in the next section we shall see how the chief priests tried to hinder the work.

## LECTURE TEN

# THE EXALTED PRINCE AND SAVIOUR

1 1 1

"Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council; and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God

rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5: 17-42).

1 1 1

**T**HERE are three distinct sections in this portion of chapter 5. In verses 17 to 25 we have the arrest and liberation of the apostles; in verses 26 to 32, Peter's testimony before his accusers; and from 33 to the end of the chapter, the moderate counsel of Gamaliel.

We notice, first, section one. The leaders of the Sadducean party were very indignant because the apostles continued to testify of the resurrection. They did not believe in the resurrection, and yet here were the disciples preaching it; and if it was the truth it was the death-blow to all their philosophy and theology. They were exceedingly disturbed. This message was being carried throughout the land. They therefore laid their hands on the apostles and shut them up in prison. But an angel of the Lord came and opened the doors and told them to go and "speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Here was direct angelic, supernatural intervention.

So they went early in the morning in obedience to the command laid on them. Word of what was going on soon reached the high priest. Filled with amazement he called together the brethren of his council, the Sanhedrin of Israel, and commanded that the apostles be brought before them. The officers went first to the prison, but returned saying, "When we came to the prison it was shut tightly, but when we had opened we found no man within." Then they went to the temple and there they found the apostles preaching Christ, and brought them the second time before the chief priests. These reproved them saying, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach

in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." They meant: "You are trying to give people the impression we are responsible for His death!" What had they said only a few weeks before in Pilate's judgment hall, when Pilate asked, "What shall I do?" They cried, "Away with Him, His blood be on us, and on our children." But now they say, "You are trying to bring this man's blood upon us." Oh, no, Peter was not trying to do that. But he was trying to show them that God had made a way through the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by which all their sins and guilt might be washed away would they but trust in the Saviour they had rejected.

Peter refused to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. He had received a commission from the Lord Himself to go into all the world and preach the gospel. He said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Notice that the Christian has his responsibility to human government, and as long as rulers do not attempt to thwart the purposes of God, the believer is to be subject to the powers-that-be; but when human government would hinder his obeying the Lord's voice, then it is for the child of God to answer with Peter, "We ought to obey God rather than men," and to be prepared to take the consequences.

Now notice section two, Peter's testimony: Peter took this as an opportunity to preach to the leaders in Israel. The boldness of this man is amazing. When you think how cowardly he had been before—afraid to confess Jesus to the young girl on the porch, and later even cursed and swore that he did not know Him; and now you see him facing the most august assembly of Jewish leaders and philosophers, challenging them in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. How can we account for it? It is accounted for by the fact he had received the Holy Spirit of God who had baptized him into Christ. He had anointed Peter, empowered him, as Jesus had promised. So Peter said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." There was now no fear in him.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." There was no beating about the bush. Peter did not attempt to mollify these dignitaries in Israel. They were guilty. They had stirred up the rabble and so Peter faced them with their sin; not that they might be condemned, but that they might be saved by turning to God in repentance. "God raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, and Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour." That is the message of the gospel. That is the word we are to bring to all men everywhere today. We look toward the throne of God and there by faith

we see Him sitting on the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, the Man Christ Jesus who shed His precious blood for our redemption. There He is in the presence of God the Father, ever living to make intercession for us, and through His name the message of salvation is sent out into all the world. The Lord Jesus Christ is a Saviour. Not simply a helper—be clear about that. Many believe that if we do our best, our part, the Lord Jesus will make up the rest. That is not the gospel at all. Somebody has suggested that in many places today the old hymn “Jesus paid it all,” might well be changed to read:

“Jesus paid a part,  
And I a part, you know;  
Sin had left a little stain,  
We washed it white as snow.”

That is not the gospel. Christ did not say, “When you have done your best, I will make up the rest.” Jesus is not a crutch, a make-shift. He is a Saviour. He does it all!

I have often told about the dear colored man who had been converted and got up in a meeting to testify what the Lord had done for him. The leader, who was quite a legalist, said, “Our colored brother has told about God’s part, but he forgot to tell his part before he was converted. Brother, haven’t you something more to tell us about it?” The man replied: “Brethren, I clear

done forgot to tell you about my part. I shore did my part. I was doin' my part running away from God as fast as I could for thirty years and God took after me till He run me down. That was His part."

We do the sinning; He does the saving. That means He has to get all the glory. If salvation were a partnership affair, then when we get to heaven we would sing, "Unto Him that loved us and unto myself, who did my best, in order to put away my sin." But there will be nothing like that in heaven. Jesus must get all the glory because He did it all.

And so Peter proclaims Christ as a Prince and a Saviour; and as a Saviour He is exalted to give repentance to Israel: repentance — change of mind, complete change of attitude. Well, these dear people in Israel had rejected Him. Now Christ is waiting for them to turn toward the One from whom they had turned away. That is repentance. And we Gentiles need to turn to Him from our sin and folly and wickedness and corruption. As I turn to God in repentance and take a lost sinner's place and trust the lost sinner's Saviour, He gives the forgiveness of sin. Mark this. When a poor sinner trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, his sins are all put away and he stands before God as though he had never sinned at all!

People come to me and say, I have trusted Christ but I can't forget my sins. It may be salutary that you shouldn't forget them. It may be well for you to remember, in order that you may walk carefully. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10: 12). But God has forgotten them! He says, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8: 12). Of how many people is this true? Of all who put their trust in Jesus Christ. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10: 43).

That was Peter's message. That is the message we carry to the world. That is the message of the Church. So often today some dear brethren forget their message is to go to the lost world. I often hear messages over the radio. I seldom manage to hear them in churches because I am constantly kept on the go. Some sermons I've heard broadcast are rhetorically beautiful and, so far as they go, true and scriptural, yet no mention is made about the blood of Jesus Christ, and no word is spoken about His atoning sacrifice! I hope the day will never come when I speak a half-hour without telling of Christ crucified, the only Saviour for lost sinners, through whom forgiveness and justification are granted to all who trust Him. That is our message. It

was Peter's message. "We are His witnesses of these things."

But our witness alone would not amount to very much. We do not have any power in ourselves, but the power comes through the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who repent and believe the gospel. When people repent and believe the message, then the Holy Spirit comes to seal them as God's beloved children and He indwells them, giving them power for testimony. Mark this—I shall only be given power for testimony if I do not grieve Him. The reason so many Christians are powerless is that they allow so many things in their lives, secretly or openly, to grieve the Spirit of God.

These things? Vanity, pride, selfishness, carelessness, worldliness, unkind thoughts and feelings. All these grieve Him. Covetousness grieves Him. The love of money grieves Him. Oh, there are so many other things we might add, which grieve the Holy Spirit of God and hinder the testimony for Christ. I wonder if we have all gone into the presence of the Lord and said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me." Then, did we wait for Him to search us, and have we dared to open our hearts to Him, and have we been honest with Him? Did we put these things out of our lives? Were we more zeal-

ous about this, we would count more for God. The Holy Spirit is given for testimony to them that obey Him, and it is as we walk in obedience that His power is manifested in our lives and words.

We are told the learned doctors "were cut to the heart." It sounds well, but it was not divine conviction. Their natural feelings were stirred—but with hatred. "They were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them." You see, instead of yielding to repentance through the Word of God, they hardened themselves and would have added sin to sin by killing the very messengers who told them of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

But in the last section we read that there was one man among them whose name we always honor because of his kindly moderation. Of course, he should have gone farther than he did, and said, "Brethren, these men are right. Let us turn to God, too, and accept His blessed Son." You will remember that Rabbi Gamaliel was the teacher of Saul of Tarsus. Saul had been brought up at his feet. Gamaliel turned to them and said, "Brethren, let us not be too extreme. Take heed what you do touching these men. There have been people before who came among us with certain strange doctrines. There was a man who thought he was called of God to overturn the Roman power and deliver us from the Roman

domination; and another who led a party out into the wilderness, proclaiming himself to be a divinely-appointed leader. In a little while their claims proved to be fraudulent. Now Jesus may be another like them and these disciples are, perhaps, simply misled. By and by the truth will be manifested. Of course, if they are right, we do not want to be found fighting against the truth. And if this be of God, you can not overthrow it. Let us be careful, lest we be found fighting against God."

That was good advice. Yes, very good advice, as far as it went—but it did not go far enough. He should have said, "Brethren, let us investigate for ourselves, and if we find these men have a message from God, let us accept it with all our hearts." If Gamaliel had done that, there might have been another Saul, another Paul, going throughout the world. At any rate, we give Gamaliel credit for his kindly spirit, and it is well to keep his counsel in mind and be very slow to judge anything that may turn out to be truly based on the Word of God.

"And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them (they weren't going to kill them, or keep them in jail; the beating showed what their feelings were), they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go."

We read, "They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." They could not do otherwise. Their hearts were full of Christ and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. And, if our hearts are full of Christ and if we really know Him as our Saviour, we will want to tell others about Him.

Would you not like to know Him? Would you not like to acquaint yourself with Him and be at peace? "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life."

## LECTURE ELEVEN

# CHECKING DISSENSION IN THE CHURCH

1 1 1

“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the Word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council. And set up

false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6: 1-15).

1 1 1

**I**N this chapter we see brought out very vividly Satan's two master methods by which, throughout the centuries, he has endeavored to hinder the progress of the work of God. In the first half of the chapter we see him endeavoring to hinder by inward dissension; in the other half by outward persecution. In the Epistle to the Philippians Paul, in urging the believers to go on together in the unity of the Spirit, tells them that as long as they work together in love and unity they need never be afraid of the attitude from without. Even their adversaries realize it is impossible to hinder those who stand together in Christian harmony; but if that inward peace is destroyed, then the Church becomes very, very weak when it has to face a godless world.

Here we have Satan, in the first four verses, trying to disturb the inward peace of the Church. God had accomplished a wonderful thing. He had wrought on day after day and week after week ever since Pentecost, adding to the Church

daily such as should be saved; 3000 definitely stepped out from among the multitudes who rejected Christ on the day of Pentecost; another 2000 were added shortly after. Then in chapter 5 we learned that a great many believers were added to the Lord, and it looked as though Christianity was to sweep everything before it.

Satan sees that he must busy himself if he is to hinder this work. He finds access to the hearts even of God's own dear children and starts a spirit of murmuring and evil-speaking inside, knowing that if he can set believer against believer, child of God against child of God, he will easily accomplish his fell purpose.

Oh, how many a church, how many a testimony for God, has been destroyed in that way! God may be graciously working, precious souls are being saved, and then some member gets an idea that he is not being appreciated; a spirit of murmuring begins, and such an one goes about in the church complaining against his brethren. Little, unkind things are said, reflecting on others, and so a spirit of opposition develops and the people wonder why the work of God does not make more progress, and why there does not seem to be more power in the ministry, and why more souls are not being saved. It is all because there is a root of bitterness inside which is not judged. How many warnings we have in God's

Word against such things! He has told us to avoid murmuring and evil-speaking.

A brother was strongly denouncing another brother to a friend of mine, and pointing out his faults and inconsistencies. My friend turned to him and asked quietly, "Is it because you love your brother that you are talking like this?" The calumniator blushed with shame. It is not love that leads people to do this; it is Satan acting through God's people and leading them to take an unkind or discourteous attitude toward their brethren.

In this way Satan sought to disrupt the church at Jerusalem. In the days when so many were being saved, when the Spirit of God was working so mightily, when the number of disciples was multiplied, you would have thought that everybody would have been so occupied with the magnificent evidences of the working of the Spirit of God that there would have been no place for murmuring, no place for selfishness or self-seeking.

But it was in those very days that "there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." It is so easy to misunderstand this. It might look as though Jews and Gentiles were all together in that church in Jerusalem. This was not the case. Those converted

on the day of Pentecost were all of Israel. There were some from Gentile lands who were perhaps proselytes, but those who came out for Christ were all linked with the house of Israel, for up to this time the Gentiles had not yet been brought in. A little later God was to begin that mighty work. The word "Greeks" here does not mean "Gentiles." It should be translated "Hellenists." It means Jews who were born not in Palestine, but in other lands where Greek was the language commonly used. In other words, they were Greek-speaking Jews; and these Hellenists had a great many Gentile ways about them because they were brought up amongst the Greeks. The Hebrews were the Jews of Palestine who were much more rigid observers of the law of Moses than the Hellenists. A great deal of bitterness existed between these two groups. The Hebrews of Palestine, very proud of their heritage, looked with suspicion and sometimes with contempt upon their fellow-Jews who were born among the Gentiles. The Hellenistic Jews, who gloried in their wider freedom, felt that the Hebrews of Palestine were very narrow-minded and self-centered.

This spirit of dissension, which existed before their conversion, cropped up after they were saved. When people are saved, the new nature they receive does not entirely change their old

nature. We still have our natural tendencies which we must judge continually in the presence of God. A brother quite lost his temper during a meeting and at the close apologized: "You must excuse me, it's the Irish in me." A dear brother quietly said, "God can make the Irishman behave like a Christian."

We are not to excuse ourselves, however, if we go wrong because of national characteristics. Here were these Hellenist Jews and the Hebrews of Palestine, now converted and brought to Christ, who had all things common, yet Satan found a means of creating dissension among them. The Hellenist Jews said, "Our widows are neglected in the daily ministration." In other words, "If a Jewish widow born in Palestine comes for help she gets two loaves; but a Hellenist widow only one. Our widows are not being treated fairly." So they began to complain and murmur.

I do not suppose there had been anything actually like that. It is so easy to imagine people treating us coldly and indifferently. We find fault with so many things for which we have no real ground of complaint. I have no doubt these brethren who had charge of the ministrations tried to be fair and upright, but it is not easy to please everybody.

The twelve immediately called the multitude of

the disciples unto them and said, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." I suppose the complainers had gone to these leaders and said, "You ought to do something about this; there is a fairer method of administration." But the twelve said, "Brethren, we have something more important than dividing up bread and meat and portioning out money and food. Our business is to minister the Word of God and we are not going to stoop down from our high and holy calling as ambassadors for Christ to stand behind tables and hand out food and drink to people."

But these things required attention, so they commanded: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." You think that some are not acting honestly? Then you choose seven men, seven deacons of your own selection, so you will have no reason to complain, but they should be men of honest report. It takes a man of integrity to handle the finances of the church; a man full of the Holy Ghost to care for the temporal things of the assembly as well as to preach the Word. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word." Notice the order—"prayer" first, and then "the ministry." Often the ministry of the Word seems

so powerless and weak because there is so little prayer behind it.

A man of God must be a man of prayer; he must know what it is to wait on God in private if he is to have the power of God in public. The twelve said, "Our business is to spend our time in the presence of God in order that we may receive a message from Him and present that message in the energy of the Holy Ghost, that it may be used in the building up of the saints." God grant that we may ever have this ideal before us!

We are told that "the saying pleased the whole multitude." Apparently everybody had an opportunity to express himself. In selecting these seven men, it is amazing how little of church politics you find in it. We so often come up against that in Christian work. I do not know of any worse form of politics than that wherein someone tries to dominate or control a certain situation. There was nothing of that here. "Choose you seven men."

One might have expected the people to say, "We must be sure we have three Palestinian Jews, three Hellenists, and then we will let these six decide on the seventh one." That's the way we would do it, is it not? But they did not do that at all. When the matter was put up before the whole church they met together and chose seven

Hellenistic Jews! Every one of them had an Hellenistic name: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte. Nicolas was not even a Jew, but a Gentile who had been a proselyte to Judaism and a convert to Christianity. Instead of having a mixed committee, one not likely to dominate the situation for any one group, they said, "We will make up a committee entirely of the party that is doing the complaining." Imagine their putting these brethren in charge of things!

"And the Word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." When dissension is checked within, then Satan's work is hindered without, and the work of God goes on in great power and blessing. My brethren, is there not something here that ought to speak to every one of our hearts? Are you praying for a revival and blessing in the Church of God? Do you ever go into the presence of God and say, "Lord, revive me; is there something in me that hinders a revival; has this tongue of mine been working overtime to hinder the work of the Spirit of God?" If we have, we may all say, "God, give me grace to judge it in the presence of the Lord, that the Holy Spirit may have free course and the Word go forth with great power."

We are told in a later epistle of Paul's that

“they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

And we find here that one of these men who had been appointed as a deacon to serve tables fulfilled his ministry so blessedly that God said to him, “Stephen, I have a wider ministry for you; I have something more for you to do,” and, so we read, “Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” This is the first time we read of any members of the Church other than the apostles doing miracles. Now God put His hand on Stephen and He used him to perform miracles and wonders. If you are faithful in a little place, God will have a much larger place for you. If you are faithful in things that are small, He will put you in a place over things that are large. People want to do such big things, but they are not willing to do the little things.

Stephen had been true and faithful in serving tables and so God said, “I want you to go out and preach.” But this led to renewed persecution. The devil had not been able to disrupt the work by inward dissension, so he decided to try another method with Stephen. We read: “There arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of

Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake." These objectors argued with him; they would rise up in the meetings to ask questions, and tried to find fault, but Stephen, full of faith and the Holy Ghost, was more than a match for them all. When they could not accuse him openly they acted underhandedly. "They suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God." We may be sure of this: Stephen never said one blasphemous word against either Moses or God.

But these false witnesses, goaded on by the others who had been opposing the truth of God, "stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council." What were the blasphemous words? Well, they tried lamely to suggest something: "We heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

Had Stephen done that? Certainly not. Had they heard anything like it? Yes; that Jesus Christ had prophesied that Jerusalem and the temple without would be destroyed (as they were in 70 A. D.). Also, that Jesus Christ had declared the new dispensation would succeed the old (as

it did in the providence of God). And so they were simply misusing the words that had been reported from the lips of Jesus Christ. You know the old saying, "Half a truth is a whole lie." If you take someone's words out of their connection and turn them around you can easily make him out a falsifier.

We are told of Stephen that "all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." I wish I could have a photograph or picture of that—of Stephen standing before the council, listening to all those false accusations, and noticing the expressions of rage, ridicule and indignation. Yet he stood there, looking upon them with a benign countenance, full of love and trust and peace and confidence, undisturbed by all the bitter things that were being said, his heart not moved to malice because of their hatred toward him, but happy in the consciousness that he was there as Christ's faithful servant. In the next chapter we read of his defense, but we leave him now facing the council with a countenance like an angel.

Stephen has been with the Lord for many years, but he has never lost that countenance. He is up there in the glory, still with the face as that of an angel.

We remember the story that our Lord told, of

the nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. But his citizens hated him and sent a message after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Evidently the Lord Jesus Christ looked forward to this very day, when He related that parable. He had now been crucified. He had gone into the far country, and now after some months the Word of God had been preached to Israel, but nationally they were unchanged, as proved by their attitude toward Stephen. They sent him after the crucified and risen Lord to say, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

## LECTURE TWELVE

# STEPHEN'S DEFENSE AND MARTYRDOM

**S**HALL we turn to the seventh chapter of the book of Acts? This chapter divides very naturally into four sections. I shall read the first one at this time, and the others as we go on with the exposition.

"Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve Me in this place. And He gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs" (Acts 7: 1-8).

At the close of the sixth chapter we saw Stephen standing before the Jewish Sanhedrin, where he was called into account for preaching Jesus crucified and raised again from the dead; and we read in verse 15, "And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." One might have thought that that glorious face, lit up as it was by the light of Heaven, would have softened the hearts of those who sat in judgment upon him, but it seemed to have the opposite effect. It stirred up hatred against him and against the gospel he preached—the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The high priest put the question to Stephen, "Are these things so?" That is, that Jesus of Nazareth was to destroy the temple and change the customs Moses delivered.

Now in the seventh chapter we have Stephen's defense. It begins with the God of glory and ends with the glory of God. You will notice verse 55, "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." We might say we have Stephen here led by the God of glory up to the glory of God. He now relates, first, God's dealing with their great progenitor Abraham; how God led Abraham out of the land of the Chaldeans and brought him into the land of Canaan, and definitely promised the

land of Canaan to him and to his seed after him. But Abraham died without possessing any of it, save the grave in which he buried his wife, Sarah. Yet Stephen has the confidence that eventually Abraham will possess the land of Canaan which God promised to him. It is true he has gone to a better country, "for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." But nevertheless, the promise remains, that land shall yet be the dwelling-place of the seed of Abraham.

Then Stephen went on to tell the story of the Egyptian bondage, beginning with verse 9:

"And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, three-score and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem" (9-16).

In this section Stephen draws attention to some remarkable facts. He shows how God permitted the people of Israel to go down to Egypt, at first

to be favorably received and then to fall into sad bondage and slavery, and he reminds his hearers how they were delivered eventually. But here he emphasizes their relationship to their brother Joseph. Joseph was hated by the patriarchs, because he was their father's favorite; he was hated for his dreams which told of his coming glory; and so they sold him to the Ishmaelites who carried him down into Egypt. Joseph is a type of Christ. He was rejected at first, but the day came when his brethren bowed before him and recognized his authority. It pictures Christ's first and second advent. Our blessed Saviour, when He came the first time, was rejected. His own people spurned Him, refused Him, and the Gentiles put Him to death on Calvary's cross. But that is not the end of the story. He is coming again and will be manifested in power. The day will come when His own earthly people will bow before His feet and recognize Him as their Brother, Jesus who is also their Saviour and their Lord.

Stephen goes on to tell of the deliverance from Egypt through Moses, who was rejected the first time and then later received.

"But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their

young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that He had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear" (17-37).

It is very easy to get the drift of Steven's discourse. It is easy to follow the argument in his

mind. He is pointing out to the people of Israel that invariably in their history they rejected their deliverer the first time and accepted him the second time. It is true, the story here is different. Moses' life divides into three sections of forty years each. He spent forty years learning the wisdom of the Egyptians and forty years unlearning it and learning instead the wisdom of God; and, after that, he was forty years leading the people through the wilderness until they came to the borders of the land of Canaan. What emphasis Stephen puts on this! From the beginning there was a great love in Moses' heart for his people and he longed to see them freed from bondage. He went out and tried to help alleviate their suffering, he tried to aid them in their distress; but they did not want his help. They said, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" They rejected him and he had to leave Egypt and go to the far side of the desert, where he remained for forty years. In the meantime his people were enduring greater and greater suffering, all because they had rejected their redeemer. What a picture of Israel down through the centuries! God raised up Jesus in accordance with His prophecy by Moses: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken" (Deut. 18:15).

And so Jesus came, "to preach the gospel to the poor . . . to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." But they did not understand; they spurned Him and said, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." "We have no king but Cæsar." So God took Him up on high. We read in Hosea 5:15: "I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early." Has any nation suffered as Israel has suffered? Has any nation endured as much? In Lamentations we read: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger." And if you go back and ask, Why this affliction—why has God permitted this suffering to come upon the people with whom He chose to enter into covenant relationship, it is because in the time of His visitation, when the Deliverer came, they spurned Him. Israel of old had to stay forty years longer in Egypt because they did not recognize Moses as their deliverer, but in due time they did receive him. Forty years in Scripture is the full period of testing and trial.

God met Moses in the wilderness at Mt. Horeb by the burning bush—in itself a symbol of the

nation of Israel. A bush—burning . . . burning . . . burning . . . but not consumed; and Israel has suffered . . . suffered . . . suffered . . . but remains today—and will remain when the last of the Hitlers and anti-Semites have bitten the dust in death—because God has said, "This people have I formed for Myself." But when will they be brought into the place of blessing? When the great Prophet comes the second time, then "they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech. 12:10).

And so Stephen shows that Moses, in his rejection at first, and acceptance the second time, is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness (that is, the congregation of the Lord of old in the wilderness) with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: to whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt." He thus shows how Israel's history down through the

centuries has been that of forgetting God and turning to the ways of the Gentiles, all of which accounts for their continual suffering. "To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt."

You know, Egypt is a type of the world, and it is quite possible for Christians in their hearts to turn back to Egypt—the world—and not know what crucifixion with Christ means. Many are not able to say with Paul, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." It is one thing to recognize we are dead to the corrupt world, dead to the licentious world, dead to the vulgar world; it is quite another thing to recognize that the cross of Christ comes between the believer and the esthetic world. A great many of us are not tempted by the corrupt world, but we fall under the spell of the esthetic world. We love the world's songs, its plays, its art; and the result is that our hearts are largely in the world instead of being wrapped up in God Himself. We may learn a lesson from the people of Israel as we continue to read this charge Stephen gave.

They said, "Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of

him." You see, Moses had gone up into the holy mount to receive the tables of the covenant from God and they could not see him. They wanted a leader they could see. It is easier to walk by sight, than by faith. "They made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven." He allowed them to sink into idolatry and experience the result of its dreadful corruption. Stephen quoted here from the Old Testament prophet Amos, 5:25, 26: "O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to Me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon." That is a very solemn thing. Have you ever thought of it? The reason given here for the captivity in Babylon was that the people made the calf in the wilderness. Even in that distant past they cherished false gods and had never judged that sin. Let us never forget: Sin never dies of old age! It goes on working . . . working . . . working . . . like leprosy, until it is dealt with in the presence of God. They never judged that sin and it led them deeper and deeper into idolatry for which they were eventually driven into captivity.

"Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus [The word "Jesus" here of course is really Joshua. It is the same name, but we somehow think of "Jesus" as applying only to our blessed Saviour] into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him an house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest? Hath not My hand made all these things?" (44-50).

And so Stephen rehearsed the history of Israel up to the building of the temple by Solomon and showed how God all along had sought to manifest His grace but they had been rebellious against Him. Then he turned on the audience and cried, "You are just like your fathers were!" It took courage. It was like the prisoner putting the judge on the docket. There sat the leaders of Israel to judge him, but this devoted servant of God spoke the word that judged them! "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye!" What a tragic indictment that is, and how true it still is! God through the Holy Spirit has spoken to us as a people in many, many ways, but we have rejected His testimony, spurned His Word, and resisted the Holy Spirit. God give us grace to humble ourselves before

we are broken in judgment; for we must either bow in penitence under the mighty hand of God or be humbled in the day when His judgments are poured out upon us.

Stephen continued: "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One (that is, of the Lord Jesus); of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

There they stopped him. He hadn't finished; he had a great deal more to say. He doubtless intended to go on and present the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ; but they would hear no more. "Cut to the heart," they ground their teeth in hatred of him. "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

Here is a very significant thing. We are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews that when Jesus had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; and here, as Stephen looked up, he saw the Lord standing. What does it mean? It is just as though the blessed Lord in His great compassion for Stephen has risen from His seat and is looking over the battlements of heaven to strengthen and cheer

the martyr down on the earth. Stephen exclaimed, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." That revealing vision should have broken them down, brought them to repentance, and shown them they were fighting against their own best interests; but instead (so hardened were they in their sins), "they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."

Thus Saul comes into the picture. He was to take up the story that Stephen had to drop.

They stoned Stephen, as he called on the Lord, "Receive my spirit." "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Oh, the love that filled that man's heart! "Don't judge them for this." It was like the beloved Master saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

And, so saying, he fell asleep—and that is what death is to the Christian, falling asleep. The fear of death is gone, "for Christ also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

## LECTURE THIRTEEN

# THE GOSPEL'S ENTRY INTO SAMARIA

1 1 1

LET us turn to the eighth chapter of the book of Acts. Instead of reading the entire portion, we shall take it section by section and thus try to expound it.

"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word" (Acts 8:1-4).

God sometimes has to act through disagreeable circumstances in order to compel His saints to work in accordance with His plan for them. We have seen, in studying this book of Acts, that at the very beginning the Lord Jesus Christ laid out a program for the evangelization of the entire world. He said, "Ye shall receive power, after

that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Up to the present, then, we have found the gospel going out in the city of Jerusalem and throughout Judea, but the disciples were very, very slow in fulfilling the rest of the program. God, however, waited upon them in wondrous grace. He desired that any in Israel who were prepared to bow their hearts in repentance should receive the message first and then it was to go out into the rest of the world. So He permitted what we call the transitional period, before the work was carried to the nations generally.

I have said before that I do not like to use the words "transitional period" without explaining that this is a period which must be understood as in the mind of man—not in the mind of God. The moment the work of the cross was finished and the Holy Spirit came in order to empower believers to preach the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, God's mind was toward all men everywhere, but it took His servants some time to get His viewpoint. He was very patient with them. They had been preaching for a number of years in Jerusalem and Judea, and many Jews had been brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But

so far no one had carried the message beyond the confines of Israel.

Following the death of Stephen, God allowed persecution to break out in Jerusalem and Judea in order that His Word might be scattered abroad, that His purpose might be fulfilled. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time [immediately following] there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." Thus they went out into the whole land of Palestine—"except the apostles"—the very ones who had been commissioned to preach to every creature. For some reason they remained behind in Jerusalem while the rest of the disciples (those who had been converted under them) fled from the persecution and carried the gospel wherever they went, but at first only to the Jews.

"And devout men carried Stephen to his burial." Stephen was buried by godly Jews, perhaps not actually by the disciples, for the term may refer to pious Jews who repudiated the act of stoning Stephen.

But now Saul, the bitter persecutor, "made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word."

Thus many were hearing the gospel who might otherwise have been left in ignorance of it.

Beginning with verse five we read, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." The Philip referred to here was not Philip the apostle, but Philip, one of the seven deacons who had been appointed to help in distributing bread among the Christian converts. We are told that "they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." Here was a man who used the office of a deacon well! He was set apart to minister in the temporal affairs of the Church but he had been so faithful, true and conscientious in carrying out his responsibilities that the Spirit of God committed to him a greater ministry. He sent him forth to preach Christ unto the people of Samaria. I call your attention to that. He did not go to them with what some people call the "Social Gospel"; he did not go to talk to them on political subjects, but he went down to preach Christ. The message of God's servants today should be the same as his, for "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

Philip had one message and one Person to present to the people: the message of redemption

and the Person of Christ who accomplished that redemption. And these poor, despised Samaritans, hated by the Jews because of their religious differences, "with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." God granted mighty signs to accompany him as he ministered the Word, "for unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city."

It was a wonderful awakening. Undoubtedly the city of Samaria was largely prepared for it because, you remember, our Lord when on earth passed through Samaria on various occasions and ministered to the people. Many indeed had already been brought to accept Him as Messiah. Therefore, when these Jewish missionaries came to them and told them that the same Christ who had died for them was living to save them, they gave heed; moreover, they saw how the mighty God was working in healing the sick and demons; and many who believed were baptized.

But we are told, "There was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery." This Simon Magus was what we would call a magician, a charlatan, who had "bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out

that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries." Such men as he were very common in the Orient not only before and during the days when our Lord was here on earth, but afterwards, when the gospel was first being carried to the different nations of the world outside of Palestine. Here we have this sorcerer operating inside the land of promise; not exactly among the Israelites, but among these people whom the Jews looked upon as a mongrel nation. Probably Simon was himself a renegade Jew and had heard of the great works of Jesus. At any rate, he gave himself out to be a miracle worker and by his trickery and so-called magic had deceived the people.

"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus, they were baptized, both men and women." This naturally turned them away from Simon. Now that they had heard the true, they turned away from the false. Simon therefore decided he had best join this new movement. So we read, "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." It is important for us to

remember there is a belief which results in salvation, but, on the other hand, there is a belief which may not result in salvation. In other words, it is possible to accept many facts concerning Jesus Christ from a merely historical standpoint. One can believe a great deal about Him and yet not be saved; but you cannot believe in Jesus as your personal Saviour without being numbered among the redeemed. These Samaritans heard Philip and trusted the Saviour he proclaimed; but Simon listened, even believed many things Philip said, and came forward to be baptized. Philip baptized him because it was God's appointed way of separating His people outwardly from the unsaved. In the beginning it was God's way of separating the remnant of Israel from the nation which was under the judgment of God. In Samaria it was God's way of separating believers from the prevalent religious system.

Because Simon was baptized does not necessarily mean that he was born of God. I know there are people who believe baptism and salvation are one and the same thing. Here is a man who seems just like the others, but there is no real faith in his soul, no true repentance toward God. I am afraid there are a great many people in Christendom today who have been baptized and have given intellectual assent to the truths

of God's Word but have never faced their sins before God and committed themselves to Him and trusted Christ as their own Saviour. If you are resting on the fact that you have joined a church, or been baptized, or partaken from time to time of the communion of the Lord's Supper, face conditions honestly before God! Ask yourself: Have I, as a repentant sinner, turned to God in faith? Have I trusted Christ as my Saviour? Is He the Lord of my life? If these things are not true, if you cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, then the fact that you have been baptized and are outwardly linked with the people of God does not make you a Christian. You are not yet saved, nor born again.

We see in Simon a baptized man, a religious professor, who had not been regenerated. He simply wanted a place in the Christian company. He despaired of winning these people back unless he could come in among them and pose as a Christian leader. Then he hoped to gain them to himself. So "when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done."

Now notice, up to this time matters had been moving along just as in Jerusalem at the beginning; but these Samaritan believers had not yet received the Pentecostal blessing, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We read, "When the apostles

which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John (two of their outstanding leaders), who, when they were come down, prayed for them (the Samaritan believers), that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)" The expression "in the name of" always implies "by His authority." It does not mean they were not baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, for that is what Jesus told His disciples to do: "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." These were baptized in the name of, or by the authority of, the Lord Jesus. But they had not yet received the Holy Spirit; they had not been baptized into the Body of Christ.

When these disciples came down, they laid their hands on them—thus identifying this new church in Samaria with the work in Jerusalem. So when they laid their hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit; and doubtless there were many outward signs.

Why did not these Samaritans receive the Spirit of God the moment they professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Just a little farther on, when Peter went to the house of Cornelius,

we are told that the moment Peter spoke the words, the Holy Ghost fell on all of them which heard the Word. But here we have an interval between. The reason, I think, is perfectly clear. For something like 500 years the temple at Jerusalem and the temple at Mt. Gerizim had been rival sanctuaries. The Jews in the south and the Samaritans north of Jerusalem had each claimed to be God's chosen people, and there was intense rivalry between them. One can understand that if the Spirit had immediately fallen on these Samaritan believers, when they received the Word, then the strife between the Jews and Samaritans might have been perpetuated and there might have been, down through the centuries, two different groups of Christians, each claiming to be the true Church. But when the apostles came from Jerusalem and identified themselves with the believing Samaritans, and God gave the Holy Ghost to them in answer to the prayers of the apostles, the work was recognized definitely and openly as one—there was but one Body, whether Jews in Judea or Samaritans in Samaria. All were joined into one Body of which the risen Christ was the Head. There was not the same danger of two groups when the gospel was brought to the Gentiles who were pagan and did not have a religion which was very near akin to Judaism.

And now Simon was looking on, and when he saw what was taking place he offered the apostles money, saying, "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit." This shows how little this man Simon had entered into the truth of the gospel. If he had understood, he would have known God gives freely, without money and without price. No spiritual blessing can ever be purchased. I think Christendom today has largely forgotten that. I have heard of people on their death-beds calling in preachers or priests and offering to make over properties if their sins might be forgiven and a place assured them in heaven. It is a delusion! "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." And the Holy Spirit coming to indwell believers is as truly a gift of God as the blessed Son He gave to die on the cross was His gift for the redemption of guilty man.

So when Simon offered the apostles money, saying, I will pay you if you will give me the same power (in order that he might use it to gather disciples about himself), Peter looked at him with indignation, and said, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." Notice the strength of that! If the gift of God could be purchased with money, it would not be

a gift! God is saving men without money and without price on the basis of the finished work of His beloved Son; and because Jesus has been glorified, He has sent forth the Holy Spirit to empower believers to proclaim the gospel. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

You see, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, was able to see through all the pretense and camouflage, through all the outward profession of this man Simon Magus. Philip, the deacon, was deceived by him. He did not have the gift of discerning of spirits, but Peter, filled with the Spirit of God, saw into the very depths of the man's being and declared, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Many of us do not have that ability of discerning, but we can at least see that if any think the gift of God can be purchased with money or with anything else they can give or do, the heart is not right in the sight of God. Such an one may not be as great a hypocrite as this man Simon; but he has not yet faced things honestly in the sight of God.

Peter called on Simon to repent. "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness." We have pointed out that this word "repent" means to change the mind, that is to change the attitude; and so Peter is saying in effect, "You need not go on like this. Change your attitude. Face

things honestly before God. Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord (the best versions read, he is directing Simon to pray to the Lord Jesus Christ) if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." There is something exceedingly solemn here: a man outwardly in fellowship with the Church of God, but whose heart is not right. "Thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

There are many like this; many who need the same admonition that Peter gave to Simon: "Repent of this thy wickedness!" Simon did not seem to be very much affected. Instead of turning to the Lord himself, he said, "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me." And that is the last we hear of him in the pages of Holy Scripture. We hear about him a great deal in early Church writings—that he became the first antichrist. and went from place to place opposing the gospel. But he turns here to Peter and says, "I want you to pray for me." Did you ever hear of people doing that? This is the first man on record to pray to one of the apostles. He said, "Peter, I put my case in your hands." A lot of people are doing that today. If you do not go direct to Christ, Peter cannot do anything for you, nor

can any of the saints; not even the Virgin Mary, the mother of our blessed Lord. Remember, there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. Why not go directly to Him and put your case in His hands!

This incident closes, then, with the 25th verse, in which we are told that, when they had testified and preached the Word of the Lord, the apostles returned to Jerusalem. On their way there, they preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. Thus we see them reaching out to the second group of which our Lord had spoken. As we pursue our study of this book, we shall see the river of grace ever widening until it reaches the uttermost part of the earth.

## LECTURE FOURTEEN

# THE CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN

1 1 1

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth: in His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speakest the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip

and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea" (Acts 8: 26-40).

1 1 1

**G**OD'S ways are not our ways. He often interrupts our plans and our service in very remarkable ways that we find perhaps difficult to understand. I think we have such a case here. Philip, as we have seen, had been the instrument of God for the conversion of a great many people in Samaria. He who had used the office of a deacon well had purchased to himself a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus, and moved by a compassionate love for those poor Samaritan people, who had a mongrel religion and did not know, as yet, the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves, he went down to them and preached Christ unto them. Many of them, as we saw, believed and were baptized. Baptism added nothing to their salvation; it was simply the outward way of showing the faith in their souls, and it was God's appointed way of confessing Christ before men.

However, just when things seemed to be at their best, when revival was spreading through the Samaritan villages, the Lord laid His hand

on Philip and spoke to him through supernatural methods (the angel of the Lord), saying, "Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." One would not have been surprised if the records stated that Philip sought to reason with the angel, and that he might have said, "See the wonderful work going on here! I do not see that my work is finished by any means. Should I leave these fruitful fields and go to a desert—a desert actually and spiritually, too?"

But there was no objection; he went immediately at the command of the angel and "behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot." Now you must not think of this as if Philip had just met a single individual driving a chariot across the desert. Undoubtedly what Philip saw was a great caravan—soldiers, merchants and all—and in the midst a chariot (which would stand out over everything else), the chariot of the treasurer of Candace queen of Ethiopia. The man in that chariot had gone to Jerusalem on a spiritual quest. He was a Gentile, an Ethiopian, not a Jew; but he had it in his heart, apparently, to know the God of Israel and had come all the way

from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship the true God. He was probably a proselyte to Judaism. He had accepted the revelation God gave Israel so far as he understood it; but you can imagine his heart-sickness when he came to Jerusalem and found there but cold formality. If he had been asking in his heart, "How may I, a poor sinner, come into fellowship with God?" there was no answer. He was returning to his home a disappointed—and doubtless disillusioned—man; and yet he had obtained in Jerusalem one thing that was of great importance—a portion of God's holy Word!

The book of the prophet Esaias had been acquired and he was so interested in it, so anxious to find out what it had to say to his own heart and conscience that, as the horses jogged along, dragging the chariot across the desert, he read from that book. How wonderfully God times things! The man had read to a part that filled his mind with questions and stirred his heart, and at that very moment he saw a stranger coming over the sands to the side of his chariot. Had not the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot"? The man was reading aloud the words we find in Isaiah 53.

Philip, leaning over the side of the chariot, said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian looked at him, doubtless in amaze-

ment, saying, "How can I, except some man should guide me? I am a poor ignorant man from Ethiopia. Oh, that I had someone to explain the words to me!" He desired Philip to come and sit with him; he then pointed to the passage: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth." The form in which these words come to us shows that the manuscript the Ethiopian held was not the original Hebrew. He probably could not read the Hebrew of the Jews; he was reading Greek, for this is from the Greek translation of the Old Testament—the Septuagint, we call it. The Greek idiom had become almost universal for business transactions.

As the eunuch pondered the words, he wondered who the one could be who silently stood like a lamb dumb before his shearer. Who was this man whose judgment was taken away and evidently died a sacrificial death for others? The eunuch turned to Philip and asked earnestly, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" No, the words did not refer to the prophet himself, yet Isaiah was a great sufferer for the testimony of the Messiah. We are told in Jewish history that he

was sawn asunder for his faithfulness. Jewish doctors tried to apply this passage to the prophet Jeremiah, saying he was the one despised and rejected of man, who, like a sheep before her shearers, was dumb. But on the other hand, the greatest of Jewish doctors down through the centuries have declared these words refer not merely to some prophet or ordinary servant of God, but to His supreme Servant, the Messiah, who was to come in due time for Israel's deliverance; and this Philip understood and knew to be the truth of God.

So "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." What a wonderful message to give to a poor seeking soul! And oh, how many thousands through the centuries since have been brought face to face with the Saviour through Isaiah 53!

I like to tell the story of a dear Jewish friend of mine, Mark Lieb, who, when he was a little boy of twelve in Odessa, Russia, came into a room where his aged grandmother sat with her Hebrew Bible on her lap and he saw tears on her face. "Mark," she said, "I want to read something to you," and she read from the Bible these words from Isaiah 53. Then she turned to him and said, "Mark, these words refer to our Messiah, the Messiah of Israel. Some day He is coming and He will suffer for our sins. Mark, I have been

looking for Him for over forty years, but He hasn't yet come. But you are just a little boy. He may come in your day. Keep these words in your heart and wait for Him, for He will surely come and fulfil God's Word." That dear Jewish lady went out into eternity without hearing of Jesus. But who can doubt that her faith in the Word of God was just as real and acceptable to God as if she had heard of Christ and accepted Him as Saviour! She was saved through believing in the name of the One who, to her, was yet to come.

I think this Ethiopian accepted Jesus the first time he ever heard of Him. There is no evidence that he had heard previously. "Philip opened his mouth, and . . . preached unto him Jesus. (Doubtless many questions were asked and answered.) And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" I wish you could see what is implied in that! Evidently Philip had told the whole story—how Jesus came to earth, was born of a virgin, lived His holy life, was anointed by God, went about healing the sick, raising the dead, and preaching the kingdom of God, to die at last, fulfilling this prophecy, on Calvary's tree, bearing the weight of our iniquities. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me" (Ps. 42: 7). Then,

Philip would go on to say how Christ was buried with the rich—in Joseph's tomb—and how He came forth from the grave and commissioned His disciples to carry the gospel message, baptizing those who believe in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. I fancy, perhaps, it was at that climax of the message that the Ethiopian stopped him and said, "Wait! Look! Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" It was his way of saying, "I believe! I acknowledge Christ as the Saviour; I want to confess Him publicly as my Saviour."

I know the next verse is not found in the best translations of the Bible. Scholars generally say it is not recognized as part of reliable Scripture; but inasmuch as it was found in many manuscripts dating back to the early Christian era, it tells us the attitude of the early Church concerning this question. Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This at least is the confession that God calls on every sinner to make. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

And so we are told that the eunuch commanded the chariot to stand still, and a most informal and lovely service took place. One can imagine the people in that caravan gathering around, looking on in wonderment and surprise as Philip and the Ethiopian descended from the chariot, laid aside their outer garments and "went down both into the water . . . and he baptized him."

Philip's work is now done. We read in the next verse that "When they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more." The Ethiopian did not need the servant now—he knew the Master; he did not need the evangelist, for he knew the One of whom the evangelist preached—Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners. So "he went on his way rejoicing."

You see, it takes so little to save a sinner! It may seem like a long process, but the moment the poor lost sinner looks into the face of Jesus and trusts Him as Saviour, he is a new creature. If he had possessed one of our hymn-books he would have doubtless gone on his way singing—

"O happy day that fixed my choice  
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!  
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,  
And tell its raptures all abroad!

" 'Tis done; the great transaction's done;  
I am my Lord's, and He is mine;  
He drew me, and I followed on,  
Charmed to confess the voice divine."

Many hundreds of years were to roll by before such a hymn as that was to be written; but I am sure it expresses the joy in the heart of this dear man who had gone to Jerusalem only to find an empty temple, yet on his way back found the Lord of the temple through the prophet Isaiah and Philip the evangelist.

In the meantime, Philip, who had accomplished his work, "was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea." And thus the message was going out farther and farther as the stream of grace broadened and deepened and thousands more were brought into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

## LECTURE FIFTEEN

# THE CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS

1 1 1

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil

he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this Name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ" (Acts 9: 1-22).

1 1 1

EVERY conversion is a miracle, and nobody becomes a Christian apart from conversion. Our Lord Jesus said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Little children receive the testimony in the simplicity of faith, and we are called upon to do the same. It is remarkable to see, as we look back over the history of the Church, how many enemies of the Cross have been subdued by the sight of the Lord

Jesus Christ who gave His life for them—and not the least of them is Saul of Tarsus.

God's ways are very remarkable; He does not undertake to explain them to us. If we had been members of that early Church in Jerusalem, doubtless we should have been thrilled over the testimony of Stephen for, in a way, he came to the front marvelously and it looked as though he was destined to become a great leader, because of his eloquence, persuasiveness and his tender way of presenting the gospel. One might have supposed that he would have appealed to men in many ways (and many *were* converted through him); but, on the other hand, bitter hatred and enmity were stirred against him as the servant of Christ; and we have seen how this brought him to his death, and how the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, a calloused, bigoted Hebrew who hated the very name of Jesus—Saul, pupil of Gamaliel—who had come from the Gentile city of Tarsus.

In Tarsus was a large Jewish colony, and this man Saul had been brought up according to the strictest ideas of the Jews. He tells us later on that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee. And there he stood that day, looking on as Stephen was put to death. It seemed to be nothing to that hardened young man that the dying martyr's face shone as if it were

the face of an angel and that he died praying for blessing on his murderers. God answered that prayer!

The Church must have felt his death a terrible blow to the Christian testimony; but God has a way of burying His workmen, yet carrying on His work. He raises others to take the places of those He calls home to heaven. No one ever thought this cynical man was to take the place of Stephen and carry on when Stephen was gone—for remember, Stephen's ministry was in a special way the gospel of the glorified Christ. He said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Now, the next time the heavens are opened, Saul of Tarsus sees the blessed One on the right hand of God and is won by Him forever.

Let us get the particulars here. "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." Saul never forgave himself for that. God forgave him; the Christians forgave him; but he never forgave himself. Years afterwards, when he looked back to these times, he said, "I am not meet (worthy) to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the

Church of God (1 Cor. 15: 9) and wasted it" (Gal. 1: 13); and when he said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—he adds, heartbrokenly—"of whom I am chief." No greater sinner than he, for he tried to root out the Church of God from the earth. He tried to destroy all who profess the name of Jesus. But God had mercy on him because he did it ignorantly in unbelief. Oh, the boundless mercy of God!

How he delights to take up a great sinner and make him a great saint! This book may fall into the hand of some one who is an avowed enemy of Christ. Perhaps the same feelings that filled the heart of Saul of Tarsus fill your heart; but let me assure you that the One who saved Saul of Tarsus is looking down in compassion on you; and all your bitterness, opposition and hatred of the gospel message does not change His love for you. Oh, that you might get a vision of the risen, glorified Christ and be brought as a captive in the chains of love to that blessed Saviour's feet, that you might then become a modern Saul of Tarsus, to go forth and preach the gospel of Christ! Many, many times has this experience been duplicated in the history of the Christian Church.

Here was Saul hurrying on his way to Damascus, with only one dominant desire: to root out

all that he found "of this way." You will note this expression occurring a number of times in the book of Acts. That was apparently the only name given to early Christianity: "Of this way"—and that is what Christianity is; it is a way! It is not just fire-insurance for eternity, not simply a method of saving us from eternal judgment; but it is a way of blessing, righteousness and gladness right here on earth. Saul of Tarsus thought to destroy all who were of this way. There is something about Christianity that will not allow it to die. Tertullian said in the second century, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Destroy one Christian and ten will take his place. It has been that way all over the world and that, in itself, shows the divinity of the gospel.

Hurrying along the Damascus road (whether on horseback or afoot, I do not know. He has so often been pictured on horseback; but I have an idea he was riding an ass, because the Pharisees had a great prejudice against riding horses); we read, "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

He never got over it. He refers to it in his letters to the Church later on, for this was a revelation of the mystery of the Body of Christ—that

every member of the Church is a member of the glorified Head in heaven. If one touched a believer on earth, immediately it was felt up there in Glory. He did not say, Why do you persecute My disciples? but why persecutest thou ME?—for to persecute one of His own is to persecute Him.

Paul cried out, "Who art Thou, Lord? Who is it that speaks thus from heaven?" And the answer came back, "I am Jesus." He uses His personal name, the name given to Him when He was born as a babe here on earth, the name the angel gave Him before His birth, the name meaning "Jehovah the Saviour." "Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins." That was the name our Saviour bore through all His earthly ministry, and when He hung on the tree Pilate wrote that name on a tablet and it was placed above His head. And now that He is in Glory, we read, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

And so the answer comes ringing back in response to Saul's agonized cry, "Who art Thou?" "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Saul was like a refractory ox kicking against the driving goad!

And that reveals to us that, after all, this seemingly hard, indifferent young man was all the time struggling with his conscience. Deep inside he was hearing again the voice of the dying martyr, Stephen. Jesus said, Saul, you are making a mistake. You are kicking against the goads. There was something moving within him, exercising him through all those days of persecution. Perhaps a reason for this is that Saul was not the first of his family to be saved. In Romans 16 he gives certain names and he calls them "my kinsmen . . . who also were in Christ before me." Doubtless they prayed for their kinsman and God was working in his heart.

He trembled, and said, "Lord." We are told "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." The implied meaning is that Paul accepted Christ as Lord there and then on the Damascus road; and we know, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And so Saul says, "Lord, henceforth I am Thine, Thy bond-servant; I belong to Thee; Thou art my Lord. Lord, give me instruction now. What wilt Thou have me to do?" From the moment of his conversion he was submissive, ready to yield himself wholly to the One who died to redeem him.

The Lord instructed him to "Arise, and go into

the city." It is sometimes a blessing to a man to go through a period of soul exercise. We would often like to hurry people into confession of Christ, but sometimes they are not yet ready; the heart exercise is not deep enough; conscience-probing has not been sharp enough. And so God allows some people to go through weeks, sometimes months, of soul exercise and then He lets the light break. For Saul of Tarsus there were to be three days before his sight was restored and he learned of the fulness of the joy of his salvation. "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." The men with him heard the sound; they thought it was thunder. They could not distinguish anything articulate.

Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened (that is, the lids—he was blind, blinded by the glory of the light that shone from the Saviour's face), they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

Do you know how the Modernists try to explain Saul's conversion? They say he had an epileptic fit! Chas. H. Spurgeon has well exclaimed: "O blessed epilepsy, if it effects a conversion like this!" Others say Saul had a sunstroke. What a mercy if every Modernist were to be sunstruck

if it would change him into a flaming messenger of the Cross!

“And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.” Now, that is always an evidence of the working of the Spirit of God in a man’s soul. We are not told anywhere in the Bible that men have to pray to be saved. They are to believe. But on the other hand, we always recognize this: when God is dealing with a man the natural thing is for him to cry out in prayer. “Behold, he prayeth.”

Does your heart cry out to God? St. Augustine of Hippo uttered these words so long ago (in the fourth century) when writing to one in great soul distress, “You said ‘I am longing for peace and I am crying to God day and night.’ The fact that thou art seeking Him is proof thou hast found Him; for He reveals Himself to those who seek Him.” Am I speaking to anyone who has been seeking Jesus, the sinner’s Saviour, and who fervently prays for light? Oh, then, you do believe in Him, and you pray because of your faith in Him!

“And hath seen in a vision a man named

Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem." Ananias feels he has to reason with God about it. Is not God making a mistake, sending him to Saul of Tarsus? Does it not look as though God is delivering Ananias himself into the hands of this enemy? No wonder Ananias talked back. He said, Lord, this man "hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy Name." But the Lord replied, Go thy way; do what I tell you, Ananias, "for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake."

You will see that all that had gone before, all the Lord Jesus had said to the Twelve, He now reiterates concerning this new convert. The Lord had bidden the twelve apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all nations (that is, all the Gentiles. The word "Gentile" is the same as "nations"; it is a different translation of the one word), but they hesitated and did not seem to have the faith to reach out. But He said, Now I am going to send this man as My special representative, and He gave him the same commission. God does not forget Israel because the

message broadens out to the Gentiles. "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake."

There is instant obedience now and so Ananias entered into the house; and putting his hands on Saul said, "Brother Saul." I like that! Notice the affection in this term. This bitter enemy of the Cross, now subdued by grace, is addressed as "Brother Saul." "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." And by his baptism he cut himself off from unbelieving Israel and took his place in identification with the Christ the nation had rejected, and with the Christ he himself had spurned until now.

"And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus." He went away, then, a little while, to Arabia and came back to Damascus, "and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." This is a stronger, clearer note than we have had so far in the book of Acts. Peter proclaimed Him as the Servant; but Saul now as the Son of God. "But all that heard him were amazed,

and said: Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this Name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?" What has happened? The miracle of conversion! The same miracle that always occurs when a poor sinner looks to the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." Oh, if I am speaking to any of the house of Israel: My dear brethren, let me plead with you—will you not heed the testimony of this great Hebrew Christian of so long ago—Saul of Tarsus, who at one time was a persecutor of Jesus and then was brought to know Him as Israel's Messiah and the sinner's Saviour? He spent the rest of his life proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah of Israel.

## LECTURE SIXTEEN

# SAUL OF TARSUS AND THE NEW FELLOWSHIP

1 1 1

Let us now turn to chapter 9, and read from verse 23:

“And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied” (Acts 9: 23-31).

1 1 1

IN the first part of this chapter we are told of God's dealings with this man Saul of Tarsus, once a bitter enemy of the truth of God, but in a moment changed into an ardent advocate of the gospel. Every conversion is a miracle. I've heard people say, "I do not believe in sudden conversions." To be perfectly frank, there is no other kind. I do not mean by that that everyone has as marked an experience as Saul of Tarsus had. But I do mean that in the life of every person who is ever saved there comes a definite moment when one trusts the Lord Jesus Christ, turning from all confidence in self. And that is conversion. It may take place after long years of exercise, or, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, it may take place in a moment by a mighty convicting work in the soul, bringing one to an end of himself who has never before been very much concerned about the message of the gospel.

We see both kinds all about us—those who are brought up, for instance, in Christian homes and all their lives hear the gospel story and perhaps grow to young manhood or womanhood without definitely closing with Christ. And yet many could say that they have never known a time in their conscious lives when they did not have some exercise about spiritual things. But there had to come a definite moment when they trusted Christ for themselves. That is conversion.

And then so many other people who have lived wild, reckless, careless lives, having no interest whatever in things of God, could say as one of the old hymns puts it:

"I once was far away from God  
On ruin's dark and fatal road,  
And little dreamed I'd see the day  
When I should tread the narrow way."

And yet these people, brought suddenly to a recognition of their lost, sinful condition and led to definite faith in the Lord Jesus, in a moment become new creatures in Christ. There are many such. It was so of Saul of Tarsus. His was really a model conversion.

Following his conversion he becomes a witness. And that is the will of God for all who are saved. If we know the Lord Jesus Christ for ourselves, we should immediately join the ranks of those who are witnessing to others of His saving power. It is not the will of God that all should preach in a public way, but it is the will of God that all who know the Saviour should speak of Him to others and seek to win their fellows to Christ. I am afraid there are a great many Christians (I do not doubt the reality of their conversion when I speak as I do) who are just content to be going to heaven themselves and who manifest very little interest in the souls of those about them. It was

otherwise with this man, Saul of Tarsus. No sooner was he saved himself than he began telling all who would listen the wonderful truth that had been revealed to his own soul, that Jesus was indeed the Christ of God, the promised Messiah and the Son of God.

He preached Christ in Damascus, in the very city to which he had gone intending to throw into prison those who loved the Saviour's Name. But we are told that after many days were fulfilled the Jews took counsel to slay him. Having rejected their own Messiah, they rejected this man who sought to awaken them to a sense of their responsibility to His claims. But their laying await, we are told, was known of Saul. They watched the gates day and night to kill him, hoping that as he went in or out of the city they might be able to waylay and slay him. But the disciples, learning of it, took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket. It was a rather humiliating way for this servant of Christ to leave the city of his first labors, wasn't it?

I remember standing at that wall of the city of Damascus a few years ago, and I looked up to a little house in the wall and a window there. The guide was absolutely certain that that was the window through which they dropped the basket with the apostle in it. Well, I do not know whether that is true or not, but as I looked at it

I could just imagine what it must have meant to this one-time proud, haughty Pharisee, now crouched up in a basket and dropped down over the wall. You would have thought he would never like to refer to it again. And if he had had the pride and the conceit that some of us have, it would have been among the buried annals. But we hear him saying long years afterward, "I was let down over the wall of Damascus in a basket." He was never ashamed to humble himself for the Name's sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From Damascus he went on to Jerusalem, and undertook to search out the little companies of believers and to join himself to those whom before he had persecuted. We read, "When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." We do not wonder that they were afraid of him. The last they had seen and known of him he was going from house to house trying to find those who professed the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ and deliver them over to be persecuted for His Name's sake. He never forgave himself for that. As he looked back years afterward he said, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle, for I persecuted the Church of God and wasted it. Howbeit," he said, "God had mercy on me because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

But having returned to Jerusalem he began to hunt up these little companies of believers. His heart was welling up with love for them now. But at once he got a setback. They were afraid of him. "Oh," they said, "we don't dare let this man into our assemblies; he is an enemy, he is a spy, perhaps, waiting to turn us over to the authorities." But Paul had a friend who knew and understood. We read, "Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." And the testimony of Barnabas authenticated the testimony of Saul. Barnabas said, "Yes, I know all about it. You do not need to be afraid of him now. He was once the enemy of the truth, but a great change has taken place." In other words, Saul of Tarsus had been born again.

And, oh, I can not too often stress the importance of that second birth. It is being forgotten in so many places today. People imagine they may become Christians by outward reformation, or by joining a church, or even by what they call sometimes "religious education." They think that you can take a child and educate him along religious lines and he will grow up a Christian. But that is all a delusion. Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

And the Apostle Peter said, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever. And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Saul of Tarsus had believed the gospel. He was born again. He would never again lift a persecuting hand against God's people. He was saved. And now he longed for association with others of like precious faith.

In Jerusalem he found a recognized fellowship. We are told in Acts 2 how those that received the Word were baptized, and we read, "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." This was the new creation company. This fellowship is called in 1 Corinthians 1:9, "the fellowship of God's Son." We read there, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son." "The fellowship" is a beautiful name for the people of God. Once we were just so many units, individual units. And we were not particularly interested in one another. It was every one for himself. But grace reached our hearts, and that introduced us into a wonderful fellowship where we had common interests, and from now on we were members one of another.

This fellowship is called very distinctly, "the Church of God." I have heard it said sometimes by persons who had not fully considered the mat-

ter that the Church had no existence during the period of transition as depicted in the book of Acts, that it came into full existence only after the Apostle Paul was in prison. That is negated by his own word in 1 Corinthians 15:9; referring to his unconverted days he says, "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God." The Church of God was there. And it was there before he was converted. He says, "I persecuted the Church of God." He uses the same expression in the epistle to the Galatians, written years after his own conversion (1:13): "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it." And from the day of Pentecost to the present time, the Church of God has been a distinct company in this world, made up of those who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church of God takes in all believers.

The Scriptures also speak, however, of "churches of God," local companies of believers. In Galatians again, 1:21, 22, Paul says, "Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ." And in the second verse of that chapter he writes to "all the brethren which are with me, unto the

churches of Galatia." Here the term, you see, is used in the plural, and it refers to local companies in various places, made up of those who professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first letter to the Thessalonians, writing to those who had been brought to God from heathenism, he says in 2: 14, "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews."

It is important to see the distinction between "the Church of God" to which all Christians belong and "the churches of God" in different communities. A church of God is a company of Christian people. There may be different doctrinal standards, there may sometimes be different views as to ordinances and sacraments, there may be different conceptions of church government, and so on. But where you find believers in the Lord Jesus Christ gathered together seeking to honor Him, coming together for worship, for praise, for testimony, for prayer, there you have a local church of God in any given community.

These churches of God were scattered, by the time Paul was converted, not only in Jerusalem but all over Judea. And in a little while we find them among the Gentiles. In Acts 5 we have the term used for the first time, in the original

manuscripts at least, "the Church" (verse 11). "Great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things." In chapter 2, verse 47, we read in our English version, "Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." You will notice, if you have a Revised Version, that the words "to the Church" are omitted. The Lord added such as were being saved. Probably the three words, "to the Church," are not to be considered part of the original text of Scripture, though they do give the meaning clearly enough, as chapter 5 shows, for this was a company from the very beginning constituting the Church in Jerusalem. And this company was persecuted by the Apostle Paul. But that it means more than a local company is clear because he persecuted the Church of God, not only in Jerusalem but in other parts of Judea, and he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the same Church, members of the Church of God, this wonderful new fellowship which God had brought into existence.

Another term is used throughout the book of Acts, and in fact through all the New Testament, and that is "the kingdom of God." Wherever these early Christians went preaching the gospel of the grace of God, they carried with them the proclamation that Christ is rightful King and

Lord of all, and they called upon men everywhere to subject themselves to Him. And those who believed the gospel, those who received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, those who owned Him as their Master now were translated, we are told in the first chapter of Colossians, from under the authority of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. His kingdom was set up in their hearts. It is a moral thing. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Here were a company of people in the midst of a sinful world who honored Christ, who crowned Him Lord of all, and they constituted His kingdom. And still that glorious kingdom is in the world. Some day it will be openly manifest, when our Saviour comes again. Now it is the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1: 9). When He returns it will be the day of the kingdom and glory. I think it is helpful to us as believers if we get some of these terms clearly in mind. We are members of the Church of God; we are members, also, of churches of God. We belong to this glorious fellowship of the redeemed, and we have been translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

More than that, this very man, Saul of Tarsus, was chosen of God later on to open up a new and wonderful revelation that had never been made

known before; that is, that believers are not only members of the Church of God under that term, but the Church of God is also the Body of Christ; and all believers are members of that Body and He is their glorious Head in heaven. What a wonderful fellowship this is! Are we to be surprised to read of those early believers that no one said that anything he possessed was his own but they had all things in common? That was not what we call today "communism." It was simply that their hearts were so filled with love one for another that they gladly shared with each other; and those with plenty ministered to those with less. So together they walked in holy, happy fellowship.

Now it was into this fellowship that this one-time enemy of the Cross of Christ had been brought. The outward expression of this fellowship is seen in the Lord's table. In 1 Corinthians 10: 16, 17 we read, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion?" and the word "communion" is the same as the word "fellowship" in the original text—"Is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the Body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one Body." And so the Lord's Supper, the table of the Lord, is the expression of that fellowship, as we eat and drink together as those redeemed to God by the precious blood of His Son in remem-

brance of Him who gave His life for us. What a wonderful thing it must have been for Saul of Tarsus to sit for the first time with these Christians at Jerusalem and enjoy communion with them, to partake of the loaf and the cup in commemoration of the Saviour whom for so long he had rejected!

I remember reading in a missionary record not very long ago how a young man in New Guinea who had been away to school and had gotten a good education after his conversion, returned to his own island and to his own village. On the Lord's day the group of missionaries and believers were gathered together to observe the Lord's Supper. As this young man sat by one of the elder missionaries, the missionary recognized that a sudden tremor had passed through the young man's body and he laid his hand upon the arm of the other in a way that indicated he was under a great nervous strain. Then in a moment all was quiet again. The missionary whispered, "What was it that troubled you?" "Ah," he said, "it is all right. But the man who just came in killed and ate the body of my father. And now he has come in to remember the Lord with us. At first I was so shocked to see the murderer of my own father sit down with us at the table of the Lord, I didn't know whether I could endure it. But it is all right now. He is washed in the same

precious Blood." And so together they had communion. Does the world know anything of this? It is a marvelous thing, the work of the blessed Holy Spirit of God.

I think of Saul of Tarsus seated there with that little group of believers around him. And I think of them looking over and saying, "That is the man that arrested my father. That is the man that threw my mother into prison. That is the man that tried to make me blaspheme the Name of the Lord Jesus. There he sits, a humble, contrite believer, receiving the bread and the wine in commemoration of the Lord who died." What a wonderful fellowship!

We read that Saul went in and out among them at Jerusalem. He enjoyed to the full these privileges of fellowship. And he spake boldly in the Name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Grecians. The term "Grecians" here means not Greeks exactly, but Hellenistic Jews—Jews born within the nations of the Gentiles. And they, instead of responding to the message, went about to slay him. God permitted him now to know something of the persecutions that he had caused others.

When the brethren realized that his life was in danger if he remained in Jerusalem, they brought him down to Cæsarea, the seaport, and sent him forth to Tarsus, his own native city. And now

with Saul out of the way the churches prospered. That seems a strange thing. You would have thought they might have prospered more with the ministry of this wonderful man of God among them. But, as you see, he was now the object of the intense hatred of the Pharisaic party that before he had represented. And the Christians realized that it was better that he go elsewhere to labor than remain in Jerusalem. And so we are told, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." Observe the three districts. By this time churches had been established throughout Judea, far north in Galilee, and in the intermediate district of Samaria. And they were edified and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Have you ever noticed something about Bible arithmetic in this book of the Acts? In 2: 41 we read the Lord added those that believed. And in 2: 47 the Lord added those that were being saved. In 5: 14 certain ones were added to their company, and they became about 5,000 men. And then in 6: 7 the number of believers were multiplied. And here we read, "walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost" they were multiplied. This is Bible arithmetic. First, addition, then multiplication. I am afraid sometimes it is not like that today. In fact, I

know a great many churches where there seems to be subtraction, rather than holding their own, let alone addition or multiplication. My dear brethren and sisters, if our companies are not being added to, and if believers are not being multiplied, I'll tell you the reason: It is because the church is not walking in the fear of God and the comfort of the Holy Ghost. When the Spirit of God has His way in the hearts and lives of believers, then unsaved people are going to be reached and won for Christ. If we are not seeing people converted it tells a sad story. It says there is something wrong, because if believers are going on with God, if He is having His way in their lives, then their testimony will really count for Him. Let us face this honestly and say, "What am I doing to win souls that the work of the Lord may progress and believers may be added to the Lord?"

## LECTURE SEVENTEEN

# THE PRACTICAL SIDE OF CHRISTIANITY

1 1 1

“And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died, whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner” (Acts 9: 32-43).

WE have noticed on an earlier occasion that the title of this book, "The Acts of the Apostles," as we have it in our English versions, is really a misnomer. Actually we read very little of any of the apostles, save two or three—and two are outstanding. We might say the first twelve chapters of this book are largely occupied with the ministry of the Apostle Peter. Therefore, these twelve chapters might be called the Acts of Peter. Then from chapter 13 to 28 the inspired writer deals almost entirely with the ministry of the Apostle Paul, so that section might be called the Acts of the Apostle Paul. In the first section, Israel is prominent, though does not have the full place. The ministry of Peter was mainly addressed to the house of Israel. But from chapter 13 on, we find the grace of God going out in a marvelous way to the Gentiles, though not to the exclusion of Israel; for wherever Paul went, he gave the message to Jew and Gentile.

We are coming to the close, then, of Peter's later Judean ministry. In chapters 10 and 11 we shall see him used of God to open the door to the Gentiles; and in chapter 12 we have his arrest and marvelous deliverance from prison. From this time on, Peter fades into the background and Paul takes the prominent place.

It is very interesting to trace out the ministry of the Apostle Peter. It is marvelous to see how God in His grace exercised people's hearts into sharing their possessions to supply others' temporal needs. Christianity is not a means simply of getting into heaven, nor is it only a system of doctrine, but it is a wonderful manifestation of divine life and love in the midst of a world of sin and wretchedness. This comes out here.

"And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda." I was half asleep on a warm afternoon while we were traveling through Palestine several years ago when suddenly the train stopped with a jerk. As I woke up with a start and looked out the window, I saw the name "Lydda." It carried me back 2000 years. At this town of Lydda Peter was engaged in ministering the Word, "and there he found a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy." I think every one of the different diseases mentioned in Scripture was intended by God to illustrate in some way the effects of sin. Palsy was a disease very common in Palestine during the days of our Lord's sojourn on earth, and afterwards. It sets forth the utter helplessness of the sinner. So often the Lord Jesus ministered to people of this type. You will remember the palsied man who was let down

through the roof by his four friends, and the Lord Jesus gave him not only healing of his body, but forgiveness of his sins. You will recall the poor man by the pool of Bethesda who had lain there 38 years. He was sick five years before even the Lord came from heaven! Jesus said to this poor, helpless man, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The impotent man answered him, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool." Jesus spoke the life-giving word that gave strength to those palsied limbs and the man sprang to his feet and went away carrying his bed. And here we have this palsied man in all his helplessness.

If you have not trusted Christ, you are just like him. You have no ability to save yourself; you can't take one step toward God. If this man is ever to be healed, someone must come to him, and that is just what Christ Jesus does. We read, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." He comes where we are and speaks the word that gives life to poor, helpless sinners.

Peter evidently saw in this man a spirit of expectation. The man may have been a Christian—we do not know. Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed." And he arose immediately. One may say, "Why do we not have many cases like this to-

day?" God has never promised in His Word that all miracles and signs would remain in the Church to the end of the dispensation. He was speaking to the Twelve when He said, "In My Name shall they cast out devils; . . . if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

Many of the apostles who believed found that these actual signs accompanied their ministry; but we never read that the same power was given to many individual believers. We know that the manifestations of the Spirit are divided to every man severally as God wills; and in the beginning there were far more such evidences of the miracle-working power of the Spirit of God in connection with the healing of the body than we perhaps see today; but there was greater reason for it. Men knew less of the human body and its ailments and how to minister to them than they know today. Down through the centuries since, God has given remarkable enlightenment and skill in dealing with physical ailments; and, you know, God does not always do for us what we can do for ourselves. He does not always work miracles—He can bless the medicine and the skill of the physician and surgeon, and these are as much an answer to prayer as if He wrought a miracle—for, after all, every case of healing is from God. The doctor's ability does not count for

anything at all unless God blesses this agency for the building up and renewing of the bodies He made.

There is another thing we should think of: When the Church went forth in the beginning, in its purity, "terrible as an army with banners," it was the delight of the Lord to allow signs to accompany it; but we must remember we live in a day when we can look back over 1500 years or more of grave departure from the Word of God, 1500 years in which apostasy has been making tremendous strides in the Christian Church, 1500 years of ever-increasing worldliness and corruption. It has been said, and rightly so, that "the corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption"—and we can see why the Lord might withdraw some of the great gifts. Suppose He gave some of these gifts today in abundant measure. To what section of the Church would He give them? He certainly could not give them to all—and would there not be a great danger of increase in spiritual pride on the part of any section specially honored?

There are reasons why God withholds certain things. I have sometimes illustrated it like this: Here is a young man who is engaged to a beautiful young woman and has full confidence in her. He delights in lavishing presents on her. Given a position across the sea, he goes away, and from

his new station sends beautiful gifts and precious memorials to this lady of his heart in the homeland. But then he learns the one he has trusted is proving anything but faithful and constant to him. She is seen with other lovers and found here and there with them in questionable places; and when the heart-breaking news comes to him, do you not think it would dry up the stream of gifts? He would not feel the same about her. Will you look at that as a little parable? When the Church was in its first love, the Lord Jesus delighted to grace her with many gifts; but the Church has been unfaithful. We have drifted far away from the principles of those early days and the Lord has had to deal with us in much more reserve than in the beginning.

There are those who say today that miracles passed away with the apostles. That is not true. Many wonderful miracles have been wrought in answer to prayer during the last 1900 years, and here and there throughout the world today God still acts in wonderful grace. Again and again God puts forth His hand in healing power, and many given up by doctors have marvelously recovered as God's people have prayed. Other signs and wonders, too, have accompanied Christianity. It really behooves us to be careful and not go to either of two extremes. Let us not insist that the working of the Spirit of God in mani-

festing His power by miracles and signs is past; and, on the other hand, let us not say that He will always so act if we ask Him to do so. The measure in which He delights to work is left with Him.

Peter could say to this man Eneas, "Arise!" and the man arose immediately. It was a real testimony to the people in the neighborhood. "And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord." God used the miracle of healing to direct the attention of needy souls to Christ Himself; and they came not only for physical help, but also for spiritual blessing.

We have another delightful story beginning with verse 36. "Now there was at Joppa (Joppa is not far from Lydda, and is on the sea coast, whereas Lydda is inland) a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." I want to fix your attention on that for a few moments. This is one of the very real evidences of a truly converted person! She was deeply interested in doing good to others. I am afraid sometimes we forget that side of it—many professing believers are so terribly self-centered. They seem to be looking constantly for some new religious thrill or new spiritual experience. They are always looking inside and always seeking blessing for themselves, and

they throng the inquiry room when the invitation is given for Christians who want a little more than they have. If you gave the invitation a hundred times a year, they would come a hundred times.

That isn't the ideal Christian at all. The ideal Christian is one who is resting in Christ for his soul's salvation and now his great concern is not his own salvation but that of others. He is interested in making Christ known and in doing good in a temporal way to others. John insists on this, and James asks, "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

This dear woman loved the Lord and manifested it in a very practical way. She was not satisfied with reading her Bible only; but she had a consecrated needle and used it for the blessing of other people; and the Spirit of God has preserved this record that we might learn from it and never forget it. Some of you dear Christian women who are not satisfied with your life, get busy and try to help and bless other people, and you will be surprised to see how your own spiritual condition will improve! You will get on wonderfully well when you start thinking about others.

I do not go quite so far as a preacher a few years ago, who said, "Anyone whose chief concern is the salvation of his own soul hasn't got a soul worth saving." Every soul is valuable; but I should say this: Anyone constantly occupied with his own spiritual experience and never concerned about blessing other people will never have an experience worth being occupied with.

This woman Dorcas must have been a most genial person. I can't imagine her as one of these "sour pusses" we sometimes see today—going around with long, melancholy faces and a "holier-than-thou" attitude. I think her face gleamed with the love of Christ. I do not think she had a dainty little handshake, raising her hand almost to the top of her head; but I believe she had a pump-handle handshake. She was always interested in other people—really a warm-hearted Christian.

But this dear woman died. Her spirit went home to be with Christ and her body lay there in an upper room. "And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died." The Christians felt Dorcas should go to heaven, but they wanted her here. For some of us they would not worry very much. They would just look pious and say, "The Lord has taken him." But they would not be very anxious to have us come back. These dear believers, however, were exceedingly

sorry to lose this wonderful Christian character.

“And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.” They probably thought, “We do not know what he can do, but we shall send for him.” “Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.” Can’t you just see that picture? There is the body of the dear one that is gone, lying upon the couch—dead, and here are her friends mourning for her. One exclaims, “Look at this garment of mine. I didn’t know where I was going to get a winter coat; but she cut a coat that her grandfather left and made it over for me!” And others were showing one thing and another. “Dorcas made it for me!” These garments seemed to have a mute voice, and Peter heard their crying and “put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand (perfect gentleman that he was), and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.” Ah, what a rejoicing they must have had!

You know, she is one of the special saints of the New Testament. Her name has been enshrined in countless Dorcas Societies all over the world since that time, groups of Christian women who come together to do what she did—to emulate her ministry to the poor and needy.

This is one of the ways the gospel of Christ commends itself to the needy. Do you realize what we call social service really began, after all, with Christ and His apostles? Many talk today of the social gospel and try to distinguish it from the saving gospel. There is no such distinction, for the gospel that saves the individual brings blessings to the needy.

Did you ever think of this (I am sure some of you have): We have no record in any history (and I have been an omnivorous reader for over fifty years) of any hospital for the treatment of the sick being established in the world before Christ came. We have no record of an asylum for the mentally sick people before Jesus came. Before He came the mentally deficient or insane were driven from their homes and left in tombs or in desert places. They were looked upon as demons. People sometimes considered them inspired and listened to their strange ravings for some new revelation. But there was no asylum in which they could be treated and tenderly cared for.

There was no such thing as a leprosarium in

the world until after Jesus came. The leper was doomed to wander in the wilderness, and it was only after Christ came that the first home for lepers was opened; and ever since then the Church of God has been ministering to those suffering from that horrible disease.

There was no such thing as an orphanage until after Jesus came. The Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and Assyrians, with all their boasted civilization, never thought of opening an orphanage. Instead, orphan children, unless adopted by some of their relatives, were exposed to the elements and left to die, or else were sold into slavery; and many little boys and girls were given over to a fate worse than death—before Jesus came. It was a Christian who started the first orphanage, and it is Christian people who have been interested in these things ever since. There was no such thing in all the world as international relief—until Jesus came. You can search all the records and you will never read, for instance, that during the famine in Egypt the people of Rome took up an offering for them; nor during a pestilence in Syria did the people in Greece raise a fund to assist those in distress in Syria. It was not very long after Jesus came that the Christians in Achaia and other parts of the Grecian world were sending to those in need in Judea.

The Red Cross would never have come into

existence were it not for Jesus; for, after all, what is the Red Cross? It is the blood-red cross of Christ! We need to remember that all these agencies had their birth in the gospel of the grace of God. Dorcas stands out before us here as a special picture in order that all of us may learn to emulate her concern for others. We are told, "Many believed in the Lord."

The last verse in our chapter introduces us to what will come before us in the next chapter: "And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner."

## LECTURE EIGHTEEN

### THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS

WE turn now to one of the great crisis chapters in the book of the Acts—chapter ten, which deals with the conversion of the first Gentiles. This chapter divides into six very definite sections. Therefore instead of reading it all at one time, let us take it up section by section. The first section consists of verses 1 to 8, in which Cornelius himself is introduced to us and we learn something of his exercises and the angelic messenger sent to him and the command laid upon him:

“There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.”

We have been tracing out thus far the ministry of Peter and the other apostles in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and Galilee. But our Lord had commissioned them to go to the uttermost parts of the earth. On a number of different occasions before He left them to go back to heaven, He laid on their hearts this program of world evangelization. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," was part of His commission. Again He bade them: "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"; and lastly He bade them begin at Jerusalem, then go unto Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The amazing thing is that not only months, but years went by, before they carried out the last part of the program. So slowly may good men, even godly men, apprehend God's plans and act in accordance with them! We do not read of any apostles going to the Gentiles as such until one of the Gentiles actually sent for Peter and asked him to come! That is the way God came in and rebuked the dilatory methods of these dear servants of His. Somebody might say, "The apostles were slow to understand His program." There can be no question of it. In Galatians we find

years afterward that the Apostle Peter had to be withstood at Antioch because of his attitude toward Gentile Christians. The apostles were not infallible. Some say Peter was the first pope, but he himself made no such claim. He was a man of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ; but a man of like passions as ourselves, and was subject to the same mistakes and blunders. God had to go out beyond Jewish limits, stirring the heart of a Roman soldier to get Peter to go to the Gentiles with the gospel.

Cornelius was captain of a Roman cohort of 100 men and was stationed in the city of Cæsarea, not far from Joppa. He is described as a devout man, God-fearing, and we are told all his family shared with him this fear of God. Many people have, I think, mistaken Cornelius' condition. There can be no question that he was already a regenerated man; that is, born again. Of all unsaved men we read, "There is none that seeketh after God."

Here was a man who had turned to God and yet he was not a proselyte to Israel. Had he actually become a proselyte, he would have been recognized as on the same ground as a Jew, but Peter spoke of him as one in whose house it was not lawful for a Jew to eat bread. So Cornelius, we might say, was a pure Gentile, standing outside of the Jewish circle. But he had

doubtless been influenced by what he had heard and seen in the testimony of his Jewish neighbors and had given up the idolatry of his fathers. That he had turned to God in repentance was very evident; he was born again.

More than this, we are told a little farther on that an angel of God appeared to him in a vision and said, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." That is significant in illustrating this man's spiritual condition. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we read that "without faith we cannot please God"; therefore if this man pleased God and God accepted his prayers and alms-giving, it is evident he had already turned to Him. What was lacking? He was like other people who turned to God before Jesus came. He did not have the light and knowledge that came through God's Son. He knew God as Creator and prayed to Him; the new nature manifested itself in his alms-giving; but he had no assurance of salvation, and he could not have it until he received definite word from God, for assurance comes by the Word of God. So the angel said, "Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side." The angel of God knew exactly where Peter lived. It is a good thing God knows where we are living. "He shall tell thee what thou

oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually." You see, here is another one in this company who was affected in the same way as Cornelius—he had turned to God and sought to please Him. "He sent them to Joppa." That is the first part of this wonderful story. The second section is from verse 9 to 18:

"On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: and he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there."

So we have God preparing Peter for this wonderful ministry to the Gentiles. Before the servants of Cornelius reached the apostle, God had to deal with him so that his prejudices would be broken down, in order that he might be ready

to go into a Gentile home to proclaim the gospel to strangers from the covenant of promise, to those who were outside the Jewish circle. "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour." The flat roof of an Eastern house forms a good place where one may retire in order to be alone for quiet and meditation. Peter prayed so long he became hungry; in that condition he fell into a trance and saw a most remarkable vision: "He . . . saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners (by sheet, of course, is meant what we might call a vast tarpaulin of some kind), and let down to the earth." It was thus a picture of the heavenly calling.

It was God's way of showing Peter that he was going to give unto all men the opportunity to enter into one blessed fellowship, to spend eternity with Him in heaven. But in this sheet Peter beheld "all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth (that refers particularly to domestic animals, and it would even include the ceremonially unclean hog) and wild beasts, and creeping things (according to the Old Testament, every creeping thing was unclean), and fowls of the air." And after hungry Peter looks on this heterogeneous collection of beasts and birds and creep-

ing things, he hears a voice say, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Peter, though a Christian, was still very punctilious as to clean and unclean food and he rebelled, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean."

Notice the contradiction implied in that first expression. "Not so, Lord." The Lord had commanded him to do a thing—and in the one breath he acknowledged Him as "Lord" and in the next he refused to do as he was commanded. I wonder if some of us are like this. We know what His will is for our lives, we confess Him with our lips as "Lord"; but we draw back from full obedience and say, "Not so, Lord." What a strange, incongruous thing this is! If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all! And if He is Lord, it is not for us to say, "Not so," but to give Him whole-hearted obedience. Peter thought he was doing right by the express word of God, for he did not yet realize he had passed completely out of one dispensation into another.

Our Lord Jesus Christ had said, "Whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats" (Mark 7: 18, 19). By this He did away with the ceremonial distinction as to clean and unclean meats. So God answers Peter, "What God hath cleansed, that call

not thou common or unclean." And in order that this might be impressed on his mind, the same vision was given to him three times and then the vessel with its strange company of beasts was received up into heaven. What a remarkable picture! It shows how God can now receive in grace all kinds of men and women. I have heard my mother tell that when my own dear father was dying, this passage was running through his mind and he kept repeating, "A great sheet and wild beasts, and—and—and . . ." He could not seem to get the next word but went back and started over, and once more came to that same place. A friend bent over and whispered, "John, it says, 'creeping things.'" "Oh, yes," he said, "that is how I got in. Just a poor good-for-nothing creeping thing, but I got in—saved by grace." No matter how low, vile or utterly useless and corrupt or unclean, the soul that trusts Jesus is in the sheet let down from heaven and will have a place in glory by and by.

Peter meditates on this. God had to give him a special revelation to prepare him for his ministry to the Gentiles. He had to show him there is no longer any difference between Jew and Gentile; all stand on common ground before God; all have to be saved by grace. "While Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent

from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there."

In the third section of the chapter, verses 19 to 24, we have Peter's journey to Cæsarea, and it is delightful to see the confidence with which he now goes on to carry out the Lord's command and give the gospel to a Gentile family.

"While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee."

Then Peter did a most unprecedented thing for a Jew: he called them in and lodged them, these Gentile Roman soldiers whom he might have thought of, the day before he received the vision, as utterly unfit to associate with.

"Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends."

Here is a whole company of Gentiles, all eagerly waiting for the first proclamation of the gospel

to a strictly Gentile audience, and here is Peter, with his Hebrew Christian friends who have come with him to participate in this new and remarkable service. As Peter comes in, one gets an idea of the spirit of Cornelius when we see this devout Roman soldier bowing down at the apostle's feet and doing homage to him, a Jew. Think of it: A Gentile centurion, a Roman soldier, bowing down reverently before a Jew who had once been just a poor fisherman! It shows how grace was working in Cornelius. You notice that Peter did not put out his hand and say, "You may kiss the fisherman's ring on my finger." No, he said, "Stand up; I myself also am a man." He meant, I have no right to such reverence as this. Do not put me in a place that does not belong to me. Would that those who profess to be his successors acted in the same way!

"And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." Peter's faith had laid hold of the import of the vision and he was ready, with confidence, to give the gospel to these Gentiles. "And Cornelius said, Four days ago I

was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

What a delightful state of affairs, to find a whole company like that—all hungry, all eager, all waiting for the Word! It was not necessary to advertise a meeting to be held in the house of Cornelius; everybody was there ahead of time, waiting for the preacher.

The next section begins with verse 34 and goes on to verse 43. It gives us Peter's sermon. I think it was easy for the preacher to preach that day with such a company before him, saying, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." "Then Peter opened his mouth." I like that. If I am talking to any young preachers, let me caution you—Don't mumble! Open your mouth and give out the Word so people can hear.

“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.” He had learned his lesson. He had learned that there is no difference between Jew and Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. “But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.” That tells us this: Wherever a man is found in all the world who turns in repentance to God and takes the place of a lost sinner and trusts God for deliverance, He will make Himself responsible to give that man light enough to be saved.

Peter was the sent one to convey the message to Cornelius, “preaching peace by Jesus Christ.” That epitomizes the message of the gospel. Into a world torn by the effects of sin, trouble, distress, bloody warfare, grief, pain, sorrow, and death, God sends His messengers, “preaching peace by Jesus Christ.” When we trust that blessed Saviour, we have peace with God; and when we learn to bring our daily troubles to Him, the peace of God keeps our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. This is the message the world needs today—peace through Jesus Christ. “That Word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost

and with power: *who went about doing good.*" These last five words epitomize the life of Jesus. He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps. Let us never be content with a mere intellectual faith or the thought that we belong to this or that church; but be sure that ours is the faith which worketh by love—and let us, too, "go about doing good."

"And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree." They did not understand and He Himself prayed for them, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Let me say a word here. Because the Jewish people long ago had part in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, do be careful that the unworthy thought never finds lodgment in your soul that we Gentiles have any right to cast it up to them. The Lord prayed for them, for their forgiveness. The Gentiles were as guilty as the Jews. He prayed for them too. We need to remember that through Christ being immolated as the great sin offering, God is able to proclaim peace to all men everywhere who will trust in Him. God raised Him from the dead and that was God's token of His satisfaction in the work His Son had accomplished, for Jesus "was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." "Him God raised up the

third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." Let us never forget, unless we know Christ here as Saviour, some day we shall have to face Him as Judge.

Peter then came to the very climax of his message in one wonderful verse: "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." The word was so clear, the gospel was so plain, and it was all so simple that Cornelius and his household understood what they heard.

We get the effect of that marvelous sermon in verses 44 to 48, the sixth section of our chapter: "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the Word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues (just as the Jewish believers did on the day of Pentecost) and magnify God." Peter preached the Word and, while he was preaching, Cornelius and all his household received the message in faith. Peter did not have

to urge and plead and entreat. He preached the Word and the whole congregation broke down, and God, who reads the heart, saw that every one of them received the message. When Peter said, "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins," they believed—every one of them—that Christ had died for them, and their sins were remitted. God set His seal upon them by giving the same Pentecostal blessing which He had given at Jerusalem to His own blessed disciples. We are even told that they spoke in tongues. This is the second occasion when this strange gift was given, so far as the record goes, though the same thing may have occurred in Samaria. We are not told they spoke there in tongues, but they may have done so.

Peter, when he saw the evident blessing of the Lord, turned to the little company of Hebrew Christians who had come down with him from Joppa and he said, as it were, "What shall we do about it?" God has received them and given evidence that all are forgiven. "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" I have heard people say sometimes that if you are baptized with the Holy Ghost you do not need to be baptized in water. It is not a question of what you need—it is a question of what God has commanded. So Peter commanded them to be

baptized in the Name, or by the authority, of the Lord Jesus.

They were so radiantly happy now that they prayed him to tarry with them certain days. I can just imagine what a delightful time they all had together as, day after day, people would gather about Peter and he would open up the Word and tell them more about God's wonderful grace and lead them into the marvelous truths of the gospel; and yet all the time in the back of Peter's mind was the burning question—How am I ever going to square myself with the home assembly? How will I ever tell them? As we consider the next chapter we shall see Peter's presentation of the case to these brethren at Jerusalem.

## LECTURE NINETEEN

# PETER'S DEFENSE OF HIS GENTILE MINISTRY

1 1 1

"And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: and he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord,

how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11: 1-18).

1 1 1

NO one, I think, can read this account thoughtfully without realizing how prejudices control and dominate the hearts of men. Most of us are more under the power of prejudice in things religious than we realize. Sometimes what we call "conscience" is, after all, only prejudice. We profess we cannot have any sympathy with this or that person (because he does not see as we do) on account of our consciences—whereas, if we were honest, we should have to admit it was just because of our prejudices. Remember the old saying—"Orthodoxy is my doxy, Heterodoxy is someone else's doxy."

Notice, too, how things have changed during the Christian era. In the early days the prejudice was on the side of the Jews, who looked with contempt on the Gentiles. There was good reason for this. God had said, "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise." On another occasion he said, speaking of the Jews, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for your in-

iquities." In a special sense God recognized Israel as His peculiar people, and He Himself put a hedge about them to keep them from mingling freely with the pagan Gentiles all around them, who worshipped idols and indulged in all the unclean things that go with idol worship.

So God called the Jews to separation from the sins of the Gentiles, and we need not be surprised, when the grace of God was revealed in Christ and the time came to carry the message to the Gentile world, that even the Hebrew Christians looked with disfavor on breaking down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles and reaching out into the pagan world with the proclamation that whosoever believeth in Jesus should not perish but have everlasting life.

Now, singularly enough, the shoe is on the other foot. Today it is the Gentile, and often the professing Christian among the Gentiles, who is found looking with disfavor on the Jew and, in many instances, has no sympathy with Christian missionary work to Israel. I have often heard it said, "The Jew had his chance; he refused Christ and therefore we have no further responsibility toward him." That is not the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ. He bade His disciples go first of all to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Paul said his ministry was to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

We have already seen, in studying this book of Acts, how the Lord Jesus outlined the program in the very beginning when He said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Some five or six years rolled by after Pentecost before there was spiritual energy enough on the part of the early Hebrew Christians to begin the work of evangelizing the Gentiles. Oh, how often today do we find little spiritual effort on the part of the Gentiles to evangelize Jews! We are so easily controlled and dominated by our prejudices, and we forget there is now "no difference—for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him."

We have considered Peter's mission to the Gentile home of Cornelius. Now we turn to chapter 11 and find Peter, an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, actually put on trial, as it were, when he returns to the Church at Jerusalem. He is called upon to defend himself for going to the Gentiles with the gospel. This shows us what I have been stressing throughout in this series of messages—that it was not the will of God that His people

should refrain so long from going to the Gentiles, but that the unreadiness to give the gospel to the people outside was to be laid at the door of the disciples in Jerusalem. They did not yet have vision broad enough to reach out to their Gentile neighbors from whom many of the Jews had suffered so much. We can realize why they hesitated, but in so doing they ignored their Lord's express command.

The other apostles themselves received the Word as a new and wonderful thing. "The apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God." It seemed almost unbelievable. God, then, was reaching out beyond the confines of Israel to poor, lost, ruined sinners of the nations. This word came back to Jerusalem and the brethren were perplexed about it, and "when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision (that is, converted Hebrews) contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." Just as when our Lord was here on earth, the charge was brought against Him when He ate with publicans and sinners, and He had to defend Himself for letting His grace go out to the needy, so Peter had to defend himself for going to the Gentiles with the message of the gospel.

Peter told the whole story and left it to them

to decide whether he had been divinely guided. "But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying." In other words, this was not a mere notion of Peter's. It was not that he had himself decided to leap over national barriers and go to the Gentiles; but while he was waiting on God, seeking the mind of God, there came to his soul a revelation of God's grace in relation to a needy world. "And in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners."

In it was this great collection of all kinds of wild beasts, domestic animals, creeping things and fowls of the air—those which, according to Jewish ritual, were divinely given as set forth in the book of Leviticus, that many were clean and others definitely unclean. The Jews were permitted to eat the clean, but not the unclean. The Gentiles, on the other hand, ate many things considered unclean by the Jews. The Jew was punctilious about eating only the things ceremonially clean, but the Gentile indulged himself as he would.

"And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat." I think I can understand something of Peter's feeling of revulsion—a strict Jew, looking upon that heterogeneous collection

of beasts, saying, "I cannot select my food from them." "But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." What did this mean? Of course, for one thing, it meant that the day had passed when one had to distinguish between clean and unclean beasts. Our Lord Jesus Christ had declared that not that which enters into the mouth defiles the man. So it is left to us now to select those foods that are most suitable for our well-being.

However, there is a deeper meaning here: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." He was referring to the whole world of sinners. In days gone by the Gentiles were considered unclean. You will remember how the Jews were forbidden to mingle with the Gentiles in marriage—how in the days of Ezra, when people failed in this way and made marriages with the people of the land, Ezra called upon them to separate from their wives and put away their children, for they were unclean. It was heart-breaking, but it was the will of God.

What does it mean then, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common"? It means that, through the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, even the Gentiles have a way of access to

God. Outside the nation of Israel, strangers to the covenant of promise, we are entitled now to participate in the riches of God's grace and to know the salvation He has provided through the Lord Jesus. The Apostle Paul said that he was "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:16).

And we can go to all men everywhere now and say to them, No matter what your record, whether you are Jew or Gentile, whether you have been punctilious about keeping the law or whether you have been utterly lawless, Christ died for all men, and the grace of God, proclaiming peace for all men, goes out to sinners everywhere; and God's Word says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

This was the message the Lord was teaching Peter. There are no longer any ceremonial distinctions to be observed; God is waiting in grace to save whosoever will. It often takes quite a little while to get something new into our understanding. "This was done," says Peter, "three times (the same proclamation made three times in order that he might be assured it was in very truth the mind of God): and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the

house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting." And so Peter started off to the household of Cornelius where he was to have that wonderful experience of which we read in the previous chapter.

"Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house. (That was wisdom on the part of Peter. He was going to do an unprecedented thing and he wanted plenty of witnesses who could testify when he got back to Jerusalem that he did everything according to the mind and will of God.) And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

There are three things I want to emphasize here: First, God could have given Cornelius the gospel through that angel, if it had pleased Him; but it has not pleased Him so to propagate the glad tidings. He prefers to reach sinners through redeemed men and women, and this is a very wonderful and serious thing for us to consider. I am sure, of the myriads upon myriads of angels surrounding the throne of God, any one of them would count it a privilege to come down and stand at any cross road in all the land and pro-

claim the gospel of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. But God has passed angels by, and has said, I am going to entrust the message of grace to sinners saved by that grace. How have we responded to that—we, to whom this wonderful privilege has been given? Will we rise to our privilege? Are we making known the gospel as we should to a lost world?

In the next place, I want you to realize this: Though Cornelius was a man whose prayers and alms-giving had been accepted by God, therefore of very necessity he must have been on the ground of an Old Testament believer. He was already quickened, but was not what the New Testament calls "saved." When we speak of being saved we mean far more than being safe. All down through the centuries those who turned to God in repentance were quickened by the Spirit of God, and in that sense were children of God and went home to heaven at death, but they did not know positively that they were justified before God. They could not know for certain that their souls were saved. All these precious truths awaited revelation in the new dispensation.

So here is Cornelius, a God-fearing, earnest man with no knowledge of peace with God, longing to be assured that he is accepted of Him. Here is this man sending to Peter to know how he might be saved; and not only he, but his

house; in other words, how they might come into the full glad knowledge of forgiveness of sins. What a vast number of people in Christendom today are very much like Cornelius—people who are undoubtedly God-fearing, and in their hearts believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore have knowledge Cornelius did not have; but they have no assurance of salvation. I am sorry to say it, but this is largely due to the preaching they hear in many places.

Mel Trotter and I were in Edinburgh, seat of the famous university; and Mel Trotter had given a powerful presentation of the gospel. I was left in the larger room to close the meeting, while Mel Trotter went into the inquiry room. When finally I came into the inquiry room, a lady said to me, "I want you to meet a dear woman ninety-three years of age, who has just been saved tonight."

I said to this lady (a fine, tall, straight Scottish woman), "So you are ninety-three!"

"Yes, I am, and until yon man made it so clear tonight I didna' ken any one could be saved and know it."

"Weel, ye didna' gae to kirk very much," I said (adopting her Scottish accent).

"I have gone to kirk all my life, but I have never heard a minister before tell how you might be saved."

In Scotland! I wouldn't have been surprised if

it had been in America, but in Bible-loving Scotland! She had gone to church for ninety years and did not know how to be saved. I remember hearing a minister say, "I hate the word 'saved.' It sounds as if everything is settled and there is nothing more to do." Thank God, it is settled! But do you not think people need to pray, work and labor for the Lord? Yes, but not in order to be saved. It is after they are saved they are to be careful to maintain good works.

Let us continue with the story. "Who shall tell thee words (God has sent words to men, the message of the gospel) whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." Now we have to go back into the previous chapter to find out what he told them. What was the content of his message? It was Jesus Christ, living His wonderful life here on earth, going about doing good, crucified for our sins, raised from the dead and ascended on high, to God's right hand. That was the message.

It is strange to hear people who profess to believe the Bible say they do not believe anyone can know he is saved until the day of judgment. The Word of God says, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." There are people who are saved and know they are

saved, and there are others who really love the Lord but somehow or other have never dared to step out on His testimony, and so still are in doubt as to their salvation.

Cornelius and his household heard the Word and believed and they were saved, and immediately "the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." That is, on the day of Pentecost. Then Peter said, "I realized, when I saw this, what God had done—that He had broken down the middle wall of partition. When I realized God had accepted them and given them the gift of the Holy Ghost, what could I do about it?" "Then remembered I the Word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost."

We know from the previous chapter how he commanded them all to be baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus had bidden His apostles to go and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and Peter acts in accordance with the words given in command by Jesus, and he baptized in water those who had already been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Let us not think to be wiser than he, nor wise above that which is written.

When the brethren heard all this, they had nothing to say against it, but "held their peace,

and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Thank God, that remains blessedly true, and no poor sinner in all the world need feel he has gone so far there is no salvation for him. God grants forgiveness to all who will believe His Word, to those who will change their attitude toward the God against whom they have sinned.

## LECTURE TWENTY

# WHO AND WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

1 1 1

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. [May I point out that whereas in our Authorized Version text we have the word "Grecian," which generally stands for Greek-speaking Jews, in the margin we have "Greeks." They were actually Gentiles to whom the brethren spoke in Antioch.] And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11: 19-30).

**W**E are rapidly coming to the close of our study of the first part of the book of Acts. The next chapter will conclude this particular division, in which we have been occupied chiefly with the ministry of the Apostle Peter. During those days, when Peter took the first place, we find the gospel going out largely to the Jews. But the Lord Jesus had commanded that it should be preached in all the world, and so we have seen how, finally, Peter's reluctance to go to the Gentiles was overcome by the vision given to him of the sheet let down from heaven. The Lord instructed him to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile (who, nevertheless, was a believer in the one true and living God); and now we find waves of grace going out farther and farther, and reaching more distant shores. All the efforts of men to keep back the good news from reaching the Gentiles proved absolutely fruitless, and we find God in a very special way honoring the message to the salvation of many.

"They which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only." This carries us back some time—in fact, several years—because Saul of Tarsus was the one who was present at the stoning of Stephen, consenting to his death; and it was after that, on his way

to Damascus to arrest anyone who professed the Lord Jesus, that he was so miraculously and marvelously converted to preach the faith he had once persecuted. He had already been preaching perhaps three years and had visited Jerusalem, but, because the Jews tried to kill him, had gone back to his native city, Tarsus.

In these intervening years we find the brethren who had fled from Palestine on account of the persecution which had broken out against the Church did not have spirit or courage of heart sufficient to enable them to give the gospel to the Gentiles in the same sense as to the Jews. They went out preaching the Word to the Jews only. Do not let us get the idea that, in limiting the message in this way, they were doing as the Lord commanded. The commission was very definite, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," but their Jewish prejudices hindered them from realizing that the same message was for Gentiles that had already been given to the Jews, until God so overruled that they began to reach out to the nations. We read, "Some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene"; that is, although Jews, they had been born in these countries and had been accustomed to mingle with the Gentiles. So when they returned to their homelands they ventured out—they went to the Greeks and preached the Word.

Antioch was a great Greek city in Syria and there the gospel was first freely proclaimed to the Gentiles, with the result that many were saved. "And the hand of the Lord was with them." You see, there is a great difference between these Greeks to whom the gospel was preached in Antioch, and Cornelius to whom Peter carried the Word. Cornelius feared the Lord with all his house; he knew God but did not understand the gospel of the new dispensation. It was otherwise with these Greeks. They were out-and-out idolaters, living in all the sins of paganism. What a day it must have been when the gospel of the grace of God was preached first to men like that! God wrought in power and they were broken down and turned in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.

"A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." I wish we could always keep to the simplicity of things as we find them here. What led them to the Lord? The proclamation of the grace of God. Nothing else. They did not have to depend on all the other things to which preachers resort today in order to attract the people. They simply went to the heathen preaching Christ and Him crucified, and God set His seal on that message and brought them to a saving knowledge of His blessed Son.

When the news of this reached Jerusalem, it

created quite a stir among the brethren. They had already sat in judgment on Peter for going to the Gentiles. They did not take a stand of direct opposition, but sent a trusted man to investigate, to make sure it was really a work of God and not simply some fleshly effort. "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch." Barnabas was a trusted man. He was the man who, we are told in an earlier chapter, had large properties in Cyprus, his native island, and he sold those properties and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet, to be used in helping the needy brethren. He was characterized not only by sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but by his love for others. So the brethren decided that he was the man to go down and investigate and report to them as to the character of the work in Antioch.

"When he came and had seen the grace of God, [he] was glad." How can anybody see the grace of God? Grace is God's undeserved favor granted to poor lost sinners who put their trust in the Lord Jesus. Strictly speaking, we cannot see grace any more than we can see love, or its antithesis, hate. Then what did Barnabas see? We see the effects of hate in the unkind things it does, and we see the grace of God manifested in

the changed lives of those who have received and believed the gospel message. This is how the gospel is propagated. The gospel proves itself by what it does. We hear a great deal about the need of a new gospel for a new age; but the old gospel still works, and works in power. When men and women believe it, and receive it in their hearts, they become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Licentious, wicked, unclean people become chaste, holy, and clean; unrighteous people become faithful, honest, and true. This is how the grace of God is seen.

If we profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us be careful to manifest the reality of our faith by godly lives. The world is looking on to see what the gospel we talk about has done for us. Christian men and women should so live and walk before the world, should so act in their behavior one to the other, that unsaved people will have to confess they see the grace of God in them.

Barnabas went to Antioch and saw the grace of God, and he ministered to them "and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." How young converts need that! It is not merely a matter of receiving Christ as Saviour. When one does that, thank God, he is saved; but from that moment on we need to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. Our Lord has warned us that no man, having put

his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. God give us to plow a straight furrow—to go on in the path of devotion to the Lord! How do we cleave to Him? With purpose of heart.

Let me try to give a few suggestions to young believers. In the first place, give the Word of God its proper place in your heart. Do not let a day go by in which you do not spend some time over your Bible. You cannot grow in grace without that. You are new-born babes and you need to be fed, and the Word is not only for our food but for our enlightenment. We cannot find our way through this world without the instructions we get from the Word of God. Not only should you be careful to meditate upon the Word of God each day, but see that you spend some time daily waiting upon God in prayer. Prayer is the Christian's vital breath. A believer who is not given to prayer will never really count for God in this scene. We are told to be instant in prayer, to pray without ceasing.

Next, if we are going to cleave to the Lord, we should cultivate Christian fellowship—seek the association of those of like precious faith. None of us are strong in ourselves, and we need one another. We are to exhort one another, to be helpers of one another in the faith. Then let us be unsparing in self-judgment. We need to keep

account with God. When conscious of failure, of sin, when we have yielded in any sense to temptation, let us not go on getting deeper and deeper into things that are wrong, drifting farther and farther from God; but turn at once to the Lord, face the matter in His presence; and remember, "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is what is meant by cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, recognizing His authority over our lives and His ownership of all we have and are.

So Barnabas exhorted these young Christians to cleave unto the Lord, in order that their lives might really count for God.

Moreover, we are told this of Barnabas: "He was a good man." I would like so to live that this might always be said of me. It means far more than for people to say, "He is cultured," or, "He is talented." One may be talented, cultured, educated and yet not be good. "The steps of a good man," we are told, "are ordered by the Lord"; and so we are to seek to be good men. "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," a man who walked with and counted on God. This was the man to help these young converts. As a result of his ministry, "much people was added unto the Lord."

But Barnabas was also a self-effacing man; he

realized his own limitations and was glad to recognize a man with greater ability than he had himself. As he ministered, he thought, There is another man who can help in a better way. I am going to bring that man here. "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul." He had been interested in Saul. Saul had come to Jerusalem and wanted to join himself to the brethren there, but they were afraid of him and feared that he intended to turn them over to the authorities. But Barnabas spoke up and told how Saul had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and that he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So the believers at Jerusalem lost their fear of him and received him into their fellowship.

Barnabas appreciated what had taken place in the life of Saul of Tarsus, and recognized his remarkable ability, and knew he was a chosen vessel to give the gospel to the Gentiles. Barnabas might have said, "I can go on ministering here with nobody interfering with me." But, no, he said, "I would do better to fade out a little and get a more capable man to take my place"—and off he went to Tarsus. I should like to have been present during his interview with Saul. So far as we know, Saul was in retirement, as though he had failed to qualify as a preacher of the Word, after he left Jerusalem. We do not read

of any work he was doing. But I think one day he was sitting in his home feeling a bit gloomy, saying to himself, "The Lord cannot use me. People are not willing to receive my message"—when suddenly there was a knock at the door!

"Welcome, my old friend Barnabas, I am glad to see you."

"Saul, I have come to take you to Antioch, to help the church there."

"Why, what do you need me for?"

"There is a great opportunity there, and I feel sure you are the man for the job."

Then I can hear Paul saying, deprecatingly, "Oh, no; I am not worthy—I persecuted this way even unto death."

But Barnabas assures him, "You are the very man for the place. Come with me!"

And "he brought him unto Antioch." I like that. It suggests to me that Paul was not ready to go until Barnabas persuaded him, in a kindly way. "Come, here is work for you." And so Saul went and "it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people." Saul and Barnabas, laboring together in Antioch for a whole year! It was there the believers first received the name which this new covenant company has borne through the centuries.

"And the disciples were called *Christians* first

in Antioch." In some commentaries you will read that the Antiochians were given to conferring nicknames, and some wag among them is supposed to have made up the word "Christian" from the name "Christ." But I question that very much. Thomas Newberry, one of the great Greek scholars of the last century, states the Greek word translated "called" really means, "oracularly called," or "divinely called." The evidence bears that out. The disciples were first divinely called Christians at Antioch. This was God's name for them. Now that the work of evangelizing the world had really begun, God said, as it were, "I am going to give you the name by which I want My people known"—and He gave them the name "Christians." We do not find the word used often in the Bible, but it soon became known all over the world. Later on, when Paul was defending himself before Agrippa, the king suddenly interrupted him and said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." That was the name by which the new company had become known; and in the first epistle of Peter we read, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."

Who and what is a Christian? We often use the term in a very loose way today. We speak of Christians as we do of Mohammedans or Jews, as denoting a company who profess certain re-

ligious views. We think of almost anyone born in a land like this as a Christian. I remember handing a gospel booklet to a man on a train and he turned to me and asked, "What did you give me that book for?" I replied, "I thought you might be interested; and, may I ask, are you a Christian?" "Well," he replied indignantly, "take a good look at me—do I look like a Jew or a Chinaman?" "You look and talk like an American." "Then," he responded, "that is your answer."

No; there are millions of Americans who are not Christians, and thousands of church members who are not Christians. What is a Christian? The disciples were divinely called Christians—those who received the Word of God in their hearts; they received the gospel and therefore were born again through the power of the risen Christ in heaven. They were Christians because they belonged to Christ.

A Christian is Christ's representative here in this world. Many years ago, when studying Cantonese, one of the branches of the Chinese language, I found the word used for a Christian was "Yasu-yan." *Yasu* was their word for Jesus—and *yan* was man; and whenever my teacher would introduce me, he would say I was a "Jesus man." That is what a Christian really is.

It is his high privilege to represent Christ in this world. He belongs to Christ, is united to

Christ, and now should seek to live out the life of Christ before men. That is what Paul meant when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." God give us to be consistent Christians! There is no greater testimony to the power of the gospel than that.

And now in the remaining verses of the chapter we have a beautiful little illustration of what I have been trying to say, for in these verses we can see Christian love in action. "And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

These brethren, Gentiles, converted to Christ in Antioch, heard of the need and distress of their Christian brethren in Judea and they said, We want to help them. They did not need to be urged, or pleaded with. They knew their brethren in Judea were in need and they gladly helped.

What started men thinking beyond the boun-

dary lines of their own nations? It was the love of Christ shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Here is the first instance in history of people putting together their money in order to send relief to men of another nation. Christianity is the truest philanthropy! Christianity teaches men formerly actuated by selfishness to find real joy in ministering to those in less comfortable and less agreeable circumstances than their own. How could it be otherwise? We owe everything for eternity to the One who came from the heights of glory to lay down His life for our sins, and surely "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

## LECTURE TWENTY-ONE

# THROUGH THE IRON DOOR

1 1 1

"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together

praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Cæsarea, and there abode. And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the Word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12: 1-25).

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**T**HIS twelfth chapter of the book of Acts concludes the first division of the story of the early days of Christianity. In the records of these first twelve chapters the work was centered in Jerusalem and Judea, and the ministry was very largely to the Jewish people, the people of Israel.

When we turn to chapter 13 we find ourselves in an altogether different atmosphere. Antioch in Syria is the center, and the work spreads in large measure among the Gentiles, though the Jews are not neglected. We have spoken of the period covered by these first twelve chapters as a transitional state, and that is right—as long as we realize the transition was in the mind of man, not in the mind of God. From the moment Christ died on the cross the heart of God was seen as going out to the whole world, and when the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost He empowered the twelve to speak many tongues that the miracle of Babel (which divided the original tongue into many different languages) might be undone and the gospel go out to all the world.

The Lord Jesus had definitely told His disciples to preach at Jerusalem, in Judea, and in Samaria, and then to go to the uttermost parts of the earth. They obeyed the first part of His command, and during these early years the ministry was confined almost entirely to the Jewish people and to the Samaritans; but now the river of Grace was overflowing the artificial boundary that even good men were seeking to throw about it. Some of the godliest men could not understand that the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was broken down in the Cross and they were still confining their message to God's ancient people.

However, we have seen how God had spoken to Peter, causing him to open the door of faith to the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius, and how a mighty work of grace began later on in the Syrian Antioch.

We have in this twelfth chapter the closing scene in Peter's Judean ministry; and when we open the next chapter, he recedes into the background and Paul becomes the leading figure. There had been persecution before, and at that time all the disciples had been scattered abroad—except the apostles. We read, "Now about that time Herod the king (this was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of the Herod under whom our Lord Jesus was born) stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword."

You will remember there were three apostles most intimately linked with our Lord's earthly ministry—Peter, James and John. These three were together with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the house of Jairus when Jesus raised from the dead the daughter of that synagogue leader. These three were in the Garden of Sorrow when He bowed before the Father and cried, "If Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done." Now one was taken away by death—James the Great (to be distinguished from James the Less,

the son of Alphaeus). James dead, his ministry was ended, and because Herod saw that pleased the enemies of the gospel he proceeded to take Peter also.

"Then were the days of unleavened bread," following the Passover, and since Herod did not want to start a riot at such a time he decided to keep Peter until after the Feast of Weeks. The text says "Easter," but in the original it is "Pentecost." Then he intended to bring him forth and put him to death. "Peter therefore was kept in prison." But now we find God's people using that resource which He has given His own in every trial: "Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." What a wonderful privilege!

People say sometimes, "Why do we need to pray? Does not our gracious God know all about us and what we need far better than we do?" But we learn from the Word that God has chosen to do in answer to prayer what He might not do apart from prayer. He gives in answer to prayer some things He will not give apart from it—"Ye have not, because ye ask not." So prayer is the resource of God's needy people—prayer for ourselves, prayer in behalf of others.

Here you have the whole Church in Jerusalem taking up this matter of Peter's arrest and praying. And while they were praying, God was work-

ing. Things had gone on until it looked as though there was no hope for Peter. God had permitted him to remain in prison many days. He gave no sign, yet all the time He was working. We often say that man's extremity is God's opportunity. Peter had come to the last night he was to live on earth—if Herod's judgment was to be carried out.

"Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison." This suggests absolute hopelessness. There was nothing Peter could do to free himself—and in that sense this becomes a picture of the sinner's condition. I would like to review this for a moment. I think we can see pictured here every one of us in our unconverted days—asleep, indifferent, bound in the chains of our sins, guarded by Satan's emissaries, doomed to die. This is the state of man without Christ. Here is a man who can do nothing for himself—when a messenger comes from heaven to Peter (and, thank God, He has sent a messenger for us, His own blessed Son!). "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison." We are told, "The entrance of Thy Word giveth light." That is why we preach the gospel and proclaim the way of salvation to men who are sleeping in sin, so they may be brought to the Light and realize their

needy condition, and then go on to follow the gleam.

The angel "smote Peter on the side." I do not know whether Peter enjoyed that or not! He was sleeping soundly—comfortable even in his chains. And so it is, when we seek to bring people to see their lost condition, many of them say, as the sluggard in the book of Proverbs, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." Oh, unsaved man or woman, sleeping in your sins, hear me! A little more sleep, a little more slumber—and you will wake up in a lost eternity! "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Peter was awakened roughly by the angel, who said, "Arise up quickly." And Peter's chains fell off from his hands. As he acted in obedience to the Word, though he thought it a vision or a dream, his chains fell off. So it is today when men hear the Word and act upon it. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

One of our own dear brethren told me only this morning that 27 years ago, after having been bound by the chains of strong drink, and useless to himself and everyone else, he came under the

spell of the gospel, "I heard the Word, and in one moment my chains fell off. I have never again walked the drunkard's pathway." That is what the gospel can do for anyone who accepts the message.

"And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals." You are a free man—now act as a free man—"Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me." First then, the sinner must be awakened; then he is brought to see his true condition and, trusting in his Deliverer, he is to follow Him. In other words, we are to follow Christ because we are saved. We are saved through what He did on Calvary's cross. "And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord."

Now, mark this, if Peter had passed through that iron gate the following day in his chains, he would have gone out, under the Roman guard, to the place of execution—to die. That is what Herod intended. But Peter, obeying the word of God, having received the message of the angel, walked through the wards until he came to the iron gate. He might have said, "I have no power to open that portal." But in a moment it gave way

—it opened of its own accord—and Peter went through, not to die, but to live and to spend many years in service for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so it is today: If you and I had passed through the iron gate of death in our sins we would have gone out into everlasting judgment; but, thank God, Christ has died for us and therefore His death becomes our death, and the iron gate is open and we can say, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” And we pass through the gate in Him.

“And they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.” Now Peter is alone and for the first time he realizes what has taken place. Up to this moment he thought he was in a dream, but “when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.” So you have two pictures here: The picture of God dealing in grace with sinners sleeping in chains and, on the other hand, you see His marvelous power in delivering His servant in answer to prayer. For while the Church was praying, God was working. That is the way

it always is. Do you know why we do not see a greater demonstration of divine power right here in our city in connection with gospel testimony? Because there is so little prayer. The Church was praying and God sent His angel and delivered Peter.

When Peter had considered the situation, I think he reasoned something like this: "Let me see, where had I better go? I am a marked man, and if I stay in the streets I shall be caught again. I think I shall go to a prayer meeting!" That is a good place for a man to go! It is a great thing to find saved people wending their way to prayer meeting. Peter knew they were having a prayer meeting at the house of Mary (the mother of John Mark, who wrote the second Gospel). His mother was very wealthy, apparently, and had a large house in Jerusalem in which she set aside one room for prayer.

But now, we have a remarkable story of people praying—without really expecting an immediate answer. We are told that "As Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda" (that is, Rose); and so little Rose came to the gate (I think it was probably like one of these doors which you and I have seen in old-fashioned barns, where either the upper or lower half opens and the other half still remains locked), and she opened one half and looked out

and saw Peter. She became so excited she forgot to open the other half! They were praying, "Lord, deliver Peter," but when Rhoda ran in and told them that Peter stood before the gate, they said unto her, "Thou art mad." Nonsense! Don't tell us that—we know he is bound in prison. They argued the matter, declaring he could not be there. What an indictment against even praying Christians! Little Rhoda cried, "It is true." But they said, "It is his angel." (They used the word "angel" for "spirit.") "It is his spirit. He has already been executed. Poor Peter has been slain and you have seen his spirit!" And all the while Peter continued to knock. I have heard of spirits rapping, but I don't think any ever continued to knock like Peter. By and by someone decided they had better go and see what it meant, "and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished." They should have been expecting him; they should have said, "We were praying you might be freed and here you are! God has answered prayer."

Have you never had an experience something like that, where you prayed and prayed and asked God for something, and when He came in grace and answered, you could hardly believe it to be true? You thought there must have been a mistake somewhere. It shows how we dishonor God

with our lack of faith. "But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison." And knowing that Herod would be desirous of apprehending him again, if he could, Peter said, "Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed and went into another place"—just where, we are not told.

"Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter." When they came to change the guard, I suppose they said, "Whatever has happened to Peter? Last night he was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison, but now he has disappeared!" When word reached Herod, he was furious. He examined the keepers and, tyrant that he was, ordered their execution.

Then Herod went into Cæsarea—and here we have an incident of which Josephus speaks. He tells how the citizens of Cæsarea, at odds with Herod, sent for him. To them he made a great speech. They then made some kind of treaty and burst into round after round of applause and exclaimed, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." Instead of denying that and saying, "I am just a mortal man; I am not to be worshipped or adored," Herod complacently took it all to himself, and because he dared to receive the glory

that belonged to God, God smote him. Josephus tells how he was smitten with an incurable disease and died within a few days. Dr. Luke (for remember he was a physician who knew all the facts and understood the malady) told exactly what it was. "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." And so Herod, this bitter enemy of the Church of God, perished.

But now the special work God had given Peter to do in connection with Israel and the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles, has come to an end. From this time on we see the river of grace becoming wider and wider, deeper and deeper, reaching to the uttermost parts of the earth. "The Word of God grew and multiplied." Barnabas and Saul, who had gone up to Jerusalem, bringing alms to those who had been afflicted because of the famine, "returned from Jerusalem (that is, they went back to Antioch in Syria where that mighty work of God had already begun) and took with them John, whose surname was Mark." This young man was intimately related to Barnabas and so he went along with Barnabas and Saul to enter into the ministry. Thus our chapter reminds us of the words of the psalmist—"Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

## LECTURE TWENTY-TWO

### A MISSIONARY CHURCH

1 1 1

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the Word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul (who also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:1-13).

**W**E now come to the second division of the Acts which deals with the great work of world evangelization. Heretofore we have been largely occupied with the work in Judea, Samaria and in the rest of Palestine. Now we see the gospel reaching out to the ends of the earth.

This chapter brings before us an altogether new start in Christian missionary effort. It is, in fact, really the beginning of Christian missions, in the true sense. It was not at Jerusalem that the vision of world conquest was manifested, but in Antioch of Syria, a Gentile city north of Palestine, where, as we have already seen, certain traveling Jewish Christians ventured somewhat timidly at first, then with greater boldness, to preach the gospel to the Greek-speaking population of that idolatrous city. As a result, many of these heathen Gentiles were brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the first Gentile church was established.

When the brethren at Jerusalem heard of this, you will recall they sent Barnabas to find out more about it. When Barnabas arrived and found the grace of God so marvelously evidenced, he remained for a long time, teaching and preaching among these Gentiles. Then feeling that his friend Saul of Tarsus could do more for them, he went to Tarsus to seek him and persuaded him

to return to Antioch, where they abode some time preaching and teaching the people. Later, when a famine broke out in Judea, Saul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem, to bring alms to these Christians, showing the bond that now had been forged between the believing Jews and the believing Antiochians. Finally the crisis came in regard to world missions, and we read in the earlier verses of this thirteenth chapter how God placed upon His servants' hearts the responsibility of sending out the gospel to the whole world.

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers." An excellently cared-for church! We do not see anything in the New Testament of that which is so common today: one lone minister set over a congregation; but we find the Spirit of God giving gifts as it pleased Him. In one congregation there might be a number of men ministering the Word, and that without jealousy one of another, each seeking to minister the gift God had given him. In this church we find five ministering the Word.

First of all, there is Barnabas, the Levite, who had sold all his patrimony and put everything he had into the work of the Lord. He was seeking now to minister to the people at Antioch.

Then "Simeon that was called Niger." We wish we knew more about him. He is the one

outstanding man in the New Testament who comes before us as a servant of God from the negro race. That is involved in the meaning of his name: Simeon that was called Niger—that is, Simeon the black man. This is interesting. The grace of God was manifested richly in this church. There was no race prejudice. People of different color of skin and of different religious background were found happily worshipping together; Jews, Gentiles, people of various races. This is all we read of Simeon, yet it is enough to tell us that the grace of God was working in a mighty way, breaking down carnal prejudice.

Then we read of Lucius of Cyrene. The name is probably Gentile, evidence already that God had begun to gift these Gentile believers in a special way.

And then Manaen. We have no way of ascertaining his background, but we know that he was brought up with Herod the tetrarch, who was part Samaritan and part Idumean. Though nurtured in the royal court, in all the corruption of those days, he is seen occupying much higher honor than Herod ever obtained—a minister of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Last of all we have Saul, the former persecutor, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, who tried to root Christianity out of the earth, but had been so marvelously converted

that now he sought to minister to the Lord, as he preached the faith he had once endeavored to destroy.

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." We do not know just how the Holy Spirit revealed His will: whether it was a deep impression made on the hearts of Saul and Barnabas, or whether, on the other hand, it was a deep impression on the members of the church. But certainly they began to talk about it and said, "These men ought to reach out and go to the regions beyond. God has given us abundant witness here, and now we should think of those who have never heard the gospel story." In either event, the Spirit of God revealed His mind.

He still speaks to men, impressing them with the deep need of a lost world. The history of missions is a story of the miraculous working of the Spirit of God down through the centuries. One can think of many whose names will shine brightly before the judgment-seat of Christ—men who were used in a large way at home; others who were successful business men, until the Spirit of God put upon their hearts a great sense of the need of a lost world and their responsibility to carry the message of Christ to those still in idolatry and pagan darkness. These

spiritually impressed men and women felt they could not go on in the ordinary walk of life but must give their talents to reach those who had never heard the name of Christ. So they went out to the ends of the earth carrying the gospel message of the grace of God. It was so here in the beginning, as the Holy Spirit said, "I want Barnabas and Saul for a special ministry. I want them to go out into the world with the message of salvation." The church came together about it. There was nothing unusual. They fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, and sent them away.

Some have thought of this as the ordination of Barnabas and Saul as gospel ministers. That is absurd on the face of it. Both had been preaching the gospel many years. This laying on of hands was an expression of the fellowship of the Antiochian church with these men as they started the work of world evangelization. As of old, with the sacrifices, the offerer, we are told, recognizing his need of atonement, and feeling oppressed by his sinfulness, was to place his hand on the head of the offering. Isaac Watts expressed the meaning of that when he wrote in one of his hymns:

"My faith would lay her hand  
On that blest head of Thine,  
While, as a penitent, I stand  
And there confess my sin."

It was the offerer identifying himself with the offering. So today when a poor sinner reaches out the hand of faith and places it, as it were, on the head of the Lord Jesus Christ and says, "I recognize that the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me; I am identified with Him in His sacrifice"—then the soul is saved. As these brethren laid hands on Saul and Barnabas, they said in effect: "Brethren, we are one with you in this missionary enterprise. You go out into the regions beyond, and we shall stay by you here at home. You go down into the dark caverns of earth, and seek to find the gold and precious things that shall adorn the crown of the Lord Jesus Christ in the ages to come, and we will hold the ropes and look after your temporal needs and pray." This ought always to be the attitude of those at home toward those who carry the message to the uttermost parts.

"So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus." Notice that while the church had full fellowship with them in their going out, we are not told they were sent by the church. They did not get their commission from the church, but from the risen Lord who had told them to go into all the world.

You know, some people talk as though this question of missions is a mere matter in which

the Church may decide whether it is wise or not, but we have nothing to say about that. It is perfectly plain and clear; it was the Lord who said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the consummation of the age."

Some years ago there was a great missionary rally in the Royal Albert Hall in London, England, and a clergyman turned to the Duke of Wellington (the "Iron Duke," whose armies had defeated Napoleon) and asked, "My lord Duke, do you believe in missions?" "What are your marching orders?" asked the Duke. "Of course, the Bible says to go into all the world," answered the clergyman. "Then you have nothing to say about it. As a soldier you are to obey orders." And that is true of the Church down through the centuries, down to the end of the dispensation. It is the Lord who commands us to go; it is the Lord who sends His workers out, and the Church is to have fellowship with them to the utmost of its ability.

Seleucia was a city on the sea coast. From there they sailed for Cyprus. Doubtless the heart of Barnabas was exercised about Cyprus. Born there, it was his former home. We can under-

stand him saying, "I should like to go first to my island home and tell the people there about the matchless grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ." "And when they were at Salamis, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews," but at first did not find an opening to go to the Gentiles.

The John referred to in verse five is John Mark, cousin of Barnabas, and son of Mary, of Jerusalem, a rich woman with a large house where many of the early services were held. John Mark was the author of the second Gospel.

"And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus"—a renegade Jew who had gone out among the Gentiles pretending to be a marvelous wonder-worker, and thereby trying to profit. He took the name Bar-jesus. (As "bar" means "son," his name really meant "Son of Jesus.") He undoubtedly had heard of the Lord Jesus Christ and His miracles; how He had healed the blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf. Mention of that name had been heard here and there throughout the world. He said, "I am the son of Jesus and I am able to work wonders, even as He did." He was there with the counselor of the country, Sergius Paulus. Paulus is exactly the same name as Paul, and it is interesting to note that from

this time on we never read again of Saul; it is as though Paul took the name of his first illustrious convert: "Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the Word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (this wicked renegade) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul (here is the change) *who also is called Paul*, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil." It is a slightly different word than that generally translated "child." In the original it is "son." "Thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" In withstanding Elymas, the sorcerer, Paul was acting for God because this man was seeking to hinder the salvation of the soul of Sergius Paulus.

It is a serious thing to trifle with the souls of men. How serious it would be if one professed to be a physician and tried recklessly to minister to sick people, using medicines which he did not understand, some of which were deadly poisons! A man like that would be subjected immediately to the law and there would be serious consequences. There have been such men in days gone by; but if it is a serious thing to tamper with the human body, it is far more serious to tamper with the souls of men; and because this man was

trying to do just that, Paul spoke to him as he did: "Son of the devil."

The Spirit of God never used a term like that of ordinary unsaved men. The Lord Jesus said of certain ones of His day, "Ye are of your father, the devil." He did not address everybody like that, but only those men who deliberately and definitely set themselves to oppose the divine program. In the first epistle of John, the apostle speaks of Cain and Abel, and says, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

All men by nature are children of wrath, but no man is called a "child of the devil" unless he deliberately gives himself to Satanic propaganda and takes a stand as a positive enemy of God. That is the place Elymas the sorcerer took and Paul invoked a judgment on him for that. "Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." The physical judgment which had fallen on him was the expression of the darkness of this man's soul.

When Sergius Paulus saw this and saw how Elymas was confounded before the messenger of the true gospel, we are told he "believed, being

astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." And so this was their first Gentile convert on their first missionary journey. He was a man of position and authority and his conversion doubtless meant a great deal in the island of Cyprus. The people generally would say, "The proconsul has accepted the new message. He has received the gospel and now believes in this Jesus whom Paul and Barnabas preach." Many were no doubt impressed.

We are told, in verse thirteen, they came back to the mainland. They had finished their work in Cyprus for the time being. Cyprus, however, was visited later by Barnabas, who spent some time there.

"Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia." This was a mountainous country, difficult to reach. And now we are told that "John departing from them returned to Jerusalem." The Spirit of God does not tell us why, yet it does not seem hard to read between the lines. We shall see as we go on, the Apostle Paul felt there was no legitimate reason for this young man to leave them and therefore he was blameworthy. John Mark, you know, was the son of a rich woman. That isn't always the best start in life—to be born with a silver spoon in your mouth! He had been sheltered and perhaps coddled all his days, and

when his cousin Barnabas went into missionary work he was impressed and desired to go along, too. But when he found himself in difficult circumstances, perhaps he contrasted his discomforts with the calm and agreeable atmosphere he had left in Jerusalem. He would think, "Mother would never let me suffer like this." So, when at Perga as he looked at that high mountain range, and thought of the stress and strain of what lay ahead, a great spasm of homesickness came over him and he determined to give up the work.

Paul did not approve of that. He felt this business of missions was not merely a junketing trip; it was not a matter of going to foreign lands just to see strange people and places. It was a tremendously serious matter, calling for true soldierly bearing, and he felt John Mark had failed in this and was unworthy of confidence. Barnabas did not quite share this view. As you know, he was closely related to John Mark. Well, we leave him now. He doubtless made a mistake. Later God allowed him to rectify his action, and he became a devoted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we have here the beginning of Christian missions; and we can thank God that, through the centuries since, this work has continued. For a period the Church seemed to forget its responsi-

bility, but during the last 150 years there has been a greater awakening in the Church of God toward missionary effort, and again we can thank God for having put upon the hearts of so many a burden for the lost world.

## LECTURE TWENTY-THREE

# PAUL'S SERMON AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

1 1 1

I SHALL not present the entire portion at the beginning, but only the opening verses of the section we are to consider. We shall then read the other verses as we go on with the address.

"But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on" (Acts 13: 14, 15).

After Paul and Barnabas departed from Perga they made their way over the mountains, and at last reached the principal city of that district, another Antioch. Do not confuse Antioch in Pisidia with Antioch in Syria. The Syrian Antioch, directly north of Palestine, was where the first great Gentile church was formed; the Pisidia Antioch was considerably farther north,

and there another mighty work of God began.

When Paul and Barnabas reached Antioch in Pisidia, they went into the synagogue and sat down. Paul always put the Jew first. Everywhere he went there were generally to be found little congregations of Hebrews. He knew they had the Scriptures, and he felt his first responsibility was to go to them and present the One for whom they had long waited. And so the two went in and took their places. After the law and the prophets had been read, the rulers of the synagogue, evidently discerning these strangers and recognizing them probably by their very dress as teachers (it was customary for rabbis, or teachers, to dress somewhat differently from other men), said, "If ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." There was a great deal more liberty in the synagogues than you will find in some Christian churches today, which never allow a stranger such opportunity; but here the rulers said, "If you have anything to say to the people, say on"; and so we read in verse 16—

"Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience."

There were two classes of people in the synagogue—men of Israel and those that feared God. Expressed in the latter were proselyte Gentiles who had accepted the God of Israel as their God

as given in the books of the Old Testament and had aligned themselves with the synagogue, and so sought to order their lives in accordance with the law of Moses. Paul now addresses both. In this marvelous sermon of his, which we have with a great deal of fulness, he traces out something of Israel's history and God's promise, and then shows how in a marvelous way that promise was fulfilled; and then he stressed the responsibility of all the people to accept the Saviour which God had provided.

"Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought He them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness" (16-18).

That is a striking expression—"Suffered He their manners in the wilderness." How graciously God bore with His people Israel! In spite of all their failures and murmurings against Him, He provided bread from heaven and water out of the smitten rock, and at last brought them into the land of promise and consented to dwell in the sanctuary they had prepared for Him.

How He has borne with our manners throughout the years! As we look back over the history of the Church, we have nothing to boast of. You say, Israel failed very grievously. They did—but we, the Church in this dispensation, have

failed even more inasmuch as our privileges are greater than theirs. How sad much of the history of the Church is, but God has borne with our manners in the wilderness when we have acted like fretful, irritable children. He has dealt with us in such loving kindness not only collectively but individually. Too many of us can look back over years and see how we failed the Lord, but He has never failed us. He has undertaken for us so graciously. How our hearts ought to thank Him for His loving kindness—and we shall, some day, when we get home. How He has sustained us! What a gracious God we have!

“And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, He divided their land to them by lot. And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years” (19-21).

All this was history with which these Jews at Antioch would be thoroughly familiar from their study of the Old Testament Scriptures. And then Paul went on to speak of David, their great poet and shepherd king, who was a prototype of his greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfil all My will” (22).

Skeptics have raised a question here. They

have said, "David a man after God's heart! Have you forgotten the sins David committed?" No, but David faced those sins and repented and God forgave him. That is a great deal more than some of David's critics can say. But it was when He found David as a shepherd lad He said, "I have found a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfill all My will," that is, in regard to the kingdom and ruling the people of Israel.

"Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (23).

God promised to do this. He said to David that He was going to give him a Son who would sit on His throne and that it would be established forever. Those words could not refer to King Solomon nor to any other of David's line, until at last Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem of Judea. In His veins flowed the blood of David—for Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a direct lineal descendant of King David through Nathan. Mary's husband Joseph, who was not actually the father of Jesus, was also of David's line. The title to the throne really belonged to him, and through his marriage to the virgin Mary and recognition as his wife before her Son was born into this world, that Son came not only of the blood line of David but also was in the royal line because by virtue of Joseph's place Jesus had title to the throne of David.

"Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus: when John had first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel" (23, 24).

And may I say this, always before the glad, glorious message of the Saviour Jesus comes the message of John of the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. In other words, men will never really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and receive Him in their hearts as Saviour until they turn to God first of all as repentant sinners.

One reason we have so many shallow conversions today, so many church-members who have never really known the grace of God, is because there is so little preaching which drives home to men the need of repentance, of facing their lost condition before God. Jesus Himself said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." If men do not realize their sinfulness they will never appreciate the saving grace of God as revealed in Christ; and so the call to repentance should never be divorced from the message of faith—repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not He. But, behold, there cometh One after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loose" (25).

John's ministry was utterly self-effacing. He said, that is, I am not He, the Son of David, the

Messiah. I am not the One through whom all nations of the earth will be blessed. He came not preaching himself, nor attempting to attract men's attention to himself; but he proclaimed the coming One, the One of whom he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This should be the attitude of every true messenger of God—preaching not ourselves, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Now Paul turned to these men and cried,

"Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent" (26).

This is the message we can bring to all men everywhere today. Whether you belong to the house of Israel, whether you are a Jew after the flesh or a Gentile, if in your heart you have any fear of God and you desire to know His way and be obedient to His will, we come to you to say: "To you is the Word of this salvation sent."

There is no man so ignorant, so degraded, but God has provided salvation through the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ; but not until men confess their sin and bow at the Saviour's feet in repentance will this salvation actually become theirs, "even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"

(Rom. 3: 22, 23). There is not one gospel for the Jews and another gospel for the Gentiles. "There is no difference, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." Therefore, whether Jew or Gentile, if men bow before God as sinners and look up to Him in faith and receive the Saviour He has provided, they will know His delivering power.

Paul next takes up the story of Jesus and tells these Antiochians, Jews and Gentiles, what has taken place in Palestine:

"For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him" (27).

That was a solemn thing. The very people who had the Old Testament Scriptures in which the coming of God's Messiah was so plainly foretold, fulfilled those Scriptures in condemning the Lord of Glory! You will remember how when the wise men came from the East to Jerusalem inquiring, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him," King Herod called the leaders of Israel and asked them where the Saviour was to be born and they turned immediately to the book of the prophet Micah and said, "In Bethlehem, in the land of Juda: for thus it is written, 'Out of thee shall He come forth unto

Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting' " (Micah 5:2). They knew exactly where to locate His place of birth, and yet they spurned Him. Why? Because they loved their sins more than Christ, and that is why men refuse Him today and spurn the Word of God.

Some say, I cannot believe the Bible; I cannot believe it is the Word of God. As a rule these are not the people who know the Bible, who read it thoughtfully and carefully. But if you do read it and you cannot believe it, it is because you are living in some sin the Bible condemns and you do not want to repent of it! Sin blinds men's eyes to the truth. Sin blinded the eyes of the people of Israel to the fact that God was manifest in Christ when Jesus was here on earth, and it is sin that keeps people from receiving Him today. Jesus Himself said, If any man will to do His will (that is, if any man desires to do the will of God), he shall know of the doctrine. If you want to know the truth, you may. If you are willing to obey God, willing to judge your sin, willing to repent of it and ask Him to make the truth known, He has pledged Himself to do it; but it is a very solemn fact that it may never grip the consciences of some people, for they are determined to go on in some sin the Word of God condemns.

"And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. But God raised Him from the dead" (28-30).

Have you ever noticed how frequently in Scripture you get those two words in juxtaposition, "But God"? You will remember in the Epistle to the Romans, after Paul wrote of man's lost and sinful condition, he said, "But God"—and then you go on to read what God has done. Men nailed Him to a tree, friends laid Him in Joseph's new tomb; "but God," by His omnipotent power, raised Him from the dead!

"And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people" (31).

Remember, when Paul uttered these words there were scores of those living who had actually seen the Lord Jesus Christ in resurrection glory and could give testimony concerning this thing. It was not done in a corner, but it was something borne witness to by a vast number of people.

"And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee" (32, 33).

"Raised up Jesus"—you might omit the word "again." The translators have put it in, but it

is not found in the best Greek text, and it is not needed here. It actually makes confusion.

"And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption. He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David" (34).

He had predicted this very thing, that the Saviour was to die and then be raised from the dead; for in the 16th Psalm we read, "For Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." So the body of the Lord Jesus lay in the grave three days but it did not see corruption. It came forth in resurrection life, a testimony to the victorious power of God over death and hell and all foes.

"Wherefore He saith also in another Psalm, Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption; but He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption" (35-37).

And now, based on this declaration of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul gives us one of the grandest gospel statements that we have in all the Bible:

"Be it known unto you therefore that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (38, 39).

What a wonderful declaration! Forgiveness of sins! justification from all things—offered to all

who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! Here are two things absolutely in contrast one to the other. Man could not do what Paul here declares God will do through Christ Jesus. You could not forgive a man and justify him at the same time. If you forgive him he is guilty, and you cannot justify him. If a man is justified he does not need forgiveness.

You can imagine a court scene—you are on trial and the jury decides you are innocent of the charge against you and they bring in the verdict, "Not guilty!" It means you are justified. As you walk out of the courtroom, suppose someone comes up and says, "That was an interesting session this morning. I think it was very gracious of the judge to forgive you." You look at him with indignation. "Forgive me! The jury cleared me. I am justified, I am not forgiven, for I did not need pardon for a crime I had not committed."

But it is otherwise with God in His dealing with sinners. We are all guilty and have come short of the glory of God; we have all failed again and again, and there is no hope until we come into His presence and acknowledge our sins. Then, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But is that all? No, we are now linked up with divine life by the Christ who

died and rose again, and we now stand before God on altogether different and new ground, and God can say, I justified that man; from henceforth I look on him as though he had never committed any sin at all. I hold him clear of every charge. Christ has settled for everything.

So that is the gospel message. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," and, "by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses." The law of Moses said, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." The law of Moses can only condemn. We cannot be justified by the deeds of the law. But the gospel of the grace of God tells us that He who never violated that law, God's own blessed Son, went to Calvary's cross and bore the judgment of the law and was made a curse for us that we might be the righteousness of God in Him; and when we trust Him, we stand before God cleared of every charge, in Him. This is justification. Oh, how full it is!

But now Paul had a solemn word of warning for these people in Antioch in Pisidia:

"Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" (40, 41).

In other words, Paul says: "When this message of the gospel comes to you, it brings with it added responsibility. You will never be the same again after you have heard the message. If you accept it, you are justified from all things; if you reject it, your condemnation becomes greater than it ever was before because you are in possession of light and knowledge you did not previously have." And so I say today to everyone to whom the gospel message has ever come, you may take these words to heart and receive Christ, and so be justified, or reject these words and spurn the Saviour and endure instead the unspeakable judgment that will fall on all who have heard the message of grace only to refuse it. He who hears the gospel for the first time becomes more responsible than he has ever been before.

Well, what were the results of this great sermon in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia? We read:

"And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God" (42, 43).

There was a real awakening. Most of the Jews were earnest, honest seekers after the truth and, as they realized their condition, desired to know more about the gospel. Many of the proselytes

questioned Paul and Barnabas who thus had opportunity to open up the Word of God to them, and lead them to acceptance of Christ as their Saviour, and then to persuade them to go on in the grace of God, learning more and more of God's sovereign goodness.

## LECTURE TWENTY-FOUR

### PAUL AT ICONIUM AND LYSTRA

1 1 1

THE portion of the book of Acts which we shall now consider consists of three sections, and in each of these we find the Apostles Paul and Barnabas in different cities. We have seen them at Antioch in Pisidia, and in verses 44 to 52 in chapter 13 we have the close of their testimony there. Then in chapter 14, verses 1 to 7, we find the apostles at Iconium, and in verses 8 to 28 at Lystra. I want briefly to consider what is said in regard to each of these ministries.

“And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, 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 so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to (or determined for) eternal life believed. And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the

devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13: 44-52).

It is always of interest to notice the various ways in which the gospel message affects different people. When Paul preached that great sermon on which we have already commented in the Jewish synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, we are told that, as one result of it, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas. We are given to understand that they opened their hearts to the truth and received the Lord Jesus Christ and took their stand definitely on His side. Paul and Barnabas persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. But there was another group which did not receive the truth. These became violently antagonistic.

"The next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God." The people's interest was so great and they thronged the synagogue in such numbers it aroused the envy and enmity of the unbelieving Jews. It grieved them that so many were anxious to listen to these strange teachers who had come to their city. They could not accept peaceably the interest shown, so began to contradict the things spoken by Paul, and even to blaspheme. So intense was their opposition the apostles saw that they must go

elsewhere. It was useless to continue ministering to the Jewish population of that city—they would go to the Gentiles. So we read, "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you."

It was God's way first to give the message to His earthly people, Israel: those who had the Old Testament and the promise of the Messiah. It was incumbent upon the apostles to seek to show them that the Word had been fulfilled, that Messiah had come and had laid down His life and risen from the dead, and that through Him God now granted remission of sins to all who trusted Him. But now Paul says, "But seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." What a solemn thing this is! Here were the chosen people—people who had been waiting hundreds of years for the coming of Messiah—and at last when He had come, they deliberately shut their eyes to the truth. Paul says, "You show yourselves unworthy of everlasting life."

Let us not think only of unsaved Israel doing that. Myriads of Gentiles are doing the same thing! Perhaps among you, my readers, are some who have heard the message of grace over and over, who know something of the corruption of your own hearts and your inability to save yourselves; you know God sent the Lord Jesus

Christ into the world to redeem you, and you know that if you would turn to God and trust Him you would be saved. What are you doing about it? Is it not true many of you deliberately turn away from the true God, and thus show that you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life?

Strictly speaking, no man is worthy of eternal life, but God in His grace is offering it to all men everywhere; and when men turn to Him in repentance and receive the Saviour He has provided, they are accounted worthy of this great gift. When they turn away from Him, trample the love of Christ underfoot and spurn the message of grace, they judge themselves to be utterly unworthy of the good things God is offering them. In other words, the man or woman who rejects the Lord Jesus Christ sins against his or her own soul. It is not merely sinning against God (there is not any greater sin you can commit than to reject the Lord Jesus Christ), but you are sinning against your own soul in that you are shutting the door of heaven in your own face and therefore you are responsible for your own judgment.

It was this that Paul stressed in dealing with these unbelieving Jews in Antioch in Pisidia. While a great many of them did believe and accept the Lord Jesus Christ, the unbelievers rejected Him and therefore counted themselves

unworthy of everlasting life. So the apostle says, in paraphrase, "You have made up your minds; you are responsible for the message you have already heard. Now we will turn to the Gentiles, to this great throng crowding the synagogue, anxious to hear. If you do not want to hear, we will go to them, 'for so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set Thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that Thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.'" These words were spoken through the prophet Isaiah, but they were spoken directly by the Spirit to Messiah Himself. Isaiah was looking down through the centuries and pictured God the Father addressing His Son, saying, "I have set Thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that Thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth." I suppose the greater number of the people I am addressing have been poor lost sinners of the Gentiles. What mercy God has shown to us! Think of the darkness of idolatry and paganism into which our forefathers had sunk! But when the gospel of grace came to them even as now, how these Gentiles, strangers to the covenant of promise, received it and were saved.

A dear Jewish friend said to me: "If Jesus is the Messiah, He came for the Jewish people. Then what are you Gentiles doing with Him?" I replied, "You see, you did not want Him; you

spurned Him and then God said, I have set Him to be a light of the Gentiles; and so He sends Him to those who are strangers to the covenant of promise, to those afar off. There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him."

"And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." I do not think we need attempt to look back into the counsels of God and see whether we have been *ordained* to life or not. Another clear rendering for the word here used would make it read, "as many as were *determined* for eternal life believed." Wherever you get a man determined to have eternal life, he can have it through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not have to stop and ask if he is elect or not. If he is willing to repent of his sin and come to Christ, he may have eternal life.

"The Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region," but hostilities continued. "The Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women." These were probably Gentile proselytes. It is a fact that in our own country (as elsewhere), the most intense religious zealots are women; and so when the Jews got hold of these women and stirred them up, they of course stirred up their husbands, "and raised persecution

against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts."

Then the apostles acted in accordance with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "Into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you" (Luke 10: 10, 11). And so we read, "They shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium." But we learn that those who were left behind "were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost."

Now we come to the second section. Iconium was the chief city of the district of Lycaonia, sometimes called southern Galatia, and is one of the cities to which Paul addressed the Epistle to the Galatians later on. "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews (again they go first to God's earthly people), and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed." I like that. "They so spake, that a great multitude . . . believed."

If it is possible to so speak that a multitude will believe, it is possible to so speak that nobody will believe! It is possible to preach so as to convert nobody—and I think a lot of preachers have learned how to do that. Year after year

nobody is converted through their ministry. Why? In the first place they do not preach the gospel, and it is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation; and secondly, they do not preach in the power of the Holy Spirit, and it is only the Holy Spirit who uses the gospel to save sinners. Paul says, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake" (1 Thess. 1:5). Mark this. The man himself has to be right if he is to preach the gospel in the power of the Holy Ghost, and only then will poor sinners be won for Christ. So we read here, "a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed."

However, they had the same trouble to face in Iconium as in the other city. "The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren." They did not immediately leave—the persecution was not so bitter that they could not go on, so, "Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the Word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (14:3). But they found the name of Jesus was divisive. It always will be. Those who accept Him are separated from those who reject Him; those who love and honor Him

are separated from those who spurn and dishonor His name. "But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles" (so do not blame the Jews only—the Gentiles were just as bad). "And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: and there they preached the gospel" (4-7).

Then we come to a most interesting experience which they had in the city of Lystra. First the people were ready to worship them as gods; and then they tried to stone them to death. So fickle is the mind of man!

"And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: the same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed . . ." (8). What an interesting picture! Here stood Paul preaching the Word. There was that poor cripple. As Paul was preaching—preaching Christ—suddenly he looked down and saw the man looking up expectantly, earnestly. He knew in a moment that the man believed the message and believed that Christ had omnipotent power.

So Paul stopped in the midst of his preaching, and "said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet." The man might have said, "I cannot rise; I have never stood erect." But there is energy in the gospel preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. In a moment the man leaped and walked. I think I can see him springing to his feet, actually dancing in front of the people, crying, "Is it really true? I never walked in my life before!"

Oh, the wonders of the name of Jesus! What was done for that man physically was just a picture of what down through the centuries the Lord has been doing for people spiritually. Millions of people have been unable to take one step toward God, one step toward heaven, until the gospel came and they believed it. When they did so they found they were able to rise out of their sinfulness and helplessness and walk in the way of the Lord, glorifying Him. This is one of the evidences that Christianity is really a revelation from heaven. It proves itself by what it does for the people who believe it.

People say, We do not see miracles today. Oh, yes, you do. God is working miracles, making sober men out of drunkards, making honest men out of thieves and liars, making upright men out of scoundrels, making good Christian women out of those who have been characterless and without

reputation; and then taking those who have prided themselves on their goodness and morality and leading them into a place of submission where they will own themselves sinners and find new life in Christ.

Yes, it is a miracle-working gospel. This man leaped and walked; and when people saw it, they were amazed, "saying in the speech of Lycaonia, 'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.'" They were worshippers of the Greek gods and they thought two of these had appeared on earth, and they called Barnabas Jupiter (Jupiter was, you know, the guardian god of the Romans, always pictured as tall and dignified); and Paul, a little energetic man, they called Mercurius. (Mercury was always represented as quick and active; the wings on his shoes denoted haste in carrying messages.) And so the people were going to worship them.

"Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city (Jupiter had a temple in that city), brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people" (13). What an experience for these two men who had just been driven out of Iconium, barely escaping death by stoning! One might say, Isn't this a wonderful triumph? Not at all! Satan was simply changing his tactics. First he tried to kill them. Now he would have them worshipped

as gods. One evil was as bad as the other. Paul and Barnabas, when they heard of it, "rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (14-17).

When Paul was addressing a Jewish congregation, or an assembly of Jews and proselytes in a synagogue, he based everything on the written Word of God in the Old Testament; but on various occasions where we find him seeking to compel the attention of pagan Gentiles, who did not know the Scripture, he does not do that, but he makes an appeal to the omnipotent power of God as manifested in creation. He points to the heaven above and the earth below, the shining sun, the starry heaven, and says in effect: "All these bear witness to the omniscience and omnipotence of the Creator of all things. Gods such as you have imagined have not created all this. The idols you worship have not done it—but the true God who

made you and the world and the universe and all that is in it. And so he challenges them as to the folly of their idolatry and he would have gone on, as he did later on Mars Hill in Athens, proclaiming the story of the Lord Jesus Christ, but they would not listen further. "Scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them."

But now see how quickly they change! "And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people" (19). In one moment this fickle people would worship them as gods. A little later they are ready, as those at Iconium, to stone them to death. "And, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." And so this apparently is the end of Paul's ministry. They dragged that seemingly lifeless body out of the city and threw it on the refuse heap. Let the jackals devour it. They were done with Paul. But God was not done with him.

I like to think this is the very time Paul had the experience of which he speaks in the second Epistle to the Corinthians (12: 2-4): "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven . . . caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it

is not lawful for a man to utter." I believe that at the very moment they thrust Paul's body away, the real Paul—the man who lived inside of that body—was in the third heaven. God said, as it were, "I want to show you what I have in store for you." Up there Paul did not know whether he was in the body or not. If in his body, he did not know it; if out of his body, he did not miss it. He was in paradise and heard unspeakable things which it is not lawful for a man to utter. How long he was there we do not know. We do read that as the body lay there the disciples stood round about, evidently making plans for the funeral, probably with tears streaming down, saying, "What shall we do? We shall have to lay his poor broken body away." But he suddenly rose up! I should like to have seen that.

It is such a graphic picture. Here gathered about the body of Paul were Barnabas and the other believers, saying, doubtless, "Is it not a pity that he had to die right in the midst of his wonderful ministry? If only he could have lived longer!" Then suddenly, I think, Paul opened his eyes, rose to his feet, brushed off his clothes and said, "It is all right. You dear brothers will have to put off the funeral a little longer!" He was ready to start again. Persecution thwarted him none. He must continue preaching the gospel of the grace of God. "He rose up, and came into

the city, and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe."

The next verse (21) tells us that when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch. It was at this time that Timothy went with Paul to serve in the gospel. They visited each assembly, "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (22).

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia (retracing their steps down to the coast). And when they had preached the Word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: and thence sailed to Antioch (in Syria, the city they left to go on their missionary tour), from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples" (23-28).

And so the first journey of the earliest mission-

aries of the Church had come to a wonderful end. What a journey it was! How many are going to thank God through all eternity that Paul and Barnabas ever went out with the gospel to the Gentiles!

## LECTURE TWENTY-FIVE

### THE FIRST CHURCH COUNCIL

1 1 1

LET us read the first five verses of chapter 15. Though I want to consider with you verses 1 to 35, we shall not read it all at one time.

"And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (1-5).

One of the hardest things for these poor minds of ours to grasp is the freeness of God's salvation. In other words, it is so difficult for us to abide in a sense of grace, to realize that the believer in

the Lord Jesus Christ is justified by faith, justified on the ground of the finished work of Christ, plus nothing else! Absolutely nothing is to be added to the propitiatory work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the ground of our salvation. This is the gospel as preached in the beginning and as preached by God's faithful servants down through the centuries: but always there have been found those who because of their legalistic minds thought it too good to be true that men could be saved by grace alone and attempted to add something else to the gospel.

① One comes along and says, "Yes, you are saved by faith—*but* you must be baptized to get to heaven." We practise baptism, but not as a means of salvation. Another says, "Grace saves us, but it is mediated through the sacraments, and you must partake of the Lord's Supper to have divine life." We observe the Lord's Supper, but not as a means of salvation. Others will say, "Yes, we are saved by grace—*but* God saves men through the Church, and you must join the Church if you are to be saved at last." We believe in the Church, but the Church does not save and does not have anything to do with the putting away of sin.

③ In the beginning, as the apostles labored among the Gentiles, they were preaching salvation by grace plus nothing, and it troubled certain men

which came down from Judea to Antioch where Paul and Barnabas were laboring at that time, having returned from their first missionary journey. These men said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." It was an attempt to add something to the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it made so much division that a show-down was necessary and "they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." They would go to the city where the first church had been established and find out if the gospel they were preaching was in accordance with the gospel that was being preached in Jerusalem.

"And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders." They did not launch immediately into a discussion of the subject of law and grace. The church had a welcome meeting for Paul and his companions and they took the opportunity to give—what we call today—missionary addresses. "They declared all things that God had done with them."

It must have been most interesting to sit in that group and listen to those veteran missionaries as they went over the years they had served the Lord and told about some of the marvelous miracles of grace wrought among the Gentiles. One might have supposed that this would have answered the question whether people need anything else than grace in order to be saved. But seated there were brethren who before their conversion had been Pharisees and had brought their Phariseeism into the Church. These were, after all, honest men. It is hard for us to realize, when religious conflicts come up, that a man may see something altogether contrary to what we believe and yet, if we are honest before God, we need to recognize that he is honest too, and is seeking according to the light God has given him to stand for what he believes to be the truth.

These men had the Old Testament—remember they did not have the New Testament—and in the prophecies of the Old Testament Israel was recognized as God's chosen people separated from the rest of the nations, and there it was made clear that as others came to a knowledge of the true and living God they came to Israel and through circumcision were admitted into the congregation of the Lord. The prophets declared men would be saved, but it was always in subjection to Israel. "The Gentiles shall come to thy

light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa. 60: 3), and "It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities . . . saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8). These are but samples of many Old Testament passages.

As the legal-minded brethren read these Scriptures they said, "We can thank God for the conversion of the Gentiles, but they must come to God through Israel; they must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses." So we read in verse 5, "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed (do not forget that they were sincere believers and yet they differed with others as to salvation by grace alone), saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." After a good deal of disputation it was decided the apostles and elders should come together and consider this matter, instead of the whole church going into session about it, and so we read:

"And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the

neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (6-11).

It seemed eminently fitting that Peter should be the chief spokesman on this occasion. He was recognized as the one to whom the Lord Jesus Christ had given a very special commission, "Feed My lambs . . . feed My sheep." He was the one chosen of God to go down to Cornelius and preach the gospel to him and his household. So after the brethren had been gathered together to consider this matter and talked back and forth and had a great deal of discussion for some time, Peter rose up. He said, as it were, "Now, brethren, let me speak." (And they were willing to listen to him.) "You know how by my mouth the Gentiles heard the gospel and believed"—and then he related again, as he had told them before, what had occurred when he went to the household of Cornelius.

He went down and preached the gospel; he did not add works, he did not say anything about clean or unclean foods or Jewish practices such as circumcision; but he told about the Lord Jesus Christ who lived and died and was raised again, and as he preached the gospel, "God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us."

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost upon

that great multitude of converted Israelites, He came in power and there were outward signs of His presence; and so when these heard the Word and believed, immediately the same blessed Holy Spirit fell on them and baptized them into the Body of Christ and gave them the same outward signs He had given the Israelites in Jerusalem—thus demonstrating to a certainty that God accepted Gentiles on the ground of pure grace, altogether apart from the works of the law. There was no difference!

How we need to stress that *no difference* doctrine today. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans, "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." It does not make any difference what religious standing you may have—no difference as to what part of the world you were born (whether among Christians or among the heathen)—or maybe you are a Jew—there is no difference! for all have sinned. The word for sin literally means "to miss the mark," and all men have missed the mark. Not one man has ever lived in this world without failure and sin—except of course the Lord Jesus Christ. Another Scripture says, "There is no difference . . . for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." There is no difference—all are sinners; no difference—the same Saviour is for everybody; and through putting

their trust in Him, all men may be justified. So Peter says God "put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."

That is what happens when people believe the gospel; it is not merely that they are justified before God—but there is new life, their hearts are purified by faith. Whereas they once loved sin, they now love holiness: whereas they once loved impurity, they now love purity. There is a complete change and reversal of attitude when people are born of God. This had taken place in these Gentiles. Who could doubt that God did the work?

Perhaps some of you have heard Evangelist A. H. Stewart tell how, when greatly concerned about his soul, he was told to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and trust Him as Saviour; but he thought that way was far too easy. He went about it according to his own idea—he joined a church, sang in the choir, and became quite a worker. He hoped in all these things to obtain peace with God, but there was no peace! One day, while he was reading in his Bible the parable of the sower, he came to the words, "Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved," and Stewart threw down his Bible and said, "Will you look at that! Even the devil knows a man will be saved if he will believe!" And that day

story

he settled it and turned to Christ and trusted Him as Saviour. Yes, God saves men when they believe; He saves all sinners, no matter what their state or condition, when they trust His Son.

So Peter says, "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" They were in bondage all the years they were in Judaism and they had to be delivered from this and brought into the liberty of grace. Why bring the Gentiles into the bondage out of which they had been saved?

The breadth of Peter's vision comes out magnificently. "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." We should not have expected him to say that. We would rather have expected him to say, "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, *they* shall be saved even as *we*." He knew he was saved. Would you not have expected him to say, "They shall be saved even as we"? But, no; grace had so wrought in Peter's heart that he turned it right around. Do you not see, God is saving Gentiles by grace and, thank God, He saves Jews by grace too! He delivers the heathen from the corruption of idolatry, He delivers the Jews from the bondage of legalism.

The Christian Pharisees did not know what to

say, but deep in their hearts they were thinking, "The Bible says these Gentiles are to come to God through Israel, and Israel is marked as separate through circumcision; therefore they must abide by the law." However, we read, "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." They did not get up and try to argue the question. Very rightfully. They were visitors and did not want to be too prominent; but after Peter made this thing clear, Paul and Barnabas said, "We will give you some examples how He has been changing wicked men into holy men through grace." So they gave example after example, just as returned missionaries have done through the years, telling of corrupt men changed by grace to godly men. So Paul and Barnabas gave testimony; and this was to help clear the minds of the Pharisaic Christians.

After Paul and Barnabas had finished, the last man you might have expected spoke on their side. "And after they had held their peace, James answered." Who was James? The brother of the Lord. "James, the Lord's brother," he is called. He is often called the first bishop of Jerusalem. He was a legalist of the legalists before his conversion, which did not take place until after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus

Christ. He was the leader of the Jewish party in the Church. He was careful not to depart from the old ways until a fuller revelation had come. But God gave to James the special light that was needed for the moment.

"Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name." These Pharisaic brethren had the Old Testament and there they read of the day when the Gentiles were going to turn to God and be blessed through Israel in the kingdom reign of the Messiah. James explains that this is not what is going on now. God is now taking out from the Gentiles a people to His name and He used Peter first to go to the Gentiles. That is the work going on at the present time. In other words, God is not converting the world today. What is He doing? He is taking out an elect people from the world and bringing them to a saving knowledge of His blessed Son. "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name." Then he says:

"And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (15-18).

Do you perceive that he was saying, "I understand. You brethren are perfectly right. The day is coming when God will bless the Gentile world through Israel and they are going to enjoy the kingdom reign of Messiah and will all be united together as one holy, happy people; but that is not what God is doing now! Now He is gathering out the Church of God, and when He has finished this special work, that which is spoken of in the prophets will be fulfilled. When this dispensation of grace is completed, when the Lord Jesus comes back again, He will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and will build again the ruins thereof and will set it up. He will then bring Israel as a nation into blessing again. Then all the remnant of the Gentiles will return to God—that is, in the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ."

In other words, James says, God is working out His own plan: Israel, His covenant people, have been set aside nationally because of their rejection of the Messiah. God is now taking out a people, Jew and Gentile, to constitute the Church of God. When He completes this work, the Lord is coming back the second time. That will be the time of blessing for the whole world. Wars will cease. Then nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; the Lord Jesus Christ shall reign in righteousness

over all the earth and Jew and Gentile will be one happy, redeemed people, glorifying God together.

So James says, "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them (knowing the intense feeling of the Jewish brethren toward certain things tolerated by the Gentiles), that they abstain from pollutions of idols and from fornication (from which every Christian should abstain), and from things strangled (which in the Jewish mind were very unclean), and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day" (19-21).

To this they agreed, and the first council of the Church ended in happy unison.

"Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: and they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (I like that. How these Jewish brethren set their seal of approval upon the faithful ministry of Paul and Barnabas!) We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good

to the Holy Ghost (the Spirit of God had made His mind clear to them), and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch (back went Paul and Barnabas with these other two brethren with them and delivered the letter, and the results were glorious!): and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord, with many others also" (22-35).

What a wonderful thing it was that the Spirit of God should have so over-ruled, where men had such different views, as to bring them all at last to see that salvation is by grace alone through faith! How we can rejoice today that that precious truth has been preserved through the centuries and that, believing in Him, we can be a part of that great company of the redeemed some day to be manifested as the glorified Church of our Lord!

Meantime, as we wait for His return from heaven, we are to seek to get the gospel of His grace out to all men everywhere, that all may have an opportunity to know of the Saviour and to find in Him life and peace, through faith, altogether apart from meritorious works of any kind.

## LECTURE TWENTY-SIX

# HOW THE GOSPEL ENTERED EUROPE

1 1 1

"And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches" (Acts 15:36-41).

**I**N this section we have the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey. We have already considered the many momentous events that took place in connection with his first journey, and we have seen how he and Barnabas eventually returned to Antioch in Syria, from which city they had set out on their gospel tour. Then, after remaining for some time, as we saw in verse 35, "teaching and preaching the Word of the

Lord," it came into the heart of Paul to go on another journey. .

We do not have in connection with this second missionary journey the same evidences of direct divine guidance as on the first. In that instance, we are told that the Holy Ghost said very definitely, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them," and the whole church at Antioch came together and commended them to the Lord. We do not have anything so definite as that in this case, but are told, "Some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord, and see how they do." It seems to have been a voluntary thing on Paul's part rather than the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit as on the previous occasion; and, strikingly enough, from the very start, things seemed to go wrong and you find the missionaries perplexed on several occasions as to just what their task should be.

At first, Barnabas wanted to take his young cousin John Mark along. He had taken him to Cyprus when they went on their first journey, but when they returned to the mainland Mark left the apostles, returning to Jerusalem, evidently preferring the company of his mother Mary and the comforts of home to an itinerant missionary life. "But Paul thought not good to take him with

them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work." I take it Paul considered the work of the Lord so serious he could not think of linking up again with a man who had shown so little sense of the importance of service for the Lord. It was no Sunday-school picnic! It was severe testing, hard work, and service for the glory of God. Paul did not wish to take anyone who was not divinely guided nor ready to endure hardship. Barnabas evidently felt differently.

"The contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder." It is rather pitiable to read that about these two devoted apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ; but the Bible never tries to hide the faults of God's servants. In that it is so different from many secular biographies. One would think their heroes perfect in almost everything; but the Word of God turns the light on and gives the record of their failures just as truly as of their successes and victories. This is both for our warning and our encouragement.

So these two venerable brethren could not agree in regard to this companion for their travels. They separated and for years did not labor together again. We are told in Proverbs, "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city." Many of us know that the beginning of strife is as one little drop of water, which, after the break

in the dike has begun, soon gets larger and larger and is practically impossible to stem. However, in this instance, as the years went on, a kindly, considerate feeling prevailed, and in his old age Paul speaks affectionately of Barnabas. As he writes from his prison cell to Timothy we read, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

I am sure most of us are thankful that Barnabas gave Mark another chance. There is many a young Christian who has failed in the beginning, but that does not prove there is not a possibility of such a one becoming a valuable worker in the vineyard of the Lord Jesus Christ. We who are older need to be careful of our condemnation of the younger. Barnabas gave a helping hand to Mark; however, it is very evident the brethren sided with Paul and thought he was right; but Mark brought forth good fruit later on.

So we read here, "Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus"—the same field in which they had labored before and found conditions so congenial. But Paul chose Silas, who is called a prophet—the one who went down to Antioch to convey the decree of the Jerusalem council. He proved himself to be an able man, as well as a prophet; and so Paul chose him to be his companion, and we are told "he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." These

were the two sections where he and Barnabas had labored before.

The second part is in verses 1 to 7 of chapter 16, where we have the apostle going to southern Galatia, or Lycaonia:

"Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not." (Ancient manuscripts read, "The Spirit of Jesus suffered them not.")

Paul had visited Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe on the previous journey and there, you remember, at first people wanted to worship him and Barnabas as gods, but later endeavored to stone Paul to death. However, the Lord preserved him and a number believed, and these were the Galatians to whom Paul wrote his letter later on.

It was on this second visit to Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe that the brethren commended Timothy, who had been converted through Paul, as one whom they believed to be called of God to give his life to the ministry of the Word. This young

man was of mixed parentage, his mother being a Jewess, but his father a Greek. So in order not to offend Jewish prejudices, Paul took and circumcised him, something he would never have agreed to, had Timothy been, like Titus, a Gentile. Paul took Timothy along, after the local brethren had expressed their fellowship by prayer and the laying on of hands. In answer to their prayers, God gave him some special gift, which we rather take was the gift of pastor, for in after years Timothy always manifested a true shepherd heart. Paul, later, in writing to the Philippians, said, "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel."

What a splendid testimony for the older preacher to give concerning the younger! What a beautiful thing! Many ministers of the gospel are far more concerned with getting on in the world, furthering their own interests, than they are about the people of God. It was different with Timothy. His one yearning desire was to be used by God for their blessing.

So Paul made no mistake in taking this young man with them. He was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium, and he proved to be a valuable helper in the years

that followed. "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."

After they had ministered in these cities they turned north and thought of going into Asia; that is, a limited area of Asia Minor—in which were located in later years those seven churches spoken of in the book of Revelation. They intended to go into this district, but they "were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia." What does that mean? Had not the Lord Jesus told them to go into all the world? Certainly. Well, was not the gospel for Asia as well as for every other part of the world? Yes. But there is often a specific time for certain work to be done, and the Spirit of God saw that the time had not yet come to enter Asia. Later on, Paul went to Ephesus, the chief city of Asia, and had a glorious time—hundreds, even thousands, throughout that city being converted. But it was not yet the Lord's time. It is a wonderful thing for the servant of God to be guided by the Lord's Spirit and move each moment in His will.

So they turned aside, and now again, over the border, lay the district called Bithynia, but once more they were hindered. The Spirit of Jesus in

some way spoke to them and forbade them to enter. And why not? In the next verse we have the answer. "And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas." Troas was a seaport looking across the Ægean to Greece. Remember, they had not yet visited Europe. So far as we know, no one had yet carried the gospel to that continent.

"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." In the morning he told the vision to his companions, and Luke says, "Immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them" (10). Note the pronouns "we" and "us." Luke became a member of the group at Troas, and from this time on is identified with the work. He and the others concluded it was God's way of telling Paul and his companions that the time had come to cross the Ægean to enter into Europe and carry the gospel to—shall I say?—our forefathers.

People say sometimes, "I am not interested in missions to the heathen. There is plenty of work to be done here." They piously add, "Charity begins at home." Yes, it does, but it is a pity if it ends there. And how thankful we should be that thousands of years ago somebody did believe

in missions and so carried the gospel to our forefathers that they might be brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ!

They decided immediately to act upon Paul's vision. "Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis." They had landed in Europe, and from thence took the Roman military highway to "Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony."

A Roman colony was a city which had been granted special privileges by the Roman government because of some service rendered to the empire. All freemen in such a colony were regarded as having all the rights of Roman citizens. It was the same as a little bit of Rome in a distant country. That is a beautiful picture, and the apostle dwelt on it in his letter to the Philippians, when he wrote, "Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." They would understand that very well, for though they lived in Macedonia, their citizenship was in Rome; and though we live in this poor world, our citizenship is in heaven! We belong to heaven and have all the privileges of heavenly citizens.

"We," says Luke, "were in that city abiding certain days." At first, it seemed as though no one was interested in their message. Many mis-

sionaries have the same disappointment. Paul heard the man in the vision say, "Come over and help us," and he surely had reason to believe that when he reached Macedonia he would find some anxious people waiting to receive him. There was nothing like that. They abode "certain days," with no one asking for help or seeking them out, with no evidence that any man or woman was a bit concerned about them.

Young people sometimes hear a fervent missionary from a distant field tell of the need of young men and young women for work in Africa or China or in some other country. They say, "I must answer the call." They arrange to leave everything here and go out to the mission field, only to find nobody wants them. And they say, "Isn't that queer? They were pleading that we come, and instead of wanting us they are ready, in some instances, to kill us." Was the missionary wrong? Did he give a false impression of conditions? Not at all! The heathen do not realize their need often until the preaching of the true God gives them a sense of their real condition, but it is that need, nevertheless, which calls for some one to help.

So here, while the Macedonians needed help, there was no one to say, "We welcome you and are anxious for the message you have come to give." Finally, they located a little company at

a place of prayer. "And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a riverside, where prayer was wont to be made." That tells us it was a Jewish prayer meeting. It was the custom of the Jews, if ten men could be gathered together, to have a synagogue in a Gentile city; but if not enough were available, they would go where they could get flowing water for their rites, and establish a place of prayer where they could avail themselves of the cleansing rites which the stream permitted.

So Paul went to this prayer meeting. But it was a very up-to-date prayer meeting—nobody was there but a few women! All the men were absent. Luke says, "And we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither." How many prayer meetings are just like that! Men often think they are too busy to come together and wait upon God in prayer, but a few faithful, devoted women will carry on alone.

Paul was not indifferent to the soul needs of these women. He was thankful to find a few in Philippi ready to hear the Word. One was a Gentile, perhaps a proselyte, of the city of Thyatira. They had been forbidden to go into Asia. Thyatira was one of the leading cities of Asia. The Spirit of God did not permit Paul to go there, but He had this woman from Asia waiting for Paul in Macedonia. She had learned doubtless from the people of Israel of the true and living

God. "She attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." That is very beautiful. There was no great upset in her life. She had already been seeking the truth, and now when Paul unfolded the gospel, without any excitement, without any outward evidence, the Lord opened her heart and she received the message and trusted the Saviour.

"And when she was baptized." Thus she took the public place of identification with Christ, "and her household with her." Who these were we are not told, except that in verse 40 we read of "the brethren" there. Lydia was a business woman, a seller of purple, and she probably had a number of men working for her. And apparently all of them opened their hearts to the Word. Lydia offered her own home as an abode for the missionaries, saying, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there." And we are told, "she constrained us." Thus the gospel had entered Europe and the work of evangelizing Macedonia was started.

## LECTURE TWENTY-SEVEN

# THE JAILER'S CONVERSION

1 1 1

"And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs,

what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed" (Acts 16: 16-40).

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**I**N this part of the sixteenth chapter of our book Paul and his companions are still in Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia. We have already read of one experience they had there, in connection with the conversion of Lydia, a seller of purple in the city of Thyatira. Now, in the rest of the chapter, we have really three instances with which to concern ourselves.

First of all, Satan's efforts to patronize the gospel, and its results; then the conversion of the Philippian jailer; and third, the deliverance of the apostle and his companion from prison. If

Satan cannot stop the work of the Lord by out-and-out persecution, he will try to hinder it by patronage; and just as soon as the Church of God accepts the patronage of the world it becomes subservient to the world. The Apostle Paul was very jealous that nothing be allowed which, in the slightest degree, would indicate that the Church of God had any connection whatever with the powers of evil. We see this in the first incident here recorded.

“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying.” It was a very common thing in the ancient world at the time the gospel was first being carried to the various countries, to find such characters as this young woman—who believed themselves to be in touch with heathen gods and thought they were actually possessed by the spirit of a god and to whom folk flocked for their advice in matters relating to business, or marriage, or to affairs having to do with the government of kingdoms, and so on.

After all, we have not progressed very far. Today we find the same characters. Even in our land, with all its enlightenment, there are literally thousands of people who scarcely make a move without consulting a clairvoyant or spirit-medium, someone who is supposed to have special

illumination because of contact with the unseen world.

This woman was of that class. She believed she was possessed of the spirit of the god Apollo. It says here "a spirit of divination." The marginal reading is "a spirit of Python." Python was a serpent sacred to Apollo. The people believed that Apollo himself spoke through this woman, who was thus enabled to give counsel. When under the power of this spirit she was not conscious of what she was saying; in a kind of cataleptic state, she was dead to all around her. Actually we know from Scripture it was a demon and not a god at all; yet people flocked to her for help, and actually believed she was putting them in touch with the heavenly spheres. She heard Paul preaching the gospel and undoubtedly it was suggested to her by Satan that she link herself up to him and his associates. She was just a poor female slave, and the money that came to her for fortune-telling and supposedly disclosing the future went into the hands of men who owned her, body and spirit.

The young woman "followed Paul and us (you will notice Luke is still of the company), and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." That is very significant when we realize the woman was under the control of a

demon. Even Satan himself believes in the reality of God's salvation and here attempts to take the position of a patron of the work of the Lord. "These men . . . show unto us the way of salvation."

Day after day she followed them, always making the same statement, endeavoring to give the impression that she, in some sense at least, was linked up with them. "But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." We have many instances in modern days of missionaries working in pagan lands where they have come in contact with people who seem to be just as truly possessed with demons as this young woman was, and on many occasions these servants of God have cast out those demons, using these same words.

I remember a dear servant of God telling of a woman who continually raved and blasphemed against God. He and others felt she was under the power of a demon, that she had worse than a diseased mind, worse than a heart at enmity against God. They finally met together in special prayer and, when this woman began blaspheming God as usual, God's servant rose up and said, "I command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, come out of this woman and enter no more!" The next moment the woman

fell at his feet in a fit. He said it reminded him of what he had read in Scripture, "The devil threw him down, and tare him," but from that time on she was never so affected again.

Demon possession is a very real thing, and the power in spiritualism today consists in this: not that God allows spirits of the dead to come back and speak through mediums, but that demons take possession of these mediums and speak through them. The Church of God needs to be on guard against those who are seeking to imitate the work of the Lord. The name of Jesus drove out the demon from this woman, for Jesus is Conqueror and Victor over Satan's host. Whenever Christ is counted on like this, He can be depended on to vindicate the glory of His name.

Now that the demon was gone out of the woman, she could no longer go off into trances, therefore her masters were indignant. The money that had come through the use of the demon's awful power over this girl no longer flowed into their coffers; their profits were gone. "And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city." Notice they did not know anything about Christianity; they did not recognize Paul and his com-

panion as Christians—but as Jews. So it was an outbreak of that anti-Semitism which is so common today. “They are Jews; get them out of the way!” Oh, how often that cry has been sounded!

If there is trouble here or there, men are always looking for a scapegoat for it. In the present day of tribulations how many there are who put all the blame upon the Jews! It is so much more convenient than to confess our own sins! Our trouble comes not because of any particular people, Jew or Gentile, but results from departure from God. He is dealing in judgment with the nations of this world because of their rejection of His testimony. Let us humbly confess our sin and failure before God and thus seek deliverance from the world’s prevailing distress and grave suffering.

As we see, then, these men put the blame on Paul and Silas, not because they were Christians, but because they were Jews, and so should be dealt with. “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.” I fancy the very people who accused them would not have been so proud to acknowledge themselves as Romans before their country was taken over and dominated by the Romans; but now they glory in what should be their shame.

"And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes (it was the Eastern way of saying, We have come to our wits' end; we don't know what to do in a case like this!) and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely." We are not told of any definite trial, or of an opportunity given to explain matters and clear themselves of the charges preferred against them. The brutal jailer, when he received them, "thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." There, their backs torn and bleeding as a result of the dreadful flagellation, the jailer does not so much as wash their stripes.

What would we do in circumstances like that? Note what they did: "At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." Undoubtedly it was the song of praise they heard, and therefore emphasis is put on that. These dear men, afflicted, miserable, unable to sleep, could not move without anguish; yet as they lay in that dungeon their hearts went out to God, presenting their case before Him, and, assured He heard, they lifted up their hearts in glad thanksgiving for His grace.

What a challenge that is for us when we find

ourselves in difficult circumstances! We have perhaps never yet had to endure conditions so bad; but have we learned to pray and to lift our hearts in thanksgiving to God? We read, "In everything give thanks." One says, "I can give thanks for blessings, but not for trials and testings." But Scripture says, "In everything give thanks"—"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

I know that today I am speaking to some who are passing through great trial. I know that some are going through deep waters, and my heart goes out in sympathy, for I, too, have gone through the floods and been almost overwhelmed; I, too, have passed through fires of affliction; but I can assure you there is no circumstance in which the believer can be found where the Lord is not able to sustain him and lift him above trial and enable him to rejoice. We are told to glory in tribulations.

You will remember the tract put out by H. B. Gibbud. One morning when he was feeling depressed and gloomy, there was a knock on his study door. On opening the door he saw a raw-boned, unprepossessing-looking woman, who said to him, "Brother Gibbud, I am Sophie, the woman God called to scrub and preach." "Oh, yes, I have heard of you." Anyone who attended Fulton

Street prayer meeting years ago would remember her. I remember meeting her myself. A poor, illiterate woman, she made her living scrubbing floors in office buildings in lower New York City. She was a radiant Christian with a tremendous love for Christ. It was she who was present when a young man said, "I have come to New York to go out as a missionary to Africa, but the Board has turned me down, saying I am not fit to go. I have applied to several other Boards and they, too, have turned me down." Sophie came up at the close and said, "Brudder, the Boards won't let you go? Then, I'll send you with my wash-board." So he went out and she took care of his expenses while she was scrubbing and preaching in New York.

"Brudder," spoke up Sophie to Mr. Gibbud, "the Lord has sent me to preach to you. This is my text—'Glory in Tribulations.' Now, Brudder, G-L-O-R-Y don't spell GROWL." Gibbud's face lit up. She went on preaching to him, and it was the beginning for him of a new and glad day of victory.

How many learn that lesson? It does not take much character, nor much Christianity, to be happy when having our own way, when everything goes the way we want it to go. BUT when everything goes wrong—when poverty or bereavement or misunderstanding is our lot—to

be able to rejoice in the Lord then is Christian victory! That is what we see here.

"At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." This was the first sacred concert ever held in Europe. Just two artists, the concert hall just a dungeon, neither piano nor organ to accompany; yet these two artists had such effect that they brought down the house! Soon the whole prison began to shake. That was the most successful sacred concert I have ever heard of! As they sang, "suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed."

You may think it far-fetched, but I have an idea that if there were more joy in tribulation, more triumphing in trouble in our own day, we would see more shaking by the power of God. The world is watching Christians, and when they see Christians shaken by circumstances as they themselves, they conclude that after all there is very little to Christianity; but when they find Christians rising above circumstances and glorying in the Lord even in deepest trial, then even the unsaved realize the Christian has something in knowing Christ to which they are strangers.

You have heard the story of the Christian who one day met another believer whose face was long

as a fiddle and asked, "How are you?" The man replied, "Well, I am pretty well under the circumstances." To which the other replied, "I'm sorry you are under the circumstances. Get above the circumstances! Don't allow yourself to be under them. Christians should never be under the circumstances." Paul and Silas were not. They were above them.

As they prayed, God took hold and began to shake the prison until He had loosened the very doors open and the fetters off the prisoners' limbs. The keeper of the prison—this hard man who had thrust them into the dungeon, this man so insensible to the things of God that it looked as though no power could reach him and bring him to repentance—"drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled." You see, under the Roman law he was responsible for these prisoners. If he lost them, he lost his life. So rather than face the executioner himself, he sought to take his own life, "but Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here."

I wonder how it was that Paul realized the condition of things. It does not seem there was any possibility of his seeing beyond that dungeon to the jailer's own apartment. Yet he appeared to know and he spoke out at the right moment. Doubtless he was guided by the Spirit of God.

How often God has guided His servants, giving the right message at the right time! Somebody told me only recently of a poor, wretched, miserable man under the power of strong drink, fighting for long against it, who finally thought he might as well give up trying. Then happening to tune in the radio he heard a voice say something like this, "Remember, if you are absolutely hopeless, Jesus is ready to save you!" He thought, "Why, that is for me"; and as he continued to listen, the gospel message came in power and he dropped on his knees beside the radio and his soul was saved. If I am addressing someone utterly disheartened, who thinks life a delusion and actually contemplates suicide, let me say to you, "In the name of the Lord, Do thyself no harm! There is hope for you; there is a Saviour for you, and deliverance and peace and rest and joy, which you may find in Christ."

This the jailer was soon to learn. When he heard the warning cry of Paul, "he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas." Why, their stocks become their throne and he, their jailer, lies suppliant at their feet! He then "brought them out, and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' " He knew they had something he needed; that they had something well worth while, and he was anxious to know the secret of the One who

had given them not only songs in the night, but songs from a dungeon death-cell. Their answer came back quick and clear—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." No beating about the bush. No going into a labored explanation of Christian doctrine, or of the nature of the Church or of sacraments. Clear and incisive was their message, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (believe, *put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ*) and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Bishop John Taylor Smith used to tell how, when he was Chaplain-General of the British Army, the candidates for chaplaincy were brought to him and always had to answer one question: "Now, I want you to show me how you would deal with a man. We will suppose I am a soldier who has been wounded on the field of battle. I have three minutes to live and I am afraid to die because I do not know Christ. Tell me, How may I be saved and die with the assurance that all is well?" If the applicant began to beat about the bush and talk about the true Church and ordinances and so on, the good Bishop would say, "That won't do. I have only three minutes to live. Tell me what I must do." And as long as Bishop Smith was Chaplain-General, unless a candidate could answer that question, he could not become a chaplain in the Army.

I wish that were always so in our own Army. What answer would you give to a man with only three minutes to live? Can you find a better one than this?—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

There are so many who say, "I do not understand which is the true Church." Never mind! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Then some say, "I do not understand the true nature of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper." Never mind! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. "Yes, but my life has been so wicked. I feel I ought to make restitution first for the sins of my past." Never mind! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. "I am so afraid I might not hold out." Never mind! This is God's message to any poor sinner today: Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. The same thing is for your house as for you. When God saves you, it is evident He wants to save your whole house. The same thing that prevails for one will prevail for all.

"And they spake unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." I think they had all been getting dressed, his wife and children, and maybe some of his servants, and they had crowded in to hear these strange preachers who a little while ago were cast into prison and were now pointing them to Christ.

"And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes." I fancy he said, "I am ashamed of the way I treated you. Let me make you as comfortable as I can. Let me show my gratitude." "And was baptized, he and all his, straightway." The whole household brought to Christ that night! Oh, they found the man of Macedonia at last who in a vision said, "Come over into Macedonia and help us."

"And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."

There is just one more incident, and with this the chapter closes. "When it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace." Evidently the magistrates, looking into the matter, had come to the conclusion that these men were not law violators and so said, "We must get them out of the way." But Paul said, as it were, "We represent the Lord Jesus Christ and do not want to be branded as violators of the law of the land so long as we are innocent, and therefore we want to be cleared of any such charge."

"They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but

let them come themselves and fetch us out." It was not pride that led Paul to make this demand. It was a proper sense of the dignity of his calling as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. "And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans (free-born citizens of the Roman empire were entitled to trial and should never have been cast into prison uncondemned). And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city."

And so Philippi seems about to close its doors to the gospel. The first city in Europe to which the message came! Instead of the magistrates saying, "Now we have set you free, go throughout our city and proclaim the glorious message," they said, "Please leave our city. We do not want your message."

"They went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed." This was the nucleus of the church at Philippi.

So the gospel entered Europe, and we can be thankful that from that day to this the message of grace is still going out in that continent, and that we over here enjoy the message today because it was brought to Europe so long ago.

## LECTURE TWENTY-EIGHT

# PAUL AT THESSALONICA, BEREIA, AND ATHENS

1 1 1

**I**N the opening verses of chapter 17 we read of Paul's ministry in the Macedonian city of Thessalonica:

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go" (Acts 17: 1-9).

It is interesting as one studies this book of

the Acts to compare the various geographical references with a map of the ancient Roman Empire. In this instance it would be seen that Amphipolis and Apollonia were on the high road from Philippi east and south toward Athens and Corinth. Passing these two cities by, the Apostle and his company went on to Thessalonica, which we know today as Salonica, located on the shores of a bay, an inlet of the *Ægean Sea*. Here, as in place after place, Paul found a synagogue of the Jews, and in accordance with his regular custom, "to the Jew first," he entered into the synagogue and, as opportunity was given him, presented his message there. We are told that "three sabbath days he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures."

Using the Old Testament with which the Jews were familiar, he showed how it had been predicted by the prophets that the Messiah for whom they waited must suffer even unto death and be raised again in order to accomplish the redemption of His people. We can think of him turning from passage to passage to prove these great facts, and then, having laid the foundation, build the superstructure of his discourse, the story of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, showing that this Jesus whom he preached was indeed Messiah.

The result of his ministry was that a number of the Jews believed and sought further fellow-

ship with Paul and Silas; also of Gentile proselytes or seekers after truth there was a multitude who accepted the testimony. Of these, quite a few were well-known women who had doubtless wearied of the unsatisfactory character of paganism and, having learned from the Jews something of the one true and living God, were now ready to accept the Saviour He had provided.

This, however, stirred the unbelieving Jews with indignation and envy. They did not want to appear openly as persecutors, but we are told they "took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort," and, by artfully arousing their prejudices, they moved them to make an assault upon the house of Jason where the preachers of the new message were being entertained. The mob created such an uproar that the whole city was moved. Paul and Silas, however, were not found, but the rash leaders of the mob, laying hold upon Jason and several other adherents of the Way of Life, dragged them before the rulers of the city, declaring, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus."

Their accusation was in a measure true. The apostle and his companion were indeed engaged in the business of turning the world upside down,

but the reason for this was that through sin the world had been turned wrongside up. So when the gospel was preached and men believed it, things were completely reversed. But the charge that the new doctrine contained anything contrary to the decrees of Cæsar was false, for the King proclaimed by Paul was not One who was to contest world-dominion with the Roman emperor, though He shall indeed reign in due time. He had already declared in Pilate's judgment hall, "My kingdom is not of this world, else would My servants fight." The kingdom of which He is Head is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. In other words, He had not come to establish a kingdom after the world order, but to call upon men to recognize and bow to heaven's authority.

It is evident that the ruler of the city and those associated with him were perplexed when they heard these things, and, not knowing just what action to take, placed Jason and the other brethren under obligation to keep the peace, and let them go.

Doubtless recalling the instructions of the Lord Jesus, "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another," the believers arranged secretly to send Paul and Silas to the next city along the highway—Berea.

A very graphic account of the entrance of the

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gospel into Thessalonica is given in Paul's first epistle to the church in that city. From that epistle we gather that he remained there, however, considerably longer than the three sabbath days particularly mentioned by Luke in this chapter in the Acts, but just how long we do not know. At any rate, the result was that many of the Thessalonians were turned from idols to the living and true God to serve and to wait for His Son from heaven. A careful reading of the two epistles to the Thessalonians, in connection with the verses we have here been considering, will throw a great deal of light upon both the entrance of the gospel into that city and the attitude of the young converts afterwards.

Going on to Berea, Paul and Silas again sought the synagogue of the Jews, and there found the same liberty they had enjoyed in many other places. The fact is, the Jewish synagogue for the first century of the Christian era was much more open than many Christian churches today. When teachers came from distant places, they were recognized and accorded an opportunity to present their views, and Paul always took advantage of this in order that he might bring the gospel message to his own brethren after the flesh first.

It is refreshing to note the fine attitude of these Berean Jews—and of the proselytes from the Gentiles who associated with them. We are told

that "these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Somebody has well said that prejudice closes the door of the mind to any truth not already known. We are told elsewhere in Scripture to "prove all things." In fact, the words are found in that very letter to the Thessalonians to which reference has already been made. The only way to test any system of doctrine is by the Word of God itself. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them."

Bearing this in mind, these Berean Jews examined the Scriptures carefully as they listened to the teaching of Paul. One can see them sitting in the synagogue with the sacred scrolls in their hands, leaning forward, listening eagerly, wonder and surprise often expressed upon their faces as they looked inquiringly upon each other. Unrolling the great vellum volumes, they turned from one passage to another, comparing Scripture with Scripture, until they were finally convinced that what Paul proclaimed was the truth. Then they ranged themselves definitely on the side of Christ, receiving the message in faith and acknowledging the Lord Jesus as the sent One of God.

We are not surprised to read in verse 12, "Therefore many of them believed," and we have the additional words, "Also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." This must have been one of the most encouraging experiences that Paul ever had. We do not read of any other city wherein he was given so fair a hearing, wherein people were so honest in seeking to know whether the Word was really in accordance with Scripture or not. How blessed it would be to find more people today characterized by the same nobility as that which marked out these Bereans—a nobility of mind that led them to put away all prejudice and preconceived notions and to examine fairly the matters to which their attention was called, testing everything by Scripture!

But this happy state of things was soon brought to an end, for Satan cannot long endure the uninterrupted reception of the gospel. And so after some days—we do not know how many—certain of the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica, having learned that Paul was preaching the Word in Berea, hurried down the highway and came there also. By their misrepresentations they stirred up many of the people who had not yet been brought to know the Lord. Once more there were an uproar and an effort made to apprehend the messengers of the Cross. Again the brethren

had to take steps to safeguard the life of the apostle. As he was the outstanding exponent of the new faith, the indignation of the unbelievers was directed against him particularly, so the believers sent him away, we are told, "to go as it were to the sea." This would suggest a stratum in order to throw his persecutors off his trail. Silas and Timothy remained to help the young believers and encourage them in their faith.

The last part of our chapter brings us with Paul to Athens, the great cultural center of ancient Greece. We read in verses 15 to 21:

"And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, wherof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)"

The brethren who conducted Paul to Athens returned to Berea with a message to Silas and Timothy urging them to rejoin Paul as soon as

possible. Meantime he waited for them at Athens. As he went about day after day, his spirit was moved to its deepest depths as he saw the evidences of the gross idolatry to which the city was given on every hand. An old Greek philosopher wrote some time before Paul's day, "In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man." Images were everywhere; not only representations of all the gods of the various countries that made up what we call Greece, but the gods adored by Asiatics, Egyptians, Romans, and peoples from far-distant lands. Practically every false deity worshipped on earth could be found in Athens, and yet this was the educational center of the world. There were different schools of philosophy where great teachers lectured on the folly of idolatry and taught their adherents to scorn the superstitions of the less cultured strata of society, but these had nothing to put in the place of the idolatry they scorned. They were simply theorists philosophizing as to the nature of the universe and man, but with no certainty of anything because they were without a divine revelation.

As Paul had opportunity, he disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, talked with the devout persons, that is, Greeks who were influenced by Judaism, and as he went about in the streets and in the markets lost no opportunity to converse with any who were ready to listen. He was an

outstanding personal worker who did not feel that he must have a pulpit in order to disseminate the truth God had sent him to proclaim.

Information regarding his teaching came to the ears of some of the philosophers of both Epicurean and Stoic schools. Contemptuously they asked, "What will this babbler say?" The word for *babbler*, we are told, means *seed-picker*. It was an ironical expression implying that he was like a bird picking up odd seeds here and there, yet had no definite philosophical system behind his teaching. Others who heard him preach of Jesus and the resurrection thought that he spoke of two new gods of whom they had never previously heard, for they took the expression "resurrection," which in Greek is *Anastasis*, to be the name of a god! Therefore, they invited him to go up to Mars Hill, or the Areopagus, where the philosophers were accustomed to hold forth, and there tell them what the new doctrine was of which he had been speaking. There was no evidence of conscience work in all this. It was characteristic of the Athenians and those who dwelt in their city to delight in anything new or novel. So they evidently gave Paul the opportunity of presenting his doctrine simply for their personal gratification.

Ever ready to seize any opportunity that presented itself to preach the truth of God—

"Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us; for in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (22-31).

This is perhaps one of the finest specimens of pulpit oratory extant. It gives us to realize what Paul meant when he said that he was made all things to all men. We have listened to him before as he preached the gospel to the Jews, and we have seen how he based everything upon the testimony of Holy Scripture. Here we are privileged to listen in as he speaks to a Gentile company who knew nothing of the Jewish Scriptures. To them he appeals to the testimony of creation as suggested in his own letter to the Romans, chapter one.

He certainly did not say what our Authorized Version makes him say in verse 22. Had he begun his discourse by declaring, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious," he would probably have closed the door of their minds effectually against his message. The word translated *superstitious* really means *given to the worship of the gods*. It might better, therefore, be rendered *religious*. That is, he began by saying, "I see that you as a people are very religious." The evidence of this was that as he moved about he not only saw many images of different gods, but he found an altar with the inscription, "To the Unknown God." Evidently, some pious soul, afraid that some god might be left out of the Pantheon, had erected this altar; and Paul takes the inscription upon it as his text, saying, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you."

In an eloquent and masterly way he sets forth the truth of the one God by whom the world and all in it had been created—too great to be confined in any temples men might build—omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. Of nothing that men could bring to Him did He have any need. Therefore, it was absurd to think that they could purchase His favor by any of their gifts. He Himself is the great Giver, bestowing all good things upon the creatures He has made.

He it was who had made of one blood all nations of men. All the various races and tribes had sprung from the first original pair that God created, and He who knows the end from the beginning had determined the times before appointed and had allotted to the different nations the lands in which they dwelt. In all these things He was giving evidence of His interest in mankind, desiring that they might seek after Him, if peradventure they might be moved to feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from us.

It is an interesting fact that the only time the word *feel* is found in the New Testament is in this verse. It has to do with the heathen. It was the desire of God that they, though ignorant of His Word, might feel after Him. When the Word itself comes, then men are not cast upon their feelings, but are asked to believe. Nor was it suggested by Paul that God was far from anyone. So close is He to all of us that it can be truly said, "In Him we live and move and have our being." Paul quotes an expression found in the writings of two Greek poets, Aratus and Cleanthes, "For we are also His offspring." This he fully accepts and he appeals to men as the offspring of God and shows how foolish it is that those who have been created by this omnipresent God should ever liken Him to images made of metal or stone by art or man's device.

This was not the same as that some teachers proclaim today, namely the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, meaning thereby that men are already God's children and hence brothers in Christ apart from regeneration. It was of creation that Paul spoke. God is the Father of spirits, and in that sense we are all His offspring; but man has fallen. Sin has come in to alienate him from God; hence the need of a second birth.

Verse 30 suggests something that may be of great comfort to those who are troubled when they think of a world left for many centuries without the knowledge of the one true and living God. Paul says the times of this ignorance God winked at, or overlooked. God deals with men according to the light they have. He does not hold them responsible for light that has not yet been revealed. But now, since Christ has come and the gospel is being preached, God commands all men everywhere to repent, that is, to change their attitude and turn to Him for that deliverance which they can find nowhere else. He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained. Paul does not yet mention the name of Jesus. He was doubtless just about to do so when his address was interrupted. He was in the midst of declaring that the resurrection of Christ from the dead was the pledge both of His grace and

His judgment. That resurrection gives assurance unto all men that salvation has been provided for them. It also gives assurance that He who died and rose again will some day be judge of living and dead.

What a pity his hearers did not permit Paul to finish this magnificent discourse! On the contrary, we are told that when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, which to them seemed utterly absurd, some mocked and others said, "We will hear thee again of this matter." "So Paul departed from among them."

At first sight it may have seemed as though his effort to interest these philosophers and their followers in the great message he had for the world was in vain; but on the other hand, we learn from the closing verse of the chapter that there were a few who profited by it. "Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

## LECTURE TWENTY-NINE

### PAUL AT CORINTH

1 1 1

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent-makers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house: and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them" (Acts 18: 1-11).

1 1 1

HAVING moved on from Athens, Paul goes to Corinth. The story of the triumphs of the gospel in that city is one of the outstanding miracles of missions. When Paul entered Corinth there was not a Christian in it;

moreover, it was one of the most debased of all the cities of the ancient Greek-speaking world. When he left it, there were literally hundreds of Christians—earnest, devoted, faithful men and women delivered from the sins that once bound them; who now sought to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, as they walked in purity and righteousness.

The reputation of Corinth from a moral standpoint was so bad at the time the Apostle Paul visited it that if a woman was conspicuously immoral, they said of her, "She is a Corinthian." If a man was unusually vile or wicked, they said, "He corinthianizes." That in itself is enough to show what a wicked, ungodly city Corinth was. But the gospel wins its greatest triumphs where the outward circumstances seem to be the very worst, for God delights to take up great sinners and out of them to make great saints.

Paul had no thought of trying to wheedle people into a confession of Christianity by preaching beautiful and profound sermons that might appeal to their delight in oratory, or that might fill them with wonder and amazement because of the extent of his wisdom. We read, "The Greeks seek after wisdom," but he tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:2: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." And he found this was enough.

Just as the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified was enough in that ungodly city to turn many from sin to righteousness, so that is the message today which God is using to break down hard hearts, to turn men and women from wicked, wayward and unhappy lives and give them the joy and victory of God's salvation.

Paul's entrance into Corinth was in a very humble way. He was not heralded as a great preacher. There was no blowing of trumpets. There was no welcome committee to meet him at the station when he arrived, but he came in quietly and unannounced; and there he found a certain Jew named Aquila, who was born in Pontus, who had lately been banished from Italy because of an anti-Semitic stir when Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome. Paul found Aquila and his wife in the tent-making business; and because Paul as a young man had learned that trade and having no other means of support, no great church behind him, no missionary society to guarantee his salary, he went into partnership with Aquila and so the two of them wrought together, while Paul, as God gave him opportunity, preached the gospel and thereby won many precious souls to the Lord Jesus.

You know Paul was not what we call today a "clergyman." He was not afraid to "dishonor" the cloth by soiling his hands at hard work. He

was always ready, when God did not provide for him otherwise, to engage in temporal employment and make the money needed for his own support, and often that of his companions, while he went on ministering Christ night after night and "reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks."

As I have pointed out before, there was a great deal more liberty in the Jewish synagogues in those days than in Christian churches today. It was customary, if a stranger came in who was a gifted preacher or teacher, to invite him to address the audience.

Paul found the synagogues open, and there he testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ; that is, that Jesus was the Messiah whom they as a people had been expecting so long. But in Corinth he had a different reception from the one he found in Berea. You will remember that of the Bereans we read, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed." They were not prejudiced; they were not bigoted. They were ready to hear, and when they searched their own Scriptures they found corroboration of the message that Paul preached. But at Corinth it was different. He came up against intense prejudice so that

eventually he had to turn away from the synagogue altogether.

“And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.”

The reference, of course, was to the book of Ezekiel. You remember God said there that when He chose a man to be a watchman for His people and the watchman was on guard and saw the sword coming upon the land, if he blew the trumpet and warned the people, and they refused to heed it and the enemy came to destroy them, they should die in their sins, but the watchman had delivered his soul. But on the other hand, if the watchman saw the sword coming and blew not the trumpet and warned not the people, they would die in their sins, but their blood would He require at the watchman's hand. Paul was God's watchman, and he faithfully warned his own brethren after the flesh of judgment to come if they refused Christ. Since they had rejected the warning God had sent them, he said, “You have had your opportunity. I am not guilty of your blood; now I turn to the Gentiles.” So he began ministering to the degraded, ungodly Corinthians, whom the Jews despised.

“And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that wor-

shipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue." That is, this man was a Greek who had heard, undoubtedly from the Jews, of the one true and living God, and had learned to believe in Him. He worshipped their God. He was no longer an idolater. And he was glad now of an opportunity to get further light and help through the Apostle Paul and his companions. So he opened his house to them, and there they remained to minister Christ in the city.

Although the great multitude of Jews spurned the gospel, one of the first outstanding converts was the chief ruler of the synagogue. Evidently the Word had already found lodgment in this man's heart. When Paul took his stand so openly in connection with the opposition that he had met, Crispus came out with a definite acknowledgment of his faith. He believed on the Lord with all his house, and as Paul continued to preach the Word, "many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized."

I wish you would notice the divine order there, because it is just the same today wherever God's Word is literally carried out. "Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized." They heard the message of the gospel. When Paul preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, they listened earnestly. They believed the Word; they received it in their hearts; and then they said,

"Now, Paul, we are ready to confess Christ openly in baptism." They were not baptized in order that they might become Christians; but having become Christians, they were baptized to confess their allegiance to the Saviour in whom they had put their trust.

By this time perhaps Paul was becoming a little restless, and might have been ready to move on, but we are told that the Lord spoke to him in the night in a vision and said, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." God speaks of the things that are not as though they are. When He said, "I have much people in this city," He was referring to hundreds of people who were living still in all the corruption of idolatry, all the wickedness that pertained to the worship of the Goddess of Lust who was the chief deity in the city of Corinth; but God looked on that which He was about to do, and He saw those people cleansed from their sins, made new creatures in Christ. So He said, "Go on, Paul. Do not let anybody turn you aside. I have much people in this city, and they are to be separated from the nation by the preaching of the gospel."

Writing to them afterwards, Paul depicts the awful condition of those who were living in sin and who shall not have any part in the kingdom

of God, and he says in 1 Corinthians 6: 9, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" and then, in continuance, describing the very kind of people that he had labored amongst for one year and six months, he says: "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

In this awful list he was depicting the type of men and women who made up a great part of the city of Corinth; but he could add in the next verse (11): "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

What a wonderful triumph it was for this dear servant of Christ to go into that wicked city and, as he lifted up Jesus, find these corrupt, evil-loving people looking to Him! And when they looked to Him, it was as when those smitten Israelites in the wilderness looked to the brazen serpent, they were healed, they were changed. They never lived again as they lived before.

People say, "I do not believe in this idea of salvation by faith alone. I think something more is required than that." But many forget that when the sinner looks in faith to Christ, a change takes

place; he receives eternal life, which means he has been born again—he has a new nature. And he learns to hate the sins in which he lived, and he learns to love the things that once he hated—holiness, goodness, purity, and truth. This is the result of looking in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. This was what accompanied the preaching of the gospel in Corinth. It is what accompanies it everywhere in the world when men believe it and receive it in their hearts in the simplicity of faith.

So Paul went on in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching the Word of God among them. If you want a full understanding of what took place there, read very carefully the two letters to the Corinthians and you will see how a great church grew up in that vile, corrupt city, a church that came behind in no gift. God gave to them a great testimony and they went out to help and bless others. It is true that in after days Paul had to rebuke them for certain evils that had been allowed to creep into the church. There will always be danger of this kind when a church of God is established in a wicked, ungodly location; but it is the delight of God to plant a church in such a place, because His thought is that every true Christian church should be a light shining in darkness so that poor, weary, wandering souls, seeing that light, may find life everlasting.

The same gospel that wrought such miracles in

Corinth long years ago is the gospel that works today. Men talk of the need of a new gospel for a new age, but our Lord Jesus Christ, in commissioning His apostles, bade them go out into all the world and disciple the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and He said, "Lo, I am with you alway to the consummation of the age." Until a new Saviour is needed, we do not need a new gospel. We need no new Saviour, for Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and He is still changing men and women from sinners into saints. He is still giving life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. He is still bringing peace to troubled hearts. He is still releasing men from the bondage of sin.

If these words come to any who are oppressed by any burden and who realize something of the bondage of iniquity, who feel that they are slaves and can not free themselves, oh, let me again, as I have done so many times before, bid you look away to Jesus. On yonder cross He gave Himself for you. There He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; there the chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him that with His stripes we may be healed. Millions have looked to Him. Untold myriads have trusted Him. They know the miracle of salvation, and you may know it today if you will only turn to Him.

I preached in Los Angeles recently, doing my little best to present the gospel of the grace of God; and the next day a lady came down with a special message for me. She said, "My husband would be here tonight to tell you this for himself, but he is working. Yesterday he listened to your preaching of the Word as it came over the air. You know, I am sorry to say that for years the sin of strong drink has gripped his life. But suddenly as your message came I was amazed. Tears burst from his eyes and streamed down his cheeks. Getting up from his seat he threw himself full length upon the floor, and there by the radio cried out, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner,' and he entered into peace with God right there in the room by the radio."

Poor, needy, lost one, this message is for you. Jesus is still the sinner's Saviour, and if you will turn to Him He will make you a new creature as He made new creatures of those in Corinth so long ago.

## LECTURE THIRTY

### GALLIO THE INDIFFERENT

1 1 1

"And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia [deputy or proconsul; Luke is very punctilious about the titles he uses and historians find that he never makes a mistake in any of them], the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment-seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things. And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch" (Acts 18:12-22).

1 1 1

**T**HERE are really two sections in the portion we read here, but I thought it well to combine them as they bring to an end the account of Paul's second missionary journey. In

the first section we have Paul's hearing before Gallio. Now we are not left to the testimony of Holy Scripture for our information as to this man Gallio. History tells us that his full name was Anneas Junius Gallio, and interestingly enough he was the half-brother of the philosopher Seneca, who was the tutor of Nero. The two brothers were separated when they were very young and were adopted into different families and did not see each other for years. When Seneca finally did meet his brother Gallio again he was greatly impressed by the graciousness of his demeanor. He uses an expression regarding him that we do not ordinarily apply to men. We would be more likely to apply it to a gracious lady. He calls him "Most sweet Gallio," and says of him, "Few men are so amiable about anything as my brother Gallio is about everything." That was a great tribute for one brother to say of another, was it not? And as we read this account in Acts we can see how Gallio runs true to form.

"When Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul." Paul had already spent a year and a half in Corinth, and God had used him in a mighty way, in the conversion of a great number who had turned from idolatry to the Lord Jesus Christ. These were delivered from the corruption in which they had been living and brought into

lives of holiness and righteousness. Now God allowed Paul's ministry to be interrupted by this persecution. "The Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat"—dragged him before Gallio.

Their charge against him was rather peculiar for men who were themselves monotheists and who did not believe in the idols generally worshipped by the people of Corinth. They said, "This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law." It is remarkable how those who are opposed to the gospel of God can often seem to fit in with others with whom ordinarily they would have very little in common! These men, who had a revelation from God, as given in the Old Testament, and knew He was the one living and true God, were yet so prejudiced against the Apostle Paul that they did not even allow themselves to become thoroughly familiar with the message that he preached, and so they charged him with persuading men to worship God contrary to the law.

"And when Paul was now about to open his mouth," in order to make clear to the Roman proconsul what it was he was preaching, Gallio was not interested. He exclaimed, "If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your

law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters." It was as if he had said, "If you had evidence that this man was doing anything corrupt or that he was actually breaking the law of the country, then it would be reasonable that I should hear the charge that you have against him; but if it is simply a quarrel about religion, then it is too insignificant for me to pay any attention to." It seemed such a puerile matter that Paul went about the country giving people a little different slant on religion than that to which they were accustomed! To him it meant little whether what the man preached might contain a modicum of truth or not.

Yet Paul proclaimed the only message that could prevail for the salvation of a lost world! He tells us in his letter to the Corinthians what that message was: "I determine to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He recognized, of course, that ungodly men, worldly men, did not understand until the Spirit of God had opened their hearts and exercised their consciences, so he says, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God . . . and the wisdom of God."

But Gallio did not think it even worth his while to give the Apostle Paul an opportunity to declare his message. How much he lost; how different

his after-history might have been if on that day, though he silenced Paul's accusers, he had turned to him and said, "Now, Paul, tell me what it is you are preaching! What is this message about a crucified God that you are carrying through the world? I understand you are telling men that you have the only message of life for lost sinners. Tell me about it."

If Gallio had only been concerned enough to hear Paul's message, patient enough to listen to it thoughtfully and carefully! For as we trace his history in secular volumes we find that at last he became a thoroughly disillusioned man, who found that the world could not satisfy and who, possibly, died a suicide. It seems sad indeed that this well-meaning, amiable man, this gracious and kindly philosophical Roman governor, should have no interest in the gospel of God!

Are there not a great many like him today?—many people scattered throughout the land who are amiable, who are kind, who have a certain interest in the welfare of others, and yet do not think the gospel of God worthy of their consideration? If this be true of you, will you not give for once in your life serious consideration to the gospel message? Face the matter honestly. This gospel has been used of God down through the centuries to transform millions of human lives. There must be something in it worth investigat-

ing. There must be something about it worth considering.

Thousands of other people as intelligent as you, as well read, as cultured and refined as you, have found in the gospel that which has brought peace and blessing and joy to their lives. It has given them deliverance from the power of sin and altogether given life a wholly new meaning. Gallio missed his opportunity. See that you do not miss yours! He drove away the Jews who accused Paul from the judgment-seat, but he turned away from Paul also.

Then we read that "all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat." These Greek idolaters were only too glad to have an opportunity to express their contempt for the Jews who had accused Paul, and so, unrighteously, they began to beat them. Gallio did not interfere, apparently. He turned superciliously away. Let them fight out their religious quarrels if they would. These things were of no interest to him.

Gallio stands out on the page of Holy Scripture as a man utterly indifferent to the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. He "cared for none of those things." And so he passes off the page of Scripture; but we may be sure that if we could follow him out into that eternity into which he has gone, we would find that Gallio cares now. We do not

know whether or not before he left this scene he had his eyes opened to the importance of spiritual realities. The inference would seem to be that he had not, but only God and he know what passed between them at the last, ere the soul and body separated. But one moment after he reached the other side he became thoroughly aware of the importance of the message that once seemed of so little account to him.

Though men turn away now from the voice of God as His servants proclaim it, we can be certain that the day will come when that message will seem to them the most important message in all the universe. For many it will then be too late to close with the gospel invitation and know the cleansing that the blood of Christ brings. "Gallio cared for none of those things." Do you care? Are you concerned? Oh, if you are, do not rest until you find in Christ the only One who can meet your soul's need.

But now we pass on to the next instance. "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila."

Then we have a statement that has puzzled many commentators: "Having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow." Does that indicate that Paul, though an apostle of the Lord Jesus

Christ, had put himself under the bondage of a legalistic vow? I think it rather indicates this: That Paul, when he was converted, at the time that he was struck down on the Damascus turnpike, was a Nazarite, and that some time before he had taken the vow of one separated to God. As you know, the Nazarite devoted himself to the Lord for a given time. It might be a certain number of months or many years, or possibly for life; but as long as he was under the vow of a Nazarite, he was not to cut his hair, no razor was to come upon his head; he was to eat no fruit of the vine, whether moist grapes or dried, whether wine or fresh grape-juice; and he was to come near no dead body, no matter how close of kin. All this had a spiritual significance. "The things that happened unto them happened unto them for types." The Nazarite was a picture of one separated to God, one who turned from the pleasures of this world and sought to walk in holiness before God, undefiled by the dead. "By sin came death." That was why the Nazarite was to come at no dead body.

If Paul were a Nazarite at the time of his conversion, which seems to me most likely, he would not feel free to break that Nazarite vow even after he was converted. He would feel that he must go on and fill out his time. He had taken a vow to be a Nazarite for a certain number of

years, and now, long after his conversion, those years had at last run out. If he had been unfaithful in this, he would have lost the confidence of Jews to whom he sought to present Christ, and so he kept that vow conscientiously. The time had now elapsed and Paul was free to wear his hair as other men do. So he had the long locks of Nazariteship shorn.

There is one thing you will notice he did not do. He did not take an offering up to Jerusalem, which the law commanded when one had fulfilled the days of his separation. You see, he himself was under no such bondage.

"When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch" (21, 22).

It was from Antioch that he and Barnabas went forth on their first great missionary journey. To Antioch they returned to give to the church there an account of the marvelous things that God had wrought through them as they went from place to place ministering both to Jew and to Gentile the gospel of the grace of God. And later on it was from Antioch that they essayed to go forth together again, but you recall there came up a division of opinion that separated Paul

and Barnabas—a question whether or not to take John Mark with them. Barnabas insisted, Paul did not feel free to assent, and so they separated. Barnabas went one way; Paul chose Silas as his companion and went another.

And now, after laboring in various places, Paul returns once more to Antioch to tell the church of the wonders he has seen of the grace of God working not only among the Jews—the chosen people with the knowledge of the one true and living God, instructed in the teachings of the Old Testament—but among the raw heathen who had worshipped stocks and stones. To them the message had come, and tens of thousands of them had turned from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven.

We can imagine something of the welcome that Paul received when he got back to Antioch, and how the brethren there rejoiced over the evidences of God's grace which he related to them!

How we should like to see today an awakening all over our own beloved land! In these dark and difficult days in which we live, should we not as Christian people be calling upon God to make bare His mighty arm, bring men and women to realize their need of Him, and bring them to their knees, to repentance and to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?

## LECTURE THIRTY-ONE

# ADVANCING FROM JOHN'S BAPTISM TO THE TRUTH OF NEW CREATION

1 1 1

"And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve" (Acts 18: 23-19: 7).

**W**E HAVE really two incidents here, but they are so intimately connected that I desire to take up both of them at one occasion.

You notice in verse 23 we have the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey. Having returned to Antioch from his second journey, he spent some time there, and then started out again. He was getting to be an old man, but there was such a desire in his heart to carry the gospel to distant places and to help and encourage those who had already believed, that he could not be content at Antioch. He must go into the regions beyond. So "he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples." And then we have this interesting story of Apollos which comes in here as an explanation of what is recorded afterwards in chapter 19. "A certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus."

Alexandria, at this time one of the great cities of the ancient world, had a very large Jewish population. It was there that the renowned Philo had taught—a man whose system was a strange mixture of Judaism and Greek philosophy. It is possible that this man Apollos was first of all a disciple of his and then, as we shall see later on, of John the Baptist. He is described as an elo-

quent man. God does not have a great many eloquent men, even in the ministry of the gospel. It is just here and there that He lays His hand upon a man who can so speak as to stir men's hearts and move on and on to a great climax. Such men are rare.

This gift characterized Apollos. He was perhaps the outstanding pulpit orator of the first century in the Christian Church. He knew the Word; that is, he was familiar with the Old Testament. Remember, the Scriptures that were in the hands of all the early Christians were the Old Testament books. They did not as yet have the books of the New Testament. But Apollos had studied the Old Testament and knew it well. He knew the promises and the prophecies. He knew something, perhaps, of the types and shadows, and was looking for the full manifestation of the Messiah of Israel as promised therein. He had heard John the Baptist preach, and had been baptized by him personally.

"And being fervent in the spirit." I like that. The word *fervent* means "boiling hot." It is a great thing to find people who have received a message from God which so moves their own hearts that it fires them up and sends them out to proclaim it with great earnestness of purpose. You remember the apostle in one place, writing to believers, says we should be "Not slothful in

business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."

I think a great many of us are fervent in business, slothful in spirit, serving ourselves! Of course we are not to be remiss in temporal things, but we are to see to it that we are fervent in spirit, that spiritual things grip our hearts and consciences and move us to earnest devotion to Christ. Well, this man was fervent in the spirit, and "he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord." But now we get his limitations: "Knowing only the baptism of John."

I think we need to try to get his background clearly in mind in order to understand what happened afterward. Born in Alexandria, evidently taught in the Old Testament, and an ardent Jew, he was looking for the coming of Messiah, and he heard of John Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Whether he made a special journey to Judea or not we are not told, but he probably heard John preach, was baptized by him, and then, fervent in the spirit, he started out to visit the Jews in distant places and to carry to them the message that John was preaching, calling upon men to be baptized, in repentance looking for the coming of the Messiah. Apollos doubtless felt that if Messiah's advent was so near, the Jews of the Dispersion as well as those in Palestine should hear of it.

Now a good many years had gone by, but evi-

dently Apollos had not returned to Jerusalem and he did not know that Messiah had come. We need not be surprised that this man, going about among what are called the Dispersion, scattered Jews living out among the Gentiles, had not learned that Messiah had not only appeared but had been crucified, raised from the dead, and ascended to God's right hand. These things had not been made known to him. They had yet to come to his attention. So he went out preaching John's baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. "He began to speak boldly in the synagogue."

In the city of Ephesus, Paul's two good friends, Aquila and Priscilla, were living. These, you remember, were the folk who were tent-makers and Paul had labored with them in Corinth. Now they had moved to Ephesus, and when Priscilla and Aquila heard of this eloquent Bible teacher who was giving out the Word of God in the synagogue, they went to hear him. There was no prejudice on their part that would keep them from entering the synagogue. And they were stirred as they listened to the messages of this man Apollos. But we can well imagine that they said one to another as they walked home, "It's wonderful; everything that he says is true, but the fact is he doesn't go far enough. He is telling the people to get ready for the coming of Messiah. Evidently he doesn't know that Messiah has al-

ready come, that He died and arose and ascended into heaven, and that the Holy Spirit has come down from heaven to baptize all believers into one Body and to bring in the blessed and glorious truth of new creation—a new creation in which all saints on earth are united by the Spirit to the glorious Head in heaven.” So they decided that they must try to help this man.

You will notice that they didn’t go at him in a carping, critical way. We sometimes hear somebody giving out a measure of truth; and we go at people in such a harsh, unkind way. We find fault with them because they do not know more, and often we frighten them off instead of helping them. How we need to pray, we Christians who love the Lord Jesus, who believe in the inspiration of His Holy Word and the fundamental truths of Christianity; how we need to pray for a spirit of grace; how we need to cultivate the winsomeness that characterized our blessed Lord Jesus!

We meet people who have come just so far, and we find fault with them because they do not see more clearly; we forget that they have not been instructed. Many modernists are modernists only because they do not know any better, and if we who know the truth would pray for them and would try in a gracious, kindly way to get to them with the truth of God, either by speaking to them personally or by putting into their hands some

upbuilding literature, many of them might be won to a full, clear knowledge of Christ.

I think I have told before of a dear young man who came to me not very long ago in a nearby city. He said, "Do you recognize me?" I looked at him and said, "I'm afraid I don't. Your face looks somewhat familiar (he had two eyes and a nose and a mouth, you know), but I can't recall your name." "Well," he said, "I couldn't forget you because God used you to help me when I needed it, oh so badly. I had gone as a young man to a certain seminary. I went in as an earnest, flaming evangelist, and after four years in cold storage there I came out practically an agnostic. They had filled me with doubt and perplexity. They told me the Bible was not the inspired Word of God. They told me that blood atonement was not the way sinners were saved, and I came out of there with nothing to preach. I did not know where I stood myself. I thought I would go into business or take up some other profession. I was passing through Chicago, and my train connection left me some hours to look around. I had heard of the Moody Church, so I thought I would go up there. I inquired how to get there and I went up and met you and you took me through the building and then up into your study. I told you how confused I was and you sought to help me, and prayed with me, and just as I was leaving you

handed me your book on the Epistle to the Romans.\* I read it on the train; and by the time I got home, all my doubts were gone, and I had a gospel to preach again. That book changed my life, and for eight years I have been preaching the gospel in a Methodist church and winning many souls to Christ."

I felt so unworthy. But it did me good because it made me feel more than ever the importance of trying to help those who really want to give out the Word of God but some way or other they do not understand. The full revelation of God's mind has not been opened up to them.

Priscilla and Aquila were wise! They did not find fault with Apollos. I think they went up to him after meeting and said, "Brother Apollos, we certainly enjoyed your message this morning. We would love to have you come home and have dinner with us." I can just imagine them saying, "Come now, come home with us"; and I think Apollos said, "I will be glad to come." So they took him to their home and then when they got him well filled up and when he was restful and happy and enjoying things, "they expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly." I think they would say something like this: "My, we en-

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\* Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans. Same author and publisher. Cloth, \$1.00; paper, 50c.

joyed you, Apollos! That was a wonderful message, but did you not hear that Messiah did come and that He was crucified and raised again?" "Why, no." "Oh yes, and He has gone up to glory, and He has sent the Holy Ghost down." Why, I can imagine Apollos saying, "What proof have you of these things?" And then they would begin to tell him of all the wonderful things they had received through the Apostle Paul and other Christians; and as they opened up the Word, Apollos just drank it in. Oh, how grateful he was for these friends who so graciously and so kindly took him into their home and taught him. And as he learned these things, he felt, Well, I am not fit to go on preaching here, but if I could get to a Christian assembly somewhere, maybe I could learn more and extend my ministry to other places.

"And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace." He went to them doubtless expecting to get help from them, and undoubtedly he did, but on the other hand this fine, fervent, Bible-taught young preacher, standing up among them giving out the truth, was a means of real encouragement to them. I don't know anyone who does a staid, old Christian so much good as a young convert

in the full flush of his first love for Christ and the truth! It was thus with Apollos. And so he helped the local assembly there. "For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

As you see, Apollos had left Ephesus, gone on to Corinth, and then from there his ministry broadened out, and he became one of the outstanding messengers of the early Church.

And now Paul comes on to Ephesus where Apollos had been. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples. . . ." Now be careful here. It does not say that he found certain Christians, and as we go on it is easy to see from this passage who these disciples were. They were Jewish disciples who had been instructed by Apollos. He had been preaching in the synagogue, preaching the baptism of John, and giving them all that he knew. Now he has gone on, and as Paul is here, Priscilla and Aquila no doubt ask him to come and preach to these people in the synagogue. And Paul, always ready to communicate to others what God had made so precious to his own soul, went with them and found these disciples.

Paul wants to help them, and he begins by putting a question to them: "Have ye received the

Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Actually what he asked them was this: "Did you, upon your believing, receive the Holy Spirit?" In other words, when you listened to Apollos and heard his message about the coming Christ and you believed it, did you receive the Holy Spirit?

This is not a question put to Christians. It is a question put to disciples in—shall we call it?—the half-way house between Judaism and Christianity, disciples of John. "Did you upon your believing receive the Holy Spirit?" And they said, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Well, not exactly that. Of course, even as Jews they had heard of the Holy Spirit. But what they actually said was this: "We had not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost be," that is, whether He be come. You see, John had said: "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." And of course Apollos had told them about that, but they said, "We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost be come."

Paul inquired, "Unto what then were ye baptized?" Notice that question and the implications of it. Why did he ask them that question? He had said to them, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" They said, "We did

not know He had come." He says, "Unto what then (that is, unto what name then) were you baptized?" Why did he ask that question? What has that to do with whether or not the Holy Spirit had come?

Our Lord Jesus, before He went away, gave His last commission to the apostles: "Go and disciple the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." That is Christian baptism. Don't let anybody tell you differently. That is the last commission of the risen Christ to His servants. They were to go out and carry His message everywhere in the world, and baptize the converts in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Now these people had been baptized. Paul says, "Into whose name were you baptized?" If they had received Christian baptism, they should have known the Holy Spirit had come. They were to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But they answered, "We were baptized unto John's baptism." That was different. That was a baptism unto repentance, a preparatory baptism, looking forward to the coming of the King. Christian baptism looks back to His coming to die, looks up to the throne where He now sits at the Father's right hand, and on toward the end of the dispensation when He will come again. The age has not ended yet. There-

fore, we are responsible still to baptize believers into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. So when Paul heard their answer, "Unto John's baptism," he explained, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

And so Paul, we have no doubt (we do not get everything recorded here in a few verses), preached the gospel to them. He told them the wonderful story, how Jesus came, how He went to Calvary, how He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, how His precious body was laid away in the tomb, how He arose in triumph, how before He went home He commissioned His apostles to go into all the world preaching the gospel and baptizing men in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, how some day He is coming back again to set up His glorious Kingdom. And we read, "When they heard this" (when they heard the unfolding of the truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ) "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Now somebody says, "Why, you see, they were not baptized in the name of the Trinity. They were baptized only in the name of the Lord Jesus." People who reason like that fail to take into account what is involved in that expression.

"In the name" speaks of authority. Why do I stand here trying to preach today? I stand here because I have been commissioned by the Lord Jesus to carry His gospel into all the world, and I come to speak to you in the name of the Lord Jesus who told me in His Word to go out and teach the nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. "In His name" is authority. In, or really unto, the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is the revelation of God in Christ, as we have it in Christianity.

So these men were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, that is by His authority which, of course, implies baptism unto the name of the Holy Trinity. Whether he baptized them himself we know not—but he saw that they were baptized when they confessed Christ as their Saviour. And now, having been baptized with Christian baptism, Paul laid his hands upon them and immediately as at Pentecost, as in Samaria, as in Cornelius's house, the Holy Spirit came on them and there were the same wonderful manifestations as at Pentecost. "They spake with tongues, and prophesied."

You see, this little group was living in a transition stage. They were neither Jews as such, still on legal ground, nor were they on full New Testament ground. They were Jews who were

looking forward to the coming of Messiah, and had been baptized with the baptism of John. In order that there might be definite evidence that they were brought right into the Body of Christ, with those gathered at Pentecost and in Samaria, in Cornelius's house and everywhere else where the Word was preached and believed, Paul in a special way put his hands upon them, commending them to God, and the Spirit fell upon them, thus baptizing them into the Body and giving them special gifts as He had given to the Jews at Pentecost. There were not many of them. "All the men were about twelve."

This was the last group brought in to complete the various companies to whom the gospel message was to go. Peter began at Pentecost and preached to the Jews. That some Gentiles were there we know, as mention is made of Cretes and Arabians, but mainly his address was to the Jews, calling them to save themselves from that untoward generation and to come out by baptism from the nation of Israel which was already under judgment.

Then later on Philip went down to Samaria and carried the gospel message to that group who came in an intermediate place between Jews and Gentiles. They had a mixed religion of Judaism and paganism, and they were brought unto the new creation through faith in Christ and the Spirit's baptism.

Then Peter went to the Gentiles, preaching the gospel to Cornelius's household, and as he preached they believed, and the Holy Spirit fell on them and brought them into the Body of Christ. And now the Spirit of God finds out this little company who had accepted John's baptism but had not yet heard the further message. They believed and were baptized by the authority of the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit fell on them. There are no other groups to be found. Everywhere else that the message is carried it will go to Jews, Samaritans, John's disciples, or Gentiles.

And so God has given us a little sample of some taken out of these groups and brought into the Body of Christ. The coming of the Holy Spirit is the great, outstanding witness that God is satisfied with the finished work of His beloved Son, and His Spirit now dwells in every believer and baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ.

Today there are but three classes of people in the world—Jews, Gentiles, and the Church of God. And when Jews and Gentiles believe, they are no longer seen by God as such but are new members of the new creation, the Church, of which Christ is the exalted Head.

## LECTURE THIRTY-TWO

# MAGNIFYING THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

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"And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19: 8 to 20).

**I**N this particular section some most interesting things are brought out in connection with the marvelous ministry of the Apostle Paul. I have designated this address, "Magnifying the Name of the Lord Jesus." Of course, if we wanted a single text for it, we would find it in the last part of verse 17: "The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." So we want to trace the record through and notice what it is that magnifies His name. What are the events as here recorded that glorified that name so long ago? What similar things would glorify and magnify His name today?

Following the baptism of the disciples of John, first in water and then in the Holy Spirit, as recorded in the early part of the chapter, we find that Paul continued at Ephesus for a long time. While the synagogue was opened to him, he availed himself of the opportunity given to go there and preach the message of the New Covenant.

"And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God." Some very well-meaning but uninstructed people would derive from this the thought that during the ministry of the Apostle Paul, as he moved about from place to place (as recorded in Acts) before reaching the city of Rome, he preached the gospel of the Kingdom;

and that after he got to Rome he received a fuller revelation as to the truth of the one Body, and therefore no longer preached the gospel of the Kingdom.

That, of course, is an utter mistake. Our Lord Jesus after His resurrection remained forty days with the apostles, teaching them concerning the Kingdom of God. The apostles, the twelve, and later Paul, went everywhere preaching the Kingdom of God, and when we turn to the very last verse of the book of Acts, after Paul has been imprisoned, after he has received, as some would say, this special revelation, but which he actually received in the very beginning—we are told in verses 30 and 31:

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”

Up to the very last Paul preached the Kingdom of God, and with that he proclaimed the truth of the Church, the one Body. The believer in the Lord Jesus is both a member of Christ's Body and a subject of the Kingdom of God. He would be a poor Christian indeed who did not recognize the divine authority over his life. Being a Christian is more than receiving a creed, more than subscribing to a system of doctrine, more than agree-

ing to certain church rules and regulations. Being a Christian implies submission in all things to God our Father, who is Sovereign of the universe.

Paul continued preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God. But opposition broke out. The name of the Lord Jesus always provokes the opposition of wicked, ungodly men who are determined not to submit to the will of God. So we read, "When divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus." That is, in the synagogue he saw that he was only going to produce strife and division because of the opposition of those who hated the name of Christ Jesus. Paul therefore concluded that it would be useless to continue under such conditions, and he said to the Christians—those who had already received the testimony—"We will have to separate ourselves from all this."

They evidently hired a public schoolroom. How often the schoolroom has been used for the proclamation of the gospel! How often our home missionaries find no other place but the schoolroom open to them, as they go about from place to place in the rural areas. Well, they have a good precedent here, a good example to follow.

Paul turned away from the synagogue and went into the schoolroom, and there in the school of Tyrannus he continued to preach for two more years, so that we are told, "All they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."

In this we see how wonderfully God carries out His own plans. You remember on the second missionary journey when Paul wanted to go into the province of Asia, the Spirit suffered him not; but now, on this third journey, the door had not only been opened to Asia, but God had so arranged that Paul should stay here long enough for the whole district to be permeated with the message. When we read that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord, it does not necessarily mean that all of them came to hear the Apostle Paul, but it does mean that many of those who did hear the apostle preach believed the message and in turn carried it to those about them.

I think we have sometimes seen something like that in our own country when there has been a great spiritual awakening. I can remember, for instance, when Dwight L. Moody was in the city of Toronto, Canada, when I was only a little lad, how the whole country talked about it, how all the newspapers carried the reports of his sermons, and everywhere one went throughout the prov-

ince he would hear of the messages that Moody had brought to the city of Toronto. Even today I can remember the hymns they used to sing as they went to and from the great gatherings. I would wake up in the night and hear the crowds as they came home from the meetings singing in the streets; the song that was most popular was this:

“The word of God is given to all who serve Him here,  
That when the Lord from heaven in glory shall appear,  
We then shall be delivered from sorrow, sin, and pain;  
And if for Christ we suffer, with Him we then shall  
reign.”

You would hear the chorus everywhere—in street-cars and elsewhere. It rang out:

“We are going home to Jesus! Going home to Jesus!  
Going to the mansions He’s preparing there on high!  
We are going home to Jesus! Going home to Jesus!  
And we’ll gather there in glory by and by!”

I can remember how people were stirred. All in the province heard the Word. So it was with Paul. “All they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus.” There were so many converts that everywhere they carried the Word that Paul was preaching, and all in the district called Asia heard about the wonderful name of Jesus—Jesus, the sinner’s Saviour.

God authenticated the work in a very special

way. Sometimes it is said that it is only when the Word is being ministered to the Jews that we have any miracles, but here is the Apostle Paul ministering in that great Gentile center where there were comparatively few Jews, and most of his hearers were men of the nations.

"And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them." Now we are not told exactly that God commanded this, but it is very evident that the people in their enthusiasm, in their recognition of the fact that God was working in a mighty way through him, came to him and said, "Let us just press this handkerchief against your body in order that it may carry healing to our sick friends." I have known people who have tried to do that today, but they were very poor imitations. But here in this special way God authenticated the message of His servant.

Then we find in verses 13 to 16 an effort to imitate the work of the Lord. If Satan can not hinder that work by direct opposition, he will try to spoil it by patronage or imitation. You remember how in Philippi he used this method. He got that poor, demon-possessed woman to go out into the streets to follow Paul and the others, and cry out,

"These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." Paul had to rebuke the demon that was in that woman, for he would not have the patronage of the devil in the work of the Lord. Here we have the enemy working by direct imitation.

"Then certain of the vagabond Jews"—they were untrue to their own religion, for God's holy law sternly forbade communication with evil spirits of any kind. God condemns spiritism in no uncertain way in the writings of Moses and of the Prophet Isaiah; but these vagabond Jews, these renegades, had given themselves over to this evil thing. They professed to cast out evil spirits by some system of incantation, and they even attempted to use the name of the Lord Jesus in order to exorcise these demons.

"Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." They sought to use the name of Jesus as a kind of charm, in order to deliver these people from their wretched condition. Well, they tried it once too often. "There were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said [that is, a voice came from within the man who was raving in the characteristic manner of one who was demon-

controlled], Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" And energized by Satanic power the possessed man leaped upon them and would have torn them to pieces if they had not run out of the house in dismay. It was the false confronted with the true. They dared to use the true, the holy name of Jesus in this wicked way to authenticate their own pretensions to power, and God would not permit it. "The man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them and overcame them, so that they fled out of that house."

Since this was known throughout the whole country, the people began to realize that there was power in the name of Jesus. Oh, that lovely name! What does it mean? "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Jehovah, the Saviour! That is the meaning of the name, and oh, how precious that name is to every believer! "And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."

Even unsaved people recognized the fact that there was something marvelous, something stupendous about the name of Jesus, something well worth their attention in the gospel message, which is the story of the Lord Jesus. The result of this preaching of the Word and the miracles accompanying it was that many believed.

Their belief was not simply an intellectual acceptance of certain truths, but they truly and definitely opened their hearts to Christ; they trusted Him as their own personal Saviour, and they stepped out boldly before the world, and, as we read, "confessed." What did they confess? Well, of course, they confessed the name of the Lord Jesus for one thing; but they also confessed their sins, and openly repudiated them. It is written: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And the Lord Himself has said: "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father and His holy angels." They confessed that wonderful name, but that was not all. There was another confession they made. "And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds."

These people had been linked with the evil one. Their lives had been marked by sins of the vilest character. Many of them were what were called magicians and witches. They probably had been actually indwelt and controlled by evil spirits, who wrought lying wonders in order to deceive the people. Such charlatans as these were found all over the ancient world of that time. We have many among us even today.

I was in Los Angeles recently. There, is a certain spiritist medium, Helen Templeton by name. She sent me a long communication which she declared D. L. Moody had given through her. She goes into a cataleptic condition and her hand begins to move. What she writes is supposed to be a direct message from some disembodied spirit. The letter she sent me was of five or six pages, professedly from D. L. Moody. He had come to her and wanted to give a message to the pastor of his old church. I was interested in reading this message, which went something like this: He said he was so sorry that when he was here on earth he did not understand. He had preached as well as he knew, but he did not know the glorious truth of spiritism; but now that he is dead, he has found out he was all wrong. Now he knew the blessedness of spiritism, but he was far behind others, and it will take him centuries to make up what he missed by wrong instruction on earth. In the letter he says this: "You know, the whole trouble was my father. He followed in the old paths, and he brought me up in the old ideas. Of course, when I became of age I was responsible and I should have refused, and accepted the truths of spiritism, but not knowing any better I followed his teaching."

I wrote her and said, "Evidently the spirit that controlled you was not very well up on his his-

tory. He did not know that D. L. Moody had no father after he grew up. His father died when Moody was a little baby; and certainly his mother never taught him the old truths, because she was a Unitarian, and was converted through Moody himself years afterward." Evidently some impersonating demon put one over on Helen! He made her think it was Moody, but it was not him at all!

But, oh, how people can be deceived by these things; how they will follow all these wretched efforts to talk with the dead, and work signs and wonders! In all our cities we have clairvoyants, astrologists, dream interpreters, spiritist mediums, and all the rest of them!

Well, many of these Ephesians had been taken up with this kind of wickedness. But see what happened. They believed, and confessed, and showed their deeds. "Many of them also which used curious arts [that is, magicians' arts] brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."

Here was real repentance! Those books cost a lot of money. Magical books—books that would teach them magical charms—they brought them all and had a great public bonfire. My, if you could get all the dream books and magicians' books today, what a bonfire you would have! How readily people are taken up with every kind

of superstition! People can believe the most outlandish fables yet tell you they cannot believe the glorious truths of the gospel.

But the gospel did its work there in Ephesus. The light of the truth delivered them from the darkness of error. They were set free. And they said, "We do not want our books any more." Someone might suggest that they should have taken them down to the second-hand book store and realized a little profit on them, but they would have replied: "If they are not good for us, they are not good for anybody else. We are not going to pass poison on to other people. We are not going to make money on them." "They burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." These people were so much in earnest, that they wanted to be right with God at whatever cost.

Today we would like to see revival; we would like to see marked blessing; we would like to see a great awakening. It will come when the people of God put eternal things above all else. How many of God's beloved saints are trifling with things that hinder their spiritual lives! How many tampering with unholy things! How many giving their time to reading and pondering over books of a wicked character! (The presses of our day are literally teeming with the filthiest

literature that one could possibly see.) What a cleaning out there would be in many Christian homes if they brought out these vile books and periodicals, and burned them up, and said, "By the grace of God, from now on we will read only what is pure and upbuilding." Give God's own Word the first place in your life and then surround it with the books that help you to enjoy that Word more, books that are of a character tending to give you a deeper understanding of the ways of God with men, and you will find real edification.

Those old-time magicians and exorcists had received Christ, and they said, "We do not want the books that we used to have." They burned them up, and they counted everything loss for Christ's sake. So we read, "Mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed."

May I ask you who profess to have accepted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, What have you ever given up for Him? Have you given up anything for Him? Have you surrendered anything for Him? Face that challenge honestly in the light of the Word of God, and remember that He who has redeemed you now claims you as His own. We read:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable (intelligent) service. And be not conformed to this world: but

be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12: 1, 2).

When God's people put Christ first; when they make everything else subject to Him in their lives, then there will be revival; then there will be blessing; then our prayer-meetings will be thronged, and our gatherings for the ministry of the Word will become centers of warm Christian testimony. God give us to be as real today as those Ephesian believers were so long ago!

## LECTURE THIRTY-THREE

### CHRIST CHALLENGING IDOLATRY

**W**E shall now consider a somewhat lengthy section of the book of Acts, but most of it will not need any detailed exposition, for the narrative is of a character that requires little explanation. We begin with chapter 19, verses 21-27:

"After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth."

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In this particular section we have a very striking instance of the beginning of a great conflict

between Christ and idolatry. Some perhaps do not realize that, when the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, after commissioning His twelve apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, the great bulk of the world lay in the darkness of paganism (except for the Jewish nation itself and an occasional few among the more philosophically-minded Greeks). Idols were worshipped everywhere. Throughout the entire Roman Empire the people generally were devotees of false gods. And yet in three hundred years after that which began in such a small way with the preaching of the eleven on the day of Pentecost, idolatry had been practically banished from the civilized parts of the world. It is not entirely banished from the world today, but wherever the gospel of grace goes, and men open their hearts to receive it, idolatry is destroyed. But this has always been through conflict, and so one of the first of these conflicts is pictured for us here.

Paul had made up his mind, after visiting Macedonia and Achaia, that he would return to Jerusalem, and thus complete his third missionary journey. Then he said in his heart, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." He had little idea how he would get there. You remember, in writing to the Romans he asked them to pray: "If by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to

come unto you." God answered that prayer, but not in the way that Paul expected. He went to Rome as a prisoner, and was shipwrecked on the way.

"I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith and love and every grace,  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly His face.

" 'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,  
And He I trust has answered prayer;  
But it has been in such a way  
As almost drove me to despair."

I think Paul might have said that concerning the answer to his prayer for a safe and prosperous journey to Rome. What God considers prosperity may often seem to our shortsightedness to be adversity.

Paul then sent into Macedonia Timotheus and Erastus, two of his fellow-workers, but he continued for a little longer, laboring in the city of Ephesus in Asia where he had already been preaching for about two years. And now, because of the great inroads that Christianity had made in the conflict with idolatry, a riot broke out.

Demetrius, a silversmith, a man who made silver shrines for Diana, which brought no small gain to the craftsmen, called together his fellows and, appealing to their cupidity, said to them, "Now, brethren, you know that it is through

making these idols that we get our living, and this man Paul has come among us and is persuading people that there are no gods which are made with hands, and the result is depression in the idol business. Our business is falling off. People are not buying silver shrines as they did in the past; and unless something is done to stop this new propaganda, our craft is going to be set at nought." He saw the danger and so mentioned it, simply from the standpoint of a worldly-minded, selfish man.

It was said, you know, that the image of Diana which was enshrined in the temple, and accounted one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, had fallen down from heaven. Actually what was enshrined in that temple was a great meteorite, which was shaped, very roughly, after the figure of a woman. The people said, "This is an image of the goddess Diana, and she sent it down from heaven that it might be worshipped, and that our city may become the center of her cult." On the site of a marsh outside the city they built a gorgeous temple in which was enshrined this black meteorite, and the people thronged there by the thousands to worship Diana. And those who desired to carry back to their homes replicas of the image purchased these silver shrines that they might worship and adore them in their own cities.

So by appealing in this way to the cupidity of these shrine manufacturers, Demetrius stirred them up to indignation. We read, commencing with verse 28:

"And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Very often, the less that certain people know about things, the more they shout about them and try to convince themselves as to their truth by the noise they make. It was so on this occasion.

"And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre" (29).

There was a great theatre in Ephesus, the ruins of which are still to be seen.

"And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia [*Asiarchs* is the word used here by Luke, who is always punctilious in his use of titles] which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together" (30-32).

Finally the mob lit upon a prominent Jew, and they drew him, a man by the name of Alexander, "out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people"

—evidently to show that he as a Jew did not have any part in this Christian worship, though both Jew and Christian worshipped the one true and living God, and both of their systems, therefore, were opposed to idolatry.

“But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (34).

If she had never been great before, all that shouting ought to have made her great, but it didn't! She was soon utterly defeated and fell before the advance of the cross of Christ.

“And when the town clerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?” [Jupiter, the supreme god] (35).

Notice how sure the man was, and yet today there is no man living on the face of the earth who worships the goddess Diana!

“Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly, for ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches [the word should be “temples,” for the word “church,” of course, as we know it today was not known to them], nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies [or proconsuls, or, as we would say today, lawyers or attorneys]: let them implead one another. But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly” (36-39).

The town clerk was a stickler for law and order, and he realized that a mob was simply an unruly group liable to go to any excess, and so he sought to quiet them—

“For we are in danger to be called in question for this day’s uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly” (40, 41).

And singularly enough, the word translated “assembly” there is the Greek word *ecclesia*, which throughout the New Testament is used to indicate the people of the new creation, the Church of the living God. The “ecclesia” is really a called-out company, and it might be used of a crowd like this as well as an orderly Christian group. Then we are told that:

“After the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, and there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas” (Chap. 20: 1-5).

The use of the pronoun “us” here shows that Luke remained with Paul. He was the apostle’s intimate companion. Luke wrote this record—“These other brethren waited for *us* at Troas”—the city almost on the site of ancient Troy, celebrated by Homer.

"And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days" (6).

Then Luke tells us of a very interesting thing that took place and which I want particularly now to bring before you :

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (7).

This is evidently something to which the Holy Spirit desires to draw our attention in a special way; otherwise it would not be mentioned so definitely. They arrived in Troas, remained there seven days until the first day of the week rolled around. And what is the first day of the week? The day that we call Sunday. And on this day, not on the Jewish Sabbath, but on the first day of the week, already it had become customary apparently for the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ to gather together for a specific purpose, and that purpose is called here "to break bread."

This refers, of course, to that simple yet beautiful feast which our Lord Jesus instituted before He left this scene. When He gathered His disciples about Him in the upper room and after they had observed the Jewish feast of the Passover, He took bread (one of the Passover flat cakes) and He said, "This is My body which is broken for you"—the breaking of bread—and then hand-

ing it to His disciples, He said, "This do in remembrance of Me." Likewise also He took the cup after supper. There was a cup upon the table of which ordinarily no one partook. It was called the cup of blessing, and if the members of the household said, "Why is this cup on the table?" the Jewish father answered, "It is the cup of blessing for Messiah when He comes." Jesus, celebrating the Passover with His disciples, now took the cup of blessing, for He was the Messiah, and He said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is shed for you for the remission of sins: drink ye all of it." Thus He instituted the Lord's Supper.

Now we find that after some twenty years had elapsed it seems to have been a customary thing for the disciples to meet together frequently to observe this feast of love. On this occasion it says it was on the first day of the week. It may not always have been so frequently, but I am sure that, where love is warm, people delight to observe this as often as they can.

They came together on the first day of the week, not to hear a preacher, though the greatest of preachers was there, the Apostle Paul; not to hear a teacher, though the greatest of teachers was there, for there has never been another teacher as great as the Apostle Paul; and they certainly did not come together just to sing

hymns, though we know they did sing, as we are told in 1 Corinthians 14:26. They did not come for any of these purposes, and they certainly did not come to be entertained or amused; but "they came together to break bread." They gathered together to remember the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether there was a preacher or not made little difference, or whether there was a teacher or not did not matter; whether there was beautiful singing or not, they were not concerned about that; but they *were* concerned about remembering the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread.

And so Paul and his companions took advantage of this opportunity. They met with the disciples that evening to break bread. Notice that it was in the evening. Most of the disciples were slaves. They had to work all day, but now that the evening had come they were able to slip away and gather together in some quiet place and show the Lord's death in view of His coming again. And as they thus came together to break bread, Paul was ready, by the Spirit of God, to preach to them, and he "continued his speech until midnight." You see, they did not have many opportunities to listen to the expounding of the Word, and of course on very few occasions would be able to hear the Apostle Paul. Although the meeting went on and on, hour after hour, we do not read that there was any complaint. But

we do read of one poor man who was completely overcome.

"There were many lights in the upper chamber" (they were in an upper room somewhere), "and there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep." This dear fellow wasn't the last man to be overpowered by drowsiness in a meeting! But Eutychus was seated in a rather dangerous place—in the window. "And as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." But "Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him"; that is, he was apparently in a state of coma. So Paul was used of God for his restoration. Every preacher does not have that power. It is too bad, perhaps, that we do not; so if you endanger yourselves by going to sleep under our sermons, you will yourselves have to endure whatever results. But Paul was able to overcome the bad results.

"When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed" (11).

We can just imagine what a wonderful occasion it was to that little group at Troas. Brought out, some from Paganism and some from Judaism, and now together as representing one Body, they

had come to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread. I think I see them wending their way from their different places to the third story of that building, and when they got there, what a delightful surprise! Who are these visitors? Why, the Apostle Paul and Dr. Luke! And here are his friends Aristarchus and Secundus, and so on. And they are all there to break bread with them and to have happy Christian fellowship together. But now they say, "We must not lose this opportunity. Paul is here; we are ready to give attention to any word he has for us from God." So, for some hours Paul went on opening up the precious things of the Word of God, and even after the serious accident to Eutychus, up they went again and gathered about him, and they were still conferring together of the things of the Lord when the morning sun began to rise.

What a wonderful picture! and it just gives us some little idea of what real Christian fellowship meant to those believers in that early day. And is it not a standing miracle that although centuries have passed since then—almost two milleniums—still all over the world, wherever the gospel has been carried, you will find people coming together for the breaking of bread, coming together to partake of the bread and cup in tender, loving memory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Someone may ask, "Of what value is the com-

munion service? Does it save the soul?" We say, "No." The communion is for those whose souls are saved. Well, of what real worth is it? Do we have to do this thing? Oh, no. If we had to do it, it would lose its preciousness, but our Lord Jesus has requested us to do it. He has said: "This do in remembrance of Me." And its value is this: That as we obey that word, it brings Christ Himself more precious before our hearts; we meditate on His love, we think of His passion, we consider His cross, His bitter sorrows, and we say in our hearts, "The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me," and we express on our part our love for Him who has thus redeemed us to Himself.

## LECTURE THIRTY-FOUR

# PAUL'S FAREWELL TESTIMONY TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

1 1 1

"And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold,

I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20: 13-27).

1 1 1

WE shall consider these verses now and take up Paul's *final charge* to these Ephesian elders in a separate section. Here the outstanding thing is Paul's own personal experience.

We have seen something of Paul at Troas where he had the privilege of remembering the Lord in the breaking of bread with a group of believers on the evening of the first day of the week. After he had preached the Word he prepared to go on toward Jerusalem, with the intention, however, of stopping at Ephesus by the way. His companions, including Luke, the writer of this book, left him at Troas and went down into the ship and sailed along the coast to a place called Assos. There they intended to take Paul in, who had walked from Troas to Assos. After meeting him, they sailed on to Mitylene, and then, as Luke says, "We sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos" (an island in the Ægean Sea), "and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus." Miletus was the port for the city of Ephesus, a few miles inland.

"Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus." He was anxious to be at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost if possible. You remember the marvelous events that had happened on Pentecost nearly thirty years before! From all parts of the Roman world the Jewish people gathered together annually for the feast, and Paul undoubtedly considered it would be his opportunity to meet and present Christ to many of them. So, stopping near Ephesus, he asked the elders of the church to come to him; and as they gathered together, Paul gave them this final testimony.

He said, "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations (trials) which befell me." His tribulations were chiefly because of the enmity of some of his own nation after the flesh who did not understand. They thought he had turned away from the faith of their fathers to teach something that was utterly false. Yet Paul went on earnestly, devotedly ministering Christ.

I think he puts before us here what should characterize every true minister of Christ: "Serving the Lord with all humility (lowliness) of mind." If there is any position, any calling where pride should have no place, it is in connection with the ministry of the Word of God, for,

to begin with, the minister of Christ is one who was just a poor, lost, needy sinner, but who has been saved by grace and entrusted with a message to the world and to the people of God. He does not receive this because of any merit of his own. It is all because of the goodness of the Lord. Certainly therefore he has nothing to be proud of.

When people used to crowd around George Whitefield and praise him because of his marvelous preaching, he would stop them like this: "The devil told me that just before I came down from the pulpit." Then he would add, "There are many who can preach the gospel better than I can, but none can preach a *better* gospel." It is the message that counts. The servant is really nothing, and the more we realize this and are willing to take the place of nothingness, the more God delights to come in and work through His servants.

We see in Paul the ideal minister of Christ, characterized by lowliness of mind and by tenderness of heart. That comes out in this testimony. He had served the Lord with all humility of mind, and he was not ashamed to weep with them that weep. We who try to minister Christ may well pray for tender, compassionate hearts. Men and women on every hand are in grief and sorrow. We can well understand what Joseph Parker

meant when, addressing a group of ministerial students, he said: "Young gentlemen, always preach to broken hearts, and you will never lack for an audience."

Oh, the sorrowing people in the world today, the broken hearts all about us! How men need that tender message of comfort which the gospel brings! But unless it comes from a heart that is really softened by divine grace, it is powerless to help and bless others. And so Paul says, "I serve the Lord with many tears." They were not sham tears; they were not crocodile tears.

I heard of a clergyman who had all kinds of instructions written in the margins of his type-written sermons. When some of his hearers found one of these sermons which had been left on the pulpit, they were surprised to read: "Smile here." "Raise the voice here." "Lower the voice here." "Weep here." And so on! It was all made-to-order emotion. That does not glorify God. But one who is in touch with the tender, sympathetic heart of the Lord Jesus, who really feels for those to whom he ministers, will be able to bring a message of consolation to those who are tried and troubled. Such an one was the Apostle Paul. His trials never turned him aside. He pressed forward in spite of them.

And then he was so true to his commission. He says, "I kept back nothing that was profitable

unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house." He was not simply a man of the pulpit. As he stood on the platform he was faithful in giving out the Word of God; he sought to be just as faithful as he visited the people in their homes.

It is pitiable, I think, that to a great extent the good old-fashioned custom of pastoral visitation has almost died out. A strange thing occurred to me not long ago. While speaking in a certain city, I learned of a dear soul who was very ill and longed to come to our meetings but was very disappointed because she could not come. So I thought, I will look her up. I found her address and went to see her. I had a very delightful visit, and then I asked, "Shall we read a little from God's Word?" "Oh," she replied, "how I wish you would!" So I read a portion of Scripture, then bowed with her in prayer. And our hearts were moved. But this was the strange part: when I was leaving, she said, "This is the first time in twenty years that I have ever had a minister read God's Word or pray with me when he visited me." "Well," I said, "perhaps you haven't been visited often." "Oh, yes," she answered; "our minister comes about once a month, and he usually tells me the latest good story and tries to cheer me up a bit." Isn't it pitiable? I do not know any more precious min-

istry than that of going into the homes of God's dear people and opening up the Word and then lifting up the heart to God in prayer. This is true apostolic service.

What was the burden of Paul's ministry? "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice the two classes—the Jews that God had set apart for Himself, who had been instructed by prophets and teachers throughout the centuries; and the Greeks. (Here, "Greeks" is an all-inclusive term for the different Gentile peoples. Greek was the language spoken almost universally in the Roman world at this time.) Paul says, "My testimony was the same in character whether to the Jew or to the Greek."

We are sometimes told today that there is one kind of gospel for Jews and another for Gentiles. Paul knew nothing of it. He says, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks." What? "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." I am afraid the first thing of which he speaks there is largely missing in many places today. I believe there are many who profess to be fundamental preachers who seldom call men to repentance. And yet if you will go through the book of Acts and on into the Epistles, you will see what a large place repentance had in apostolic ministry. The Apostle Peter

went from place to place calling men to repentance. Paul himself insisted on it wherever he went, and he could say to these Ephesian elders, "During all the time I was with you, and wherever else I have gone, I have called men to repentance." In a preceding chapter we saw that God "commanded all men everywhere to repent, because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained." I suppose the reason some of my dear brethren are so afraid of the word "repentance" is that they imagine people will think of it as a meritorious act.

Repentance is just the sick man's acknowledgment of his illness. It is simply the sinner recognizing his guilt and confessing his need of deliverance. Do not confound repentance with penitence. Penitence is sorrow for sin, and "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." Do not confound repentance with remorse. Remorse generally consists in grieving because you are found out. How many a man in prison is filled with remorse, because he got caught! Remorse is not real repentance. Judas was deeply remorseful when he saw how things were going with Jesus, and he brought the thirty pieces of silver and threw them down in the office of the high priest, but he was not truly repentant before God. The words translated,

"Judas repented," more properly should be "Judas was remorseful, and he went out and hanged himself." That is the sorrow of the world that results in death, but godly sorrow leads to repentance.

Repentance is not penance. It is not trying in some way or other to make up for the wrong things of the past. Repentance is far more than that. It is judging oneself in the presence of God; turning right about face, turning to God with a sincere, earnest desire to be completely delivered from sin. And when a man takes that attitude toward God and puts his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he finds salvation; for apart from that, faith will never be real. The two things go together—repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

May I ask you who read this: Have you ever faced your sins in the presence of God? Go back into the Old Testament and you find that God has given us an entire book to show us the importance of repentance. That book is Job. It is the record of the best man that God could find in that ancient world, and he demonstrates even to Satan himself that his outward life is absolutely without flaw. Yet before God finishes with that good man, we hear him crying out from the depths of a broken heart: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth

Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

My friend, if a good man like Job needed to make a confession like that, surely you and I need it. We may well come before God and take the place of lowliness and repentance. If I address among you a poor, broken-hearted, repentant soul, and you are grieving over the sins of the past, recognizing your guilt and longing for deliverance, then I would point you to the Lord Jesus Christ who in infinite grace on yonder cross bore your sins in order that you might be forever delivered from the judgment due to sin. Paul links up faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ with repentance toward God. Put your trust in Him. Look to Him. He has said, "Look unto Me and be ye saved, for I am God and there is none else." When you look up in faith to Him, then He takes you up in grace, puts away all the sins of the past, gives you a new life and a new standing before Him. This may be yours today if you have not trusted Him already.

But now, having reviewed this, Paul looks forward into the future. He says, "Now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there." He felt that he must go. There are certain things that come before us a little later on that might make us wonder if he was right in that. Even

the best of men err in judgment, and it may be that Paul was wrong in going up to Jerusalem.

We are told later on of one who said to him "by the Spirit" that he should not go to Jerusalem, but he could not recognize it as the voice of God. He felt that he must go. One reason that he wanted to go was because of his intense love for his Jewish brethren. He was a Christian, but a Hebrew Christian, and he could say, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved, for I bear them record that they have a zeal of God but not according to knowledge." He desired to help them; and he felt that to go to Jerusalem at Pentecost and meet them and witness to them might mean the salvation of many. So he was determined to go to Jerusalem for Pentecost, and yet he says, "Wherever I go, I am told that bonds and afflictions await me." Doubtless the Spirit of God spoke through various brethren as he moved on from city to city, who said, "Paul, we are afraid you are making a tremendous mistake. Your mission is specially to the Gentiles; not to Israel."

But somehow he could not recognize that as the voice of the Lord to turn him aside. He took it rather as the voice of the tempter seeking to dissuade him. "But," said he, "none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy,

and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." In other words, he is saying, "After all, my life is of no account except as it is used for the glory of God, except as I have the privilege of ministering Christ to others. I am not afraid of bonds and imprisonment, but I am afraid of dishonoring my Lord, and so my great concern is to finish my course with joy."

It is very interesting to notice in connection with this the Apostle's last epistle—Second Timothy. You there find him writing from a dungeon death-cell, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." That which he longed for actually came true. Notice that the great thing he had received of the Lord Jesus was to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And there can be no higher calling than to be a preacher of the gospel.

I sometimes feel, you know, that some of us who minister the Word are inclined to undervalue the work of the evangelist and to think that teaching believers is a more important work. But there is no greater ministry than that of going to poor, lost, needy sinners with the gospel of the grace of God.

I have been told of Duncan Matheson, who, on one occasion, was asked to address a meeting. Over a thousand Christians had gathered there

to hear the Word. He read a portion of Scripture that had a wonderful message for Christians, and began forthwith to open it up for their edification. But as he thought of poor, needy sinners he turned to them instead and went on to fill the whole hour with a gospel message. At the close of the meeting one of the conveners came up to him and said, "Brother Matheson, it was really too bad. Here were a thousand Christians who came for some spiritual food, and you spent the entire hour preaching the gospel." "Oh," said he, "were no unsaved ones there?" "There might have been a half-dozen or so." With a twinkle in his eye, the old man replied in his Scotch way, "Oh well, ye ken, Christians, if they are Christians, will manage to wiggle awa' to heaven some way, if they never learn any more truth, but poor sinners have got to be saved or be in hell!" We never want to forget that, and that is why the most important message God ever gave to man was the message of the gospel of the grace of God.

A friend of mine inquired of an older minister about a young preacher he had known. The other replied, "I am afraid he is not doing very well. He has fallen from being a gospel preacher to becoming a prophetic lecturer." Some people would think that was going up, but it might really be going down. Of course it is perfectly right and proper to minister on prophecy if the Lord

so leads, but not to the neglect of the gospel—the testimony of the gospel of the grace of God.

“And now, behold,” Paul says, “I know that ye all” (I know that his heart was sad when he said this), “among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.”

What did he mean by that? He was thinking doubtless of that passage in Ezekiel where God said, “If I take a man and set him in the watch tower and he seeth the sword coming but does not warn the people, their blood will be upon his head; but if the watchman see the sword coming and warn the people and they take not warning, then they shall die in their iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.” Paul says, “I have delivered my soul. I am pure from the blood of all. I have not ceased to warn day and night. I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

There you have the Holy Spirit's answer to some who would tell us that Paul never knew the full counsel of God until after he reached the prison in Rome.

May that ever be our testimony as we seek to minister the Word of Christ!

## LECTURE THIRTY-FIVE

# PAUL'S CHARGE TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

1 1 1

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship" (Acts 20: 28-38).

1 1 1

WE have been meditating upon Paul's final *testimony* to the Ephesian elders. We noticed that on his way to Jerusalem he came ashore at Miletus, the port of Ephesus, and

there had the elders come down from the city to meet him, that he might speak with them for the last time on earth. And so he first gave them his own personal testimony to the way God had called him out, set him apart as a minister of the gospel, and something of the content of his message; and in the verses which we now consider he concludes his address by his final *charge* to them.

An elder, according to the Word of God, is a man approved in life and doctrine; one who, because of mature years and consistent Christian living, is selected by the Holy Spirit to serve in a special capacity having to do with the oversight of the spiritual affairs of the Church of God. It is a very serious thing to be called to assume such responsibility. It is not something that any man should ever seek as a matter of personal advancement. It is not an honor that the Church should bestow upon a man simply in recognition of his spiritual gifts or his fine personality, or because he happens to have a standing in society that would make him an outstanding representative of the Church. Nothing like that. But it is a calling, a divine calling to serve the people of God, and the elder is to be known by his earnestness, his devotedness, his tender compassion for others, his faithfulness in living and proclaiming the truth; and God holds him responsible to a very

great extent for the spiritual welfare of the believers who recognize him as called under God to this office. Understand, when I am speaking of an elder, I am not simply speaking of a pastor or a teacher, but of an overseer in the Church of God. Scripture says that at the judgment-seat of Christ elders are to give an account as those that watch for the souls of believers committed to their charge; so they have a very, very responsible place indeed.

We who are members of the Church of God should ever be ready to recognize them and to give to them the honor that belongs to them. Scripture says the elders that rule well should be accounted worthy of double reverence. I sometimes think that the Church of God is about the only place left today where age really counts. You cannot jump over twenty years of Christian experience.

So often dear young Christians are impatient of restraint and impatient of the kind and fatherly care of God-appointed elders. On the contrary, they should recognize the fact that these men of God have been over the path ahead of them, that they have had the struggles and the temptations and the trials which the young are now facing. There was a time when they too had to combat the world as young people do now, but through grace they were enabled to overcome, and

now with the experience they have attained they are able to guide and direct younger men. I know that outside in the world when a man reaches even middle age he is thrown to one side as one no longer fit to take a responsible position. In the Church no man is ready for a responsible position until he has become a mature servant of God.

Paul sends for these elders and tells them first of his ministry and then he gives them a very definite charge. "Take heed," he says, "therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock." Notice the order. Yourselves first, then the flock. It is possible that even an elder may turn to one side. It is possible that even one who has known the Lord for many years may be tripped up by some snare of the enemy, and therefore the elder needs to be careful of his own walk, of his own spiritual fellowship with God, and then he is to have a care for the flock of God.

You will notice that twice in this passage the apostle uses that term, "the flock." In verse 28, and again in verse 29, he speaks of grievous wolves entering in, not sparing "the flock." It is a very lovely expression. It suggests, as our Lord Jesus has told us in John 10, that the people of God are His sheep. You remember He said that He came as the Good Shepherd to call His own sheep out of the fold of Judaism, and then

He said, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring," referring to the Gentiles, "and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd." Judaism was a fold without a center. Christianity is a flock; there is a center without a circumference. There is no fold built around the flock of God. Its safety is in keeping close to the Shepherd. There are various similes used for God's people. This is one of the most beautiful. As members of the flock of God, how careful we should be to keep close to our Shepherd, to walk in His steps!

Now he says to these elders, "The Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the Church of God." The word translated "overseers" is our word "bishops." Some of us have come to think of a bishop as a man set over a great many churches, but here the apostle speaks of a number of bishops in one local church, for a bishop is an overseer. They have the spiritual oversight in the Church of God, and he commands them, in their care for the saints, "to feed the Church of God." The same company he spoke of as a flock he now speaks of as a Church, a called-out company, which is the exact meaning of the Greek word *ecclesia*.

What a wonderful thing it is to belong to that company! Paul once persecuted that company. God forgave him, but he could never forgive him-

self. "I am in sorrow because I persecuted the Church of God." Oh, I fancy many a night he lay awake thinking of the affliction that he had brought on God's dear children in years gone by. But he says, "God had mercy on me because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Notice, the company that he persecuted is the same company to which he joined himself after he was converted. The church at Ephesus was the Church of God. The Church of God was the object of his persecution.

"Purchased with His own blood." "Purchased with the blood of His own," would be a better rendering of this. Fundamentally, you could not speak of the blood of God, because God is a Spirit without physical form, and therefore to speak of the blood of God would be incongruous; but if you turn it around, you get the exact meaning of what Paul said to these men: "Feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with the blood of His own," that is, the blood of His own Son. The Lord Jesus Christ was God; but in order that He might shed His blood for our redemption, He became Man. He who was God and Man in one Person went to the cross and poured out His precious blood to make propitiation for our sins; and now we who believe in Him constitute the Church of God and the flock of God, and as such we need food.

It is the business of the elders to feed the flock

of God. How do they do this? By ministering the truth to them—the truth about Christ. As the Word of God is opened up and brought home in power to the flock, they feed upon Christ Himself. That is one reason why we are warned against “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is.”

Many Christians today shrug their shoulders and say, “Oh, I am not interested in going to meeting. I don’t need to go; I can worship God just as well at home.” But in so acting they deliberately rob their own souls of that food which they need for their spiritual upbuilding. We need the Word of God; and He has appointed that, as His people gather together, the truth should be opened up that the saints may be nourished on the words of sound doctrine. “Feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with the blood of His own.”

Then the apostle brings in a warning. He looks with prophetic eye down through the centuries and there he sees what has now become history. As the centuries went on, unconverted men came into the outward circle of the Church of God. Professing to be Christians, many of them pushed forward into places of leadership, and the history of the professing Church is a very sad history indeed. Oh, so many unrighteous, unconverted men seeking to hold positions of authority over

God's people—grievous wolves entering in from the outside, not sparing the flock! But then, not alone did they come in from the outside, for the apostle says, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

It has been one of Satan's favorite methods of disrupting the peace of the saints of God, to raise up in their midst men, perhaps truly converted to God, but men who in large measure were self-seeking; and these men endeavored to force upon the saints of God certain teachings in order to make division in God's house, and then gather a group around themselves with the object of attaining personal recognition and support. Just as though he were living today and could see what is going on in so many places, the apostle predicts this very thing!

Well, now, what is the Christian's confidence? What is his safety in view of such circumstances as these? He says, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years" (the three years in which he had labored at Ephesus) "I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." The apostle was not ashamed of tears. To him eternal things were so real that, when he saw people turning coldly away from them, it almost broke his heart, and he wept over them; and then as he entered into the homes of

God's saints and saw the sorrows that many of them had to endure—bereavement, sickness, penury, and persecution—he was no unsympathetic onlooker. He could weep with those who wept and rejoice with those who rejoiced. This expresses the heart of the true pastor. "I serve with tears, and I cease not to warn you with tears."

"But now I am going away from you," he is saying. "I am never going to see you on earth again, but here is your resource in the day of difficulty": "I commend you to God"—He abides when His servants pass on—"and to the Word of His grace" (God's blessed, infallible and inspired book, the Bible) "which is able to build you up," to edify you.

Why is it that many Christians today make such slow progress in the Christian life and are so weak when they ought to be strong? It is because they give so little time to the reading of the Word of God. I would like to press the question home upon your minds, dear friends. How much time do you really give to the Bible day by day? Do you study the Word? Do you take time to meditate on the Word?

I was in Glasgow, Scotland, some years ago, and a dear missionary from India, returned home on furlough, took part in the meeting. He read us a letter which he had received from an Indian

elder in the church which the missionary had left behind. This is what he read: "Dear brother, we have missed you greatly while you have been gone, but we are trying to carry on. We are all studying the Word more faithfully than ever, and God has already been at work and we are having a great rebible." He meant "revival," but he spelled it "r-e-b-i-b-l-e." And you know, that dear missionary reading the letter said, "Brethren, I do not think there was any mistake in that letter because whenever there is a re-Bible movement, there will be a revival."

And that is what we need—to get back to the Bible, to give more attention to the Bible. There are professing Christians who rarely open their Bibles from one Sunday to the next unless perhaps to read the Sunday-school lesson. There are many Christian homes which no longer have a family altar, where husband and wife and children never sit down to read the Word together and lift up their hearts to God in prayer. Is it any wonder that the Church of God is so weak? Is it any wonder that worldliness is coming in like a flood? Is it any wonder that false doctrines are so readily accepted when God's own beloved people are not acquainted with His holy Word?

Our resources, I repeat, in the day of evil are God and the Word of His grace, "which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance

among all them which are sanctified." What is it to be sanctified? It is to be set apart to God, and every believer is set apart through God's grace, and as we study the Word our sanctification goes on practically. More and more in life and heart we are separated to the Lord alone.

And now again he refers to his own attitude. He who would seek to help and bless others need not expect to lift them any higher than he is himself. Water does not rise above its own level. The minister of the gospel must be very careful to walk with God in his private life as well as publicly, and so Paul says, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." "I have not been among you for what I could get from you." "Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me."

Whenever funds gave out, you never find Paul trying to stir them up, to get them to give him anything. I was rather shocked to read in the newspaper recently of a minister who was suing the church for not having been given all his salary. Paul never did anything like that. He never appealed for anything for himself. He was not afraid to ask for others, however. He asked funds for the poor saints at Jerusalem, but he never asked for himself. He said, "I have the authority, but I will forego it." When money

gave out, he went around and got a job. He was not afraid of degrading the "cloth" or of getting his hands dirty. He found a job at tent-making, and he not only supported himself, but he supported those who were with him. "I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

When did He say it? Where is it recorded? You search the four Gospels and you will never find these words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And yet Paul, speaking to these Ephesian elders, Gentiles far away from Palestine where Jesus had lived and preached and died and rose again, records them. You see, it is evident that these words fell frequently from the lips of the Lord Jesus. They are not recorded elsewhere, but the saints spoke of them as they moved from place to place. Different ones remembered they had often heard Him say them. He was in the habit of saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

I can imagine when Philip came so sorrowfully and said, "Lord, here are all these people and what are we going to do with them?" Jesus said, "Give ye them to eat." Philip looked at Him in amazement and said, "Why, it would take 200 pence" (that isn't 200 pennies in our money, but

it would be the equivalent of about \$200) "to get bread enough for these people." Jesus said, "All right, what have you got?" and they handed Him five loaves and two small fishes. He blessed and brake them and gave to the disciples, and probably even then turned to some of them and said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And when He was ministering help to some poor, sin-sick soul, no doubt He would turn to Peter or one of the other disciples and say, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

It makes one so happy to be rather at the "giving end" than the "receiving end." These "gimme-gimme" folks who are always going around with an open hand, hoping you will give them something, are not happy people. The happy ones are those who give to others. I do admire Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch. No matter how many came in to dinner, she said, "It's all right, we can just add another ladle of water to the soup." She found it was more blessed to give than to receive; and so it is with the consistent Christian who is living in fellowship with his Lord. "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; that is, it makes you happier to give than to receive.

Well, Paul's address is concluded. Now I think I can visualize this little company. These words of Luke's help so. "When he had thus spoken, he

kneeled down, and prayed with them all." There is Paul on the seashore, and they are all kneeling around him. What a hallowed little prayer meeting that must have been!

They were sad because the one who had led them to Christ was going away, and they feared some dreadful thing was about to come upon him. They did not understand it all, but there they were, bowed reverently before God, and Paul prayed with them all. Wouldn't you like to know what he said? If only there had been a record made of it that we could hear it today! How I would love to enter into that prayer! Oh, I know that he must have poured out his heart in prayer for these elders that they might be given all needed grace and wisdom to guide the saints aright. It affected them very definitely, for we read: "And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him." Strong men they were, and yet they were not ashamed in this way to express their deep love for the man of God who had won them for Christ when they were strangers to grace.

But "sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." And they never did. It was his farewell. He went on to Jerusalem, was arrested, incarcerated at Cæsarea, and taken on to Rome, and although after two years of imprisonment there

he was set free for a little time, evidently he never reached Ephesus again. His work with them was done, but oh, done so well! Surely he had no regrets as he looked back. He had served so faithfully. God grant that when you and I finish our work we may be able to rejoice in what God has wrought and not have our consciences troubling us because of unfaithful service.

## LECTURE THIRTY-SIX

# PAUL'S FINAL VISIT TO JERUSALEM AND HIS ARREST

1 1 1

“And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: and finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cæsarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that

place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21: 1-14).

/ / /

WE come now to a most interesting incident in the life of the Apostle Paul. In our study of this book we have followed him from the days when he was a bitter persecutor of the Church of God, through his conversion, his giving himself up to the work of the Lord, his three missionary journeys, carrying the gospel throughout all that region which we generally designate as the Near East, and then we saw him leaving Ephesus for the last time to continue his journey to Jerusalem.

Already the Spirit of God had intimated through different servants of His in various places that this journey would not be as successful as Paul had hoped. It is very evident that it was his deep love for his own people after the flesh, the Jews, that led him to go up to Jerusalem. He was going to them with alms that had been committed to him by the Christians in the Gentile churches to assist those in Judea who were suffering because of famine. He felt that this opportunity to minister to his people in a temporal way

—both those who had become Christians and those who were still Hebrews and refused the Christian testimony—would enable him to show them how truly he loved his people, and that this would be used of God to break down the bigotry and the bitter opposition in the hearts of so many of them.

He knew exactly how they felt. He himself had felt as they felt. There was a time when he thought of Jesus as a deceiver, as one who was misleading the people, and he felt himself bound to do everything he could to hinder the work of the gospel, but the Lord had won his heart, and now he hoped by special kindness to his own people to be able to win them.

But we need to remember this. When God saved him by grace and called him to be a minister of Christ, He especially commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles; and although wherever Paul went he invariably entered the synagogue and preached to the Jews first, yet it was always among the Gentiles that he found the most fruit.

With the Apostle Peter it was different. The Lord seemed to have given Peter a special gift and ministry for the Jews, and when Paul and James and Peter and John and others met together in Jerusalem years before and talked things over, they agreed among themselves that

evidently Peter's special mission was to the Jews and Paul's to the Gentiles. But he could not forget the blood ties that held him fast as a man after the flesh to Israel, and he still hoped he might be God's special messenger to them. So he was making his way toward Jerusalem.

Did he make a mistake in so doing? Did he really disobey the voice of the Lord? It is hard for us to say. We may be sure of this, that if he did make a mistake, he made it from the best of motives. If he blundered here, he blundered out of an overpowering love for the Jewish people. I am afraid that some of us cannot say of our mistakes that they always have had love behind them; but if Paul made a mistake here, it should be a great encouragement to some of us.

You ask, Why? Well, you see, we are apt to think of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ as though they were men of an altogether different calibre from ourselves and, therefore, that we need not think that there is any possibility of our being used as they were. But we learn as we study the book of Acts that these men were of like passions with ourselves. They had the same fallible judgment that we have. They could be misled as we are misled.

The Apostle Peter was clearly misled at Antioch when he withdrew himself from the Gentiles and refused to eat with them when Jew-

ish brethren came down from Jerusalem. We have already seen how Paul and Barnabas misunderstood one another and had a bitter quarrel over the case of young John Mark; and all these things impress upon us the fact that these were men like ourselves who needed daily to seek guidance of the Lord that they might be directed aright, and who had to confess their own sins and their failures. This is a great encouragement to one like myself, and I cannot help thinking it ought to be to others also. I realize that one blunders so frequently; one errs in so many ways. Even when one has attempted to do the very best thing, he often feels in looking back that he has made a mistake on the right hand or the left.

It is such an encouragement to know that all the work that God has accomplished through His servants in this world He has done through imperfect instruments. He has never had a perfect instrument. The Lord Jesus, of course, was perfect, but He was more than an instrument. He was God Himself manifest in the flesh. But all the merely human servants that God has ever had have blundered somewhere.

Go back into the Old Testament. Noah failed terribly after the flood when he came under the power of wine. Abraham denied his wife. Isaac failed because of fleshly appetite. Jacob—what a record of blundering and failure was his! Moses

## 502 *Paul's Visit to Jerusalem—His Arrest*

—his spirit was provoked at the waters of Meribah, as a result of which he was not permitted to enter into the land of Canaan. David—what a blot there was on his record, though he bitterly repented of his sin!

So one might go on through all the Old Testament, and find that even when we come to the New Testament the same thing is true. We think of John as the gentlest and most loving of the Lord's disciples, and yet John and James would have called down fire from heaven and burned up the city of the Samaritans because they refused the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter denied his Lord. Thomas doubted. Over all of them "Failure" could be written. And yet God used these men in spite of their failures, in spite of their lack of judgment, and He brought them to repentance because of their sin and He cleansed them from all unrighteousness, and gave them opportunity after opportunity to magnify His grace, and so we read a record like this in Acts 21.

It is not incumbent upon us to judge the Apostle Paul. It looks as though he missed the mind of God here. Yet if he did, we realize that we too have often missed His mind. Still He has been so wonderfully patient and kind, our hearts can only go out to Him in deep thanksgiving for all His patience and His kindness toward us.

The early verses of this 21st chapter are very

interesting if you read them with a map before you. You can trace Paul's journey from Miletus right on to Jerusalem, but you notice in verse four that when they got to Tyre, where they remained for seven days, they found disciples who said to Paul—now observe this—"through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem." Now was this simply testing his readiness to suffer, or was it really a warning word forbidding him to go? It may be a little difficult for us to decide, but there is the statement. They said to Paul through the Holy Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. But it is very evident that if this was a positive command not to go, Paul did not recognize it as such. He rather took it as a test of his readiness to endure, and so he went on.

Luke, who was with him, said, "When we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed." We had something similar to that in the last chapter. There Paul kneeled down on the shore and prayed with the Ephesian elders, and now here is this little group. It is so interesting to notice the women and the little children all knelt together and prayed as they commended Paul to the Lord, and as he commended them to the grace of God.

Then Luke says, "When we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship and went on to Ptolemais, and then the next day we came on to Cæsarea," and there another interesting incident occurred. "We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him." This is the Philip who was chosen to be a deacon. Scripture says, "They that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." This is the same Philip we find in the early part of the book of Acts, moved by the Spirit of God, going down to Samaria, where he preached Christ and many of the Samaritans believed and were saved.

Then the Spirit of God took Philip out of what we might consider a great spiritual awakening and revival and told him to go toward the south unto the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. Without any question he obeyed and went down to Gaza, and there he beheld a caravan coming, and as it drew closer he saw that in the most prominent chariot was a man of Ethiopia, who was reading a scroll. Philip drew so close to the chariot that he could hear the man reading aloud, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we

are healed." This was Philip's opportunity. He put the question, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man looked up in amazement, finding Philip right at his elbow. He had been so absorbed in reading that he apparently had had not even seen Philip. He said to him, "How can I unless someone explains it to me?" He invited the stranger to come up into the chariot and talk it over. And Philip "began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

Now this is the Philip who was living at Cæsarea. We are told that he had four daughters, and these young women were anointed servants of God, and all had the gift of prophecy. But God did not use these young women to admonish Paul.

We read, "As we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us," he did a most striking thing. He unloosed Paul's girdle. The Easterners wore long, flowing robes, held together at the waist by a girdle. With Paul's girdle he bound his own hands and feet and solemnly said, "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."

Was that another warning, telling him not to go, or was it simply another test of his faith? It

may be hard for us to decide. It will all come out clearly at the judgment-seat of Christ. Certainly Paul's companions took it as a warning not to go on, but he himself interpreted it otherwise. Luke says, "When we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem." They felt he was making a mistake. He was putting himself in unnecessary jeopardy which might result in the cutting short of his great ministry, and so they pleaded with him not to go.

But Paul, unable to view it from their standpoint, and moved by his great love for his Jewish people, answered, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." In other words, Paul says, "Bonds and afflictions do not terrify me; the thought of persecution and trial does not trouble me. I am ready to endure all these things for Christ's sake." Truly he did not take this as an intimation that he should not go to Jerusalem, though it may have been that. So when the others heard what he had to say, they simply said, "The will of the Lord be done."

We need to remember that there is not only God's directive will, but His permissive will, and if Paul misunderstood the former he was in line with the latter. God was going to work out some

special purpose in the experiences that His servant would have to undergo at Jerusalem.

So now, beginning at verse 15, we read, "After those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem." You have a curious instance in that verse of how a word may completely change its meaning in the course of time. Three hundred years and more ago when this verse of Scripture was translated, a carriage was something that you carried. Today it is a vehicle that carries us. The meaning is quite reversed. Instead of saying, "We got into our carriages," as we might have supposed, he says, "We took up our carriages . . ."; that is, "We took up our baggage and went on to Jerusalem."

"There went with us also certain of the disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." There evidently had been quite a change since the day that Paul had gone to Jerusalem some years before to have the company decide whether or not Gentile believers must be subjected to the law of circumcision. They received them gladly, and apparently with true brotherly confidence.

But now on the day following, something took place that fills us with perplexity. How could it be that the incident which is next recorded could

ever have had the approval of Paul? Listen to it. "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord." They could rejoice in what God had done for the Gentiles!

But they had something on their minds in regard to Paul's attitude toward Jewish Christians that they were going to bring before him. James said unto him, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law." The Apostle Paul had written the epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans long before this, and he had told believers that they were not under law but under grace. And even for the Jew, speaking as a Jew, he says, "The law was our child-leader until Christ"—our *pedagogus*. The word in the King James Version really means "child-leader." The law directed Israel in the days of their minority; but, he says, after Christ has come, we are not under the law. But these Jewish Christians at Jerusalem had not learned this. They were still carrying out the various commandments given in connection with the Old Testament ritual.

James said to Paul, "And they are informed of

thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses." He did not refer to what Paul taught the Gentiles because they were never under Moses, and Paul did not seek to put them under him. He gave them the truth of grace. But James says, "They have heard that you tell the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs" (that is, the Jewish customs).

Now James practically says, "Paul, I have a little plan that will put you right with your Jewish brethren here at Jerusalem if you are willing to fall in with it." It was what you might call a specimen of religious politics, and here again we see how easily a great man of God may fail and be misled, for James was certainly an outstanding servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. After the flesh, the Lord was probably either his brother or his cousin. At any rate, he was intimately related to Christ after the flesh, and he had the full confidence of the Christian people in Jerusalem. And yet he put this plan up to Paul.

He said, "What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them," that is, these men were Nazarites. If you go back to the Old Testament in the book of

Numbers, you will find that if a Jew took the vow of a Nazarite, he was to devote himself wholly to the things of God for a certain period of time. It might be a few days or a number of weeks, months, or years. Paul himself was certainly a Nazarite when he was converted. A Nazarite had to let his hair grow, but at the end of the period of the vow he was to shave it off and bring certain sacrifices and present them to God.

When Paul concluded his vow, he did not bring a sacrifice. Why? He knew that by one Offering Christ had perfected forever them that are sanctified, and he knew that the sacrifices under the law had no more place in the Christian economy.

But here were these Jewish Christians, and they had not learned this. They are concluding their Nazariteship and they are going to the temple to present their sacrifices. Many of these men were poor and unable to buy proper offerings. Certain well-to-do Jews would purchase the lambs for the sacrifice, and so meet the need of their poorer brethren. That was looked upon as a very meritorious thing.

Now James says, "Here is your opportunity, Paul, to square yourself with the brethren. Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them. You pay for the sacrifices that they may shave their heads and all may

know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing." You see, they were making a difference between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles. But Paul himself declared there was no difference before God.

"As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication."

Now what would you have expected of Paul in circumstances like these? What would you have supposed would be the attitude of the man who wrote Galatians and Romans? Surely you would have expected him to say, "I cannot do that. For me to go with those men to the altar in the temple and be at charges, offering animal sacrifices, would be the denial of what I have preached during all the years of my ministry." But again I say that if Paul failed here, he failed because of his intense love for his Jewish brethren. He wanted to do something to win them, and so he agreed, for we read: "Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accom-

plishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them."

Just imagine if that had been consummated, what it would have meant! It would have nullified to a large extent the testimony of the Apostle Paul in the days to come. Imagine him stepping up with them to the altar and offering animal sacrifices—a virtual denial of the one sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God did not permit it. Instead of allowing it, He so overruled that the very Jewish people that Paul wanted to reach misunderstood him entirely and took steps which led to his arrest. "When the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place." That was not true. He had not brought Greeks into the temple, but the next verse explains why they said that.

"For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple." How easy it is to get excited over suppositions and to go to extremes because of imaginary things with-

out seeking to find out the truth! "All the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar, who immediately took soldiers and centurions . . ." Now God is going to take care of His dear servant. There may have been mistakes; he may have failed to get the mind of God; but the loving heart of the Saviour goes out to him still, and He is going to protect him; He is going to take care of him. And so He does it through the Roman chief captain, who, we read, "immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done." It was absurd on the face of it. There was a mob in an uproar and instead of first inquiring the reason for the clamor, the chief captain takes it for granted that Paul must be to blame and so he had him bound and then inquired what he had been doing.

"And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded

him to be carried into the castle." That is the castle of Antonia that overlooked the temple court.

"And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him." It is easy to stir up a mob. Half of them did not know what the trouble was about, but the mob spirit is infectious, and so this great host was shouting for the death of the Apostle Paul. As he was about to be led into the castle, he said to the chief captain, "May I speak unto thee?" He spoke in Greek, and the captain asked in amazement, "Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian which before these days made an uproar, and led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?" Not at all. There had been an uprising against the Romans some time before, and the chief captain supposed that this was the guilty man who headed that rebellion.

"But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the

Hebrew tongue." In the next chapter we shall follow his own story to his Jewish brethren of his wonderful conversion.

But now, let us gather up a few thoughts in closing here. How often you and I in our very effort to do the will of God are likely to miss His mind, sometimes through prejudice, sometimes through wrong information, sometimes through not being wholly surrendered to do His will. But oh, how wonderful the mercy of God that, even if we blunder, He never gives us up. He is still looking after us in His loving-kindness; and while we may have failed, yet God is going to see us safely through to the end. And when at last we reach yonder glory land, we will look back over all the path we have come and we will be able to praise Him for it all.

"Oh, Lord, whate'er my path may be,  
If only I may walk with Thee,  
And talk with Thee along the way,  
I'll praise Thee for it all some day."

## LECTURE THIRTY-SEVEN

### PAUL'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY

1 1 1

"Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense, which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith), I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And I answered, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our

fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

"And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee: and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him" (Acts 22: 1-24).

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**T**HERE is tremendous power in personal testimony. It is a great thing to preach Christ and Him crucified. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God." We are commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. When the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness, or the simplicity, of preaching to save them that believe. But if there were only preaching, if

there were only the setting forth of the tremendous facts of the gospel, I am afraid it would avail very little unless there were men and women to stand back of the preacher and the preaching and say, "I believed the message and my whole life was transformed. I came in my sin and my guilt and I trusted the Lord Jesus, and He has cleansed me from my sins. When I heard the gospel message, I was under the power of evil and wicked habits. They bound my soul like fetters, but He snapped the chains that bound me, and set me free. My whole being was diseased with sin, but Jesus healed me. I was blind to eternal realities, but whereas once I was blind, now I see." This is the kind of testimony that gives men to know that there is power in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a very interesting fact that five times in Scripture we have the story of Paul's conversion. I have sometimes heard people object to men frequently relating the account of God's dealing with them. They think that they should just preach the doctrinal message, but you find when you turn to the Word of God that, five times over, the testimony of this man is brought before us. In Acts 9 we have the historical account of his conversion as related by Luke himself. In this twenty-second chapter of Acts we have what we might call Paul's Hebrew account of his con-

version as, standing on the stairs of the tower of Antonia which overlooked the temple court, he told his Jewish brethren how God had saved him, and he put the story in such a way that it should have appealed particularly to their hearts.

Then in chapter 26 of this book we have what might be called the Gentile account of his conversion when, standing before Festus, the Roman governor, and King Agrippa, he again related, at length, God's dealing with him, but told it in such a way that it should have been of special interest to that cynical, unbelieving ruler, Festus, as well as to Agrippa.

Then in Philippians 3 we have the whole wonderful story told again. He tells us what his religion was, what his hope was, what he trusted in before he knew the Lord Jesus, and then he tells of the wonderful revelation of the righteousness of God in Christ, which led him to put away all confidence in any righteousness of his own.

In 1 Timothy he tells once more what he had been—a blasphemer, a persecutor of the Church—in his ignorance and unbelief; but how God in infinite mercy reached out to him, saved his guilty soul and made him His messenger to those still in their sins. Five times he gave the story of his conversion! So I want to ask your special attention to this which I have called his Hebrew account of his meeting with God.

You remember, as we saw in the last chapter, the people took Paul and were about to kill him. The Roman chief captain, not knowing what was going on, came down and arrested Paul, but gave him an opportunity to speak for himself. So Paul stood on the stairs and, to the great multitude below in the court of the temple, he told the story of his conversion.

"Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you." He was a Jew by birth. He is speaking to his Jewish brethren, and he addresses them in becoming manner. He had long since learned to make himself all things unto all men. He says, "To the Jews I became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews, and to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak." And so he addresses them here in what they themselves would recognize was a proper way to speak to his own Hebrew people.

"And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence." Oh, the appeal there is in the tongue that one has been accustomed to from childhood up! There is something about your own native idiom that grips you!

There was intense bigotry in their hearts, and religious bigotry is the worst kind to overcome. He begins his story in a very simple way. They thought at first that he was a hater of their na-

tion who wanted to tear down the things that they loved. He tried to make clear the fact that there was a time when he was just as zealous as any of them in maintaining the institutions of Judaism.

No one ever need be ashamed that He is a Jew. There are people, perhaps, who despise the Jews; and there are some Jews who are almost ashamed to be known as Jews, who shorten their names so they won't sound Jewish; but surely none need be ashamed to be known as a member of that chosen race—that race to whom God committed the divine oracles and which, through the millenniums, has maintained the truth of the one God.

You remember when Disraeli was speaking in the British Parliament, a certain lord rose to his feet and cried out in most contemptuous tones, "You, sir, are a Jew." Disraeli drew himself up to his full height, which was not very much, and replied: "My lord, you accuse me of being a Jew. I am proud to answer to the name, and I would remind you, sir, that one-half of Christendom worships a Jew and the other half a Jewess. And I would also remind you that my forefathers were worshipping the one true and living God while yours were naked savages in the woods of Britain."

We Gentiles will never be able to thank God enough for what the Jew has meant to us in pre-

serving for us the Holy Scriptures and in giving us our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has declared: "Salvation is of the Jews."

"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus"; that is, he was one of the dispersed among the Gentiles. "A city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel." He was educated in Jerusalem, a student of Gamaliel, a well-known rabbi, whose reputation for righteousness is revered among the Jews to this day. "I was taught," says Paul, "according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day."

It is possible to have a zeal for God and yet not have it according to knowledge. Paul says of his own kinsmen after the flesh in another place: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." That was the state of this man himself for years. Ignorant of how righteous God really is, fancying he could work out a satisfactory righteousness of his own, he was going about endeavoring to do that very thing until the event

took place of which he speaks in this chapter when he was brought into contact with the living Christ and found in Him a righteousness in which he could stand perfect before God. But in the old days, he says, "I persecuted this way unto the death."

It is interesting to note that this is the term frequently used in this book for Christianity—"this way." Christianity is the way to God, to life, to heaven. And Paul says, "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."

Then he says, "The high priest" (and perhaps the high priest was standing there as he spoke) "doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders"; and there they were waiting to bring their accusations against him, "from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished."

But as he drew near Damascus that great event took place which transformed his life. The most remarkable thing about the story of Paul's conversion is that he had a conversion to tell of. I know a great many professing Christians who can tell scarcely anything about their conversion. Of course, we recognize the fact that many have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ in early childhood. It is not necessary, nor may it be

possible for them, to retain the memory of the transaction when they first came to Christ. We can quite understand that. These things fade from the child's mind. But others who have gone on to adult years before they came to know the Lord ought to be able to give some account of what took place when they turned from darkness to light and from death to life.

You remember the minister whose parishioner came to him and said, "Would you mind if I suggested a subject that you should use on some occasion?" "Why," said the minister, "I am very pleased to have you show that much interest. What is it you would like me to speak on?" "Well," the man replied, "I would like very much if you would give us a sermon on the text, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'" "I shall be delighted to do that, and I will notify you a little in advance when I am going to speak on that subject."

The time came when he was to speak on the text, and then he thought, Let me see, how will I divide it? Conversion—what? Conversion—how? Conversion—when? Conversion—where? He thought a little on conversion—what? Well, conversion must be the turning of the heart to God; and he elaborated on that. And then he came to conversion—how? How is a man con-

verted? A little perplexed, he thought, Well, let me see, how was I converted? Why, I don't know. I think I'll pass over that just now.

He came to the next point: conversion—when? Well, one may be converted as a child; one may be converted in youth; or one may be converted in mature years. But then constantly the thought came to him, When was I converted? Was I converted when I was a child? I can't ever remember. Well, was I converted when I was a youth? No, I am sure I was not, for I got far away from God out in the world. No, not as a youth. Was I converted when I came to more mature years? I do not recall. And so he passed on to the next point: conversion—where? It might take place in the home, in the church, in the Sunday-school, or out in the open. God is ready to meet men wherever they may be.

Then the thought came to him, Where did it take place with me? Was I converted at home? Was I converted in church? Have I ever been converted? And suddenly it came to him in tremendous power, I am preaching to other people and I have never been converted myself. I don't know *when* I was converted. I don't know *how* I was converted. I don't know *where* I was converted. I have never been converted at all! He preached his own sermon to himself, and got down before God and told the Lord Jesus that he

would trust Him as his Saviour, and that was the beginning of a new life and a new ministry. When he came into the pulpit on Sunday to preach on conversion, his words had tremendous power, for he was a new man.

So the remarkable thing, I say, about this story of Paul's conversion is that he had a conversion to tell about. Do you know anything about conversion? You may be a church member, but that is not conversion. You may have been baptized, but that is not conversion. You may take the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, you are interested in missions, but these are not conversion. You like to help the cause of Christ perhaps, but that is not conversion. Conversion is a turning to God from self. It is taking the place of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know anything of the experience that Paul knew of trusting Christ? He says:

"And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me." I stood on the hill on one side of Damascus one day and saw the road on the other side coming up from Jerusalem. I tried to visualize that scene: the persecuting agent of the Sanhedrin and his followers, as they drew near the city where they intended to arrest all

who loved the name of Jesus. "Suddenly," he says, "there shone from heaven a great light round about me." With him it was an actual light shining from heaven—the light of the glory of God reflected from the face of Jesus Christ.

This is always the beginning in the case of real conversion. Men go on in the darkness until light from heaven shines into their hearts as they come under the power of the Word in the energy of the Holy Spirit. That Word causes the light to shine in and shows man what he really is—a poor, lost sinner in the sight of God—and then reveals the Saviour that He has provided.

"There shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" He was amazed, and said: "Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." And the men with Paul could hear a strange noise but could not discern any words. They thought perhaps it was thunder or something like that, but he could hear every word distinctly. And he said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said unto him, "Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do."

Then we read, "And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of

them that were with me, I came into Damascus." I think we may take a spiritual meaning out of those words, "I could not see for the glory of that light." The glory that shone from the face of Jesus blinded Saul of Tarsus forever to all the glories of earth and to all thought of self-righteousness. When his eyes were opened again, he saw things in a new light. Everything was different.

But he entered Damascus a blind man, and was led by the hand to the home of a friend with whom he was to lodge. There he remained in deep soul exercise until Ananias came to him with the message, "Brother Saul, receive thy sight."

What a wonderful thing! Ananias was a Christian Jew. Saul had been a persecutor of the Christians, and Ananias was one of the very men that Saul had come to arrest, but now he says to him, "Saul, my brother." Grace had made them brothers. And Paul said, "The same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Do not link the expression "wash away thy sins" simply with baptism. "Wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Nevertheless, the baptism was a picture of the washing away of sin, but no sin can be purged by water. Sin is only purged by the precious blood of Christ. But there is a sense in which when he was baptized his past was all washed away. He had been a bitter hater of the name of the Lord Jesus, but when he went down into the water of baptism, all that disappeared. He came forth not to be a persecutor but a preacher of the gospel of the grace of God. The past was gone. He was henceforth to walk in newness of life.

Then Paul leaps over a number of years, and explains why he had to give himself to the work among the Gentiles. "And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee: and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."

What he evidently thought was this: "Surely,

Lord, they will believe; they will see the wonderful change that has taken place." But when men have made up their minds, they are hard to change. "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." And so the Lord says, "No, Paul, you are not the one to make them believe. I have another work for you. Peter and some of the others are especially fitted for this work."

"And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word." But when that hated word "Gentiles" came from his lips, there was a riot and they began to throw dust into the air and to cast off their clothes, and cried: "Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." The chief captain had to come down and lay hold of him and take him into the castle to get him out of their hands. What a terrible thing religious prejudice is, and what a wonderful thing it is for a man or woman to have an open mind and be ready to look into these things and to be taught of God!

## LECTURE THIRTY-EIGHT

# THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION

1 1 1

"And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them" (Acts 22: 25-30).

1 1 1

WE have been tracing out some of Paul's experiences on the way to Jerusalem and in the city itself. We have noticed that possibly he blundered in taking that last journey to Jerusalem. It may not have been God's will

for him; but if he made a mistake, he made it from the best of motives—from his sincere love for his own people, Israel, and his desire to bear witness to them once more. But that witness was rejected, and we have read of the stirring up of the mob, and of the chief captain's coming down and putting Paul under arrest. Moreover, we have considered his account of his own conversion as he stood upon the stairs of the Castle of Antonia.

And now we are told that, as they were leading Paul away, they gave command to scourge him, which was a practice in those days, but Paul turned to the centurion and said, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?" Involved therein was this: The Roman government permitted one method of dealing with those who did not have full Roman citizenship, while certain rights were given to those who did which the others did not have. And among those rights guaranteed to a free-born Roman citizen, or one who had paid a certain sum of money to purchase his citizenship, was the right to be tried in court without scourging. And so here, when they were about to scourge the Apostle Paul, he stood on his rights as a Roman citizen.

I believe there is a lesson for us in that. Sometimes we are told that because Christians are

heavenly citizens, they have no responsibility whatever as to citizenship here on earth. We have even heard it said that inasmuch as one cannot be a citizen of two countries at the same time here on earth, so one cannot be a citizen of heaven and a citizen of earth at the same time. But this certainly does not follow. Since it *was* right for the Apostle Paul to claim Roman citizenship in order that he might not have to suffer scourging, then it was also incumbent upon him—and is incumbent upon any citizen of any country in this world—to fulfil the responsibilities of citizenship. In other words, if I am to have certain protection as a citizen, I owe it to my country to act accordingly when it comes to fulfilling my responsibilities. It is true I am a citizen of heaven, but I am also a citizen of whatever country I belong to on earth by natural relationship, and so I am to be loyal to my government, to pay my taxes, and to accept even military responsibilities, as at the present time, if I am subject to them. It would be unthinkable that one would be entitled to claim protection from a country if he did not loyally respond to the rightful demands of its government.

So when the centurion here heard that Paul was a Roman citizen, he went and told the chief captain, saying, "Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman." Then the chief captain

came and said to him, "Tell me, art thou a Roman?" He had not suspected anything of the kind. Paul said, "Yea." The chief captain answered, "Well, it cost me a great deal to obtain this freedom." Paul answered, "But I was free born." That is, Paul's father was a Roman citizen before him, and so, although a Jew of Tarsus, he himself was born a Roman citizen, and had all such citizen's rights and liberties.

"Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews" (that is, the chief captain is anxious to know just what crime this man Paul was supposed to have committed), "he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them."

And now we come to the main part of our theme as found in chapter 23:1-11. Remember, Paul was standing before the Jewish Sanhedrin. There they were, all these religious leaders, the seventy elders of the people of Israel waiting to sit in judgment upon him. "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until

this day." That was a tremendous claim to make. Observe, he did not say, "since I became a Christian," but he looked back over his whole life—his life as a Jew before he knew Christ, as well as his life as a Christian since he came to know Him.

"Why," you say, "surely that could not be. He could not have persecuted the Church of God with a good conscience." Yes, because conscience needs instruction, and there was a time when Paul thought it was the right thing to do to try to destroy Christianity. He says in another place, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth."

People say sometimes, "If we go according to our consciences, it will be all right. There are many different ways, but they all lead to heaven. We can each take our own way as our conscience leads us." But conscience uninstructed by the Word of God may lead people to do the most unscriptural and even evil things. See that poor Hindu mother over yonder as she makes her way to the filthy Ganges river. She holds in her arms a darling child. She waits a minute or two, mumbles a prayer and then hurls that little babe into those filthy waters. She does that in all good conscience, for she has been told that it is the way to appease her vile gods and to find

peace. And so people may do a great many things according to conscience which are thoroughly wrong.

The important thing is that we come to God's own Word and ask "What saith the Lord?" Find out what the mind of God is, and then act accordingly. You say, "I endeavor to keep the ten commandments and to live up to the Sermon on the Mount, and I think if I do these things it will be all right with me." Well, suppose everything would be all right. Have you always kept the ten commandments and have you always lived up to the Sermon on the Mount? Is it not a fact that you have broken those commandments over and over again? Is it not true that often you fail to fulfil the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount? Why then talk about being saved if you try to keep the law or live up to the Golden Rule or something like that? Where is your good conscience? Already you have violated the law of God; and if you are honest before God, you will have to confess that you have a bad conscience and it needs to be purged by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So far as Paul knew, he was doing the right thing in persecuting the Church of Christ, until he learned the truth, and he learned it in the presence of the Son of God that day on the Damascus road. So he could make this declara-

tion: "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

We read that the high priest, Ananias, forgetting the responsibility that rested upon him as the leader of the people, to be perfectly just and maintain the law in that high court of the Jews, in his indignation "commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth." Then Paul lost his temper. You say, "Paul, that holy man of God?" Yes, Paul got thoroughly stirred up that day. Paul was filled with anger, and he turned to the high priest and said, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall, for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" This was pretty strong language for him to use, and immediately somebody spoke up and said, "Revilest thou God's high priest?" Do you turn to God's high priest and call him a whited sepulchre? Do you dare use language like that in addressing the high priest?

Oh, how I love the spirit that Paul showed! He did flare up a little and say something he should not have said, yet, when it was called to his attention, he immediately condemned himself: "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." And so he used God's own Word to condemn himself. The next best thing

to never having failed at all is to confess it the moment you find out you have done wrong and not to try to justify yourself. So Paul immediately acknowledged that he should not have spoken in that manner to the high priest.

How did he happen to do it? Well, you may consider I am a bit imaginative about this, but I think Paul had defective vision. Several things in Scripture have led me to that conclusion, and I believe that as he stood there before the council he was not able to recognize those at some distance from him, perhaps at the other end of the long room or in the galleries as he stood down below; therefore he did not realize it was the high priest who had spoken. I think that this sight difficulty is suggested in the letter to the Galatians, "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand." But, as we see, the moment Paul found out his mistake, he calmed himself and was ready to apologize for what he had said.

Then we are told that Paul perceived that the one part were Pharisees and the other Sadducees, "and he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." What led him to speak like this? We need to read on to see. "And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between

the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both."

You see, there were two rival sects in Judaism nineteen hundred years ago. The Sadducees were materialists. They did not believe that man existed in another world after death. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were entirely scriptural and orthodox and believed in the resurrection of the dead; they believed in the conscious existence of the spirit of man between death and resurrection; and they believed in angels created by God and sent forth to be ministers to men.

Paul, seeing that there were men of both parties in that group sitting in judgment on him, took advantage of the situation to get the help of the Pharisees. You might say, "Well, is that exactly transparent on his part?" I rather think I would have done the same thing, and so I am not going to condemn him. He knew that the Pharisees confidently believed in the resurrection of the dead. It gave him an opportunity to testify. "Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question."

Is there a resurrection from the dead or does death end all? Paul, if they had given him an opportunity to reply, would have said this: "I have met One who died and rose again. I have

looked into His face; I saw Him in the Glory; I heard His voice; and I received from Him, the risen Christ, the commission to go out into the world and proclaim the gospel to needy men and women. Everything for me rests upon the truth that you Sadducees refuse to believe in—the truth of the resurrection of the dead. I stand with the Pharisees today for the hope of the resurrection.”

May I say that every Christian can take his stand with the Apostle Paul. We believe in the hope of the resurrection, and we rejoice today to know that Christ who died lives again. Has He not said, “Because I live, ye shall live also”? That is why we join with all of Christendom in commemorating the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on every Easter Sunday.

Alas, there are tens of thousands of people who observe Easter who know nothing of the risen Christ as their own personal Saviour. These Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, yet they denied the resurrection of the Son of God. Your mind may believe in all the things we have been speaking of, and yet perhaps you have never rested your soul on the fact that Jesus died and rose again. Remember, that is the fundamental Christian confession, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised

Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

I have often called attention to the fact that these verses—Romans 10: 9 and 10—can be best illustrated by the fingers of one hand. It commences with uncertainty—that little word "If." It ends with glorious certainty—"saved." What a wonderful thing it is to be able to say, "Thank God, I am sure that my soul is saved." Well now, in between there are three "shalts." "If"—there is the thumb. "If thou *shalt*"—there is the first finger. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and *shalt*"—there is the second finger. "Believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou *shalt*"—there is the third finger; and now the fourth finger—"be saved." There it is. Why, you have the gospel at your very finger-tips! Think of it! "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." It is not enough to believe in resurrection; it is not enough to believe in Christ's resurrection. What we need to know is that we have trusted the risen Christ as our own personal Saviour.

When Paul insisted that the reason he was called in question was because of his faith in the

hope and resurrection of the dead, "there arose a great cry, and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God." You see, these Pharisees realized that it was best for them not to be too insistent now in persecuting a man who was such a strong defender of the very thing they believed in—the truth of resurrection.

"And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." Blessed, living, loving Saviour, appearing there to His poor, tried, discouraged, imprisoned messenger to encourage his heart as he went on proclaiming the hope of resurrection!

## LECTURE THIRTY-NINE

# GOD'S OVERRULING PROVIDENCE

1 1 1

"And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these

things to me. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cæsarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; and provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter after this manner: Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent Governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee, what they had against him. Farewell. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: who when they came to Cæsarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall" (Acts 23: 12-35).

1 1 1

**I**T is important to remember that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." One would emphasize that upon reading a portion such as this, for in this particular instance we have absolutely no men-

tion of God or of the Lord Jesus Christ or of the way of salvation, of redemption by His blood, or of any other great truth of Scripture. We simply have a historical incident, and we might well ask, "Of what profit is it to us?" But it is part of Holy Scripture, and God by the Spirit caused Luke to write it and preserve it for a definite purpose and, I think, to bring before us in a very special way God's providential care of His people.

God is never nearer to His people than when they cannot see His face; He is never closer than when they do not hear His voice; He is never undertaking for them more definitely than at the very times when His own name is not even mentioned. You see that in the Old Testament in one little book which is distinctly the record of God's providential care, the book of Esther; a book that brings before us some of the most thrilling experiences in the history of the nation of Israel, God's earthly people, the Jews. And yet in that little book we do not have the name of God or any pronoun referring to God; we do not have any reference to any Bible doctrine; and at a time of tremendous stress we do not even read anything of prayer. Yet God worked providentially for the deliverance of His people.

Somebody has well said that God is often behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes that He is behind. It is well for us to remember that.

There are times in all our lives when we seem to be forgotten of God, times when we find it difficult to pray, times when we grope in the darkness and we can't understand God's way with us; but He is always near at hand. He is waiting to undertake for us, and He is watching over us, even when we are so weak and sick that we can not remember His promises. In the book of Psalms is one passage which says, "He remembered His covenant *for* them." That is a wonderful thought. When they forgot, He remembered still and remembered it for them.

Here we find the Apostle Paul in a very precarious situation and no outward evidence of any manifestation of divine power, and yet God is watching over him in it all. We have already noticed how he had been arrested, and how he had been given an opportunity to speak for himself, but how his message had been refused and his enemies had demanded his death. But the Roman chief captain had taken him in custody and put him in prison, and now in the opening verses of the section before us, verses 12 and 13, we read of a conspiracy entered into by over forty desperate men who evidently hated the gospel of God above everything else in the world, and thought they would be doing God service if they could put this servant of His, the Apostle Paul, to death.

We read that "Certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul." More than forty had entered into this conspiracy. Further down in the chapter we read that they had bound themselves with an oath. This in itself is suggestive. What a wicked thing it is for men to enter into a curse like this, to bind themselves with an oath to do anything, whether good or evil!

Our Lord Jesus Christ has distinctly forbidden His followers to take oaths of any kind, and yet how recklessly people talk today and how even ungodly men call God to witness as to what they intend to do. I am not speaking merely of profanity, awful as it is. I never can understand how even self-respecting men, not to speak of professing Christians, can stoop to profanity. I am sure one never hears a man take the name of God in vain or blasphemously use the name of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ but finds himself looking with utter contempt upon him. Yet I fear there are many who actually think it is an evidence of an independent spirit and of manliness to dare to use oaths and profane language. Unconverted men sometimes carry it so far that they are not even conscious of it as oath after oath comes from their lips. God's Word says, "Swear not at all"; and in the Law we read, "Thou shalt

not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." This refers not only to profanity but also to taking such an oath as these men took, for doubtless they bound themselves in the name of God that they would not eat or drink until they had taken Paul's life.

One wonders what became of the poor wretches when they were not able to carry out their oath. They must have had a terrible time until at last, I suppose, they simply broke down and violated their oath. It generally ends up that way.

Is it necessary to say a word to real Christian people as to the wickedness of taking God's name in vain? One shudders sometimes to hear the language that professing Christians use. The Lord Jesus told us, "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne: nor by the earth, for it is His footstool." And yet what a common thing it is today to hear people use the word "heaven" in a careless, profane way. Do you ever use it that way? How often you will hear a Christian ejaculate, "Oh, heavens!" or "Good heavens!" or something like that. Do you realize that this is just as profane, just as wicked in the sight of God, as if we were to use other vile expressions which ungodly men use? Because you are taking in vain that which speaks of the throne of the Majesty of the universe, and you are doing something expressly forbidden by our Lord Jesus who

said, "Let your yea be yea, and your nay nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." When you feel it necessary to add any kind of oath or give strong expression to any asseveration you make, you are simply departing from the simplicity of speech which should characterize believers. For we read, "That for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

These men had bound themselves with an oath that they would kill Paul. I take it they believed it was their religious duty to get rid of him. When you can get a man to believe that it is his religious duty to do something, he will go to any length to carry it out. Saul of Tarsus must have remembered those days when he thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. So we can be sure that he now would not have any hateful feelings toward these men who are seeking his life. He would remember the days when he was seeking the lives of those who trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We find these conspirators coming to the priests and elders of the people in order to have their dire purposes sanctioned by these religious leaders. They told them of the oath that they had taken, and said, "Now won't you act as if you would inquire something further concerning him? And we will be waiting nearby, and when they

bring him, we will kill him." It was a diabolical plot and one might have thought of Paul as totally helpless. He knew nothing of it, and there seemed to be no way by which he could learn of it, shut up in prison as he was. But there was One who knew all about it, and although unseen, He was watching over His servant all the time. When we speak of God's providential care, we mean God's unseen interference in the affairs of men.

These men did not realize it, but knowledge of their plot came to Paul in a most interesting way. Paul had a sister living there (we might never have known it except for this incident) who had a son, and her son became aware of this plot. Perhaps the conspirators did not think that it was necessary to keep the thing so secret since Paul was shut up in prison, but at any rate this lad heard of it, and he went to the prison and asked the guard to take him to his uncle Paul. And when he told Paul what he had learned, the apostle immediately called one of the officials, the centurion, and said, "Will you take this man in to see the chief captain? He has something to tell him."

Notice the level-headed way in which Paul acted. He did not say, "I am not afraid of this. God is able to protect me. He is still able to work miracles." But God does not use miracles when it is not necessary. He would have us use

good common sense and not count on His interfering or intervening in some miraculous way.

I remember years ago when I was a Salvation Army officer, we used to say that there were three things that should characterize every saint of God: "Now abideth these three: grit, grace, and gumption; but the greatest of these is gumption." Gumption is just good, common, ordinary sense, and I know many Christians who do not use good sense. Some way or other they have an idea they are God's favored people and it is not necessary to use good judgment and wisdom in regard to the affairs of life; the Lord will undertake for them. Bless you, if you are hungry and a good dinner is put before you, God is not going to put the food into your mouth in some miraculous way. And so God isn't turning upside down the universe in order to please people who happen to be in difficult circumstances. He expects us to use common sense.

So Paul used his head, and he sent the young man in to the chief captain, and when the lad came in to him and gave him his message, "The chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me." He must have thought he had a very important prisoner, for see what he did!

He let the young man depart, and then called

two centurions and said, "Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cæsarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred." That is seventy cavalrymen, two hundred infantrymen, and two hundred spearman. Just think of it! Four hundred and seventy Roman soldiers, all to protect this Christian servant of God and keep him from his foes who were seeking his life! God saw that he was protected. Did He need the Roman soldiers! No, He could have sent several legions of angels; but God doesn't work in miracles unless it is necessary, and so He used soldiers instead.

The chief captain thought he had a good opportunity to get into the favor of the Governor down at Cæsarea, so he wrote a letter which was partly true and partly false. He said, "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent Governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him." Well, that is all true, but the next part of the letter was absolutely false: "Having understood that he was a Roman." He did not understand anything of the kind. He thought he was an Egyptian. He told Paul that. He said, "Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?" And it was not until they were

about to scourge Paul, and Paul said, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" that the chief captain came to his rescue and said, "Are you a Roman?" And Paul said, "Yea." The chief captain said, "With a great sum obtained I this freedom"; but Paul answered, "But I was free born, and I have certain rights."

You see, Claudius Lysias was in a tight fix, for if that lash had come down on the back of Paul, a Roman, and word of it got to the ears of the Governor, Claudius Lysias himself would have been arrested for violating the law of the empire. So now he wants to make it appear that it was his zeal for the Roman government that led him to save Paul's life. That was what some people would call a "white" lie, but every white lie is absolutely black in the sight of God, and "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." That is, whether they tell white lies or black lies. All lies are lies in God's sight.

So he says, "When I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council" (which was quite true), "whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man,

I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell." So much for the letter.

And so the soldiers went on with Paul, taking him away at once to be sure that these conspirators did not fall upon him. They took him by night as far as Antipatris, and then on the morrow the infantrymen returned, but the cavalrymen went on to Cæsarea, which was the seat of Roman government for that district. They delivered the epistle to the Governor. "And when the Governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia" (Tarsus, you know, was the chief city in Cilicia and there Paul was born), "I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come." So now we see Paul in the hands of the Roman government, in prison at Cæsarea, waiting for his accusers to come down from Jerusalem and plead against him. "And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall."

Now notice the position in which Paul is found. He had gone up to Jerusalem, apparently—I speak thoughtfully here, I don't want to go to extremes—apparently against the commandment of the Lord. Certain disciples along the way said to Paul, through the Spirit, that he should not go to Jerusalem; but because he loved his Jewish

brethren so tenderly, though they did not understand him, and he hoped that God would use him to bring to them a knowledge of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, he continued on his way. He had written some time before to the church of Rome that he hoped to visit them and he asked them to pray that he might have a prosperous journey. He goes on to Jerusalem, but finds himself unable to do that which he had hoped. He finds that instead of his brethren being willing to receive him, they do not understand and want to put him to death, and he finds himself in a Roman prison, first in Jerusalem and then in Cæsarea, and afterwards from there sent on over land and sea, still a prisoner, to Rome. He attains his objective at last, but he reaches Rome in chains.

In all this God was overruling. In all this He was having His own way. It is a wonderful thing to realize that, in spite of our mistakes and our blunders, we have a blessed Father in heaven who is working everything out for good. Paul could write, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

Surely these experiences of God's gracious overruling Providence ought to speak comfort to the troubled hearts of many of us. We are conscious, perhaps, of sin and failure in our own lives, or

we realize that in our ignorance and short-sightedness we have missed our path. The natural tendency in such instances is to conclude that we can no longer count on God's loving care, that we have forfeited all title to His Fatherly consideration. But it is not so. He loves us still, and He is ever ready to undertake for us when we put all in His hands. He will overrule even our sins and blunders for our blessing and His glory.

He is never more concerned about us than at the very time that all seems to be darkness and confusion. Let us not doubt His love because perplexities abound on every hand. Be it ours to look up in faith and say with Isaiah, "I will trust and not be afraid"; or with David, "What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee." He has given a promise that can never be broken: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Let us then ever remember that His is a love unfailling, a love which no mistakes of ours can alter. And He is working all things according to the counsel of His own will, ever having our blessing in view.

## LECTURE FORTY

### PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE FELIX

1 1 1

"And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the Governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying, that these things were so. Then Paul, after that the Governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written

in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him" (Acts 24: 1-23).

1 1 1

WE have seen how God protected Paul from being slain by a group who had conspired together and put themselves under an oath that they would eat or drink nothing until they had killed the object of their hatred. Saved from their ferocity by the chief captain, Paul was sent down to Cæsarea and there, in due time, he appeared in the courtroom before Felix, who was the Roman governor. His accusers sent a deputation to Cæsarea, headed by Ananias, the Jewish high priest, and with them a man whose name indicates that he was perhaps a Gentile by birth, Tertullus, an orator,

or really a lawyer. He is one of those very wordy kinds of lawyers who can paint a picture to suit himself and call good evil and evil good, and make white black and black white.

When he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse Paul, but first he praised Felix, a man whom the Jews themselves bitterly hated. With the fawning words of one who was seeking to curry favor with him, he says, "Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness."

I think Felix must have put his tongue in his cheek when he heard Tertullus speaking like this on behalf of these Jews from Jerusalem, for he knew pretty well how much they detested him, and he must have known too that they were thoroughly aware of his own wicked, godless life, so that even to address him by his title, "Most noble Felix," was in itself a misnomer. He was anything but noble, this governor, a most ungodly man, one whose whole life was a reproach to the high office which he held.

Tertullus proceeded to accuse Paul, and brought four charges against him, one of which was true, the other three absolutely false. He says, "We have found this man a pestilent fellow." He uses the word "pestilent" in the sense of a disrupter

of the peace. Paul was not that. Then he says, "A mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world"; and that, of course, was totally untrue. Thirdly, he declares him to be "a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes," and that was a fact, for Paul was a Christian and these were called Nazarenes, after Christ their Saviour who was so designated. But the fourth charge is again false: "Who also hath gone about to profane the temple"—something that Paul never even thought of doing.

"Whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands." That was just a little, lawyerlike overstatement of the case on the part of this experienced pleader. "Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so."

Now notice again the charges they bring against Paul. First, they insist that he is a pestilent fellow, a disturber of the peace. Yet this man had gone about for nearly thirty years, living a devoted, faithful life, seeking in all his ways to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, laboring with his own hands whenever there was a temporal need to be met, never depending upon the

church at home to support him. If they did not send on what might be required to sustain him and his companions, he would simply look up a job and work as a tent-maker in order to provide for the needs of himself and those working with him. But he went everywhere, witnessing, ministering Christ, and told both Jew and Gentile of the wonderful change that had come over his own life—that marvelous event that had taken place on the Damascus road when he beheld the risen Christ in glory after he had been persecuting His followers for many months.

Paul was anything but a pestilent fellow, a disturber of the peace; unless, indeed, one recognizes the fact that there is a false peace in which men are found who are strangers to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. These Paul tried to arouse to see their danger and to show that they were lost and needed a Saviour. The world has always been quick to say that people who preach against its ways and expose its sins and its faults are disturbers of the peace. You remember how they said before of Paul and his companions, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." And there was a sense in which that was true, because through sin the world had been turned wrong side up.

So Paul and his companion preached the message that turned the world right side up, and of

course the devil and his followers consider that as disturbing the peace. But Satan has held men captive so long that I think none of us should be concerned about disturbing his peace. Indeed, if we are able to do something that *will* disturb his peace and deliver captives from his snare, whatever charges they may then bring against us, we shall feel we have done something worthwhile and we can thank God for the privilege of doing it.

Then they charged Paul with being "a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world," and that was very far from the truth. He never moved anybody to sedition. He always insisted, when addressing Christians, that they must be subject to the powers that be, that they must always pray for kings and rulers and for all who held position in the government in order that men might live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness.

It may be that one sees things in the governments of this world which are contrary to the mind of God, but he seeks to overcome them by methods that are in accordance with the spirit of the gospel. The remarkable thing is that the effect of the preaching of the Word throughout the Roman empire was used by God to overturn very many things that oppressed men and brought distress upon the world. In fact, practically all of the great reforms that have been wrought

through the centuries owe their existence to the proclamation of the liberty-giving message of the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul was not a mover of sedition, but, on the other hand, he was indeed well known as a "ringleader of the sect" (or the heresy) "of the Nazarenes." That word translated "sect," which is also rendered "heresy" farther down in the chapter, really means a "school of opinions," and the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ were considered just another little, peculiar school of opinions. So the Nazarenes were thus contemptuously dubbed because they followed Him who was called a Nazarene.

There was a time when Paul was bitterly opposed to this group, when he as Saul of Tarsus sought to destroy everyone who preached the way of Christianity. He never forgave himself for that. He says on one occasion, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God and wasted it." But what made the change in this man? The wonderful fact that he had a sight of Christ in glory. He was never the same afterward. From the very moment he was brought to know Him he was commissioned to proclaim the faith that once he had sought to destroy, and he became indeed an outstanding leader and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, the rejected Messiah, the One who came in lowly

grace to Israel, was refused by His own people, died on the cross for their sins, and has ascended to God's right hand and has sent His servants into all the world to tell men everywhere that those who put their trust in Him will be eternally saved.

Paul had proved its reality in his own case; and because he knew what it meant to be a Christian, he went forth to declare to others the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. But when they charged him with going about to "profane the temple," that was untrue. For although he had been separated from that temple by the revelation of Jesus Christ, he always had the greatest respect for everything connected with the religion of his youth. The temple in this sense was still the house that God had established in Israel, and Paul knew that of those worshipping in that temple many had a zeal of God though not according to knowledge. He would never have thought of profaning it. In fact, at the very time he was arrested he had gone almost beyond what you would have expected of him. Knowing the high standing of the temple in Jewish thinking, he had entered the temple with several men who were just completing their days of Nazariteship. He had arranged to pay for the sacrifices that they were to offer, and he would have done so had not God Himself, I believe, intervened by

causing the riot and his arrest in the meantime. For it would have dishonored God had Paul actually stood there and assisted in the sacrificing of the lambs that had to be slain in order that the Nazarite might be freed from his vow. He knew that, by one Offering, God had perfected forever those who have put their trust in Christ. But it was his love for his people that led him to go as far as he did, farther perhaps than he really should have gone.

No, he was not a profaner of the temple. He revered and honored the God of the temple too much for that. But they did not understand. They were so bound by the shackles of legality that, when this man came preaching salvation by the free grace of God, they could not comprehend it. They thought of him as an enemy of the old religion and an enemy of their people, whereas actually he was simply bringing a message that was the fulfilment of all the forms and ceremonies of the legal dispensation. He was there as the personal representative of the One who is pictured in every sacrifice ever offered on Jewish altars, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, having made these charges against Paul, the Jews declare that Tertullus has presented the case fairly, and so Felix gives Paul an opportunity to defend himself. Notice how he began. He did not descend to flattering words,

but said, "Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself." In other words, he realized that Felix knew the people who were accusing him, that he knew the strong prejudices and bigotry that characterized them; therefore Paul felt all the more ready to state his own case in the presence of this Roman judge.

He tells him that just twelve days had elapsed since he went to Jerusalem, not to cause a riot or stir people up, but to worship God. And no one found him in the temple disputing with anybody, or raising up the people, nor did they find him misbehaving in the synagogues or in the city. He went about continually ministering in grace to any who were willing to listen to him. "Neither can they prove," he says, "the things whereof they now accuse me." But on the other hand, he acknowledges the third charge, declaring: "This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."

I like to think of Paul standing there before that august assemblage, hiding nothing, covering nothing, majestic as he proclaims himself a follower of the crucified Lord Jesus Christ. "The Way," was the term used generally in those days

for Christianity; simply because the following of Jesus professed to be a way to life and to blessing. And, thank God, it is, for it sets forth Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Lord Jesus says, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

So Paul went everywhere proclaiming the Way, and we today have the same blessed privilege. We are here preaching the Way, to tell men there is only one way to God. Men do not like that. They say something like this: "After all, we are all seeking to get to the same place. There are many different ways, but they all end up at the same place." Who says so? Our Lord Jesus says, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me. I am the Way." The Apostle Peter says, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus." You say, "Oh, but there are so many ways." Yes, the Old Testament tells us in the book of Proverbs, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." People say, "But I have my religion and you have yours, and my religion is good enough for me; it satisfies me." Oh, but that is hardly the question. Is it good enough for God? Does it satisfy God? It is God who has declared that there is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus. Do you

know Him? Have you trusted Him? He is the Way.

Paul was not ashamed to declare that he recognized no other way to God, no other way to heaven, than through the Lord Jesus Christ. "After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers."

Then notice how he says that in the truth revealed in Christianity we have the completion of all that was set forth in type and shadow in the Old Testament: "Believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."

Do you believe all things that are written in the law and the prophets? You know sometimes I tell my Jewish friends that I am a better Jew than they are! Because I find that many bearing Jewish names cast grave doubt upon much of the Holy Scriptures, and take almost a modernistic attitude toward the whole Bible. They question whether the prophecies will ever be fulfilled.

I believe it all. I believe that all things written in the law and the prophets and the Psalms are true. I believe that the Old Testament, from the book of Genesis to the book of Malachi, is the very Word of the living God. And in that I stand with the Apostle Paul who was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. But I believe this, that all the ritual service, all that was written concerning the tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament,

pointed forward to the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ. His cross is the true altar; He Himself is the true Sacrifice. He is the Light of the world; He is the Bread of Life upon the table in the Holy Place. He is the Ark of the Covenant. On His heart was written the law. He has offered Himself without spot unto God and it is through His blood alone we can draw nigh unto God. And it seems to me, the more one studies the Old Testament and considers not only its types and shadows but its prophecies, the more one must come to see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of them all.

That was the stand Paul took. That is what made him a Christian. That was why this outstanding Jewish rabbi Saul of Tarsus became a Christian. That was why he became from the time of his conversion such a remarkable exponent of the grace of God. Here was a man who believed for years in the Old Testament economy. When he got the fuller revelation, he believed that. He said, "I believe, therefore have I spoken." God pity the men who stand in pulpits today ministering to people and have not themselves real faith in the truth revealed in this blessed Book! "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the dynamics of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteous-

ness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written" (in the Old Testament), "The just shall live by faith."

This was Paul's declaration: "I believe all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God." He uses hope with the sense of full assurance. "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow." You see, he recognizes the close link between Judaism and Christianity, so that Christianity is the full flower of which Judaism was the bud. "I have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust."

You see, the charge they brought against him was this: He is preaching that Jesus who died has risen again. He says, "But I am not preaching anything in so declaring that my Jewish brethren ought to think impossible. They profess to believe in resurrection, unless they are of the Sadducean sect. They believe there will be a resurrection of the just and unjust: so do I." Everything for man was based upon this great fact. Does this truth of the resurrection bring real joy to your heart?

Notice the two kinds of people who are going to be raised—the just and the unjust. As surely as there are two ways to live and two ways to die, so are there to be two resurrections. Our Lord

Jesus Christ Himself has said, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life: and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"—or condemnation. A resurrection of the just and of the unjust! And who are the just? "The just shall live by faith." They are those who have believed God even as Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness or justice. And so when men put their trust in the Lord Jesus, receive Him as Saviour, they are numbered among the just. Those who refuse Him and go on in their sinful way are numbered among the unjust; but whether just or unjust, after they leave this world they must rise in resurrection. If they left this scene in their sins, they will rise among the unjust unto condemnation; but if they left this scene cleansed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, they rise among the just to have part in eternal bliss.

Do not forget that there are two resurrections. We would like to believe that there is something about death so purifying and so ennobling that in the very hour of death, no matter what manner of lives men have lived, they are suddenly changed so that they pass out into eternity clean and pure and fit for the presence of God. But

our Bibles forbid us to believe that. Our Lord Jesus says, "I go My way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins," and He says, "If you die in your sins, whither I go, ye cannot come."

If men die in their sins, they will be raised in their sins, and in their sins they will stand before the Great White Throne and be judged for their sins and condemned throughout eternity. But, on the other hand, we read, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." It is possible to die in the Lord, and those who die in the Lord enter into rest.

Who are they who die in the Lord? They are those who trust the Lord, those who receive the Lord as their own Saviour, who manifest by devoted, godly lives that they have really been born from above. These die in the Lord, and these are raised in the Lord, and spend eternity with the Lord; for of these it is written, "They shall not come into condemnation but are passed from death unto life."

Paul declared that these truths that meant so much to him had gripped his conscience and made him concerned about his manner of life. People say sometimes that we Christians are interested in only one thing and that is that men accept Christ as their Saviour. Not that at all, but we

do believe that if men definitely put their faith in the truth that God has revealed in His Word, it is going to work a miracle within. They will receive a new life and nature, and will be concerned about living in a holy way. A love for holiness always follows new birth.

Paul said, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men." He sought so to behave that none could accuse him, honestly, of any ill-doing, and that God might ever be glorified in him.

Then he tells what it was that brought him to Jerusalem: "Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings." Not to create trouble, or even to proselyte them to his doctrines or peculiar views. Famine prevailed, and he came to bring gifts that Christian people had given to him for those in need. "I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult, who ought to have been here before thee to accuse, if they had anything to say against me"; but they were not there. When he stood before the Jewish council, they could not find any evil in him unless it was this, that he had interrupted the peace by crying out, "Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question

by you this day." That is, the whole matter of whether Christ is Messiah or not is linked with the question as to whether resurrection is possible. Every orthodox Jew said it is possible. Well, Paul said, it was not only possible but it had taken place, for Jesus had risen from the dead. And this was the message that he carried throughout the world.

"When Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that Way"—he had evidently come in contact with Christians before—"he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter." He should have cleared Paul, but this man Felix was given to procrastination. It characterized him throughout. He put off setting Paul free. "We will wait," he said. In the meantime, "he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him."

It was very evident that Felix knew Paul was innocent of the charges brought against him. As one set to administer the law, he should have freed him; but he was like Pilate, who said, "I find no fault in this man," yet allowed His accusers eventually to carry out their will against Him.

As you think back, what a record Paul has had!

How he delighted to go from land to land, glorifying Christ! As we go on with our study of this book, we see that God has in store for him, although a prisoner, still greater opportunities to magnify the One who had redeemed him.

## LECTURE FORTY-ONE

### FELIX THE PROCRASTINATOR

1 1 1

"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound" (Acts 24: 24-27).

1 1 1

**I**N the previous section I purposely refrained from continuing the exposition to the end of the chapter because in these closing verses we have a very special message for any who have not yet definitely decided for Christ, yet intend to so decide some day. God's Word says, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation"; but it seems so natural for us to put off the settlement of this the greatest of all questions.

Felix took that attitude, and so far as we have any record he lived and died a Christ-rejecter.

We read, "After certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." This man Felix—Antonius Felix, to give him his full name—was appointed by Claudius Cæsar to be procurator in Judea some two years before Paul was arrested and brought to stand before him. He was a most unprincipled man, an ungodly, scheming politician who stooped often to the very lowest of methods in order to bring about his own purposes.

It is recorded of him in history that when he could not accomplish his purposes, he would not hesitate to call into his service a group of assassins, a secret order bound together by an oath, who were pledged to undertake to destroy anyone for whose death they were paid. Felix in this way managed to remove a great many of his enemies and, as he fancied, to secure his own position; but he proved, as men always find who stoop to cruel and wicked methods to obtain and hold power, that he failed dismally. But a few years passed before he was in disgrace, and, so far as we know, he died a suicide.

The Spirit of God here mentions his wife Drusilla, evidently in order that we may realize something of a power over this man that kept him

from making a definite decision for Christ. Who was Drusilla? She was the youngest daughter of King Agrippa I. It was a sad family—three sisters, every one of whom lived a life of infamy—Bernice, Miriam, and Drusilla.

Drusilla at fourteen became the wife of Azizus, the king of Emesa, but some years afterwards Felix met her and lured her away from her husband; then in defiance of all law, both human and divine, he took her as his own wife. And so as Paul stood before Felix there sat with him on the judgment-seat this woman, the partner of his life of sin and corruption. God draws special attention to Drusilla's presence with him. Her father was of Edomite and Jewish extraction. She was brought up in the religion of Israel. Felix was a heathen; Drusilla knew better. She had been instructed in her earliest days in the knowledge of the one true and living God. She knew something of the high standards set forth in the law of God, and she must have been conscious that she was flaunting them all in the life she lived.

These two sent for Paul from time to time in order that they might discuss with him or hear him tell of the faith in Christ. Evidently Felix' interest was something like that of Herod's some years before. Herod was curious about Jesus and desired to see Him. He had heard of His wonder-

ful miracles. But at last he was instrumental in putting Jesus to death; that is, his attitude helped in the final rejection of Jesus.

And so here Felix was interested in Paul and his message. He evidently knew a great deal about what had happened in Palestine, particularly in Judea of which he was procurator. He knew about Jesus; he knew about His crucifixion. He knew that it was commonly reported that He had risen in triumph from the dead. He knew how the gospel was spreading through all that part of the world, and how it was reaching out even to distant lands. Undoubtedly deep in his heart he wondered whether Jesus were not what He professed to be—the Son of the living God. If so, Felix must have felt that he owed allegiance to this blessed One. But to step right out and accept Christ, to yield his heart to Christ, would mean facing the sin in which he was living. Drusilla, too, would have to face her sin.

I do not know of any harder test for a man or woman today than just such a condition as this. It is hard for people when they know they have violated God's holy law and entered into a relationship contrary to God and are living in sin—hard for them to judge their sin in the sight of God and get right; and so Felix, while interested, yet shrank from taking the step of full allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We read that as Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," Felix shuddered. No wonder he shuddered, with another man's wife sitting there beside him on the throne! When Paul reasoned of righteousness, he must have brought before Felix the fact that he had no righteousness. I fancy we get in the epistle to the Romans something of the line of reasoning that Paul would bring to show that the judgment of God was against all unrighteousness, and that all men everywhere were sinners and needed a Saviour. And then he would not hesitate to witness to the fact that Felix, instead of holding his physical passions in subjection, had allowed them to run away with him, to dominate his reason; so that, instead of living in self-control, he was controlled by evil.

And Paul went on to tell of judgment to come. It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment. There was no sugar-coating here. There was no palliating the message; no "soft-pedaling." It took tremendous courage for this little Christian Jew to stand there before that Roman governor and his paramour, and press home upon their hearts and consciences the corruption of their lives and the wickedness of their hearts; then to insist that for all these things God was going to bring them into judgment!

And yet we do not read that Felix responded to it. He knew the truth of much of which Paul spoke, and he doubtless recognized the truth of the rest of it, and he shuddered. The memory of his sins rose up before him, and as he stood there facing God about those sins, he was in trouble and distress, but there was no repentance.

What folly it is to try to cover up and forget our sins! Remember, if unconfessed, God has never forgotten them. He says, "I will not forget any of their sins." They are there in His books of record, and in His judgment day they will be manifested. We are told that "some men's sins are open beforehand, going before them to judgment: and some men they follow after." Whether hidden and covered here on earth or not, they will all come out there. You say: Well, is there no way of deliverance? Is there no way of salvation, for I have sinned? I have violated God's holy law, but is there no forgiveness?

Ah, yes. And as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, he must have put clearly before Felix the glorious message of the gospel. It is not necessary that the sinner go on to meet God in judgment—that is, if he is willing to judge his sins now, if he is willing to come now into the presence of God and face those sins. But men need to remember this: the first time that a man comes into the presence

of God, he must come with all his sins upon him. If you never come into the presence of God until the day of judgment, you will stand there with all your sins upon you, and you will hear that Voice saying, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

On the other hand, if you are ready to come now into the presence of God, you must come with all your sins upon you. You can not get rid of them otherwise. You cannot cleanse your own heart. Job says, "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt Thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." It is absolutely impossible for you to cleanse yourself; to wash out the stains of sin. But thank God, if you are ready to come to Him in repentance—and repentance involves a complete change of attitude in regard to sin—if you are ready to come now, earnestly desiring the forgiveness of sins, there is forgiveness with Him, thank God. For "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

We read in the book of Proverbs, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." That mercy was offered to Felix. That mercy was extended to Drusilla, but this impenitent couple, doubtless putting their heads together, said: "We

are not ready to face this thing; we are not ready to separate one from another; we are not ready to break the tie that binds us in our unholy union." So we read that though Felix shuddered, he answered Paul, saying, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

That is the answer that so many make. Felix, the procrastinator! We have a saying that "Procrastination is the thief of time"; and the Spaniards say, "The road of by-and-by leads to the house of never." And here is this man, realizing his lost condition, knowing that he is not right in the sight of God, confessing that he ought to face things honestly in His presence, knowing that he should put his trust in the Lord Jesus, yet he puts it off.

Forget Felix for a moment, and let me ask you, reader, to face this question honestly. Are you saying as Felix did, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee"? You fully expect to be saved some time. Perhaps a dear father or mother has gone on to heaven, and you promised before they left that you would meet them later on. Perhaps they are still living, and again and again they have prayed for you and pleaded with you to come to Christ, and you have said, "Oh yes, some day, some time, but not now. When I have a more

convenient season, then I will get right with God."

When do you think that more convenient season will arrive? When will you ever have a better opportunity of closing with Christ than you have today? When will it ever be easier to repent of your sins, to confess your need, to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, than it is now? Do you think it may be a more convenient season when perhaps the health that you now enjoy is taken from you and you toss on a bed of sickness? In the last fifty years I dare say that I have ministered to hundreds on sick beds, but I have never yet been at a sick bed of a Christian but what that Christian was not glad that he had trusted Christ when he was well and strong. I have had many say to me, "I am so thankful that I do not have that matter to settle now when my body is racked with pain, when my poor mind is troubled and distressed. I am so thankful that I knew Christ as my Saviour before I became ill."

Often when I have stood by the sick bed of an unsaved one, I have been stirred to indignation when some doctor or nurse has said, "Don't talk religion to him. Don't disturb him. He is too sick to be bothered by anything that might excite him." I know what they mean. They mean that we are not to tell dying men and women that it will be Christ or hell, and that to reject the one

is to choose the other. And I admit that it is hard to go into the room of one who is lying low in weakness, and be faithful to that one in regard to the great realities of eternity. It is only occasionally that I have seen one in such a condition ready to listen and to turn to God for salvation.

Do not be guilty of the inexcusable folly of saying, "‘When I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee’—when I am laid aside on a bed of sickness, then I will face the question of my soul’s salvation."

I wonder if someone is saying, "When I can take life more leisurely, then will I consider this question. Today I am engrossed in study; I am overwhelmed with the pressure of things at school; or, I am out in the business world and occupied with all that I have to face day by day. Give me a better opportunity. When I have finished training, or when I have reached the place where I can retire from the activities of business and can look at things more thoughtfully, then I will call for you." Let me tell you this: The average person who spends his lifetime in occupation with the things of this world will not leave all those for the things of God when it comes to what he calls a time of leisure. Oh, the elderly men and women whose spiritual sensibilities seem to be absolutely atrophied! They never seem to have interest in eternal things. They remind one

of a solemn verse in the book of Revelation, chapter 18:14, which, literally translated, reads, "And the fruit season of thy soul's desire has gone from thee."

Now is the time to get right with God, in the midst of study, in the midst of business, in the midst of all the various things you have to face. Take time to settle this greatest of all questions—that of your soul's salvation. People say, "When I am old it will be time enough; after I have had my fling, after I have enjoyed the things of the world, then as an old man or woman I will turn to Christ." Oh, the wretched hallucination that leads one to be so foolish as to speak like that!

Think of the Lord of glory, as a young man, in the very prime of life, dying for you. Yet you say to yourself, "After I have drunk the cup of sin to the full, I will give the dregs of my life to Him." Could there be baser ingratitude than that? Old men seldom turn to Christ.

When I was only twelve I went into a meeting in an auditorium at Los Angeles. About 10,000 people were gathered in the building which had two galleries, a building that has since been torn down to make way for another. I went to hear D. L. Moody preach. Because I could find no other place, I crawled out on a rafter beneath the ceiling. There was Moody giving his message. I remember how in the course of his address he

said, "I want everyone in this auditorium who is a Christian, who knows he is a Christian, to stand up. Now, remain standing until the ushers can tell me about how many are on their feet." Then he said, "There are between 5,000 and 6,000 people standing. What a testimony—5,000 to 6,000 Christian people in this building! Now," he said, "I want everyone here who became a Christian before he was fifteen years of age to sit down," and over half of that company sat down. Then he said, "Now how many of those who remain standing accepted Christ before they were twenty?" More than half of those remaining sat down. And then he went on, moving up the years by tens. "All who were saved before they were thirty, be seated"; and a number sat down. "All who were saved before they were forty, be seated"; and a smaller number sat down. And when he got to fifty, there were only about twenty left standing in that great congregation who had trusted Christ after they were fifty years of age! It was an object-lesson I have never forgotten.

Youth is "the time to serve the Lord, the time to win the great reward." But if you are past your youth, oh thank God, He still waits for you to come. Yield to Him now. Do not say, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee," lest when you call He is no longer listening to your cry, for we read in the

Word that Wisdom speaks to those who refuse her voice and says, "Ye shall seek me early and ye shall not find me. Ye shall call upon me and I will not hear."

Felix lost his opportunity. The next verse suggests another reason why he did not decide. Not only lustful, he was a covetous man. "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." A judge on the bench, corrupt, wicked, hoping that this poor, penniless prisoner would perhaps raise money from his friends in order to bribe the judge for his deliverance! Of course Paul would not resort to that. He would rather have remained in prison for years than to buy his way out. So he stayed in jail, but Felix "sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." I fancy every time he spurned the voice of God, his conscience grew harder, his spirit more indifferent.

So "after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." And Felix passes off the page of Holy Scripture, but he did not pass out from under the eye of God. He lived and died in wickedness and corruption, and some day he will stand before a Judge who can never be bribed, and he will have to answer Him for refusing the message of grace.

What about you, dear friend? Have you been refusing to yield to the Spirit of God? Have you been waiting for a more convenient season? Oh, will you not believe God when He says, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation"?

## LECTURE FORTY-TWO

### PAUL AND FESTUS

1 1 1

WE will consider the entire 25th chapter for the basis of our exposition; but because it is rather lengthy, we will read it portion by portion as we continue expounding it. First, may I ask your attention to verses one to five:

"Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him" (Acts 25: 1-5).

We have followed Paul step by step as he answered the charge of sedition, first on the temple stairs in Jerusalem and then before the chief captain himself; later, before Felix; and now we have him still in the prison at Cæsarea. But

Felix is displaced by Festus. Felix, we saw, was a man of most immoral character. Festus was a Roman governor of a rather different type. He was, in a sense, high-minded, a man who studied philosophy, but one who had no faith in anything beyond this world. He tested everything by human reason and was not prepared to believe in anything concerning which he could not rationalize.

This man was scarcely in office—he had been there only three days—when he went up from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, and the high priest and other leaders of the people informed him of their charges against Paul. They pleaded with him that he would send for Paul to come to Jerusalem, because they would have men lie in wait to destroy him on the way. What a corrupt thing religion is when it leaves God out! Now these men were the religious leaders of the people, yet they sought in this nefarious way to destroy the Apostle Paul, contrary to the law, even while they pretended that they wanted to judge him in accordance with the law.

However, Festus, fortunately for Paul, answered that the Apostle should be kept at Cæsarea and that he himself would return there shortly. Then he said, "If you have anything against the man, send your messengers down, send the accusers down, and I will hear them at my judgment-seat." And so we read in verse six:

"And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment-seat commanded Paul to be brought."

One notices the energetic way in which this man Festus does things. He is the very opposite of Felix—Felix, the procrastinator, who always put things off, who always said: "Tomorrow, some other day, some other time; when I have a more convenient season." But Festus dealt promptly with the matters that came before him, as became one to whom it was given to dispense Roman justice.

"And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended any thing at all" (7, 8).

Here was a man who had nothing to fear. He had always made it a point to have a clear conscience before God and before men, and he could stand before the judgment-seat of Festus and say, "There is absolutely no charge of criminal action of any kind that can be proven against me." Not one of their charges could be sustained. But Festus in this respect was a little bit like Felix—willing to please the Jews; he answered Paul:

"Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged" (9, 10).

He recognized that he had certain rights as a Roman citizen, and he insisted on the recognition of those rights.

"To the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go" (10-12).

This appeal to Cæsar was the right of a Roman citizen, but it evidently took Festus by surprise. He hardly expected this poor missionary, this almost friendless man (from his standpoint), to insist on facing the great Cæsar himself, and so without realizing for the moment that he had no actual charges to prefer against him, he said, "Unto Cæsar shalt thou go." Later, the incongruity of allowing a man's case to be appealed to a higher court when he had not been condemned in a lower one came home to him with power, and that leads us to the next step in this drama.

"And after certain days King Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea to salute Festus" (13).

I ask your attention to the words—"and Bernice." You will notice that you have them a number of times in this section of the Acts. Here in verse 13; again in verse 23, "And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice"; and then

again in chapter 26, verse 30, "And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice." Why does the Spirit of God three times bring in this woman's name like this? She was not sitting in judgment on Paul. She had no authority to pronounce on his case, and yet when the king, Agrippa, is referred to, her name is mentioned in connection with him as they come before Festus; again as they sit upon the judgment-seat, and once more as they leave the palace.

Of what do these two words speak? Who was Bernice? She lived in an incestuous relationship with Agrippa, her own brother. God recognized the seriousness of the sin, the wickedness of her life. There she is, attached to Agrippa, and when his name is mentioned God adds, "and Bernice." If Agrippa died unsaved, we may be sure God links Bernice with him still; and when Agrippa stands eventually at the judgment of the Great White Throne, Bernice will stand there with him! In other words, Bernice represents that sin, that evil thing in the life of a man and woman from which they can never be separated either in time or in eternity—if they do not judge the sin and get right before God.

When Agrippa hears the words, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," Bernice will be there too. So far as we can tell, both lived and died in

their sins and they will go out into everlasting fire as "Agrippa and Bernice." Surely there is something intensely solemn here! Oh, the awfulness of sin! How it clings to one! There may be times when Agrippa wanted to get rid of Bernice. It often happens like that, you know. A man may tire of the poor, foolish woman who has yielded to his wicked desires and he would throw her off if he could; but God will never let Agrippa throw Bernice off. They will be linked together in the judgment and in a lost eternity.

"And after certain days King Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: about whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him" (13-15).

One likes the straightforward way that Festus takes things up!

"To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment-seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed" (16-18).

Festus took it for granted that this man Paul must have been guilty of some very grave crime, either against the Jews themselves or against the

Roman Empire; but when he listened to the trivial things they were charging against him, he was amazed that reasonable people would expect a Roman governor to pay any attention to their foolish religious quarrels. He says:

"But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (19).

In other words, says Festus, "It was one of the most absurd things you ever heard of. I thought that as they stood before my judgment-seat they would charge the man with some very, very grave crime, but instead they talked of trivialities of their own Jewish faith. Then they thrust forth the silly idea that this man Paul was going through the country talking about a man named Jesus which was dead. Everybody knew he had died; everybody knew he was crucified. This thing was not done in a corner. And their charge against Paul was that he preached that this Jesus who was dead is now alive."

I think I can see the lips curl as Festus, the rationalist, looked inquiringly upon the face of Agrippa as much as to say, "Did you ever hear the like? All this fuss about a man who is dead, simply because this man imagined he was alive again, something that nobody of course believed!"

It was a very small thing to him, this story of one Jesus which was dead whom Paul affirmed to

be alive. Festus did not know it, but that was the greatest matter that the world had ever been called upon to face. That story about Jesus which was dead whom Paul affirmed to be alive was to be declared throughout the world. It was to overthrow the paganism of Rome, to make men over, and eventually to bring in a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. And yet it seemed such a trivial thing to this philosophic Roman. He says:

"And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cæsar. Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, thou shalt hear him" (20-22).

Now Agrippa was one thoroughly conversant with the Jewish religion, and doubtless he had heard a great deal about this new Christian movement. Certainly he seems to have had a genuine desire to hear what Paul has to say for himself. We are told that on the morrow "Agrippa was come, and Bernice." No getting away from that woman! She is there. Clinging to him, she will cling to him forever. It is a terrible thing to sin against God, to trample God's truth under foot. Sin once embraced will be with you forever unless you find deliverance through the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth" (23).

Then Festus introduced the subject like this:

"King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him" (24, 25).

You see, it is customary in law that if a lower court passes on a man's case and condemns him, he may appeal to a higher court and then all that has proceeded in the lower court is presented for the examination of the higher court. Yet here was a man who had not been condemned by any court, and in order that he might have a fair hearing he appealed to the highest court, to Cæsar himself, and Festus did not know what charges to bring against him.

"Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O King Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him" (26, 27).

And I am sure we all recognize the rightfulness of the stand that Festus took. As I bring this section to a close, I want to drive home a question to each reader as the Spirit of God may

enable me to. This One, Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive, what does He mean to you today? Do you know Him as the One who on Calvary's Cross was crucified, the One who was buried, but was raised again for our justification? Have you trusted Him for yourself? If not, why not?

## LECTURE FORTY-THREE

### PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

1 1 1

WE are now to consider the account of Paul's testimony before Festus and Agrippa. I will not read the entire chapter preceding the exposition, but will take it up in sections. Let us read the first seven verses:

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews" (Acts 26: 1-7).

We have already noticed that the account of Paul's conversion is found five times in the New

Testament. This should impress upon us the value of testimony to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have the historical account of Paul's conversion in the ninth chapter of this book. Then we have what we might call his Hebrew account of his conversion given in chapter 22, when he was standing upon the temple steps at Jerusalem and explaining to his Jewish brethren why he was now a Christian.

Here in the 26th chapter we have what might be called his Gentile account of his conversion. While he was addressing himself directly to King Agrippa, who had been brought up in the Jewish religion, yet on the other hand he had in mind the Roman governor Festus; and following his own rule, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some," he presented the story of his great experience in a way that ought to have appealed to a Gentile as well as to King Agrippa.

Then in the third chapter of the epistle to the Philippians Paul tells the story again of his conversion; tells of his religion before he was saved and how, when he had a sight of the risen Christ in glory, he counted all things else but loss for Him. And once again in 1 Timothy he gives a brief account of the same wonderful story—how he was led to trust the Lord Jesus for himself and how he, who had been a persecutor of the

Christians and a hater of Christianity, became one of the most earnest advocates of the faith that once he despised.

And so on this occasion we are to listen to him as he tells the story before King Agrippa and Festus. The first eleven verses of chapter 26 are devoted (at least in large measure) to the account of his unconverted days. We have read seven verses, and in a few moments we will take up the remaining part of this particular section.

We are told that Agrippa said unto Paul: "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself." Recognizing Agrippa's acquaintance with the Jewish religion, Paul felt that he would be able to understand at least in measure something of what he had gone through. He began by saying: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently."

Then he went on to tell of his life as a young man who thoroughly believed in Judaism as the final revelation from God. He declared: "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all

the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."

You will notice the peculiar grammatical construction of a part of this sentence—"the most straitest sect of our religion." One is reminded of Mark Antony's expression as given by Shakespeare, "That was the most unkindest cut of all." Ordinarily we do not use a double superlative like this, but the Apostle Paul wanted to stress the fact that no man was ever more firmly convinced that Judaism was God's final word to mankind than Saul of Tarsus was. He believed in it with all his heart. He lived it. He was not simply a Jew by profession.

Many today call themselves Jews, yet are not at all careful about observing the customs of the Jewish people or the ordinances of the Jewish religion. It was otherwise with this young man. He was most punctilious about attending to everything that the law commanded. He carried out not only what was written in the law of Moses but the additional traditions of the fathers in Israel.

The Pharisees were the most religious and the most conscientious of the Jews. I know we Gentiles are accustomed to think of Pharisees as though they were all hypocrites, but that is not necessarily true. Many of them were hypocrites,

just as there are many professing Christians today who are hypocrites; and our Lord Jesus had some very stern things to say to some of the Pharisees. "Woe unto you, Pharisees, hypocrites." He condemned them for making long prayers in public just in order that they might be seen of men. He condemned them for sounding a trumpet that men might know that they were giving alms. But on the other hand, there were Pharisees who were intensely in earnest and very conscientious, and Saul of Tarsus was one of these. No man is a hypocrite who can say, "I live what I profess"; and Saul could say, "I lived a Pharisee."

And even as a Christian he wanted Agrippa to understand that he was not divorced from the great outstanding truths of Judaism. There is not one truth which God revealed through Moses and the prophets which is denied by Bible-believing Christians. We believe with our Jewish brethren in the unity of the Godhead, but we also believe that God is a Trinity, revealed in three glorious Persons — Father and Son and Holy Ghost. We believe in the Old Testament doctrines, of the importance of knowing God and walking in obedience to His Word. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, and in the final judgment, the eternal punishment of men who died in their sins, and the everlasting blessedness of

the righteous. So Paul could say to Agrippa, "The Jews who have known me could testify that I have lived a Pharisee."

"And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews." What did he mean by that? He meant this: "I am standing here today in chains because I believe with all my heart what every honest Jew believes. I believe in the resurrection of the dead, but I believe that Jesus Christ has already been resurrected. I believe in the Messiah promised to Israel, but I believe that Jesus Christ is that Messiah, and that He died for our sins, just as depicted in Isaiah 53, and that He was raised from the dead and taken up to the Father's right hand as described in Psalm 110: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool!" Paul could say, "I believe all of these things, and I stand here a fettered man because I believe with all my heart what you Jews profess to believe, and I am convinced that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Jewish hope." Then he says:

"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (8).

I take it he is addressing himself here directly to Festus, for Festus had ridiculed the thought that Jesus Christ which was dead should now be alive again. But why should one think it incredible that the Lord who created this universe, who breathed into man the breath of life, should be able to bring back His own blessed Son from the dead, or any others after death has claimed them?

Then Paul continued to tell Agrippa something of the circumstances of his life before he knew Christ. He said:

"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (9-11).

Note that, "I thought I ought to be opposed to Jesus Christ." I have no doubt that there are some people who really believe they are doing right in opposing the gospel of the grace of God; let me stress this: Sincerity of belief does not in itself prove anything. You might, for instance, board a railroad train and be absolutely sincere in thinking that it was going to take you to Minneapolis, and yet you might later discover that it was going to Omaha. Your sincerity of belief would not alter the facts. It would not change anything.

Saul of Tarsus sincerely believed that Christianity was a delusion. He sincerely believed that Jesus of Nazareth was a deceiver. He sincerely believed that the Christians were a fanatical people who ought to be rooted out of the world. He was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong. You see, you need to test your own sincerity by the revelation God has given. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word it is because there is no light in them!" Sincerely believing that Christianity was wrong, sincerely believing that he had to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, Paul acted accordingly: "Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them."

This seems to imply that Paul himself was a member of the Jewish high council, otherwise he would not have been entitled to participate in their deliberations.

"And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." In these words he covered his whole life from his childhood up to the moment of the great crisis when the Lord Jesus was revealed to him as the Son of the living God.

Next he told how that took place:

"Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a Voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (*i.e.* the ox goads). And I said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (12-15).

Now, however you may try to explain this, however you may understand it, the fact remains that something happened that day on the Damascus turnpike which changed this man completely. He tells us what took place. You may not want to believe him, but then how are you going to account for the marvelous change in his life and in his way of thinking and acting from that moment on? One instant he is the hater of the Lord Jesus Christ and the bitter persecutor of Christians; and the next he is a humble, subject Christian, himself willing to lay down his very life for the name's sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. And for thirty years he went on in accord with the position he took that day. What brought it about? He had seen the Christ of God. God was pleased to reveal the Lord Jesus directly to this man. He felt himself struck to the ground, a light from heaven shining round about him. He said, "I could not see for the glory of that light,"

and he heard a voice in the language that he loved the best—the Hebrew tongue—calling him by name and pleading with him tenderly, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

That tells us something we might not have known. There was something within Saul that all the time revolted against the bitterness of persecution. He was uneasy at heart. Perhaps it was the remembrance of the light that he saw in the face of Stephen when, looking like an angel, he cried, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge”; and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” Perhaps it was the consciousness of the prayers of his kinsmen, to whom he refers in Romans 16 as those who “were in Christ before me.” Who can question but that these kinsmen of Saul often prayed for their young relative, prayed that God might speak to him and quicken him, and that he might come to see and know the Lord Jesus! So he was like a refractory ox kicking against the goad that was prodding him. When Jesus appeared, he cried out, trembling and amazed, “Who art Thou, Lord?” And a voice came back, an audible voice from heaven, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest”; and that changed everything. The revelation of Jesus Christ! That is what conversion really is—when a man is brought for

the first time in his life to look in saving faith upon the face of the Lord Jesus.

I know what some say about this. I know how they try to explain away the wonder of it. Someone in Britain years ago writing on the conversion of Saul of Tarsus insisted that it was to be explained in this way: Paul was evidently an epileptic, and as he went along the Damascus road he had a fit and fell to the ground, foaming at the mouth, and thereafter was a changed man! Spurgeon said, "Oh, blessed epilepsy that made such a wonderful change in this man! Would God that all who oppose the name of Jesus Christ might become epileptics in the same sense."

Some are saying today that it was a sunstroke. That is what a modern writer declared recently. He said that as Saul travelled on the road the sun became so hot he was struck and fell to the ground, and that was his conversion! As I read it, I thought, "Would God that all modernists could be so sunstruck that they might begin to preach Christ, and so come back to the grand old gospel of redemption by the blood of Jesus!" And yet I have often said, and I say it again after thinking it over, I am quite in agreement with the modernist save for one letter. It was a *Son*-stroke, not a sun-stroke! It was the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus that struck home to the very heart of that man and

gave him to see the One he had been persecuting—the Saviour of sinners. And so the great change took place. See what he says about it:

“I heard a Voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee” (14-16).

This was Paul’s ordination to the ministry. No human hands had anything to do with this. Henceforth he could say—

“Christ, the Son of God, hath sent me  
Through the midnight lands;  
Mine the mighty ordination  
Of the piercèd hands.”

The blessed Christ of God commissioned Saul that day to be His messenger. He was to go forth as His witness. As such he would be delivered from the people (this is, from the Jews, his own people), and the Gentiles, unto whom now he was to be sent; for this man’s work was to be particularly among the Gentiles, though he never forgot his own people. Everywhere he went it was the Jew first. And what was his commission?

“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (18).

What a glorious, full commission is this! It is as though the Lord is saying, "Saul, all over the world men are sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death. They are blind; they cannot see. But you are to go out as My servant and, as you proclaim My Word, these blinded eyes will be opened and men will be turned from darkness to light, from the awful, ruinous power of Satan to God Himself who waits in grace to save." And when they thus turn to Him, they will receive the wonderful blessing of forgiveness of sins. They will be cleared of every charge that God Himself had against them, and they will have a glorious inheritance among those who are separated unto God in Christ Jesus through faith. This was his message, and this is the message that God is still sending out into the world. Oh, how men's eyes need to be opened! They are open enough to the things of this world, but they are blind to the things of eternity. And God's truth alone can give enlightenment. "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psalm 119:130).

Beginning with verse 19, Paul tells something of his life since his conversion. He says:

"Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (19, 20).

We are sometimes told today that repentance has no place in the message for this present glorious dispensation of Grace, but here is the man who is preeminently the apostle of Grace to the Gentiles, and he says, "Wherever I have gone, this has been my message, to tell both Jews and Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

What is repentance? It is a complete change of attitude. It is a right-about-face. Here is a man who is going on living in open, flagrant sin, and he does not care anything about the things of God and is totally indifferent to the claims of righteousness. But laid hold of by the Spirit of God, that man suddenly comes face to face with his sins in the presence of God, and he turns right-about-face and comes to the God he has been spurning and to the Christ he has been rejecting and he confesses his sins and puts his trust in the Saviour. All this is involved in repentance.

Here is another man. He was not living in open sin, but he has been living a very religious life. He has been very self-righteous. He has been thoroughly satisfied that because of his own goodness and because of his punctilious attention to his religious duties, God will accept him and eventually take him to be with Himself. But suddenly he is brought to realize that all his own righteousnesses are but as filthy rags, that noth-

ing he can do will make him fit for God's presence, and he faces this honestly before God. For him too there is a change of attitude. He turns away from all confidence in self, the flesh, his religion, and cries: "In my hand no price I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling." This is repentance. It is a right-about-face.

And so everywhere that Paul went he preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and today God, through His servants, calls upon "all men everywhere to repent: because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." It is repent or perish; turn or burn! Face your sins now and find deliverance from them or face them in the day of judgment when it will be too late for deliverance.

In bringing his marvellous story to a close Paul added:

"For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (21, 22).

That is, there is not one thing in Christianity that is contrary to any truth revealed in the Old Testament. There is a greater fulness; additional

light has been shed upon many old truths, but every servant of Christ today who is really faithful to the Word can say what Paul said: "I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."

Paul himself opened up wonderful truths of grace not hitherto made known. The glorious truth of the believer's justification from all things; his union with Christ; the baptism of the Holy Spirit; the truth of the one Body—all these things are involved in the fact of his showing light unto the people as the messenger of the risen Christ.

And as Paul thus spoke for himself, Festus the skeptic, Festus the rationalist, who would not acknowledge the miraculous, leaned forward and cried, "Paul, you are going crazy. You have been dwelling too much on religious problems, and lost your wits, and don't know what you are talking about." Paul looked the Roman governor straight in the face, not a sign of fanaticism about him, and calmly, coolly, answered him: "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." And turning to Agrippa for corroboration, he said:

"For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner" (26).

Then addressing Agrippa directly, he pressed the question home: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" Without waiting for an answer, he added, "I know that thou believest." And Agrippa, leaning forward, exclaimed, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Perhaps it was not exactly that. Perhaps it was, as a more literal translation would put it: "With but little persuasion would you try to make a Christian of me!" Paul answers:

"I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (29).

And he held up those manacled hands! "Oh, Agrippa, I wish you and Festus and Bernice and all the rest here, I wish that you had the same blessed hope that I have." And that is what we say to all who do not know Christ.

"And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: and when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar" (30-32).

But God had permitted him so to appeal in order that he might witness in Rome.

## LECTURE FORTY-FOUR

# GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

1 1 1

**N**OW we come to Acts 27. Since there are really five sections here, it will help us if we consider a section at a time. So let us turn to section one:

“And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus’ band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; and, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The Fair Havens; nigh whereunto was a city of Lasea. Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished

them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south-west and northwest. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete" (Acts 27: 1-13).

This is one of the chapters of the Bible that we really ought to study with a map of the Mediterranean before us. Those who have carefully investigated Luke's record as given here express themselves as amazed at the accuracy with which he refers to the various ports and to ancient shipping ways. You know, some people have suggested that perhaps a certain few portions of the Bible were written at a date later than they professed to be. The book of Acts has been particularly attacked.

Some years ago a little group of freethinkers in Scotland decided on a plan whereby they might show up the inaccuracies of Scripture, and so cause people to realize, as they put it, that the Bible was not really the Word of God. One member was given the task of going to Asia Minor and Southern Europe and the islands of the Mediterranean, and visiting all the places mentioned by Luke in connection with Paul's journeys. It was hoped that he would be able to unearth so

much information as would make evident the falsity of Luke's record, that many who had pinned their faith to the book of Acts as a part of God's inspired Word would have to give it up.

The young man chosen was Sir Wm. Ramsay. He investigated very carefully, and after the most minute examinations concluded that Luke was absolutely accurate in every particular; and he himself, once a freethinker, became a Christian, and has written some splendid books in defense of the Word of God.

It would be interesting to trace out the details of Paul's voyages from one place to another, but our space forbids this. There are a few things, though, that I should like to call particular attention to. First, the use of that little pronoun *we*. It is very evident that Luke, the writer of this book, volunteered to accompany Paul after his arrest. You will notice in verse one: "When it was determined that we should sail into Italy." The use of this pronoun here and in the next chapter shows that Luke was with Paul to the last.

Another person of note who accompanied him was Aristarchus, one of Paul's own converts from Macedonia. We read in verse two: "And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us." We read of this man Aristarchus elsewhere

as an outstanding witness for Christ; and he was not ashamed to share the prisoner's lot in order to be a comfort to Paul.

Another thing that strikes us in this passage is the way in which Paul, the prisoner, comes to the front. This man of God, wherever you find him, seems to be master of the situation. When they put him in jail and made his feet fast in the stocks, he and his companion, Silas, put on a sacred concert. There were only two of them and they had no organ accompaniment, but they gave such a splendid performance that they brought down the house! There was an earthquake, and next thing you know the jailer and all of his house were converted.

Then when Paul was arraigned before various dignitaries, he always came out as the real master of the situation. Again and again we have seen the prisoner bringing the judge into the dock! When he appears before Felix he dares to reason with him concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. When he stands before Festus he says, "Why should you think it an incredible thing that God should raise the dead?" To King Agrippa he said, "I would to God that **not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds**"—a Christian.

When he was a prisoner on shipboard, in a

little while all the crew and the soldiers, the master of the ship, and Julius, the centurion, were taking orders from Paul. He is God's man for the occasion. There is one thing about a man who walks with God—circumstances never affect his fellowship and communion with the Lord. Paul could say, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." A brother said to another once in my hearing, "How are you getting on?" The other answered, "I am doing very well under the circumstances." The first brother replied, "I am very sorry to hear that you are under the circumstances. You know, if you keep your eyes on the Lord, He will keep you above the circumstances." And so Paul always seemed to be above the circumstances.

The ship sailed from one port to another. Paul gave advice which they refused to accept, and they soon ran into trouble. When they did accept his advice, God's blessing rested upon them.

Now reading from verse 14, we find that they ran into a hurricane:

"But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon" (but the manuscripts read as the margin—*Euroquilo*). "And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive."

Note how Luke speaks. He is so thoroughly one of the company.

"And running under a certain island which is called Claudia, we had much work to come by the boat: which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship";

that is, they had a lifeboat there that they almost lost, but, having secured it, they arranged to pass cords underneath and over the ship in order to hold the almost shattered timbers together.

"And fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship" (they began to throw the freight overboard); "and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship" (17-19).

I can see Paul and Luke and Aristarchus pitching in with the sailors and the rest of the men, to help cast off the tackling of the ship. They were not afraid to do their part.

"And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (20).

Here we find a people who have come to the very end of their own ability. There they are in their ship, the cargo tossed overboard, the tackling gone, and absolutely hopeless of the salvation of the ship or of their own lives. But it has been said, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," and so here God intervenes. Beginning with verse 21 and reading on to verse 29, we have something that brings before us in a very striking way the divine sovereignty of God. This is the third section.

"But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss."

Think of that! Here is a prisoner, and he talks to the centurion and to his guard and to the master of the ship and to the sailors, and says, "You should have listened to me and let me run this ship. If you had listened to me, everything would have been all right." He had told them that they ought not to leave a certain harbor, but they did not believe him. People do not believe God's messengers; yet some day they are going to find out that as the servants of God tell of a fearful storm coming upon this poor world, they speak according to the Word of God. Following his rebuke, Paul says: "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer." I like that. He does not turn to them and exclaim, "Well, it serves you right. You are getting what is coming to you." He says, "I have been praying and, when I prayed, God answered, and now I have something to tell you that will encourage you."

'I exhort you to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you but of the ship.'

You are going to lose the ship, but you are not going to lose your lives. I can tell you beforehand that every one of you is going to be saved." How

did he know that? Because he had to do with God about it. He says,

"For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (23).

Oh, the dignity of that! Paul could look at these representatives of the Roman Empire who had put him in bonds, and say, "I am the servant of the most high God. I belong to Him, and I serve Him, and I am in His service even now. He sent His angel to me. You couldn't see him. You had eyes only for the storm and the creaking timbers and the treacherous rock ahead, but I have seen the angel of the Lord." The man of God can see things that the man of the world can never see. He can behold what the man of the world cannot behold. He says, "I saw this angel, and he said to me:

'Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar' (therefore you can't get drowned): 'and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.'"

So he says, "Now I know it is all right. God has told me that I am going to get to Rome and everybody that sails with me is going to get safely to land." Now here you have a striking instance of the sovereignty of God. Here is God speaking and declaring His purpose. He says through His angel, "I have settled it that all these men are going to be saved." Of course, He is speaking of their temporal salvation, their physical salva-

tion, but it is God speaking, you might say, arbitrarily. He speaks in His sovereignty, just as He has chosen in Christ certain ones who are going to be saved for all eternity. Who are they? All who trust in the Lord Jesus. This is not hyper-Calvinistic fatalism. It is divine, elective love.

When God predestinates, He does it in love. You get that in Ephesians 1: "In love having predestinated us." But His predestination is to what? To go to heaven? It does not say so, either there or in the eighth chapter of Romans. It says in Ephesians that He has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself." It says in Romans 8: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Again, in Ephesians we are told that He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should—what? . . . go to heaven while other people go to hell? It does not say that. What does it say? "That we should be holy and without blame before Him."

I am not afraid of that kind of predestination. Are you? It tells me that, having trusted Christ, I shall some day be wholly like Him. I am predestinated to be holy and without blame before Him. But nowhere in God's Word are we told that all this is purely arbitrary. God insists on

man's responsibility to face his sins before Him, to turn to Him in repentance, and to put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; and He shows us that the invitation to salvation is as broad as the human race. He says, "Whosoever will may come"; "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"; "Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Here we get one side of this great truth of the divine sovereignty. God says these men who sail with Paul are all going to be saved. That part is settled. But let us go on a little. In the next section we shall come upon another side of it. Let us, however, complete the present section.

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

Can you say that? "I believe God." It is a great thing when God speaks, when you can just put your foot down and say, "God says it, and I believe it."

I have often pointed out a very interesting ideograph in the Chinese language. When studying Chinese many years ago, I was struck by the remarkable make-up of the Chinese word for *faith*. It is partly made up of the character for *word*, itself very interesting. The lower part is the figure that stands for a mouth, and then above it are several lines indicating something coming out of

the mouth. After all, that is what a word is! Then to one side there is a character of a man. And is not that what faith is—a man standing by the Word? I wonder where the ancient Chinese got that. They made up that character for faith thousands of years ago—long before the dawn of our civilization.

Said Paul, "God's angel has been speaking to me, and said, 'Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.' Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." In other words, "All right, Lord, I will stand by that. I believe God." Can you say that?

Sometimes a poor soul comes to me in distress and says, "I have been praying and praying for months for salvation, but I don't seem to get it and I am miserable." "Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" "Oh, I do," is the response. "Do you believe He died for you?" "Yes." "Do you believe He bore your sins in His own body on the tree?" "Yes, I do." "Have you come to Him and told Him you are a sinner and are ready to trust Him?" "Yes, but He doesn't seem to accept me; I am not saved." "Where are you looking for assurance?" "Well, I expect to feel different when I am saved." I answer: "You might feel very happy and not be saved at all. You might

be trusting in the wrong thing altogether, or the wrong person. Why, I know people who say, 'I know everything is all right. I have been baptized into such and such a church.' But they were just deluded by the Devil, for baptism itself saves nobody. Jesus only saves and He does it for all who believe in Him."

I remember speaking to a woman who had just joined a certain church which teaches salvation by sacraments and legal obedience. She said, "Before I joined this church I never was at peace, but now I just trust my salvation to those in authority." That is false peace; a peace built upon error.

But I said to this troubled soul to whom I referred a minute ago, "The Lord Jesus Himself said, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.' Now, notice, there are five things that go together here. 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word.' Have you heard His Word? 'And believeth on Him that sent Me.' Do you believe that God sent Jesus to be your Saviour, to die for you?" "Yes, I believe that," she answered. "All right; now look at the next phrase: 'Hath everlasting life.' Have you everlasting life?" "Well, I hope so," was her response. "But

it does not say that. 'He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.' Can't you take your stand on the Word of God?" That poor woman's face brightened and she said, "Oh, I see it. I must just take Him at His Word. That is sufficient."

Paul says, "God has spoken and I believe God." And Christian, what about you? Do you believe God? Why do you go around with your head hanging down like a bulrush, as much as to say, "Oh, if you only knew my circumstances; my health is poor, and I am afraid I shall lose my job. I don't know what I shall do when I get old." Do you know One who has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"? Do you know that it is written: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"? Do you know the Holy Spirit has declared, "All things work together for good to them that love God"? Well then, why not brighten up and say, "I believe God; the Devil is not going to get me down because circumstances seem to be against me? I believe there is a God who is above all circumstances."

"Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island." Paul says, "I believe God that we shall get safely to land; however, I know this, we must

be cast upon a certain island." "But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria"—think of it! Fourteen awful days and nights in a dreadful storm, and all they had to rest on was the word of God that they should get safely to shore! "About midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country." They began to hear the roaring of breakers, and they "sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day" (28).

What a graphic picture of that little ship driven before the tempest all those days and nights! And now in the deep darkness they can't see what is ahead of them, but they can hear the water dashing against the rocks, so they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wish for the day. How we Christians are like that sometimes. Things all seem to be going wrong, and it looks as if we are going right on the rocks, but faith's anchor holds because the Word of God can never fail.

The next section suggests another side of the truth:

"And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the fore-

ship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (30, 31).

Now, look at this! They have had the word from God that they are all going to be saved, but it looks as if they are going to be dashed upon the rocks. And now the sailors, miserable rascals, say, "We will save our own lives and let the ship go to pieces." Under cover of the darkness and pretending to cast out the anchors, they seek to let down the lifeboat, planning to row away and find some cove of safety. But Paul is on the alert. He sees what they are up to, and to the centurion he says, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Then see what happens. "The soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off."

The captain might have said, "What difference does it make? You told us we are all to be saved anyway. It doesn't make any difference what anybody does; if God has foreordained it, that is what will happen." But Paul might have replied: "Yes, it makes a great deal of difference." You see, human responsibility is just one spoke in the great wheel of God's purpose, and divine foreordination is another. And so though God foreordained the whole thing He showed Paul that these men were responsible to abide in the ship. This was how He effected His purpose.

Man might say, "If God is going to save me,

He will save me; and it doesn't make any difference what I do." It makes a great deal of difference! If you do not do something, you will be lost, but if you turn to God and confess your sin and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then—thank God—you will be saved. And when you are saved, you will be able to look up in gratitude to the God of all grace and say, "Lord, I thank Thee that Thou hast chosen me in Christ before the foundation of the world." You see, there are two sides: Man's responsibility and God's sovereignty.

"And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing" (33).

Notice how he again takes charge of the situation. He appoints himself chief steward, and says, "Come now, you are going to be saved, but you need some food. It has been fourteen days since you have had anything to eat. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you." What confidence possessed the soul of this man because he had a word from God which he dared to believe!

"And when he had thus spoken, he took bread and gave thanks to God in presence of them all."

I think I see all those awe-stricken sailors and

soldiers asking "What is he doing now?" "Oh, he is looking up to his God and thanking Him for preserving our lives and for the food we are to eat."

" . . . And when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat" (35, 36).

And now, in the last section, Luke says, "We were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls." Think of it! All this company of people and God had said they were all to be saved! But notice how they were delivered. They were saved with difficulty, through great trials; but they were saved. God fulfilled His word.

"And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore" (38-40).

Follow this picture. It took a real seaman to write this. Luke certainly entered into the spirit of the sailor.

"And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves" (41).

And now the enemy comes in. Satan would

make the plight of the seamen an excuse to destroy Paul.

"And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape."

It was the voice of the devil, though he spoke through the soldiers' lips. But see what happens:

"But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land" (44).

God's word was fulfilled. All were saved, but they had to meet their own responsibility in the matter. There is a lesson here for every one of us. No word of God shall be void of power, but we are responsible to obey His Word and manifest our faith by our works.

## LECTURE FORTY-FIVE

### PAUL AT ROME

‘ ‘ ‘

WE now come to the last chapter of our book, which may well be divided into five distinct sections. In verses one to ten we have the account of Paul and his companions at Melita, or, as we now say, Malta, an island that has been very much to the front in the last few months because of the heroic defense of its garrison and of the men of the navy and the air force there at the present time. General Dobbie, who recently retired from the governorship of Malta, is an out-and-out Christian, and during all the time he was there he conducted Bible classes with his men and officers and sought to lead them in prayer and trust and confidence as they looked up to God for His protection during the awful bombings that they have gone through.\* It is rather interesting to find the Malta of today thus linked

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\* Written in July, 1942.

with the Malta of so long ago. So we will first read the ten verses that speak of Paul at Melita, then take up the other divisions as we come to them.

"And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness" (1, 2).

In chapter 27 we are told how the vessel in which Paul and his companions were sailing toward Rome was wrecked on the shores of Melita, but that all escaped safe to land. There is an interesting point here in that the Spirit of God has seen fit to take note of the fact that the barbarous people, those unlearned and ignorant people who had not the culture and refinement of many in the Roman Empire, showed to this shipwrecked company "no little kindness." God always recognizes every kindness done to His own, and so He has put it on record here.

"For they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold" (2).

We can imagine that shipwrecked company gathered about that fire trying to dry out their clothes and become comfortable again after the terrible experience they had just gone through.

And notice how Paul took part in it:

"And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire . . ." (3).

He was not one of these clerics who are afraid of getting their soft white hands dirty. When they were gathering firewood, Paul was out with the rest doing his part. As he picked up various pieces, he saw what looked like a bit of firewood, but when he laid it on the fire it turned out to be a viper, a serpent that was stiff from the cold.

“ . . . There came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.”

And then we see how easy it is to jump at wrong conclusions.

“And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live” (4).

I think our translators or editors should have capitalized the word *Vengeance* here, for the Melitans, I believe, were thinking of Vengeance as the name of a god. They were saying, “This man has escaped shipwreck, but the god, knowing that he is a murderer, is not going to suffer him to live, and so this viper has fastened upon his hand.” And they expected him at any moment to fall down dead, but:

“He shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm” (5).

You see, it is never safe to depend on snap judgments. People do that so frequently. Half the scandal that goes around among members of

the Church of Christ is simply the result of jumping at conclusions.

Not long ago I read a little article in a church bulletin in which the pastor explained that he had been greatly troubled by a rumor going around to the effect that his wife had attended a meeting of some heretical group and that he had gone there in great indignation and dragged her out by the hair of her head and brought her home and beat her. He undertook to explain that he had not dragged his wife out of that meeting, that he had never at any time dragged her about by her hair, and that he had never beaten her, and also that his wife had never attended that meeting, and finally that he was a bachelor and had never had a wife! We are so ready to pick up things, you know, and make so much out of them.

So these barbarous people said, "There is no question; it is evident that he is a murderer and Vengeance is not going to suffer him to live"; but when Paul shook the beast into the fire, they went to the other extreme.

"Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god" (6).

That conclusion, of course, was just as wrong as the other. These people really did not under-

stand the circumstances. Paul might have explained to them that when the Lord Jesus authorized His apostles to go out to preach His gospel in a hostile world, He even told them that they should pick up vipers and they should do them no harm. This was one instance of the fulfilment of that promise.

Then we see how Paul was able to return the kindness of those barbarians. We are told in verses 7 and 8:

"In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid hands on him, and healed him."

Now observe we are not told that this man was saved. We are not even told that Paul first preached the gospel to him and brought him to Christ. But he saw the man in his deep need and he went in and prayed and laid hands on him, and the Lord graciously answered.

"So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: who also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary" (9, 10).

The second section of this chapter is from verse 11 through verse 16, and gives us the rest of the journey to Rome, part by water and part by land. We are told that:

"After three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: where we found brethren" (they are now on the Italian mainland), "and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. And from thence when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage."

One can understand something of the blessedness of that meeting and what it must have meant to the Apostle after all the trials, the shipwreck, the suffering he had passed through, after all the false charges that had been lodged against him, and knowing that he was going on to be tried before Cæsar's judgment throne! So it must have been a great joy to find that these Christians at Rome, hearing of his coming, cared enough to go all the way out to this town midway between Rome and the port where he had landed and convey to him their expression of Christian love and fellowship. Paul was encouraged, and we are told:

"When we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him" (16).

Of course he was still a prisoner, but he was not cast into the common prison. He was allowed to pay for more comfortable quarters

where, although under guard, he had a certain measure of liberty and his friends were permitted to visit him.

The third section extends from verse 17 through verse 22, and tells us of Paul's first interview with the Jews in Rome. A great many of them were living there, and Paul felt it would be wise to send for their leaders first and explain something of the circumstances that had led to his arrest, of his appeal to Cæsar, and of his coming to Rome for trial. If these Jews at Rome were fair-minded, they might be able to defend him, instead of persecuting him and trying to make it hard; or at least they might take a neutral attitude. So we read:

"And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of" (17-19).

Notice Paul's attitude toward the Jews. He ever recognized the fact that he himself was by birth and by religion originally a Jew. And though now a Christian, his heart goes out in love to his Jewish brethren; he would not seek in any way to influence anyone against them, or to

hurt them. "Not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because" (and I think I see him holding up his manacled hands as he speaks) "for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." What did he mean by "the hope of Israel"? It was the coming of Messiah, and Messiah who was to be crucified and rise from the dead, and Paul says, "It is for that I am bound with this chain." As a true Jew, he looked for the coming of Messiah. When Jesus came and was crucified and buried and rose again, he did not at first realize that He was the Messiah. He was a persecutor of those who followed in His Way, but now he had been brought to see in Him the hope of Israel. He believed in the resurrection of the dead, toward which all his people looked forward, save the materialistic Sadducees. "It is because of this," he said, "that I stand here a prisoner before you."

"And they said unto him" (and you will notice that they are very much more fair-minded than the Jews were in Jerusalem), "We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee" (21).

They seem to have been quite unprejudiced and that, of course, is the only right attitude when one brings a message which he professes to be of God.

"We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect" (that is, the sect of the Christians or of the Nazarenes, or "Way," as they were commonly called), "we know that everywhere it is spoken against" (22).

One cannot help but admire these fair-minded Jews. They said, "Paul, we are ready to listen to you, to hear what you have to say, although we have heard certain things about this Christian sect that make us very suspicious as to its being worthy of our adherence."

Then the fourth division of the chapter is from verse 23 through verse 29, and we have Paul's controversy with the Jews.

"And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God" (23).

Let us consider this for a moment. "He expounded and testified the Kingdom of God." We need to distinguish carefully between the two terms—the Kingdom of God and the Church of God. But when some of our friends tell us that we are not to preach the Kingdom of God in this dispensation, but only truth concerning the Church of God, we point them back to a passage such as this and many others. For we find in the very beginning of this book of Acts that during the forty days of our Lord's sojourn on earth after His resurrection He instructed His disciples in things pertaining to the Kingdom of God; and

then all through the book we find first the twelve and then the Apostle Paul preaching the Kingdom of God, and with that we come down to the very last chapter. We hear Paul speaking to these Jews and expounding and testifying to them the Kingdom of God.

In other words, God is the rightful Ruler of the Universe, and the world is in revolt against Him. It has turned after a usurper. Satan has become the prince of this world. Man has foolishly allowed himself to follow him; but everywhere the servants of God go, they are called upon to tell men that God Himself is earth's rightful King, and then bid them repent and bow at His feet and acknowledge the divine authority. But more than that, it is our business to tell them that God has sent His own Son and that some day that blessed One is to rule in righteousness as the Father's representative down here. Men have refused Him. They said, "We have no king but Cæsar. We will not have this Man to reign over us." So the messenger of Christ is to go out and proclaim to men that God raised Jesus from the dead and has set Him at His own right hand, and men are called upon to own allegiance to Him, to bow at His feet in repentance, to acknowledge His authority. So we read, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead,

thou shalt be saved." It is as we preach this that we are proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

"Persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (23).

What a wonderful discourse that must have been. How I should like to have been sitting in an alcove listening to it all! I think it would have been better than any course in theology in any seminary that men have ever built since, just to hear the inspired Apostle opening up the wonderful truths of God's way with men, particularly setting forth the mystery of the gospel. He had a double kind of response. We read:

"And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (24)

Some of these thoughtful, open-minded Jews compared scripture with scripture, listening attentively to what Paul, a Hebrew Christian, had to say to them, and finally were convinced. They believed that Jesus was God their Saviour and Messiah. Others, who did not believe, took a position in opposition.

"And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with

their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (25-27).

Paul was evidently divinely guided in quoting these words from one of their own prophets. He refers them back to a book that they revered as divinely inspired, and they were right in so considering it. He read to them what Isaiah said concerning them. If he had made such charges himself they might have been indignant. They might have said, "Well, is this the way to accuse your brethren, the Jews?" But instead of that, he gives them God's own Word from one of their own prophets. And then he adds:

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (28).

Some think this marks a distinct dispensational break, but it is not that at all. It is just the same thing that had occurred before when Paul was in Antioch of Pisidia, as recorded in Acts 13:46. He first preached the gospel to the Jews, and when many of them refused it he said to them, "Well, we will turn to the Gentiles." That was his course wherever he went—to the Jew first, then to the Gentile. And so it was here. Some of them had received his message, but others refused. "Very well," he said, "now I have been faithful with you. I have given you an oppor-

tunity. Now I shall turn to the Gentiles." Of course he had been preaching to the Gentiles for thirty years, but he meant those in Rome.

"And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had great reasoning among themselves" (29).

The last section of the chapter consists of just two verses—30 and 31. The next two years of Paul's life are compressed into them:

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (30, 31).

Here Luke's record closes. How we should like to have the additional account of what took place afterwards, but we shall never know that until we get home to heaven. It is true that historical records have come down to us from early days, telling us that after these two years Paul appeared before Cæsar and was cleared of the charges of sedition brought against him in Jerusalem; that he was set free and, for some three to five years afterward, went about ministering the Word of God, going first to Spain, and some say even as far as Britain; and then back again to the Near East, visiting some of the assemblies where he had labored before. This is attested by his letter to Titus, which was written at that time. After he had finished his final testi-

mony, he was brought back to Rome and there martyred for the name's sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now what I want to emphasize in closing is this: Up to the last Paul preached exactly the same message that he had carried through the world during the thirty years before. No new revelation came to him after he got to prison. It was not then that he received the revelation of the one Body. He received that revelation on the Damascus turnpike when, at the very beginning, the Lord said to him, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest"; when he was given to see that to touch the feeblest saint on earth was to touch the Head in heaven. There was the mystery of the one Body revealed—Christ the Head of His Body; members of that Body on earth. Doubtless this was opened up to him more fully when he went into retirement in Arabia. But he did not proclaim this to the unsaved. It is a message to the Church of God. That was one of the mysteries kept secret from the foundation of the world. The book of Acts deals particularly with his message to the world, to the unsaved; and wherever Paul goes he preaches to unregenerate men the Kingdom of God, and lifts up the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who died and rose again and has been exalted to God's right hand, there to be a Prince and Saviour. The message is one

throughout. This is the gospel, and we are to carry it to the world today.

We have seen as we studied this book how in the very first chapter the Lord Jesus outlined His program. He said, "You shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." We have noted how in the beginning Peter and the rest of the twelve bore witness in Jerusalem, how that witness went out into Judea, and there for a time it stopped. There seemed to be a peculiar unreadiness on the part of the apostles to continue the rest of the program. They had no difficulty in going to their Jewish brethren, but they hung back from going forth to carry the message to the Gentiles. It was not an apostle, it was a deacon—Philip—who finally had faith enough to go to Samaria, and he bore witness there. When word came to the Christians of a mighty work of God being done in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to see what was being done; and so we find John and Peter continuing the work begun there. But it was some time before the message went out to the Gentiles. God had to give to Peter a special revelation—of the sheet let down from heaven, which was full of all kinds of beasts and creeping things. The message was, "What God hath

cleansed, that call not thou common." Directed by God he went down there to the house of Cornelius and preached Christ, and all that heard believed, and the Holy Spirit fell upon them as on Jewish believers at Pentecost.

Thus Peter opened the door to the Gentiles as in Jerusalem he had opened the door to the Jews.

Then God laid His hand on Saul of Tarsus and gave him a vision of world-wide evangelization and sent him out to carry the message to the ends of the earth. From that time on we find the river of grace ever broadening and deepening and reaching to the utmost bounds of creation, so that before the Apostle himself passed off the scene he could speak of the gospel which has been preached in all the creation under heaven. We know from secular history that the rest of the apostles left Jerusalem later and obeyed the Lord's command, and so the gospel was carried into all the world. And today the stream of grace is still rolling on and on and on. We are to follow in the steps of the apostles and go to all men everywhere, warning them to repent, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for "whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

What almost seems like the unfinished character of the book of Acts, from a merely literary standpoint, is doubtless intended to teach us that

until the fulfilment of the angels' prophecy that "this same Jesus" shall return even as He went away, the work of evangelization for this age will not be completed. We are to heed the Word—"Occupy till I come."