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PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY TOUR.

– MAY 2. – ACTS 13:1-13. –

WITH this lesson we leave the parent Church at Jerusalem, and the later Church at Antioch, and start with the Apostle Paul upon what is termed the first missionary tour. Really, however, nearly all of the work thus far done might be said to be of the nature of missionary work. Our Lord's work amongst the Jews was in the nature of a missionary work. The work which began with the day of Pentecost amongst the Jews was in the nature of missionary work. The work done by those who were scattered abroad as the result of persecution in Judea was in the nature of missionary work. The Church at Antioch was itself a mission Church. And so the missionary journey of the Apostle Paul should not be considered in the light of *special* mission work, as that term is used to-day (not a mission to savages and barbarians), but rather as a part of the whole work, which the Lord was pleased to specially bless and use in the establishment of the truth in various quarters distant from Jerusalem.

In a previous lesson we saw the progress made by the Christians at Antioch under the instruction of the holy Spirit through Barnabas and Paul. And this is corroborated by the testimony of this lesson that the Church at Antioch was in a healthful condition, spiritual and full of zeal for the spread of the gospel. It had in it by this time several persons of ability and full consecration whom the Lord was pleased to use in connection with its ministry; and the time had come when Paul and Barnabas could be spared to go elsewhere, to start others in the good way; and the holy spirit indicated that this should be done. How this was indicated we are not informed, and we will not speculate concerning it. Suffice it that the Church understood the directions of the holy spirit and obeyed them, Barnabas [R2141 : page 121] and Paul being agreeable also. Barnabas is mentioned first in the record because up to this time he had the more prominent position, as being older than

Paul in spiritual things and perhaps also older in years. While Paul was "a chosen vessel" unto the Lord, prepared for a great service, it had not yet been fully manifest that he was the Lord's choice to fill the place of Judas, the *twelfth apostle*.

Apparently Barnabas and Paul were sent forth at the expense or charges of the Church at Antioch, and hence went forth as their representatives, as well as representatives of the Lord. The importance of the matter was appreciated, and the dependence of the mission upon divine blessing was recognized in the fasting and prayer and outward manifestation of appointment by laying on of hands. This laying on of hands was not by way of giving *authority* to preach, for Barnabas and Paul had already been teaching in various quarters for some years, and had been teaching the Church at Antioch for over a year: it was therefore merely a ceremony by which the missionaries and the Church undertaking their support took cognizance of each other as representatives and represented in this special work about to be begun. But while accepting the commission of the Antioch Church, as its representatives, the missionaries specially recognized that they were sent forth by the holy spirit. – Verse 4.

They had not gone far before they began the work which lay so near to their hearts; – the preaching of God's message, of good tidings of great joy, of reconciliation effected by the precious blood of Christ. They did not go to heathen people, but went to sow the seed of the Kingdom in already prepared soil: they went, first of all, as in every place, to the Jews who for sixteen hundred years had been under the law as a school-master to prepare them to receive Christ. The pious Gentiles who were "feeling after God, if haply they might find him," and who had some knowledge of the God of Israel, frequently attended these Jewish synagogues, and hence in going to these the missionaries, Barnabas and Paul, were reaching the best prepared and most religious element in every place.

The liberality of the management of the Jewish synagogues is attested by the fact that the gospel got a ready hearing in all of them up to the point where they realized that the message was likely to produce a division in their midst. If the Jewish synagogues and Christian churches to-day were conducted on a similarly liberal basis, and gave opportunity for the presentation of any subject that could be presented from the Scriptures and in harmony with the Scriptures, the present missionary work of disseminating the present harvest truth would be very much simplified. While to-day we are less subject to the violent persecution, on the other hand we are seriously handicapped by prevailing conditions and sectarian bondage.

John-Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, is here introduced to us; not as a third laborer in the special work of ministry of the truth, but as an assistant or servant to Barnabas and Paul. In this as in every place the Scriptures, while teaching that all believers are "brethren" and "fellow-heirs," nevertheless repudiate entirely the thought entertained by some to-day that all brethren are exactly on an equality in every matter. Very properly Mark did not say – "If I cannot go on an equality with Barnabas and Paul, I will not go at all." Very properly he did say that if there is any opportunity for service, if by any means I can render [R2141 : page 122] any assistance in the journey and affairs of these whom the holy spirit has indicated as special representatives, I shall be most glad to serve them, and thus serve indirectly the Lord and his cause. And there were opportunities, as there are always opportunities for those who have a will to serve the cause; and no doubt Barnabas, and especially Paul, received many helps from their younger brother who had become their servant chiefly from his desire to serve the cause of Christ. No doubt also their opportunities for public ministry of the truth were enlarged and broadened by his helpful assistance in secular affairs. Paul especially constantly needed a helper, because of his thorn in the flesh, his weak eyes.

Mark's faithful service continued for some time, but for some reason (verse 13) not stated he left the work, and we may judge very

nearly lost his privilege and opportunity in connection with it. No one knows how much he may have lost of spiritual blessing and privilege by his failure to continue with Paul. The disagreement, whatever it may have been, apparently extended to his uncle Barnabas, and eventually led to the separation of the latter from Paul. However, years afterward John-Mark apparently saw things in a different light, and again joined Paul's company. He seems to have ultimately become a true yoke-fellow, very highly appreciated by the great Apostle. (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11.) Here is a suggestion to all of us that, no matter what may be the door of opportunity for engaging in the Lord's service, faithfulness to it is essential to progress; and there is a further lesson that if we find that we have erred and been unappreciative of our privilege the best thing to do is to repent therefor and seek a renewal of the opportunities, and to attest our loyalty by fresh and increased earnestness.

The gospel heralds continued on their journey through the Island of Cyprus, until at Paphos they came in contact with a new experience. There Satan has a special servant, a spirit-medium, a sorcerer, and false teacher. This man had ingratiated himself with the chief government official of that place, and when the latter was being reached by the gospel message the sorcerer opposed it, realizing that there can be no harmony between light and darkness, between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of demons, and that if the deputy governor became a follower of Christ and imbued with his spirit, he would be proportionately out of harmony with spirit mediumship and sorcery and all the evil works of the flesh and the devil. It was a peculiar case, such as apparently had not previously been presented; it was a contention between truth and error and the servant of truth and the servant of error. It was just such a case as was needed to bring forward the Apostle Paul's grand traits of character: opposition only made him the stronger by arousing him fully to the necessity of the case. More than this, although he had already been made the recipient of certain "gifts" of the holy spirit, he was now specially imbued with divine power, as is here indicated by the Greek text; and acting under the direction of this holy power which possessed

him, he pronounced against Elymas the scathing rebuke and sentence of blindness, recorded in this lesson.

The deputy, who was evidently honest-hearted and sincere in his desire to know the truth, was thus convinced of the truth, and embraced the gospel. From this time onward Paul takes his place as the chief one in the work: hereafter it is Paul and Barnabas or Paul and his company. It is quite probable that it was a failure to recognize the Lord's leading in connection with the Apostle Paul and his leadership as an *apostle* of this branch of the work, and through family sympathy with his uncle Barnabas, that John-Mark here deserted the work.

The spiritual lesson here, for us all, is (1) that the Lord himself is at the helm and directing his work, and that each and all of us should continually look to him for the guidance of his work and to note how he is leading the various members in the body (1 Cor. 12:25-31); (2) the lesson teaches us the Lord's will respecting the promulgation of the gospel; for altho unfortunately the Golden Text chosen is spurious – not found in old manuscripts (Mark 16:9 to end, being omitted by all old manuscripts – See also Revised Version), – nevertheless, the same thought, that it is the will of God that the gospel should be preached everywhere, is abundantly taught in other places (Matt. 28:19) and enforced by this very lesson under consideration. We see from it, too, that while certain servants are chosen and indicated by the Lord for certain special services, yet others are permitted to serve as did Mark, and still others may serve the Church at home, as did Simeon and Lucius and Manaen, and that still others – the entire Church – are privileged to cooperate in the matter of sympathy, love, prayers, hospitality and financial sustenance. – Rom. 12:6-13.

Circumstances have since greatly changed, and we are not to be confined to exactly the same methods of procedure now as then; but the inherent principles are the same. We neither wear the same kind of clothing, nor travel in the same kind of vessels, nor are we supported in exactly the same manner. But with all of these variances the same

service is now due to be performed; namely, the preaching of the gospel to all who have "ears to hear." With the gospel presented on the printed page, and with present mail and rail facilities, a very much larger number may become public missionaries, going from place to place, holding up the **[R2141 : page 123]** lamp of life, carrying the good tidings from door to door. The same agencies make it possible for those who must remain at home and who can use the mails to thus go about doing good, preaching Christ and his Kingdom and its righteousness. Others in turn can go about preaching orally as well as circulating the printed page – "every man according to his several ability." (Matt. 25:15.) We who are living to-day have special opportunities and privileges for ministering the truth to others. Our responsibility is correspondingly large, and our faith and love and zeal should be correspondingly shown; for he who loves much and who has many opportunities will surely do much for him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.
