

THE GOSPEL SENT TO EUROPE.

– JULY 4. – ACTS 16:6-16. –

"The entrance of thy words giveth light." – Psa. 119:130.

AFTER the conference at Jerusalem respecting the obligations of the Law upon Christians, we noticed that Jude and Silas returned with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, to deliver the decision of the Council. After remaining with the Antioch Church for several months the Apostle Paul proposed to Barnabas that they revisit the Churches of Asia Minor, which they had established during the first preaching tour. The Apostle was thoughtful of the interests of the general work, and remembered the necessity of watering as well as sowing the truth. Experience is convincing that this thought is correct, and that it is just as true to day as then that beginners in the Christian way need the careful oversight of those who are more advanced, that they may become rooted, grounded, established and built up in the truth.

The necessity for doing something to center and develop the interest of beginners is very generally recognized to-day, but with many the thought seems to be that the beginner needs to get into the current of what is termed "Christian work," but what in reality is very largely animal excitement. We may be very certain that the Apostle's thought was not with reference to getting up some little excitement and entertainment for the "babes" in Christ, such as strawberry festivals, apron sociables, gossip societies and other entertainments to attract the world, at ten cents a head, for the Lord's cause. These were not the considerations which moved the Apostle to suggest the new tour. He had a more important work than this; he thought of the newly interested believers, the opposition with which they would have to contend among their former friends, the false arguments and sophistries which would be raised by the adversary to combat the truth; the inexperience and perplexities of the Lord's flock, and he needed to

go amongst them to encourage, strengthen and establish them in the truth and make of them strong soldiers of the cross.

Barnabas readily assented to the proposed tour; but before they had proceeded far in the arrangement, a difference of opinion arose between the two which, however, has been very greatly exaggerated, we think, by many Commentators. We hold that they did not have a "quarrel, bitter and angry;" that they did not "part in anger;" that it is not true that "neither would yield to the other, and therefore both were wrong." Quite to the contrary, we think that each had a right to act according to his own judgment of the Lord's will in the matter under discussion; and that a sharp discussion, in which each would be positive, should not with Christians signify any bitterness or acrimonious feeling.

The point of the discussion was, whether or not John Mark (cousin of Barnabas and writer of the Gospel of Mark) should go with them on this journey. We saw in our lesson of May 2 that Mark forsook the service of the ministering brethren (Paul and Barnabas) in their first tour, and Paul evidently thought that up to this time Mark had not properly recognized his misconduct on that occasion, and hence was determined that the assistant on this occasion should be some one upon whom they could place greater dependence. Barnabas, on the contrary, stood up for Mark, and as a result they determined that it would be best to make two parties instead of one. The evidence seems to be that Barnabas was rather the loser by not acquiescing with the Apostle Paul's view of the matter; for altho Barnabas and Mark started on a preaching tour, its importance and success were comparatively much less than attended the ministries of Paul: so **[R2175 : page 188]** much so that no particular report of it is given, and Barnabas thereafter is almost lost from sight.

That Paul's conduct was not the result of any unkind feeling toward either Barnabas or Mark is evident from the fact that in one of his subsequent epistles he mentions Barnabas most kindly; and a little

farther on we find Mark one of Paul's associates in the work. Presumably he had learned the lesson which the Apostle thought he needed to learn. However, as a result of their candid differences of view, as Dr. Stalker puts it, Paul had to part "from the man to whom he owed more than to any other human being; and Barnabas was separated from the grandest spirit of the age." "They never met again."

Paul chose Silas, whose full name was Silvanus, one of the brethren sent from Jerusalem after the conference, to be his companion and helper; and they started northward from Antioch, then turned westward to Derbe, then to Lystra, where the company was joined by young Timothy. Altho Timothy's mother was a Jewess, his father being a Greek he had never been circumcised. Paul, foreseeing that he would be a valuable assistant in the work, recommended that, according to the Jewish custom, Timothy be circumcised, and thus become in the fullest sense a Jew according to the custom divinely enjoined upon that nation.

Paul has been sharply criticised for his course in this matter by some who consider that his action here directly contradicted his testimony to the Galatians – "If ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing." (Gal. 5:2-6.) But these critics fail to notice an important feature; namely, (1) that circumcision was established before the Mosaic Law was given at Sinai; (2) that it was made a national mark, and that any Jew who was not circumcised, forfeited by that neglect his rights in the Abrahamic promise. (3) The Galatian Christians, who were told that they must not be circumcised, were not Jews, and had nothing to do with Israel's national sign; and for them to perform circumcision would indicate that they were seeking for divine favor by becoming Jews and coming under the Jewish laws and regulations, and that they were not trusting fully to Christ. (Gal. 2:14-16.) (4) A Jew, on the contrary, while trusting in Christ, could properly enough conform to the national usage of circumcision established before the Law.

Having passed from the province of Galatia in which were located the cities of Antioch, Lystra and Derbe, the Apostle evidently here intended going into the province called Asia, a part of what is known as Asia Minor, but the holy spirit hindered them and forbade that course. How this instruction of the spirit was communicated we are not informed; and no matter, since we have confidence that the Apostle was not following mere impressions, but made sure that he was under the divine guidance. They next thought to go into the province of Bithynia, but again they were hindered, and so passed by Mysia; that is, they passed through the province of Asia without preaching therein, and came to the seaport of Troas, thinking there to take shipping, but apparently uncertain as to which direction the Lord would have them go.

Here the Lord's leading was very distinct: in a dream the Apostle Paul saw a man of Macedonia beckoning to him and saying, "Come over and help us." This settled the Apostle respecting the course he should take. The Lord was leading him, but evidently chose to delay the full and clear information respecting his route, that the Apostle (and the Church in general through this account) might realize the more fully how directly God was leading and providentially guiding in the presentation of his truth. The Apostle and his company immediately prepared to go to Macedonia in obedience to the Lord's indication.

Thus the Lord specially directed the word of his grace to Europe. Instead of sending it northward and eastward through Asia – to the millions in Asiatic Russia and India and China, and instead of sending it **[R2176 : page 188]** southward to the other millions in Egypt and all Africa, the Lord specially guided his truth northwestward into Europe. Who cannot see that a great question was in the balances, and was here divinely decided?

Let it be remembered, too, that, in sending the gospel into Europe, the Lord chose first of all the most enlightened parts of Europe. Macedonia lies just north of Greece, and their peoples were practically one; their intelligence and civilization were practically on a par. Only a short time before, Greece, under Alexander the Great, had conquered the world, and Greek civilization and the Greek language and Greek

philosophies had thus been spread among all civilized people. And altho subsequently the Caesars of Rome had conquered Greece, they had not destroyed the influence of the Greek literature and philosophy, which still dominated at the time of our lesson. In sending the gospel into Macedonia, therefore, the Lord was sending it to the people most advanced in civilization and the arts. After starting the work in Macedonia and in Greece, the good tidings were later sent to Rome, and from these, then the centers of civilization, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has spread northward through Europe and westward through America, and has been the instrumentality for producing the highest types of civilization that the world has ever known; and this in proportion as the Word of God has been free, and has been received into good and honest hearts.

In Macedonia, by the spirit's leading, they went first to one of the principal cities, Philippi, and there on the Jewish Sabbath they found by the river side a prayer meeting. The women who attended it were probably all Jewesses, and the Apostle concluded that those who were seeking the Lord in worship and prayer would be in the best condition of heart to be approached with the gospel: a judgment which experience since, in every land, endorses as correct. Paul's discourse concerning the hopes of Israel and the fulfilment of these in Jesus the Messiah, and the story of his crucifixion for our sins, found a lodgment in the hearts of some who heard it. This was the start of the Church at that city, to which later Paul wrote – the Epistle to the Philippians.

The brief reference to Lydia, one of the believers, is worthy of notice. Her heart being touched with the message of the gospel, she esteemed it a privilege to serve and entertain those whom the Lord had been pleased to honor as servants in carrying to her his message. We have here a good lesson of thankful appreciation and hospitality.
