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PAUL A PRISONER AT PHILIPPI.

– JULY 11. – ACTS 16:22-34. –

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."
– Acts 16:31.

ALTHO, as we have seen, Paul and his company were divinely directed into Europe, his early experiences there would have led many others to think that there was some mistake respecting the matter, – some misdirection; for he had not been long in the new field of labor until he was imprisoned. The Apostle, however, knew to expect just such experiences, and realized himself in the hands of one who was both able and willing to make all things work together for good to his servants. The imprisonment was of the Evil One and his deluded servants, and was permitted of God as a means for contrasting the spirit of the truth with the spirit of error, and of bringing the gospel particularly to the attention of the jailor.

The circumstances which led to the imprisonment are interesting and instructive. Satan then, as previously and since, used spirit manifestations to delude the people. A young woman was the spirit medium through which the demons (fallen angels) operated, personating the dead, and delivering messages purporting [R2182 : page 200] to be from them, to those who paid liberally for the service. Apparently, the revenues from this [R2182 : page 201] source were very large, for the woman was owned and controlled by a company or syndicate, and "brought her masters much gain."

It is perhaps difficult for us to determine the motives which prompted the evil spirits to move the medium to cry after Paul and Silas, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." These evil spirits, however, were similarly moved on several occasions to confess our Lord Jesus Christ. (Mark 1:24,34.) The Apostle endured this testimony for several days,

but finally expelled the evil spirits; probably through sympathy for the woman, as well as from a realization that if thus permitted the evil spirits might claim some collusion as between themselves and the Apostle, and so after his departure might have an improper influence upon those who would receive the gospel of Christ.

Wealth always has been a power. It is not surprising, therefore, that the syndicate of worldly men who were making much gain through this spirit medium, angered by the wanton destruction of the value of their property, as they would regard the matter, and realizing the loss of all their future profits from this source, would feel disposed to inflict some kind of retribution upon those who had been the cause of their misfortune. And their wealth had power with the magistrate who, similarly blinded, did not recognize that a good work had been done in liberating a fellow-creature from the power of the devil, and thus stopping one avenue of evil influence and deception. The Apostle, as a shrewd man, probably knew to expect some such results; otherwise we may suppose that he would have rebuked the evil spirit on the first day. He probably took the time to think and pray over the matter, and to ascertain the Lord's will before putting himself and the interests of the cause in jeopardy. We may be sure that he was guided in this matter for good, the Lord probably wishing to bring the gospel message to the jailor.

The charges brought against Paul and Silas are worthy of note as indicating the cunning of the syndicate owning the medium. When Paul and Silas were dragged to the public square, where trials were conducted, the charge brought against them was not that they had wrecked the financial interests of the syndicate by the exercise of a spirit more powerful than that which possessed their medium, for such a charge would have had no weight under the laws of the Romans; but taking advantage of the fact that the Roman law, while tolerant of all religions, made it a criminal offense to attempt to proselyte a Roman, they made their charges along this line, claiming that Paul and Silas were Jews, who were endeavoring to proselyte Romans. This charge

had some foundation in fact, for of course the brethren were there for the very purpose of converting Jews, Greeks and Romans to Christ. On this charge they were adjudged guilty, and the masses taking sides against them, the magistrates made the penalties the more severe. They were beaten in public, and then put into the inner prison and their feet made fast in the stocks.

With many, such treatment, and the fact that God permitted it, would have brought discouragement, and they would consequently have chosen some less hazardous calling in life; but these servants of God were true soldiers of the cross, who had enlisted for life, realizing that they were called upon "to endure hardness as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ." Instead of bemoaning their lot and wishing they had never enlisted in the Lord's service, or thinking of how they could withdraw from it, these noble men, on the contrary, rejoiced and thanked God that they were accounted worthy to suffer in his name and for his cause. While not disposed to be obtrusive with their prayers and praises, they evidently felt that it would be proper that their fellow prisoners who would know something of their treatment, should know something also of how they received it, and of the grace of God which sustained them. No such prisoners had ever been there before, and never before had that prison been a Bethel, a house of God, a gate of Heaven. As the Apostles prayed their strength of heart and fervency of spirit increased until they broke forth in songs of thankfulness, gratitude and praise to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Heathen religions have holy books, and prayers, and occasional mournful chants by their priests or priestesses, but they have no singing of hymns in worship. These seem to have been confined first, to the Jews, and secondly, to their successors in grace, Christians; but now, alas! they are taken up by all classes, and some times prostituted to the uses of Mormonism, Christian Science, Spiritism, Theosophy, etc.

How greatly this conduct of Paul and Silas differs from the recorded conduct and sentiments of some of the greatest and most

notable and most stoical on the pages of history. Of Ovid, the famed poet and philosopher, it is declared – "There is scarcely one of his many letters which he wrote during his short exile, which is not full of unmanly lamentations." Of Seneca, a noted writer of Paul's day, it is written that his books were "full of most sounding professions of stoic superiority to passion and pain, yet, when exiled, he broke into abject complaint." Similar things are said concerning Cicero, and Napoleon Bonaparte is another example. Yet all these men, even in their exile, were surrounded by wealth and luxury: but here we have before us two men who had forsaken all for the privilege [R2182 : page 202] of being God's ambassadors, representatives of Christ, suffering to bear the message of divine grace to the sin-blinded and unthankful; – yet under most distressing circumstances, with their backs lacerated from the beating, with their feet in the stocks, and their whole bodies therefore pained and uncomfortable, with seemingly no cause for thankfulness that the worldly could discern, they were filled with love and gratitude to God, and their hearts overflowed in songs of praise. Surely they were actuated by super-human hopes and joys!

Nor were they the only ones upon whom the truth and the holy spirit of the truth has had such an influence. We remember many martyrs who likewise "endured as seeing him who is invisible." We think of Daniel praying in the lion's den and answering the king in a cheerful voice, "The God whom I serve hath sent his angel and shut the lion's mouth." We remember the three Hebrew captives, who, because of faithfulness to God, were cast into the fiery furnace; and who there had the presence with them of one in appearance like the Son of Man. We remember Bunyan, who, while in Bedford jail, England, for faithfulness to the truth, not only prayed to God, but figuratively sang his praises, as represented in his remarkable work – *Pilgrim's Progress*. We remember also King David of old, some of whose most expressive and impressive Psalms were written in hours of distress, when the Lord upheld him. Madam Guyon, while imprisoned in the Castle Vincennes (1695), wrote songs and sang them in praise to God. Writing of it subsequently she said, "It sometimes seems to me as if I

were a little bird, whom the Lord had placed in a cage, and that I had nothing now to do but to sing. The joy of my heart gave brightness to the objects around me. The stones of my prison looked to my eyes like rubies." In prison she wrote: –

"A little bird I am, shut from the fields of air; And in my songs I sit and sing to him who placed me there: Well pleased a prisoner thus to be, because, my God, it pleaseth thee. My cage confines me round, – abroad I cannot flee; But though my wing is closely bound, my heart's at liberty. My prison walls cannot control the flight, the freedom of my soul."

Thank God, the days of beating and imprisonment for Christ's sake are no more; but there are still opportunities for the development and exercise of the spirit of sacrifice by all who are faithful followers in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus; there are social smitings and ostracisms for the truth's sake, which can be borne with rejoicing to such an extent that the smart is scarcely felt. There are times when the Lord permits our financial conditions to become almost a gloomy prison as viewed from the natural standpoint, – times when responsibilities or sicknesses may shut us in as prisoners; but under such circumstances the faithful are able to realize the Lord's favor and mercy; they find many blessings to recount and their hearts overflow with thankful gratitude and praise, so that all who come in contact with them take knowledge of them, as they did of the Apostles, "that they have been with Jesus and learned of him."

The Lord's response to the faith, prayers and praise of his servants, by an earthquake, is of course out of the ordinary course of his providences; but the case was an extraordinary one. These were extraordinary servants, the work given them to do in establishing the Church was an extraordinary work. And evidently something extraordinary was needed in the case of the jailor, who, though an honest and well disposed man, was not expecting any blessing of religious instruction from the prisoner under his care: yet, as soon as

he grasped the situation he became as teachable as a child at the feet of his prisoners, inquiring the way to eternal life. It is worthy of note that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has little effect upon any who receive it otherwise than in meekness: those who oppose themselves and fight the truth at every step are not of the kind, nor in the condition to be blessed by it: hence the Lord's instruction to "preach the gospel to the *meek*.

The gist of the apostle's instructions is summed up in our golden text, – "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" – the significance of which is very comprehensive. [R2183 : page 202] It implies not only mental assent to the fact that Christ died for *our sins* and arose for *our justification*, but also a reception of these truths into the heart and into the life of the believers; so that thenceforth he may realize that he is not his own, but bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ; that he belongs to him and should willingly submit in every matter to his guidance and direction.

The Apostle did not tell the jailor and his family that they must *seek* the Lord's favor and forgiveness for several weeks, in prayer at a mourner's bench, or otherwise; but, on the contrary, that they should simply and at once *believe the facts* as preached to them, and at once start a consecrated life in harmony therewith. And all this faith and consecration was at once confessed and professed by the jailor and his family when they were immersed.

Meantime, we can imagine with what tenderness and gratitude to God the jailor washed the wounds of his remarkable prisoners; and recognizing them as the servants and representatives of the Lord he entertained them with the best his house afforded. A proper appreciation of God and his goodness always leads to an appreciation of the servants and instruments which God is pleased to use in bringing blessings to us. [R2184 : page 203]

CUMBERED WITH MUCH SERVING.

"So busy, O so busy," is the cry on every side,
"There's much to do, and workers few, while on the moments glide;"
And weary hearts are fainting off' beneath their load of care;
And willing hands have grown too weak the burden's weight to bear.

"No time to rest, no time to wait for strength to be renewed,
No time to tarry till the soul with power is endued;
The tasks increasing every day, this life so near its close;
We cannot rest," the toilers cry, "until death brings repose!"
O burdened hearts, can it be true this is the Master's will?
Are you to labor every hour and never to be still?
These vessels are so very small, our cups will not run o'er
Unless we seek the fountain's brink for filling more and more.

Take time to sit at Jesus' feet and hear his blessed Word;
Wait there, like Mary, till your soul to love's best deed is stirred;
Then break the alabaster box, and let its perfume sweet
Spread with the gospel's joyful sound, and make the earth replete!
O be not cumbered with much care, – they serve who only wait;

The Lord's command, "Go thou and work," will never come too late.

His truth must burn within your soul e'er you a task begin:

For we must know our captain's will if faith's good fight we win.

Then come apart each weary one into a place of rest, –

The flesh so weak must often seek the Rock and Shadow blest;

There tarry in that silence sweet till freed from every care,

And you arise, with strength renewed, for him to do and dare.

– F. G. Burroughs.
