

PAUL'S LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.

– OCTOBER 3. – ACTS 21:1-15. –

"I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." – Acts 21:13.

THE date on which the Apostle Paul, after his interview with the elders of the Church at Ephesus at Miletus, resumed his journey toward Jerusalem, is calculated by those who have made a special study of the subject, to have been Monday, April 24, A.D. 58. He wished to reach Jerusalem about the time of the Passover, but apparently was somewhat delayed enroute, and it is supposed he did not reach there until May 17 – Pentecost day, that year.

The expression "after we had gotten from them," would seem to refer to the affectionate parting between Paul and those who accompanied him, and the Elders of Ephesus with whom evidently Timothy remained. As noticed in the previous lesson, "they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing:" so that they were finally obliged to break away from them, to get aboard their vessel. There is nothing very special in the account of the journey: it was in a sailing vessel, slow and tedious and rather uninteresting. Probably the master and crew of that small vessel had little idea how much the value of their ship's burden was enhanced by the addition of Paul and his company. Little did they know how honorable a servant and ambassador of the Most High was their guest and passenger, and how he and his associates carried with them the gospel of Divine grace, a pearl of great price. "The world knoweth us not, even as it knew him not." Paul's company seems to have consisted (1) of Luke, the writer of this account, who uses the pronoun *we*; (2) Trophimus (verse 29); (3) Aristarchus (Acts 27:2).

Paul's experience in the city of Tyre serves to show us the bond of sympathy and Christian love which prevailed in the early Church.

Apparently Paul and his companions were unaware that there were believers at Tyre, but, no doubt providentially, they found some; and so close was the bond of Christian sympathy that the finding of them insured the finding of fast and loving friends. We may imagine the blessed experiences of the little group of believers during the seven days of the Apostle's stay with them. We are not told what was done, but from the character of the Apostle we may judge with considerable accuracy, for "a good fountain sends forth sweet waters" only. He surely did not waste time in telling them of his many travels and the various scenes in foreign lands. We may be sure also that, having the spirit of love shed abroad in his heart he did not indulge in "*gossip*" in respect to the Lord's people in the various places he had visited: he had come under "the royal law" of Love, which neither thinketh nor speaketh ill of his neighbor; and we may be sure he would be doubly careful of what he would say to or about the Lord's "brethren." Paul had a grander mission than this, and a mind too noble to permit him to be either a "busybody in other men's matters" or a gossip. He had more important business: As he elsewhere expressed himself, "This one thing I do," – the Father's business. Forgetting the things which [R2222 : page 282] were behind, and pressing forward to those things which were before, he ran with patience the race set before him in the gospel, for the prize of the high calling; looking unto Jesus as both the Author and Finisher of his faith.

We may therefore know assuredly that those seven days were profitably employed by the Apostle in talking over with the Church at Tyre the gracious plan of God, his precepts and his promises to those who love and obey him. The impression made indicates that the Apostle had become a lifelong friend of the Tyre believers, so much so that they were all loth to part, and husbands, wives and children accompanied Paul and his associates clear outside the city limits, and they parted with prayer. Where such holiness of heart, singleness of purpose and devotion to the Lord are found, there cannot be found in the same individual a contrary spirit; and all who are in close company with such a Christian will be profitted and helped and kept thereby.

A briefer visit was made at Ptolemais, the next stop being with Philip, the evangelist, at Cesarea. We are not surprised to find a Church at Cesarea, for it was here that the gospel to the Gentiles first was preached; this being the residence of Cornelius the first Gentile convert. (Acts 10:1.) We may reasonably suppose that a man like Cornelius who, before receiving the gospel, "feared God with all his house" and "gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway," on receiving the good tidings of great joy would become ten fold more zealous than he had ever before been. That the Church at Cesarea was of considerable size is evident from the fact that Philip made it his head quarters, and that this was the third visit which Paul had made to this city during his travels. – See Acts 9:30; 18:22.

The statement of verse nine to the effect that Philip had four virgin daughters "which did prophesy" is worthy of notice. The word "prophesy" is used in many instances in the New Testament to describe public or semi public speaking and not always a foretelling of future events. It is somewhat difficult to know which view should be taken in the present case, because in the next verse Agabus is mentioned as a prophet – a foreteller of future events – possessing the gift of prophesying. But whichever view of the word prophesying we apply to the daughters of Philip, the intimation would be that women were recognized of the Lord in connection with the ministry of the gospel in the early Church. In attempting to reach safe and sound Scriptural conclusions on this subject, it is proper that we take into consideration all the statements and all the facts bearing upon it. While the Apostle writes most positively "I suffer not a woman to teach or to usurp authority over a man," he also says that if women in the Church pray or prophesy, it should be with their heads covered; and thus we see that his other statement that "I suffer not a woman to teach" must be understood in a qualified sense and in connection with the latter part of that statement – not to usurp teaching functions over and above the men. We find, nevertheless, that the Apostle greatly appreciated the co-operation of female believers, and that he speaks of them in the highest terms of appreciation.

In all this Paul followed closely in the footsteps of the Master who, tho he appreciated very highly and specially "loved" Martha and the Marys and the several honorable women among his disciples, and altho he privileged one of them to be the first to know of his resurrection, and tho he sent the message of his resurrection by one of them to Peter and the other disciples, nevertheless he did not make use of women in connection with the public ministry of the gospel. He not only chose males for the twelve apostles, but also subsequently for the seventy evangelists sent forth to declare him and the Kingdom of God at hand. It behooves us to note the divine leadings on this and on all other subjects and to follow as closely as circumstances will permit in the same footsteps, – whether we see or do not see, positively, the philosophy of the inspired methods. It may be argued that women were more ignorant then and are more intelligent now, but this would not account for the matter satisfactorily, because we know that the masses of the men were correspondingly ignorant of literature and philosophy at that time: as for instance in our Lord's case, the people in general marveled that *he could read*, and very few men except amongst the Scribes had the necessary education to read, or any use for such an education, since books were very rare and costly.

Without offering any reason why this should be so, without attempting to give any explanation of the Divine course, we can very safely afford to wait for the few remaining years, until "that which is perfect is come," without attempting to change in any particular degree or even to greatly modify the methods instituted by our Lord, and generally practiced by the early Church. Especially so when we notice that Satan's method seems to be along diametrically opposite lines: he uses females chiefly – for Spiritualistic mediums, for Christian Science instructors and healers, and as apostles of Theosophy.

On the contrary, we have no sympathy with the sentiment apparently held by some brethren, that the sisters of the Church are to be entirely ignored, and that any suggestions which they may offer respecting the Word of the Lord should be despised. But, while

recognizing certain facts and principles on this subject [R2222 : page 283] laid down in the Scriptures, all should remember that it is a part of the Christian duty to be kind and courteous to *all*, overbearing and dogmatic toward *none*, male or female. And furthermore, let us remember that, while the outward proprieties acceptable to the Lord, may distinguish the more public ministers as for men, and the more private ministries for women, yet amongst those who are faithful to their appointed ministries, as the Lord has been pleased to arrange for them, there is no personal discrimination as between the sex in our Lord's love and estimation; "there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male or female," but all are one in Christ Jesus. – Gal. 3:28.

Distinctions as to nationality, freedom or sex, while they may be properly enough recognized in their relationship with the affairs of this present time, have no bearing whatever upon our Lord's love for us, nor upon our love for each other, nor upon the conditions of the future, when all these *distinctions will be removed*; that which is perfect having then come, national distinctions and different degrees of freedom, as well as sexual differences will all be obliterated. So then, while under divine providence a bondman may not be granted the opportunity to render as great a service in [R2223 : page 283] the Lord's cause as if he were a free man, while a very poor man might not have the same opportunities for service as if he were made a steward of wealth, and while the sisters may not under divine commission take quite so prominent a place in the public ministry of the truth as the brethren, nevertheless each one who is faithful in the use of the opportunities which the Lord has given him will be blessed according to his faithfulness to the Lord's arrangement; – *as greatly*, we may suppose, as tho equally faithful in the use of larger opportunities. And each one should be zealous to render all the service possible to the Master, in harmony with the station and conditions under which he has been placed through divine providence. The bondman is not to feel that the only way in which he can serve the Lord acceptably would be by becoming a master instead of a servant: nor are the sisters to suppose that the only way in which to be acceptable and to show their zeal

would be by usurping authority over the man, contrary to the Divine order in nature, and as set forth in the Scriptures. On the contrary, thankfulness and gratitude to God is to be the ruling sentiment of our lives; and our zeal is to be, to use every opportunity which the Lord shall bring to our hands, rather than to endeavor to alter his arrangements in the mistaken thought we might thus render him a greater or more acceptable service.

The Agabus mentioned in the tenth verse had already been manifested before the Church, as specially used of the Lord in foretelling the famine which came upon not only Palestine, but a large part of the civilized world at that time. (Acts 11:27.) His prophecy therefore of bonds and imprisonment awaiting Paul at Jerusalem would have great weight with all the Church. He accompanied it with signs, as was common with the prophets of olden time. (Jer. 13:5; 19:10,11; Ezek. 4:1-3; 5:1-4, etc.) Believing implicitly that Agabus (as he declared) spoke as a mouthpiece of the holy spirit, the friends began to importune the Apostle to discontinue his journey to Jerusalem; even his companions joining in the request. But Paul was fully convinced that it was the Lord's will that he should go to Jerusalem and could not be hindered from so doing. As he had told the Elders of Ephesus that the holy spirit witnessed to him that bonds and imprisonments awaited him at Jerusalem, so now he was not surprised when through Agabus came another intimation to the same effect. His noble answer to the fears and entreaties of the brethren was in the sublimely courageous and yet beautifully sympathetic language of our Golden Text. O how important it is that we should all learn the lesson, not to be moved from faithfulness to the Lord and his commands; neither by the tears and entreaties of friends nor by the frowns and threats of our foes.

"Where duty calls or danger, be never lacking there."

Paul's firmness would no doubt be misunderstood by some, to be obstinacy and self-will: in reality however it was the very reverse of

these. Self-will in him was completely subordinated to the divine will; and instead, therefore, of its being obstinacy it was *faithfulness* that he exhibited. His determination carried the day, and the others acquiesced, saying not, Paul's will be done; but, recognizing that Paul was faithfully carrying out the Divine plan they said, "The will of the Lord be done."
