

THE FIRST PERSECUTION.

– ACTS 4:1-12. – FEB. 2. –

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

THE COMMOTION caused by the healing of the cripple by James and John, and the gathering of the crowd of worshipers to whom they preached, brought upon the apostles a new difficulty. The priests, whose ministries were more or less interrupted by the disturbance, felt a grievance against those who thus attracted attention away from themselves and their services, and the officers of the Temple, whose duty it was to preserve order, were also disturbed. These, coming upon the preaching Apostle and the interested multitude, arrested the three who were the cause of such a commotion, that the matter might be enquired into. It was toward evening, and therefore too late to gather the members of the Sanhedrin Court. The three who had been witnessing for God and for Christ were put in ward, in the prison; not as felons, but for trial. It would have been possible for the imprisoned men to have viewed their situation from the standpoint of unbelief, and to have said to themselves and each other: God did not approve our work, and hence has permitted us to be thus arrested and imprisoned, and now we know not what the result will be on the morrow, for those who crucified our Lord may crucify us also.

Or they might, in unbelief, have reasoned still otherwise, and have said to each other: After all, what right have we to think that God has anything to do with these matters? We are like other men, and have merely found some new way in which natural law operates in the healing of the sick: God evidently is not concerned in this work; for if he were surely he would not have permitted us to come into these straits, while we were seeking to serve him and to declare the good tidings. But we may safely assume that the thoughts and words of the prisoners took a totally different direction. Full of faith, they no doubt said to

themselves: We know not in what way the Lord may intend to use this, which seems to be a disadvantage to us, and an interruption to his work; doubtless however, he will use it in some manner to forward his cause and to reach more of his people with the truth.

As a matter of fact, the Lord evidently intended through this seeming calamity to bring to the apostles a still grander opportunity of testifying to the truth on the next day – of preaching to a class which they might never again have opportunity to reach – the priestly class, the ruling class, represented in the Sanhedrin, and those who would gather at its sessions. When the Sanhedrin Court opened the next morning, amongst its seventy members, representatives of the most influential classes in Jerusalem, were Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, his son, both of whom had about two months previously presided in the trial of the Master himself. Nevertheless, the apostles were evidently not at all dismayed by the dignity of the Court – the Lord evidently fulfilling to them his promise, "Ye shall be brought before kings and governors for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles; but when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak." (Matt. 10:18-20.) That Peter, as spokesman for the three, was supernaturally assisted, is implied in the narrative. "He was filled with the holy spirit."

It is not amiss here to notice that the Jewish party which most particularly persecuted our Lord [R2939 : page 22] was the sect of the Pharisees, the holiness people of that time, basing their opposition upon our Lord's public declarations of their hypocrisies, – the Sadducees taking less interest in the persecution. But, on the contrary, in the Acts of the Apostles, the persecutions of the Church seem to have been largely at the hands of the Sadducees. The Sadducees should scarcely be considered a religious party, for they denied the resurrection of the dead, and denied also the existence of spirit beings, and hence believed principally in a religion for the present life merely. The Sadducees were the policy-men of that time. They favored harmony with the Roman

Empire, and might, indeed, be termed the politicians of the Jewish nation. History says that the high priest and his family, and those principally in influence, were Sadducees. It is evident, therefore, that the preaching of the *resurrection* of Jesus, and of some spiritual power by which he could work through the apostles to the healing of the man born lame, would be an aggravation to these Sadducees, because it was directly in conflict with their belief and teachings.

Indeed, it is worthy of notice, here and in subsequent lessons, that one of the main features of the Gospel which the apostles preached was the doctrine of the resurrection – that Christ had risen from the dead, and that through him in due time not only believers should be raised from the tomb, but ultimately all the world of mankind be released from death, – that each and all might have a full share in the judgment or trial for life everlasting, which had been secured by the ransom sacrifice of Christ. No wonder, then, that the Sadducees specially resented this new doctrine, which antagonized their views and to some extent supported their religious opponents, the Pharisees.

It may at first seem peculiar that a court trial should be held in respect to the healing of a cripple. However, the object of the trial evidently was, if possible, to condemn the apostles for having practiced necromancy, sorcery, the black art. For, according to the law, a witch or wizard or necromancer, a spirit medium, was to be put to death.

If Peter had been filled with fear he would not have spoken as he did to this Court, or if he had [R2940 : page 22] been filled with the spirit of egotism and boastfulness he would have spoken differently; – he would have spoken unwisely, rashly, no doubt. But filled as he was with the holy spirit, the spirit of meekness, patience, gentleness, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, and guided in his words by this spirit, he made an address which is beautiful, both for its simplicity, its directness, and its meek-boldness. His opening sentence had in it, possibly, a gentle irony respecting a trial for a good deed; but, as on previous occasions, he immediately proceeded to disclaim for himself

and his associate, John, any power, any authority, in connection with the matter, and declares that the miracle was performed in the name, by the authority, by the power, of Jesus of Nazareth. Once again, he is not ashamed to own that the one he acknowledges was contemptuously called the Nazarene; nor to say that he is a follower of the one who was crucified as a malefactor. While telling the plain truth, that this very Sanhedrin had caused the death of Jesus, he states the matter without bitterness or acrimony.

Peter allowed the fact that God raised up Jesus from the dead to stand as the proof that they had erred in their condemnation of him; and, without parleying the question, he proceeded to assure his hearers that this one, Jesus, whom they despised and rejected, had nevertheless been owned of God as the "chief corner stone" of the great Temple which God purposes to build. He thus referred their minds directly to a Messianic Psalm (118:22) familiar to them, pointing out its fulfillment in Christ, and declares, "Neither is *the* salvation in any other." This expression, "*the* salvation," to his hearers would have the sense of, The salvation for which we Jews, as a nation, have been waiting and longing, – a national salvation, and an individual salvation in the Kingdom of God.

Let us mark well also the inspired utterance of the Apostle, "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." This would be a difficult lesson for his hearers to receive. It would mean a total revolution of their theories, hopes, aims, plans and projects. It would mean that they had been wrong, utterly wrong, in all their expectations for some time. It would mean that they had, as teachers, been misrepresenting the divine plan and misleading the people. The Apostle's course, however, was plain. It was proper that he should state the matter clearly, without peradventure, that his hearers might have a full testimony respecting the truth.

The Apostle's words are "a hard saying" today, also, in the nominal church. False doctrines have made it appear an unreasonable statement

in the minds of Christian people generally. They say, This cannot be so, because if true, it would mean that the heathen are lost. If true, it would mean that our friends and neighbors and relatives who have never believed in the name of Jesus, who have never accepted him as their Savior, are lost; and by "lost" they would mean – gone into eternal torment. Thus does false doctrine becloud and contradict the truth. But how beautifully and how simply might the Apostle's words be received just as they are, if all could but realize that the whole world was already lost, already condemned, by one man's disobedience; already under sentence of death and passing into it. Peter's declaration is that only those who have accepted Jesus have yet come under the terms of the only salvation God has provided: and, since Jesus "tasted death for every man," it follows that in God's "due time" every man must come to an opportunity of hearing of the only name, and of accepting the one salvation. This opportunity, according to the Scriptures, will be during Messiah's reign in the Millennial age, when "the knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth," and "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" by the glorified Christ and his glorified Church unitedly, the spiritual seed of Abraham. – Gal. 3:16,29; Jer. 31:34.

Blinded by the inconsistencies of doctrines received from the "dark ages," many of the Lord's professed people are today grappling with this question of who shall be saved, many or few, and fail to **[R2940 : page 23]** see that the greater part of God's plan of salvation is to come after the calling and perfecting of the "elect," the Church. Thinking that the present life ends all trial for every creature, many are convincing themselves that the Apostle erred, and that instead of one name only being given for salvation there are many names – including those of heathen divinities and teachers. They fail to see the *ransom* and its importance, as paving the way for teaching of any value or assistance. Hence they vainly hope that the ministries of Confucius and others will somehow or other save them, separate and apart from Christ, whom the Scriptures declare to be God's appointed Savior for the whole world, – and of whom Peter, under the plenary inspiration of the holy spirit, declares that his is the only name whereby salvation must be obtained,

if obtained at all. These false hopes turn the eyes of many away, so that they cease to look for the God-ordained "Sun of righteousness," whose beams, we are promised, shall shortly enlighten and bless all. – Mal. 4:2.

Very evidently the testing for the saints in this end of the age is coming along this very line – belief or unbelief in the testimony which God has given us through his Son, and through his chosen apostles, – "the twelve." Those who are faithful to the Word of the Lord will come off conquerors; those who yield to human theory, miscalled wisdom, will fail, will stumble, will be separated from the true wheat, the entire remnant of which must shortly be gathered into the garner. We thank God that this stumbling and unbelief will not mean the Second Death to all who stumble, because very few today evidently have that sufficiency of light and opportunity essential to a sentence to the Second Death; – very few obtain their full trial. We are to judge ourselves closely, however, and build no false hopes for ourselves, if we are among the favored few who have tasted the good word of God and been made partakers of the holy spirit. We are to remember the Apostle's caution that such as have enjoyed these favors, if they should fall away, would be doing despite to God's grace, and would afterward find no place for repentance. – Heb. 10:29. [R2945 : page 23]

THE GREAT JEHOVAH'S PLAN.

I am so small, and thou so great;
So weak, and thou so strong;
Yet from my heart there flows to thee
A true and loving song.
Thou art Jehovah, God!
And hast in thy control
The empire of the universe,
Where suns and systems roll
In wide expanse of trackless space,
Yet held in place by thee;

Each sphere into its orbit set,
Through vast immensity.

Of dust am I, and to earth's dust
I'll molder and decay;
This living frame and pulsing heart
Will soon have passed away;
But is it all of life to live,
Or all of death to die?
Thy Word proclaims a ransom found,
On whom we can rely.

Thou art the mighty King,
Thy name, the Holy One,
But unto thee a living way
Was opened by thy Son.
He is our righteousness;
Through him comes peace with thee;
And in his name we favor seek,
And are from sin set free.

He tasted death for every man;
He dieth once – no more;
And by his sacrifice secured
Man's rights he will restore.
"Death" was the penalty of sin,
But Love o'er Death hath won;
For the gift of God is life supreme,
Eternal, through his Son.

He died for all of human kind;
He rose that they might live;
And, as God's Word is ever true,
This greater life he'll give!
In sheol, hades, hell,

In earth, or oceans' deep,
His voice and power will soon be felt,
To wake from death's long sleep.

The one true church, the "little flock,"
The Holy Spirit sought,
As kings and "royal priests" of God,
Are to the Father brought.
"First fruits" are they of those who slept:
Joint-heirs with Christ, their Lord,
When he, who is their life, appears,
He'll bring them their reward.
Made like the One they serve and love,
His nature to them given;
His power, glory, honors share;
Their home, with him, in heaven.

As "Abraham's seed," they'll bless the earth
And rule with loving sway;
Instruct and teach the way to life
Is to God's laws obey.
But they who will not hear this Priest –
Christ and the Church – his wife,
Will be cut off by second death,
Destroyed from hope of life.
But they "who will" need never die,
And glories, yet unknown,
Are kept reserved in store for those
Who loyal love have shown.
Thus up the scale to perfect life,
In "highway" wide and broad,
The ransomed race can seek and find
Full harmony with God.

A race redeemed, an earth new made,

Riches and wealth untold;
A world where righteousness will dwell
And man his God behold!
Where pain and sickness, grief and death
Are memories of the past;
Where loving faithfulness to God
Forever more will last,
With curse removed, the blight of sin
Entirely swept away,
And man God's image evermore
Abides in perfect day.

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This is thy finished work,
Thy own most glorious plan;
And this the wondrous love thou'st shown
Toward sinful, fallen man.
Oh, Israel's God! How great art thou!
What wisdom, love and grace
The eye of faith will always find
When we thy dealings trace!

– Mrs. Jennie M. Stratton.

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