

VISITING, WITH PETER, THE PRIMITIVE SAINTS.

– ACTS 9:31-43. – APRIL 13. –

"Jesus Christ maketh thee whole."

THE PERSECUTION which scattered the disciples from Jerusalem throughout all Judea, and of which Paul was one of the leaders, subsided shortly after his conversion; and was followed by a period of rest, recuperation, edification, etc., as mentioned in the first verse of our lesson. Paul's conversion may have had something to do with this, but in all probability a trouble which arose about this time between the Jews and their Roman rulers had more to do with it.

About the year A.D. 38 the Emperor, Caligula Caesar, who had but recently come into his office, promulgated an order that his statue should be set up in various quarters of the empire, and should be worshipped. When the Jews learned of this order, and that it was the intention to put these statues in Jerusalem, and even in the Temple itself, as well as elsewhere, their indignation and trouble knew no bounds. They gathered in great masses, young and old, to entreat the local governor to intercede for them that such a desecration of their holy temple and holy city and holy land should not be permitted. Speaking of one of these protest-gatherings, the historian says: "A vast throng, arranged in six columns of (1) old women, (2) matrons, (3) maids, (4) old men, (5) men in their strength, and (6) boys, gathered before the palace of the procurator, and threw themselves on the earth, with wild and piteous cries of despair, when he showed himself on the balcony. They declared they would die, but never give way. Petronius [the governor] made every effort to have the Emperor change the edict, but the most he could arrange was a command to leave the Temple untouched. But many altars were raised to the Emperor outside of its gates; and news came that all the synagogues in Alexandria had been turned into temples to Caesar.

These things lasted till January, A.D. 41, on the 24th day of which Caligula was murdered."

It is not surprising that such outside persecution and interference with their own religious rites and liberties caused the Jews to relax their persecutions of the Christians, and thus brought about the period of rest mentioned. Persecutors never like persecution for themselves. Those who have the mind of Christ are never persecutors; they feel it to be their bounden duty not to cooperate, not to assist, things which they believe to be wrong; they may even find it necessary or expedient to denounce the wrong, and to show up its inconsistencies; and in some instances to name the active agents in these wrong teachings and wrong doings – as the apostles have done on several occasions in their writings. But as for persecuting others, the Lord's people can take no part **[R2986 : page 104]** in this: we are hindered by the spirit of love, the mind of Christ, which directs that we should do unto others as we would they should do unto us – our Golden Rule, our "perfect law of liberty."

The record says that the churches were edified. This word edified carries in it the thought of construction or building. We get the thought, therefore, that this time of peace was a time of upbuilding amongst the little groups of the Lord's people in Palestine. There is a two-fold sense in which the Church may be built up or edified – in numbers, and also in the graces of the spirit. Apparently the infant Church was edified both ways. It was growing in numbers, and growing in grace. That the latter is included is shown by the following declaration, that the believers walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the holy spirit.

The Scriptures declare that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psa. 111:10) – not a selfish fear; but a reverential fear; not a fear that the Lord is evil instead of good; not a fear that he will eternally torment or otherwise unjustly deal with his enemies; but a reverence of the Lord which recognizes his greatness and his

goodness, appreciates the same, and fears to do aught that would be displeasing to him or that would separate from his love and favor. This proper kind of fear, which is the beginning of wisdom will never be lost, so long as the wisdom is maintained. We creatures of the dust, "by nature children of wrath, even as others," and transformed and renewed only by the Lord's grace and power and truth, must never lose sight of our own littleness and insufficiency, and of our complete dependence upon the Lord's mercy and favor. To lose sight of this would surely mean our fall. Hence, altho the Apostle declares that perfect love casteth out fear, we esteem his meaning in this passage to be the dread fear rather than reverential fear. Perfect love will cast out dread and slavish fear, but it will cultivate and stimulate and increase our reverence for the Lord; so that, as the Apostle again declares, even the advanced Christian who has lost his slavish fear, will, from love of God, and from a desire to please him and to attain the end which he has indicated for us, "fear, lest a promise being left us... any should seem to come short of it." – I John 4:18; Heb. 4:1.

But reverence of God was not the only grace developed in the primitive church. To it was added [R2987 : page 104] the comfort of the holy spirit. (The use of the word "ghost" as a translation of the Greek word *pneuma* is very unfortunate, and confusing to the English reader. The word should never be used. *Pneuma* should invariably be translated "spirit."*) The holy spirit is the spirit, mind or disposition of God; and the primitive Church was cultivating this, developing it in their hearts, walking in it, that is, living it. The word *comfort* signifies united, cemented or strengthened together; and the thought of the passage as a whole, therefore, would be that the Church was not only multiplying in numbers, and being edified or built up together as God's holy Church or temple, but that the various "living stones" were being cemented or bound together by the holy spirit. This is a forcible and graphic description of a glorious condition in the primitive Church. It is what should be striven for by the Lord's dear people everywhere today as well; indeed it is as true of the true Church of Christ now as it was then.

[*See MILLENNIAL DAWN Vol. V. Chap. 8.](#)

The thought of building together, building up, etc., when applied to the individual, signifies his own faith structure, which the Apostle tells us is to be composed of gold, silver and precious stones – divine truth and character – from which should be excluded all wood, hay and stubble of error, sin and hypocrisy. The same thought may be applied to the Church assemblies in a slightly different way; for each little congregation of the Church may be considered as a temporary temple, or abiding place of God in the world, as represented by his holy spirit indwelling. In a still larger sense the whole Church in any period may be considered as God's temple, in which he representatively resides, and through which he speaks to such as have an ear to hear. It is in this sense of the word that the seven churches of Revelation represent the one Church of the Lord throughout the world, in seven different epochs of its history. But let it be distinctly borne in mind that none of these proper enough uses of the word "temple," etc., interfere at all with the still larger, and still more *exact* thought respecting the divine Temple, the Church.

This still more exact thought is with reference to the Church glorified, which has not been under construction, upbuilding, during the Gospel age, but is to be constructed speedily at the second advent of the Lord and the gathering together of his saints unto him. In this last view, be it noticed, each of the Lord's followers is symbolically a "living stone," now being chiseled, fitted, polished, prepared, for a place in the glorious Temple, whose construction was delayed until the end of the age, when, as typified by Solomon's Temple, each part will come together with exactness, "without the sound of a hammer," – without the slightest need of trimming or altering any of those perfected ones, all of whom together will constitute the glorious Temple of God, which will be filled with his presence in the fullest and most complete sense, and constitute the center of his blessing and instruction to all the families of the earth during the Millennium; –

"the New Jerusalem, which cometh down from God out of heaven."
– I Pet. 2:4-7; Rev. 21:27,10; I Kings 6:7.

"THE SAINTS WHICH DWELT AT LYDDA"

We see from this narrative that altho the Apostles made Jerusalem the headquarters for their work they, nevertheless, went hither and thither throughout Judea, meeting with the Lord's people scattered by the previous persecution, etc., and forming *nuclei* of little congregations in every direction. In these travels Peter came to Lydda, the chief city in the Plain of Sharon (Saron), about midway between Jerusalem and Joppa – about ten miles from each; and his special mission, we are told, was the visiting of the saints. We like this word "saints." It signifies holy, set apart, sanctified believers in Christ. There is much opposition to the use of the word today, attributable, we believe, to two reasons. One is that the vast majority of professing Christians know that they are not saints, not sanctified, not living as near to the Lord as they could live, – not separate, even in **[R2987 : page 105]** heart, from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Such persons have strong reasons for disliking the word "saints," realizing that it would exclude them and nearly all of their friends and special associates in Christian work. Another reason for opposition to the word "saints" is that in the dark ages it became the custom for the Roman and Greek Catholic churches to "canonize," or legally set apart as objects of reverence, certain persons respecting whom, after several centuries had elapsed, nothing specially evil was remembered, but only things esteemed as honorable and praiseworthy. The word, saints, thus became separated from living Christians; and, indeed, this may have been because there were few Christians really so "alive toward God" as to be representatives of saintship. Another reason why some dislike this term, "saints," is that they consider it to be rather boastful, – some would even say hypocritical; because having lost sight of "justification by faith" in its proper application they have become accustomed to think of and to pray for *all* Christians as "miserable sinners" – overlooking the fact that there are some in whom "the

righteousness of the Law is fulfilled," because "walking not *after* the flesh, but *after* the spirit," the merit of Christ covers all their unwilling shortcomings. – Rom. 8:4.

The Lord's people, however, are to remember to apply and take pleasure in all the names and practices authorized by apostolic usage; and the term "saint" certainly thus approves itself to us. Almost all of the epistles of the New Testament are addressed to the saints; and those who can not properly apply the term to themselves can not properly apply to themselves the exceeding great and precious promises contained in those epistles, – for all the promises are addressed to and meant for the saints – the sanctified in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:9; Eph. 1:1, etc.) Let it be borne in mind that the word "saint" does not signify actual perfection, merely, as in our Lord's case, but also those *reckoned* holy through him; and that the apostles who were saints, and who classed themselves with the saints of God, declared respecting themselves, "We also are men of like passions with you." – Acts 14:15.

The term saints, then, properly applied in the Church refers to those who altho originally "children of wrath, even as others," have been rescued from that condition of condemnation, and been washed, cleansed, and thus brought into accord with God through the forgiveness of their sins and the covering of their weaknesses and blemishes; and who, in connection with these blessings of God, and in appreciation of them, became the "sanctified in Christ Jesus" by making full consecration of themselves to live, not perfect lives (an impossibility), but as nearly perfect as they may be able; – the Lord's grace making them continually "holy, acceptable to God" the Father, through the merit of Christ Jesus. Let us not be ashamed of this name, "saints": if it present before our minds saintship, holiness, separateness from the world, that is just the very thought which should be there continually. It is a thought which will help us, and enable us the better to live separate from the world, as our Master indicated, saying, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." – John 17:16.

"JESUS CHRIST MAKETH THEE WHOLE."

Our Golden Text is from Peter's words to Aeneas, the paralytic, whom the Apostle found at Lydda and healed. We are not told that he was one of the saints; the presumption, therefore, is that he was not, but that at most he was a friend to some of them, and that thus the Apostle's attention was drawn to him. The fact that he had been bedfast, helpless, eight years, testified that the healing was a miracle. Its fame spread abroad, and resulted, we are told, in the drawing of many unto the Lord and to the Church. Thus did the Lord establish the Church and attract to it those who were in the right attitude of heart, using miracles then, as he now uses other means. Those miracles, as already pointed out, can not have lasted much longer than the apostles themselves; the gifts of healing, etc., being granted only through the laying on of the hands of the apostles – and the twelve had no successors – the heavenly Jerusalem had twelve foundations, and no more, and in them were written the names of the twelve apostles, and no others.

"THIS WOMAN WAS FULL OF GOOD WORKS."

One of the disciples, that is, one of the saints, residing at Joppa, on the seacoast, was apparently a woman of means and education, and if her name represented her appearance, she was very beautiful. Tabitha, in the Syriac language, Dorcas, in the Greek, signifies graceful, beautiful. But this woman was famed for a beauty and a grace entirely separate and distinct from whatever she possessed of these qualities naturally. Hers was the beauty of a meek and quiet spirit, full of love and helpfulness. She was a burning and a shining light for the Lord in that vicinity, evidently. She was not "a Bible reader," for there were no Bibles in the language of the people at that time. She was not a tract distributor nor a colporteur, for there was no printing done then; but she did what she could; she served the Lord, his brethren and all needing help, according to the best opportunities afforded her. She helped the poor, and particularly widows, who as a class at that time

were apt to be in a very trying position, especially if poor. Dorcas had been in the *habit* (the Greek text indicates) of assisting the poor with garments, etc., probably, almost certainly, assisting them also with words of encouragement and helpfulness, and ministering to them the truth. Under these circumstances it is not strange that her death should have produced sorrow, especially amongst the beneficiaries of her charities, and amongst the numerous friends which a beautiful Christ-like spirit of this kind is sure to make.

While it is very true that the civilized conditions of the present time take from us many of the opportunities possessed by Dorcas, by supplying means of employment for poor widows and others indigent, and by providing County Homes, etc., for the needy, nevertheless, all who have the spirit of the Lord, which Dorcas had, and which she so nobly exemplified, will surely still find opportunities for laying down their lives, some way or other, in the service of the household of faith. As the Apostle says, "We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren." (I John 3:16.) Some one has suggested that possibly Dorcas was a martyr – that her death probably resulted [R2988 : page 106] from her service to others. A Christian poet has said of such as she: –

"These, tho their names appear not on the scroll
Of martyrologists, laid down their lives,
No less a martyrdom in Jesus' eyes –
For his dear brethren's sake; – watching the couch
Of loathsome sickness or of slow decay,
Or visiting the captive in his cell,
Or struggling with a burden not their own,
Until their weary life sinks slow away,
These, too, are martyrs, brother."

Yes, all of the Lord's saints are to be martyrs; – their consecration is to lay down their lives in the service of the Lord, the brethren and the truth; and as nearly as they can understand in the way which he

shall direct them, through his Word and his providences. Our covenant is not one of self-preservation, but one of self-sacrifice. True, we are looking for and hoping for a life eternal and glorious as spirit beings; but the terms and conditions upon which we are scripturally hoping to attain that perfect and new life are that we shall sacrifice what remains of this present earthly life. Another thought, that comes in this connection, is that while, undoubtedly, our chief service under present conditions is the ministry of the spiritual food, spiritual drink and spiritual clothing, to the household of faith, yet nevertheless we are to remember that to the extent of our abilities and opportunities we are to do good unto all men, as the Apostle enjoins.

Everyone of the Lord's saints should be recognized in his neighborhood as of generous heart, of kindly impulses; whether he have dollars to give, or only pennies. Of kind words at least he should be noted as a giver, remembering that it is more blessed, and more God-like, to give than to receive. And those who lack the wherewithal for generosity in this world's goods, so that they have nothing wherewith to minister in a temporal way, to the necessities of the saints or others, are not to forget that they have the still more precious, more valuable, more helpful, more cheering, consolations of the spirit of the truth, and kindness to dispense to such as are in any need. Would that all of the Lord's people would cultivate these Dorcas qualities, and thus become more and more beautiful and graceful in the eyes of their Lord, as well as in the eyes of the world!

Today, as the traveler passes from Joppa, going toward Jerusalem, the guide shows him on the outskirts of Joppa, at the side of the public road, a large, and at one time very beautiful and costly, monument to Dorcas. It is a fountain at which many weary ones have refreshed themselves. The narrative of Dorcas' good works and Christ-likeness, like the waters of a fountain, have come down the rugged channel of the centuries, – encouraging, refreshing, and stimulating God's people all the way. Nevertheless, quite probably some in her day spoke evil of her; perhaps even some who were the recipients of her

favors may have declared that she performed her charities that she might glory in them, and to be seen and known of men, rather than for the love of those to whom she ministered: and such may be our experience, as we seek to do good unto all men as we have opportunity. But the fact that good may be evil spoken of must not deter us. We seek to please the Lord, and to cultivate in our hearts his spirit, and to exemplify this spirit before others, thus letting our light shine: this is our only proper course, whatever may be said of it by the skeptical world, or an envious class of "tares." We are to seek chiefly the approval of our Father and our Bridegroom; – to be content therewith, and to be content with nothing less.

Apparently Dorcas took sick and died suddenly, at about the time that others of the saints at Joppa heard of Peter's being at Lydda and the cure performed there. They sent for him immediately; probably with no thought of his performing such a miracle as to bring Dorcas back to life; but rather with the thought that they had lost a highly esteemed member of their little group, and that Peter could give them some consolation at this time. There was no telegraph or telephone or mail service then, and some of the brethren became the messengers to take the word to Peter, – to request his presence, and that he would not delay. In the city of Jerusalem a corpse must be buried the same day, but in the smaller cities and villages they might remain as much as three days unburied. Peter's presence was wanted without delay, before Dorcas would be buried; and he went at once.

An affecting scene was before Peter as he entered the death-chamber. Poor widows and others were lamenting the loss of their friend, and showing the garments which she had made for them. That surely was a noble tribute to the usefulness of her life. No millionaire has ever left monuments which will endure so long, or which will reflect so much glory upon his character, as were left by this humble woman. And even the humblest and poorest of us may to some extent emulate this example and leave some such monuments of love and testimonies of appreciation behind us when we die. It is a sad end

when any, especially of those who have named the name of Christ, die and leave none who sincerely, truly, mourn for them and miss them. It testifies to a life that was either selfish or misunderstood. We who are looking forward to the close of our earthly journey, and that before very long, should see to it that our lives are spent day by day in such a manner that some will be the happier for them; and that our decease will be recognized by some, at least, as a loss.

Peter's most notable miracle was the bringing of Dorcas back from the portals of death. Like the other miracle, it was peculiar to that time, and for the special purpose of the establishment of the Church. We are not to suppose that it was the Lord's intention that all of his people during this Gospel age should be thus snatched back from death, nor that they should be all relieved from beds of sickness, nor that they should all have powers such as the Apostle here exercised. There is a ministry of evil – of calamity, sickness, death, etc., – which has often been valuable indeed to the Lord's people, inculcating various lessons and developing various fruits of the spirit, meekness, patience, gentleness, etc. Let us after consecrating our all to the Lord, and while using our consecrated all as wisely as we know how, accept whatever divine wisdom shall mete out to us. Let us remember our Lord's words, – "The cup which my Father hath given (poured for) me, shall I not drink it?" – John 18:11.

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