

## THE GOSPEL OF FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

– ACTS 13:43-52. – MAY 25. –

**"Through this man [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."  
– Acts 13:38.**

PAUL AND HIS COMPANY, passing through the Island of Cyprus to the city of Paphos, at its southern end, did not tarry there. Its climate is miasmatic, and this is presumed to have been the reason for a hasty departure for the high lands of Asia Minor – Galatia, etc. The Apostle is presumed to have referred to his own semi-invalid condition at this time when later, in writing the Epistle to the Galatians, he said, "Through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel to you at first." (Gal. 4:13,14.) Galatia was the name of a district or state in which were located a number of cities and churches mentioned in the account of Paul's missionary tours – Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Antioch on the borders of Galatia, in the state of Pisidia. The Antioch of this lesson should not be confounded with the larger city, Antioch of Syria.

In our last lesson we noticed Mark as the companion and servant of the two missionaries, but he discontinued his service at Paphos and returned to Jerusalem; hardships or discouragements or home-sickness, we know not what, evidently, for the time quenched his zeal as a servant of the Lord and of the truth, – assuredly much to Mark's disadvantage. Whatever the cause, evidently the Apostle Paul considered it quite insufficient; so that on another occasion, when Barnabas suggested Mark's accompanying them similarly, the Apostle declined – which he evidently would not have done had Mark's desertion been fully justified by considerations of health or necessity. It was a labor of love, however; no salaries were attached, and if Mark chose to discontinue his sacrifice it was his own business, and he was the loser.

So it is today, the Lord leaves his people free from restraints; free from threats; free from compulsion; to the intent that they may present their bodies living sacrifices day by day. Now, as then, whoever grows cold may discontinue his sacrificing, but himself will be the loser. We want to keep distinctly before our minds that while God condemns sin, and while his people have no liberty in this respect, but are obligated to do their best to withstand sin, it is different in the matter of sacrifice. The Lord is calling for free-will offerings, and whatever is not given with a hearty good-will, yea, with an earnest desire, with zeal, may as well be kept; – but the rewards promised to those who imitate the spirit of the Master and his devotion will be lost also.

There is an element of encouragement, however, in Mark's experience. Later on he evidently became quite a thorough and devoted soldier of the cross, was again accepted to the Lord's service, and we find that the Apostle Paul made acknowledgment of appreciation of his faithfulness. (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11.) Mark's recovery of lost ground and his reinstatement by the Lord in his service should be an encouragement for any who similarly have grown cold and lax as respects their devotion and sacrifice, and who have been consequently dropped out of active service of the truth. The Lord is very merciful to us in our weaknesses and imperfections, and as he restored Mark, undoubtedly he is willing also to restore all who will similarly learn a lesson from their failures, and who earnestly desire and strive for reinstatement and the privileges of service.

The first stop made in Asia Minor was at Antioch of Pisidia. The usual custom was followed, of going first to the Jews – to their synagogue. The missionaries were recognized as strangers and also as men of talent, and after the regular services of the synagogue had been introduced by the reading of the usual lesson from the Law, they were invited to address the assembled people – Jews by birth, and Jewish proselytes from the Gentiles. The Apostle Paul was the speaker, and made a telling address. He recognized the fact that his hearers had faith in God's promises regarding the coming Kingdom: he did not need,

therefore, to emphasize the Kingdom feature in this discourse. Rather, his hearers needed to see that there could be no Kingdom and no permanent blessing of all the families of the earth, such as was implied in the promises made to Abraham, unless in some manner divine forgiveness of the world's sins could first be secured.

The trend of his discourse, therefore, was to show how God had established a (typical) kingdom in the past, which had never reached the grand stage essential to the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises, and that the thing necessary and lacking was a *redemption* of the world and the forgiveness of sins. Then he presented to their attention Jesus as the Messiah, – not merely a crucified Messiah, but also a risen one who, because of his death for the sins of the world, was able to save unto the uttermost all that should come unto God through him. Having put the matter squarely before them, the Apostle, in the words of our Golden Text, offered his hearers forgiveness of sins as the very essence of the Gospel.

Forgiveness of sin is still the essence of the Gospel, altho mankind now, as then, are generally loth to accept it thus, – it disappoints them by condemning them, and showing up the fact that all are sinners; – that there is none righteous, no, not one; – that all need just such a redemption as God has provided [R3009 : page 150] in the sacrifice of Christ. It disappoints also in that it shows a necessity for repudiation of sin in the heart, and, so far as possible, resisting it in all the conduct of life. Few are prepared for this – few have an ear to hear this message. The majority are ready to say, Preach unto us smooth things! Praise us for our religious fervor! Point out to us how much superior we are, not only to the heathen world, but to the masses of those who are about us! Tell us that we are God's people, and that he could not get along without us! Do not tell us that we are sinners, and under condemnation as others; and that all who would come unto God through Jesus Christ must come by the same strait and narrow gate of faith, and repudiation of sin, and heart-consecration!

The discourse had its effect, – a two-fold effect. The honest hearted, realizing the truth regarding God's perfection and their own imperfection, realized their need of just such a Savior as the Apostle had preached: these were specially drawn to the missionaries, who, recognizing their right attitude of heart, assured them that they were already in God's grace or favor; and that now the message of salvation through Jesus was an additional unfolding and development of the same favor that had already been extended to the Jews; and that they should continue in the grace of God, – continue to let God lead and guide them in his way, – continue to be the recipients of his mercies and blessings, which now were multiplied to them through Christ Jesus, and the atonement work he had accomplished. Others were much less prepared for the Apostle's words, and rather inclined to be envious of the attention bestowed upon the missionaries and their teachings, – which meant corresponding disregard for the usual leaders of the meeting and for the doctrines previously set forth, which the new views were calculated to supersede entirely.

So we find it today also: the essence of the Gospel preaching of today, as eighteen centuries ago, must be man's sinful and condemned condition, and his need of redemption, reconciliation and recovery from sin and its wages, death. This is the Gospel, which is falling into disuse in the pulpits of churchianity, in response to the itching ears of the majority, the "tares," and their call for the preaching of smooth things.

Additionally, it is proper now to emphasize the Gospel of the Kingdom, which the Lord and the apostles made so prominent; and to show that the little flock, the elect of this age, are to constitute the Kingdom – which, in the coming age, is to rule and bless the world, by restraining Satan and every evil device, and causing the knowledge of the Lord to abound. Now, as then, the larger unfolding of the truth, the divine plan of salvation, is interesting to some – to the honest-hearted; and repulsive to some – the vain-glorious, the sectarian, the proud, the self-satisfied. Now, as then, when we are appealed to by those who

have an ear to hear present truth, they should be encouraged to "*continue* in the grace of God." They should not be told that their ignorance of present truth implies that they have none of the grace of God, but that because they have received [R3010 : page 150] of his grace into good and honest hearts it is the will of God that they should continue therein and grow and increase and abound; – that to this intent he is sending forth present truth to his people in every quarter, that the true wheat may be ripened and gathered to his garner.

News of the new religion – supplemental to the Jewish – spread throughout the little city in which Judaism had evidently gained a good foothold and great respect; – so that the whole city gathered on the next Sabbath to hear the message of the missionaries – probably the majority coming merely out of curiosity, to see the difference between the doctrines of these and of the regular Jewish teachers. "The whole city" may be understood hyperbolically, as signifying a large concourse; or that all classes and conditions of citizens were well represented. The gathering of such a multitude could not be held, probably, in the synagogue, but we may presume, in the yard or court surrounding it, or both. Such attention to two strangers and their new doctrine, which threatened an overthrow of Judaism, naturally awakened a spirit of jealousy in those whose interest was much in forms and ceremonies, honor amongst men and denominational pride, and, as a result, they contradicted Paul's statements with blasphemy. Not that they blasphemed God's name, but that they slandered or blasphemed the Apostle and Barnabas – speaking evil of them; we may surmise, misrepresenting their motives, their characters, etc. This is the usual course of those who fight against the truth, and it is so today. The truth cannot be gainsaid; it is irresistible; but it can be misrepresented; it can be denied; the presentations of it can be distorted, and its messengers can be slandered, vilified. The Adversary seems to adopt this method on every occasion. It is the method now in vogue. Those who oppose present truth will not dare to meet it openly in public discussion before the people, but they will distort and misrepresent it, and say all manner of evil against its advocates and will persecute those who favor it.

The missionaries were not discouraged by the opposition, but were rather made the more courageous, and brought to the point where they explained to their vilifiers, plainly, the true state of the case: that they were rejecting God's favor, God's plan, against themselves – to their own injury, to their own loss. They pointed out that God, in his mercy, had long favored Israel, and that in sending the message of Messiah to them first he was still favoring them; but that according to his direction it was their duty to proceed, and to tell the Gospel to whoever had ears to hear – to the Jew first, but also to the Gentiles. They pointed out that the lamp of truth which God had now lighted was not to be to the Jews exclusively, as had been his previous favors, but, as the Prophet had already declared, was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles" – salvation unto the ends of the earth. – (Luke 2:32; Isa. 42:6; 52:10.)

This feature of the Gospel specially aroused the opposition of such Jews as were in the wrong condition of heart, but was proportionately attractive to the few who were in the right attitude. So it is today: the message which is now due to Christendom is – More Light! It shows that the lamp of God's Word of promise, which at the beginning of this age [R3010 : page 151] was permitted to bless both Jews and Gentiles in proportion as the eyes of their understanding were opened to see it, is shortly now to give place to a greater light; that whereas the Word of God has been a lamp to the feet and a lantern to the footsteps of his faithful for over eighteen centuries, God's purpose now, shortly, is that this lamp shall become unnecessary, because "the Sun of Righteousness shall rise," and the whole world shall be flooded with the light of the knowledge of the goodness of God. – Mal. 4:2.

Those of God's people who are in the right attitude of heart will be gladdened by this expansion and unfolding of the truth: no feelings of jealousy will be theirs. But the majority, full of sectarian theories and plans and selfish sentiments, and blinded largely by false theology and by misrepresentations of the Word of God are violently opposed to any thought of God's general goodness being extended to *every creature*, – not only those who have not yet gone to the prison-

house of death, but also to the fifty thousand millions who have already gone down into the silence of death, in ignorance of the only name given under heaven or among men whereby we must be saved. But all the faithful, all the honest-hearted, will ultimately rejoice at the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of God's plan, to be consummated during the Millennium by the glorified Christ, Head and body.

Many of the Gentiles were glad as they heard of God's favor being broader than they had previously supposed – some, we may infer, were merely pleased that something had been shown up that was broader than the Jewish teachings, but some others, we are assured, believed in the true sense of the word – accepting Christ as their Redeemer and as their Law-giver. And so today also we see two classes among those who favor the present truth: some who hail it with joy and gratefully worship and serve the Lord more fervently than ever; and some who are merely glad to find that there is no Scriptural ground for the popular theory of an eternal torment for the vast majority of mankind; but are not specially drawn or constrained by divine love and mercy.

The more the truth spread the more angry became its opponents, the Jewish leaders; and what they could not oppose with argument or logic they did oppose successfully with prejudice and superstition, arousing these baser sentiments by misrepresentation. They secured thus the co-operation of some of the most honorable and notable people of the city, to such an extent that the missionaries were obliged to depart from them. The Adversary's methods are the same today in this respect also, that by misrepresentation he secures for his agents, often unwillingly, some who are noble and honorable people. This teaches us two lessons: First, to be careful ourselves – to be on guard against the Adversary's methods, if we are honorable and well-intentioned; to see to it that we are not inveigled into opposing the truth while supposing that we are doing God service. It teaches us also to have respect for those who are our opponents, and who give evidence of sincerity, even in their persecution. Some of the best friends of present truth today were once its bitter enemies, revilers and persecutors. We

are hoping for many more recruits for the truth from this class of people. Their opposition is the result of misapprehension of the facts; they are blinded by the Adversary. Some may not get proper sight of the matter until the Kingdom binds Satan and opens their eyes; but others we may hope are the King's own and will be helped in time for them to make their calling and election sure in the Kingdom "little flock."

**AS MANY AS WERE ORDAINED TO ETERNAL LIFE,  
BELIEVED.**

The word "ordained," here, may properly be translated *disposed*; and thus we get the thought that as many of those who heard the gospel and its offer of everlasting life, and were disposed to accept the terms, became believers – obedient to the faith. So it is still. The truth, wherever it goes, finds some who like it and some who dislike it; some who appreciate the doctrines and rewards which it presents, and some who prefer the pleasures of sin or the affairs and rewards of the world. It is the time for each one who has heard to take his choice. Soon the number of the elect will be complete, and then the work of the elect will begin – the blessing of mankind.

We assume that the expression, "shook off the dust of their feet" is a figurative one, as we would use it today, meaning that we took our departure. Our departure, under such circumstances, would be a witness against those who rejected our message and those who persecuted us – a witness which they would remember in coming time. Yet the departure of the missionaries was not in anger, for we are assured that they were filled with joy and with the holy spirit – rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake, and to have their names cast out as evil; – rejoicing also that they had, by the Lord's grace, accomplished something in the service. The expression, however, included more than merely the missionaries: it included those who remained as well as those who went. All were rejoicing. The truth and its spirit are constant causes for joy of heart to those who have



them. On the contrary, the persecuting spirit, the jealous spirit, is always the unhappy one. Let us see that our rejoicing is of the same kind – in the Lord, in the truth, in the service, notwithstanding persecutions, trials and difficulties.

