

## REJOICING IN TRIBULATION.

– *ACTS 16:22-34* – JANUARY 4. –

**"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."**

THE International Lessons change with the New Year from the Old Testament to the New, taking up the theme where we left it six months ago. That series of lessons noted (1) Christ as the central figure of Christianity; (2) the Holy Spirit as the motive power of Christianity; (3) the gradual development of the Church from its birth at Pentecost; (4) missionary work by Paul and Barnabas; (5) Paul's second missionary tour, with Silas and others as his companions, and by them the first entrance of the Gospel into Europe. We now take up the subject at this point. The first city in Macedonia – the first city, therefore, in Europe – to hear the Gospel message, was Philippi. One of the Apostle Paul's epistles, addressed to the church there established, is known to us as the "Epistle to the Philippians."

At Philippi the Apostle and his companions, in seeking for those who revered the Lord, and hence most likely to have hearing ears for the Gospel, found a little group who met by the riverside for worship. Lydia, one of the number, became prominent for her thorough acceptance of the Gospel message, and her zeal in entertaining the Apostle and his company, and in forwarding, as best she could, the interests of the cause. The meetings were held outside the city, doubtless, on a similar pretext to that which, until recent years, excluded the worship of Protestants in the city of Rome, compelling them to go outside the city if they would hold any gatherings for worship. Philippi had its approved religious system, and would grant liberty for meetings to no other.

It was while the apostles were day by day passing from Lydia's home to the place of worship outside the city gate that they were met repeatedly by a young woman known in that city as a Pythoness, or

Sybil (a sooth-sayer or truth-teller or fortune-teller; a foreteller of future events, or prophetess). She was evidently well known to all the people, and the exercise of her profession brought large income to a joint-stock company which owned her as its slave. As the evangelists passed daily she called out after them, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." These words, though true enough, coming from such a source, and possibly in a jesting voice, might be understood by those who heard them to be sarcasm, ridicule, and, therefore, a hindrance to the Lord's work; or even if uttered in serious tones their coming from such an unsanctified quarter would probably preclude their having any favorable influence with those of such cast of mind and heart as might otherwise have a hearing ear for the Gospel of Christ. This continued many days, the Apostle gradually becoming more and more grieved by it – probably because it was hindering his mission, and perhaps, also, because he was grieved to see a fellow-creature thus made a tool of by the fallen angels, the wicked spirits which controlled her. Similarly our Lord refused to recognize the testimony of the evil spirit who acknowledged him, saying, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God," and had compassion upon the one who had the evil spirit, and delivered him. – Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34.

Present-day higher critics and lower critics are disposed to dispute that there are evil spirits, and that human beings ever are or ever were possessed by demons. Such incline to suppose that either deception or insanity was mistaken by the Lord and the apostles in these cases of obsession. However, to those who have learned to respect the Word of God there is no room for questioning the accounts. Our Lord commanded evil spirits to come out of possessed ones, and they obeyed him; and in this case the Apostle Paul invoked the same divine power for the healing of this young woman – for her deliverance from the evil spirit being which **[R3122 : page 380]** had obtained possession of her and made her its slave, speaking through her, and otherwise using her mouth, ears, etc., as channels of communication. These fallen angels adapt themselves to the varying

conditions of humanity in all parts of the world, and in connection with all the various systems of religion, all of which we may properly accredit, more or less directly, to the great Adversary of the truth, who worketh by and through those who will submit themselves.\*

*\*See [What Say the Scriptures About Spiritualism? Proofs That It Is Demonism.](#)*

As this young woman was a money-winner for the people who owned her, we can imagine what consternation was aroused amongst them when they found that not only was their source of gain for the future gone, but also that the large amount of money invested in this slave was lost (for such spirit-possessed ones had a high market value): they became desperately angry. Nothing will so greatly move men as love or selfishness; and under present conditions selfishness moves the vast majority, and with intense power. They had no hope of getting the evil spirit back into the woman; they must have revenge upon those who had financially ruined them. There is much of this spirit abroad in the world today: so long as the truth and the Lord's servants quietly go their way the world will generally be too busy with its affairs to molest them; but so soon as they perceive that truth and righteousness are inimical to their earthly interests and prospects their opposition becomes intense. Nor should we consider it to be the chief business of the Lord's people to stir up the animosity of the world and to bring persecution upon themselves. As a rule it is best that we leave the world to watch its own affairs, while we preach the Gospel, not using it as a sledge-hammer, to break men's hearts, but as the message of peace and love and blessing and joy to those whose hearts under divine providence have been already broken; and who have ears to hear the message of the grace of God. Very generally the apostles pursued as smooth a course as principle would permit, and in this instance very evidently Paul acted under special guidance of the Lord. The Apostle's general instruction is, "So far as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" – do not go out of your way to stir up trouble, but if the Lord in his providence allows it to arise, be courageous and full of faith in

him [R3123 : page 380] who has permitted it, that he will overrule it for good.

The owners of the Pythoness evidently had influence, and succeeded quickly in arousing a mob determined to have revenge against Paul and Silas. Of course they did not attempt this by telling the truth. They did not say, We were using a poor slave girl, possessed of an evil spirit, for our financial profit, and these men have restored her mind, her will – released her from mental enslavement to sanity of mind. No; like all who are engaged in a bad cause, they ignored the truth of the matter, and raised spurious charges – that the prisoners were teaching a religion contrary to the laws of Rome, and likely thus to raise sedition. We see that this was contrary to the truth, for the Lord's servants went, according to law, outside the city gates for their worship. However, under the circumstances the false charge, without proofs, was sufficient to bring down upon the Lord's representatives the severest penalties their judges could inflict: their clothing was torn from them, and the command was given that they should be beaten with rods and imprisoned. The customary sentence of the time was, "Go, victors! Tear off their garments! Scourge them!" This was one of the three times Paul was thus beaten. (2 Cor. 11:25.) He referred to it in his letter to the Thessalonians, declaring that he was "shamefully" treated at Philippi. – I Thess. 2:2.

The prison was constructed with outer cells, which were more or less accessible to the light and air, and with an inner or central dungeon for the most vicious criminals. It was into the latter that Paul and Silas were thrust, and their feet made fast in the stocks, which often were so constructed as to separate the limbs widely and to make any movement very painful. It was under these unfavorable circumstances, with their backs bleeding and raw from the scourging, that reflecting upon the wonders of the divine plan, and their own association with that plan, these faithful brethren were so filled with the spirit of rejoicing that they gave vent to their feelings in hymn-prayers of thankfulness for

their privilege of suffering in connection with the Lord's service, of enduring tribulation for righteousness' sake.

How remarkable it must seem to the worldly, who have never tasted of the joys of the Lord, that these men could thus rejoice in tribulation – rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer afflictions for the cause of Christ! How little the world knows of the peace of God which passeth all understanding, that rules in the hearts of the Lord's people who have grown in his grace and heart-likeness! How little can they appreciate the fact expressed by our Lord when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." And again, through the Apostle, "We glory in tribulation, also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." (John 14:27; Rom. 5:3-5.) And as these faithful servants of the Lord could rejoice in whatever experiences God permitted to come to them in the discharge of duty, so may we remember that ours is the same God, that he changes not; that he is equally able and equally willing today to grant the sunshine of his favor to those who trust him and seek to walk in his ways. It is the reverse condition that the followers of Christ need to dread, need to fear, as expressed by the poet,

"Oh, let no earthborn cloud arise  
To hide thee from thy servant's eyes!"

In a general sense, the entire Gospel age is represented as being a night, in which sin and distress prevail, and, as the Prophet has declared, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" – when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams, to scatter all the miasm of sin and death! But even in this night-time the Lord's people do not need to sorrow as others, who have no hope. On the contrary, to his people, "He giveth songs in the night." (Job 35:10.) While they are watching, hoping, praying, for the glorious

morning of deliverance, their trust in the Lord is as an anchor to their souls within the veil. How could such children of the great King go mourning all their days? Surely especially now, as **[R3123 : page 381]** the Millennial morning is dawning, we can say, "He hath put a new song into our mouths, even the loving kindness of our God!" He has given his people the blessed privilege of singing the new song of Moses and the Lamb, that others cannot sing – at least not yet. These who sing and make melody in their hearts unto the Lord will surely also show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvelous light – theirs will be the psalm of life, manifesting in looks and words and tones and sentiments the love of God received into good and honest hearts.

Since as Christians we have learned that it is our privilege to be always rejoicing – to rejoice evermore and in everything give thanks – we need not, like the world, wait for special manifestations of divine favor to call forth our praise, our homage of heart and our grateful obedience to the Lord. Rather, learning that divine providence is in all of our affairs, ready to shape them for our good, we may rejoice "whatever lot we see, since 'tis God's hand that leadeth us." Some one has well said: –

"If we are not ready to praise God where we are, and with our conditions and circumstances as they are, we should not be likely to praise him if we were differently circumstanced and our conditions just that which now seems to us most desirable. Daniel could sleep better in the den of lions than Darius in the royal palace; he who could not find rest in a lion's den, when *that* was the place for him, could not gain rest by a mere removal to a palace. It is the man's self which must be changed, not his circumstances or his possessions, in order to his having a heart overflowing with joy and praise."

When, in 1695, Madame Guyon was imprisoned in the Castle of Vincennes, she sang praises to the Lord, composing one of her own hymns, as follows:

"A little bird I am,  
Shut from the fields and 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 fly;  
But though my wing is closely bound,  
My heart's at liberty;  
My prison walls can not control  
The flight, the freedom, of the soul."

The shaking of the prison, the loosing of the chains, the opening of the doors, the waking of the jailer, his dismay and intended suicide, fearing the ignominy which would attach to him from the escape of the prisoners, Paul's call to him to do himself no harm, assuring him that the prisoners were all safe, constitute together a thrilling episode, more remarkable to the jailer than to anyone else. Doubtless he had heard something respecting these men, so different from the ordinary criminals with which he had to do. Doubtless, he had been impressed with their unresisting attitude; their Christlike demeanor even under severe provocation; their moderate submission even to their severe treatment at his hands. In any event he seems to have felt a heart-hunger for fellowship with his Creator such as these discredited men under his care enjoyed. Quite probably he had already been reading the Gospel of Christ in the features and conduct of his prisoners, whose living epistles were always open to be known and read by those about them. Had there not been some such preliminary instruction of his heart, we can scarcely suppose that he would so quickly have resolved to walk in the footsteps of the prisoners – that their God should be his God, and their salvation which was able to make them joyful in tribulation, should, if possible, be his salvation. And this was his inquiry: "What must I do to be saved?" – saved from sin, saved from



its penalty, – death, saved from its degrading influence, saved from its unrest of heart and mind, saved to the same peace and joy and comfort and consolation which his prisoners exemplified.

We are not surprised at the reply given by the Lord's servants; we are not surprised that they did not say, Go to the confessional, get the priest to sprinkle holy water upon you, pay him to say masses for your sins, and join the Catholic Church. Neither are we surprised that the message was not that he must feel his guilt a long while, and pray to the Lord a good while, and seek forgiveness at a mourner's bench night after night, and join a Methodist or Presbyterian or other human system. How evident it is that these servants of the true Gospel and builders of the true Church were not Catholics, nor Presbyterians, nor Methodists; and that they neither founded these sects nor taught along their lines; and that they would no more affiliate with or encourage their methods today than they would then have done.

The answer to the jailer is one which commends itself to the Christian mind as being the proper one – no more, no less: he should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as his Redeemer, as the one who had died on his behalf, through whose stripes he might be healed, saved and through whose sacrifice he might rejoice in at-one-ment with God; and having thus believed with all his heart, whether it required a moment or an hour to explain and to understand these simple first principles of the Gospel, his next step was to consecrate himself, to be baptized into death with his Redeemer, and to symbolize this consecration into death by a baptism in water. And he was encouraged to hope, not only for his personal salvation, but that his family might be sharers with him. We may reasonably suppose that this conversation about his salvation progressed while he was ministering to the evangelists – washing **[R3124 : page 381]** their wounds, seeking to make them comfortable and providing them food. We may also reasonably suppose that with many more words than are here presented the Apostle set before the jailer and his assembled family the simple story of the love of God manifested in the gift of his Son;



and of the love of Christ manifested in his sacrifice on our behalf; and the evidence of the acceptableness of that sacrifice, as testified to by our Lord's resurrection and by his sending of the holy spirit upon the infant Church; and the subsequent message now going forth to whomsoever had an ear to hear, that there is salvation in him and in no other.

There is a lesson here for us in regard to the promulgation of God's message. We are not to use words of man's wisdom; not to attempt to philosophize and to show our learning; nor are we to say, Now, do not be in too much haste; there is plenty of time, and after we are comfortably fixed we will have all day tomorrow to talk this matter over. We are to remember the declaration of the wise man, "A word in season, how good it is!" We are to remember, when talking **[R3124 : page 382]** with those who have an ear to hear and are inquiring the way to the Lord, that there are great crises in the lives of men, momentous occasions, in which one word may be more valuable, more potent, than would be a hundred words or a thousand words at another time, under different circumstances; and we are to be instant in the Lord's service, whether seasonable or unseasonable to ourselves, – gladly ready to lay down our lives for the brethren. The disposition of Paul and Silas to preach Christ to the jailer regardless of their own convenience and comfort and need of rest was in perfect accord with the joy of the Lord which filled their hearts and led them to sing. Dissatisfied Christians, disposed to grumble, would be inclined neither to sing praises under such circumstances, nor to preach the Gospel to a poor inquiring fellow on so out-of-season an occasion. We are to distinguish, however, between out-of-season to ourselves and out-of-season to others; and to be willing to serve others at any time, however out-of-season to ourselves, if it be in season and opportune for them. We are not to intrude even the Gospel itself at inopportune times, however convenient the occasion may be to ourselves.

Let us learn from this brief statement of the Gospel discourse by the Apostle the wisdom of simplicity and directness. The Apostle

might have preached a great deal about the Jewish Law, and about the Jewish failure to keep the Law. He might have discussed the various philosophies of the false religions; and all of these might be proper at the right time, but now was not the time suited for these, and hence he confined his remarks particularly to the general statement that Christ was the Messiah, that he had redeemed the world, that he must be laid hold on by faith, and that to all who thus took hold on him he became the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The next morning the rulers, learning something of the circumstances of the night, ordered the release of Paul and Silas; but the Apostle sought to forward the interests of the cause he served by returning word that he was a Roman citizen, and that Roman law had been violated in three particulars in his case: **(1)** That they had "beaten" him; **(2)** that this had been done "publicly;" **(3)** that it was specially reprehensible in that he had not been legally "condemned."

These charges against the rulers might have gone hard with them; hence, it is not to be wondered at that they came to the prison, as the Apostle requested, and brought their prisoners forth publicly, thus giving evidence to the people that they conceded that an injustice had been done them on the previous night. It was agreed that the Lord's representatives should leave the place, and evidently this was as wise a thing as could have been done, at the time, for the publicity given to the Apostles and their teaching would now have opportunity to work, and the new disciples might have a better chance for presenting the truth quietly, in the absence of their leaders, against whom strong enmity had been aroused on account of the healing of the woman. From here the servants of the Lord went to Thessalonica, and undaunted by their experiences (indeed, rejoicing in them) they boldly spoke the word of grace to such as would hear them there.

"Many men of many minds," writes the poet; hence it is not surprising that some with too little reverence and too much self-consciousness are disposed to criticize the Apostle's course in

claiming Roman citizenship here and on another occasion. We should approach such criticism from the standpoint of reverence, recognizing the apostles as specially chosen and specially inspired of the Lord and specially guided of him and fit to be our exemplars in all matters (Matt. 18:18) unless (as in Gal. 2:11) the criticism of their conduct or words is found in the Scriptures themselves. Unquestionably it was proper for the Apostle to appeal to his Roman citizenship as a means to secure *justice*, not injustice.

Similarly we may properly appeal to every item of the human laws under which we may be living that would protect us in our just rights; but we may not go beyond this and denounce the laws or violate them. Our Lord's admonition was in line with such submission to the ordinances or *laws* of men, in respect to our earthly affairs; and he explains, – If any man *sue thee at the law* and take away thy coat resist not, but even let him take thy cloak also. If, however, any man attempts to rob us of our coat without due process of law we are not bound to yield except it seem to be the better policy. In all civilized lands we would have the right to call on the *law* to protect us from violence.

Such a course would not mean an acknowledgment that we are citizens of this world and renouncers of our heavenly citizenship – even as the Apostle's course did not mean this. It would mean merely that as strangers and pilgrims, we are required to pay taxes for the support of law and order, and that worldly people recognize our rights to certain protection in the laws which *they framed*.

Similarly the Apostle at times referred to himself as a Jew – not as denying his Christianity, but as one now might say, – I am a German, or an American, thus to appeal not to a religious prejudice, but to a national sympathy, which, if men's hearts were right, would not need to be appealed to, because it would be quite sufficient to say, – I am a fellow *man*. The Apostle on one occasion, perceiving that his enemies were chiefly Pharisees, cried out, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee! For the hope of the resurrection I am called in question!"

To imagine a similar case now, suppose that Christians were practically of two parties, one professing faith in the resurrection of the dead, and the other denying a resurrection and future life; suppose the latter were called "Evolutionists," and the former "the Faithful," and that some of us were misunderstood and caught by a mob, and that we perceived that a goodly number of our assailants were of "the Faithfuls," and that we were to cry out, "I am one of the 'Faithful' and the son of a 'Faithful!' It is because I believe in the resurrection of the dead that I am now being molested!" Surely there would be nothing amiss in such a position. And this was exactly Paul's case; – the name Pharisee stood for faith in God and in a future life by a resurrection and for obedience to the Law and, in general, full loyalty to God. The word Pharisee signifies – *wholly separated to God*; and only that the word has since come to be proverbial for hypocrite any of the Lord's people could still say, I am a Pharisee – I am one of those wholly separated to God.

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