

## "LOVE AS BRETHERN."

– ACTS 21:1-12. – APRIL 26. –

**Golden Text.** – "The will of the Lord be done." – Acts 21:14.

BROTHERHOOD in Christ is the closest of all relationships, and many incidents in the Apostle's journey from Ephesus to Jerusalem illustrate this brotherhood relationship most beautifully. In a preceding lesson we had the account of the parting of Paul and his company from the elders at Ephesus, and of their loving demonstration and tears and prayers. The first verse of this lesson says, "After we were gotten from them," etc., – the words "gotten from" signifying, torn ourselves away, as though the hearts of all were so thoroughly united that the separation meant the breaking of very tender ties. And so we find it to be today, with the Lord's similarly consecrated people. They become attached to each other in a manner that formal creeds and confessions in earthly bundles, or denominations, do not bind. Each one who is united to Christ feels a special interest in, and sympathy for, each fellow-member, so that, as the Apostle says, if one member rejoice all are glad, and if one member be in trouble or affliction or sorrow all are sympathetically affected. This will be noticeable in proportion as the law of love develops and abounds in each member. The little love in the beginning of Christian character will expand and deepen, filling all the avenues of the heart, and sanctifying them in a pure, unselfish, holy love.

The voyage from Miletus to Patara was probably in a small coasting vessel. At the latter port they found a larger seagoing vessel, on which they made the through journey to Tyre. At the latter place the Apostle and his companions hunted up some believers, whom they previously knew resided there. This is another evidence of affection and interest. Apparently the number of the interested was small, just as today; the twos and threes, sixes and sevens, are much

more numerous than larger companies. The fewness did not hinder the Apostle from seeking them out, that he might encourage and strengthen them. Rather, we may say that in some respects the appreciation of the fact that the Lord's jewels are not numerous makes them all the more precious. In this little church were some who evidently had the gift of prophecy, as it was granted in the early church – foretelling future events, just as with the prophets of old, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., except that those of the earlier dispensation spoke evidently in a more public manner, while these latter had messages especially for the Apostle and the Church. The message that came to them was to the effect that the Apostle at Jerusalem would be caused to suffer; would be imprisoned, maltreated, etc., and on this account they urged him not to go. The Apostle tells us previously, that the spirit witnessed in various places that bonds and imprisonment awaited him; but, nevertheless, he understood it to be the divine will that he should go to Jerusalem, and that, hence, he would not hesitate, knowing that the Lord was able to work out his own good purposes, if he were obedient. We are not to understand this testimony of these local prophets to be a contradiction of the Apostle's understanding of the same holy spirit's leading; the one teaching him that he should go to Jerusalem, the other teaching that he should not go to Jerusalem. We are rather to understand that these prophets merely had from God a revelation to the effect that Paul would suffer violence in the city of the great King, and that on the strength of this information they themselves advised the Apostle not to go. But Paul, without disrespect, or in any degree impugning the truthfulness of their message, drew a different lesson from it – understood the Lord's message differently. He saw that this meant a trial of his faith, his zeal, his perseverance, and that for him to yield to these suggestions, through fear, would have been an evidence of his lack of confidence in God, since the Lord had himself revealed to him that he should go up to Jerusalem.

It may be wondered why the Apostle would feel so urgently desirous of going to Jerusalem, knowing in advance what to expect.

We reply that he evidently realized that the work amongst the Gentiles was growing considerably, and that there was a feeling that there was a more or less clearly defined separation of interest and sympathy as between believing Gentiles and believing Jews, and that part of the Apostle's object in this visit was to counteract this tendency and to help cement the Church as one. He was taking with him contributions from the various churches amongst the Gentiles to the poor of the larger congregation at Jerusalem, a thank-offering to the Lord for the good things which had been sent to them through their Jewish brethren. These offerings would attest the love and fellowship of the Gentile [R3182 : page 125] believers, and help to convince the brethren at Jerusalem that those abroad had one and the same spirit as those with whom they were better acquainted in Palestine. Then again, in Paul's company were several Gentile representatives, as it were, of the grace of God amongst the Gentiles – noble brethren, whose meekness, patience, gentleness, long-suffering; brotherly kindness and various fruits of the spirit fully attested the work of grace amongst the Gentiles to be the same as amongst the Jews. Furthermore, the Apostle realized that some had, intentionally or unintentionally, misrepresented his position – claiming that he was an opponent of the Law and of the Jews. He was an opponent of neither; he loved the Jews as his brethren, and he loved the Law of Moses, realizing that it was just, perfect and good, and so great and wonderful a law that no fallen human being could possibly live up to all of its requisites, and that, therefore, whoever would be justified could not be justified by the Law, through obedience to it, but must be justified according to God's arrangement – justified by faith. During this visit he hoped to be able to show that he had no disrespect for the Law, but that as Jesus magnified it, held it up, and showed how great and wonderful a law it was, he, Paul, magnified the Law of God, the Law of Moses, and showed that it could be kept only reckonedly, by any of the fallen race, and then only by those who could have imputed to them the righteousness of Christ to make up for their blemishes and shortcomings.

Furthermore, he foresaw the complete fall of his nation from all divine favor into unbelief and a great time of trouble, just at hand, and he, doubtless, desired to make one further effort amongst the Jews to give a final testimony that might be helpful to some, hoping that his experience in the many years amongst the Gentiles might have brought him greater wisdom in knowing how to present the gracious message. We know that these were his sentiments respecting the condition of the Jews, because his Epistle to the Romans had already been written – after he left Ephesus, presumably at Corinth, – and in that Epistle to the Romans it will be remembered that in the ninth, tenth and eleventh chapters the Apostle clearly sets forth the stumbling of the whole Jewish nation, only a remnant taking hold upon the Lord Jesus, the rest being blinded until the fulness of the Gentiles should be come in. We remember his explanation of the olive tree, whose root was the promise made to Abraham, and whose branches were the individuals of the Jewish nation. The breaking off of these branches from divine favor left opportunity for grafting into this olive tree – of divine favor and participation in the covenant made with Abraham – of all of the Gentiles who should heartily accept the Redeemer. The Apostle had all these thoughts, then, clearly in his mind. He had no expectation of being able to turn Israel as a nation, but he did wish them to discern his love for them, and his earnest desire to assist them, that peradventure he might remove from the minds of the Apostles not only any prejudice they might, as Jews, have had against the Gentile converts, but that, additionally, he might assist some who had not yet made a decision, not yet gone into the condition of darkness, stumbling, etc. Here again love as brethren is manifest. The Apostle loved the Jewish nation with an intense love, as is witnessed by his declaration, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." (Rom. 9:3.) Not that he would wish to suffer eternal torture for them, nor yet that he would wish to be cut off in the Second Death for them; but that he was willing to be cut off from participation in the glories of the Kingdom, as a member of the body of Christ, if thereby he could

have brought his nation into that glorious position, the first right to which belonged to them as a people, until they rejected it.

The stay with the little company at Tyre lasted seven days, while their vessel was unloading its cargo and reloading another. As we read the account of how the disciples at Tyre, with their wives and children, accompanied the Apostle and his companions to the ship, and all kneeled in prayer on the shore, we say to ourselves that the spirit of discipleship was evidently the same everywhere in the early Church – just as warm and just as expressive among these probably less cultured ones at Tyre, as it was with the elders of the Church of Ephesus at Miletus. And we are glad to say that the household of faith today has many of the same characteristics of intense love for the brethren, even though they have not previously seen each other. We frequently think of this striking likeness when some of the friends, and sometimes their children, accompany us to the railway station to say "Good-bye." Truly by one spirit we are all baptized into the one body, and whoever lacks this spirit of fellowship, of oneness, is quite likely to become more and more cool and indifferent, until he loses the truth entirely; and whoever cultivates this spirit of fellowship and love for all the members of the body of Christ will find it growing, intensifying.

"Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above."

Mrs. M. J. Preston has put into poetic form the thought that we should speak our kind sentiments, and look them, and perform our kind services to one another, while we have the opportunity – and not let these **[R3183 : page 126]** opportunities go by, and leave our expressions until our friends are cold in death. She says: –

"What use for rope if it be not flung  
Till the swimmer's grasp to the rock has clung?"

What help in a comrade's bugle blast  
When the peril of Alpine heights is past?  
What need that the stirring paeon roll  
When the runner is safe within the goal?  
What worth is eulogy's blandest breath  
When whispered in ears that are hushed in death?  
No, no! if you have but a word of cheer  
Speak it while I am alive to hear."

Leaving Tyre their vessel soon came to Ptolemais. There were a few friends at Ptolemais, and the day was spent in their company, and probably the partings again were full of expressions of sympathy; and then Caesarea, the Roman capital of Palestine, was reached. Philip the evangelist, one of the seven deacons originally appointed at Jerusalem, and who did a good work, it will be remembered, with the Ethiopian eunuch and at Samaria, was at this time apparently making Caesarea his home. We have no definite statement respecting the number of believers at the place, but evidently most of these groups of the Lord's people were few in number. Five of the Church, at least, were of Philip's own family, for he had four daughters, who are spoken of as unmarried sisters which did prophesy. It is difficult for us to determine whether or not they prophesied of future events, because this word "prophesy" is also used to designate public speaking without reference to foreseeing. Apparently the Apostle's company tarried more days at Caesarea than they had intended, for finding that they would not be in time for the Passover the Apostle and his company were not in special haste to reach Jerusalem before the Pentecost season. It was while they tarried in the latter place that Agabus, a brother in the Lord, who had delivered important prophecies of future events, came to Caesarea and finding Paul took his girdle and therewith bound his own feet and hands, and declared that thus Paul would be bound and delivered to the Gentiles. This form of prophecy, illustrating by signs, was not uncommon to the Jews. It will be remembered that Isaiah and Jeremiah and others of

the prophets similarly acted out parts of their messages – thus, doubtless, making them more impressive.

This last testimony from Agabus seems to have affected all of Paul's companions who, taking a view similar to that taken by others, now joined in a general appeal to the Apostle not to go further on the journey – to give it up, not to run foolishly into danger. His reply shows us how thoroughly convinced he felt that it was the Lord's will, and that his dear friends were conscientious, he does not for an instant dispute. His words are most touching: "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?" Here again we are reminded of the words of the poet: –

"We share our mutual woes;  
Our mutual burdens bear;  
And often for each other flows  
The sympathizing tear."

But the Apostle was firm. He had not started on this journey without the full conviction and assurance that it was in the Lord's providence that he should take it; and he was not to be daunted by any of the circumstances that might arise. He well knew that all the powers of darkness would assail him in vain, except as the Lord should permit, and he well knew also that the Lord would permit nothing to occur that would be to his real disadvantage. He would, therefore, go on conscientiously and courageously, and finish the work that the Father had given him to do. He would be sustained by his faith in the divine supervision of all his affairs, just as our Lord Jesus was; who, we remember, said to Pilate, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." – John 19:11.

There are few such noble characters as Paul's, unmoved by threats or fears, strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and ready not only to be bound for Christ's sake, but to die, if such should be the arrangement of the Lord's providence on his behalf. Let us each

and all emulate this noble example of one who followed so closely in the footsteps of our Lord and Master. Let us be strong, not only in our consecration, but also in the taking of all the steps that the Lord's providence may lead us to take.

The Apostle's argument was successful. He infused new courage into the hearts of his colaborers, and they apparently resolved that if he were about to die or suffer they, too, would rejoice if the will of God respecting them eventuated in their death; and if they did not suffer personally they would, at least, have the honor of being companions of those who were misused for Christ's sake, and thus be to some extent the sharers in the blessing promised. (Heb. 10:32,33.) The Apostle's companions saw the matter as he did, that it was the Lord's will; and they resolved to bow to it, notwithstanding that the Lord had given them information in advance which would have permitted them to turn back, or seek to save their lives. There is a very valuable lesson for all of the Lord's dear people in this word, "The will of the Lord be done." We should each seek to know the will of the Lord. If first of all our consecration be complete, even unto death, it will mean that we are seeking to know what the will of the Lord is respecting us, and it will mean that as we learn his will we will do it at any cost. It will mean that we will be on the outlook for the Lord's providences in all of our affairs, realizing that nothing happens by chance to those who are in covenant relationship with God, as members of the body of Christ, – that all **[R3183 : page 127]** things must work together for good to them. A fuller realization of the divine care over the elect would, doubtless, often guide our steps aright by directing the eye of faith to expect the Lord's leadings and to look for them in all matters that are of any importance.

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