

## THE APOSTLE PAUL AT ROME.

– ACTS 28:16-24,30,31. – JUNE 14. –

**Golden Text.** – "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

– Rom. 1:16.

DOUBTLESS the favorable impression made by the Apostle Paul upon the centurion who brought him prisoner to Rome – the evidence which the latter had on the journey, in the storm, in the shipwreck, and subsequently during the stay at Malta – combined with the favorable letter sent by Festus to Caesar explaining that the charges against the Apostle were evidently the results of religious hatred, etc., secured for him very different treatment from that usually accorded to prisoners sent to Rome. He was treated as a prisoner to the extent that he was continually chained to a guard, a Roman soldier, responsible for his appearance whenever demanded. These guards were changed every few hours, so that, on the whole, probably a considerable number of the garrison had personal contact with the Apostle, knew his manner of living most intimately, and many of them must have heard his teaching and preaching to the numbers of Jews and Christians who visited him. It is surmised, – not without grounds, we think, – that some of these soldiers, who were subsequently sent to Great Britain, carried the gospel thither. Certain it was that the Apostle's life was a living epistle which cannot have been without its effect, either for the blessing or the hardening of those with whom he came in contact – to some a savor of life unto life; to others a savor of death unto death – according as they received or rejected the knowledge and light. The same should be true of all the Lord's followers to the extent of their abilities and opportunities; each should let his light so shine as to glorify the Father. Business acquaintances, social friends, neighbors, relatives, – all should know exactly where we stand on all questions of righteousness, as well as what is the foundation for our faith and hopes.

We are informed that Paul dwelt in his own hired house – more properly apartments, not necessarily an entire building. The expenses of maintaining such a residence, where numbers of people could be invited, must have been considerable, and evidently the Apostle did not here continue his trade of tent-making. It is possible that his necessities were supplied by his friends at Rome and elsewhere: it is possible also that by this time, in the Lord's providence, he had inherited a considerable patrimony from his father's estate. The lesson in this particular is that God is able to supply all of our real needs in one way or another. It is for us to do with our might what our **[R3208 : page 184]** hands find to do, using our time and strength and talents in the Lord's service to the best of our judgment, and leaving all arrangements as well as results in his hand. No doubt it was to the Apostle's advantage that for a time he was left in penury and found it necessary to labor, working with his hands for life's necessities while he was preaching the good tidings. Thus he demonstrated his loyalty to the Lord, to the truth, to the brethren, to principle; and thus he set us an example along these lines which, doubtless, has since been profitable to many of the Lord's followers.

Paul had a considerable number of kinsmen and acquaintances in Rome, the number of whom we know was at least over thirty-two according to the salutations of his epistle written to them previously at Corinth. (Rom. 16:1-15.) Doubtless these were informed of the Apostle's arrival and visited him speedily. But our lesson calls our attention particularly to the Apostle's energy in seeking to be about the Master's business, – seeking to make known the good tidings to those who as yet had not heard it. Three days after his arrival in Rome he sent forth an invitation requesting the leading Jews there to visit him. We can learn a good lesson from this in harmony with the Apostle's words, "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Our chief business, like his, should be the Lord's service; the comfortable fixing of our abode and our fellowship with our friends and relatives should not occupy the most important part of our time. We should remember the Apostle's words, "This one thing I do"; and applying them to

ourselves we should be "instant [unceasingly] in season and out of season [when convenient and when inconvenient to ourselves]" in our service of our Lord and his cause.

The Jews accepted the invitation and visited the Apostle: doubtless they came readily for several reasons. First, all the Jews residing in Rome had been subject to persecution, which had some three years previously driven Aquila and Priscilla from the city. This persecution had now to some extent abated, but doubtless it had left the hearts of the Jews in a much humbler condition than they would otherwise have been. Persecutions certainly have their value to the Lord's people; they help to make us tender-hearted, compassionate and sympathetic with others, as well as help to polish and develop us in Christian character. Secondly, the Jews were, doubtless, interested in a fellow-countryman in distress, and specially interested in one whom they found to be so peculiarly treated by the Roman government – one granted so great liberty as Paul enjoyed. The Lord's providence was certainly in this matter, and the Apostle's peculiar form of restraint was evidently favorable to the cause he represented. The Jews would certainly beware how they would raise a commotion against one who, though a prisoner, was treated with such consideration, and one who was under the direct protection of a soldier, and for violence to whom they would be directly responsible to Julius, who is supposed to have been the prefect of the Praetorium, or "captain of the guard," of that time – a man of good repute. It was while a prisoner in his own house that the Apostle found favorable opportunity for writing several of his epistles – to the Philippians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Colossians. Doubtless the two years spent in prison in Caesarea were valuable to the Apostle himself, as giving him more abundant opportunity for further study of the divine plan than he could have enjoyed while engaged continually in the mission work. Now this added experience and grasp of the gospel found their expression in the epistles referred to, and were communicated to the Church at Rome. We should remember, too, that Rome was the very center of influence at that time, that from its influences radiated in every direction. Thus

we see the Lord's guidance in the Apostle's affairs, and applying the lesson to ourselves it impresses upon us his assurance that "all things shall work together for good to those who love God, to the called ones according to his purpose." Consoled with this promise we can endure trials and disappointments, even though at the time we cannot see how such experiences will ever work good. Thus we learn that

"Faith can firmly trust him,  
Come what may."

To the chief Jews who visited him the Apostle explained briefly the cause of the opposition of the Jews, the necessity of his appeal to Caesar and the assurance that he had naught whereof to accuse his own nation. His nobility of character is prominently before us at every turn of his affairs. How many less noble minds would have felt embittered against their own nation! How many would have charged the rulers of it in immoderate terms for their injustice, hypocrisy, etc.! We love the Apostle all the more because we discern in his course the true, noble, Christian spirit and principle. Let us seek to emulate his example, not only in respect to what we shall say of earthly laws and rulers, but let us also apply the same rule to all who seek to do us injury; let us not render evil for evil and railing for railing, but let us remember how it is written of our Lord that "when he was reviled he reviled not again."

Mark the wisdom of the Apostle in handling his subject: He not only showed no unkindness of sentiment toward those who had been the cause of his imprisonment, but he declared to his hearers that he was bearing his bondage because of the hope of Israel. He **[R3209 : page 185]** was not seeking for their sympathy; he was seeking to turn their hearts to the Lord. Hence, as soon as possible in his narrative he directed their attention to this central fact, that Israel had a hope, and that it was because of his loyalty to Israel and Israel's hope that he was suffering imprisonment.

Kindness often begets kindness (though not always), and the Jews responded in most considerate terms that they knew nothing against the

Apostle and that they would be pleased to hear his story from his own lips. They admitted, however, that they had some prejudice against the doctrines he advocated because they had heard unfavorable reports concerning Christianity – that "everywhere it is spoken against."

The nearer we approach to the truth the more likely we are to find numerous enemies. Good men and bad men may have both friends and enemies, but it is reserved to the pure gospel and those who uphold it to be *everywhere* spoken against – to have few zealous friends outside its own little consecrated band; but it will not always be so. It is so now because we are still living in an epoch known spiritually as "this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4), and because Satan is the god of this world, who now worketh in the children of disobedience, blinding their eyes to the truth and constraining them to hate the light and oppose it. By and by Satan will be bound, and his deluded subjects will have the eyes of their understanding opened (Isa. 35:5; Rev. 20:1): "then shall ye return" – turn about – see things from the divine standpoint, and discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not – discern a marked difference from the present time – that evil doers will suffer, and that those who do the will of the Lord will be greatly blessed and no longer be everywhere spoken against.

The Apostle did not attempt to preach the gospel at this first interview, but simply introduced himself and his message and made an appointment for a future meeting, at which, according to the Greek text, a great number gathered, to whom he expounded the matter, testifying the Kingdom of God and persuading them concerning Jesus – from morning until evening. We can imagine the substance of this long discourse: it evidently was along the same lines as our Lord's words to the two with whom he went to Emmaus after his resurrection, when he opened unto them the Scriptures – showing the types of the Law, the necessity for an antitypical sin-offering and the necessity for an antitypical Prophet, Priest and King; the predictions of the Prophets concerning these things; the words of David, of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, of Zechariah, Joel, etc., etc. Doubtless, too, the Apostle gave an account

of the purity of our Lord's life and teachings, and narrated the facts proving his resurrection, and his own witness that the Lord was no longer a man, but a glorious being, whose presence when seen by the Apostle shone above the brightness of the sun at noonday. Doubtless, too, he pointed out the high calling of the Church, and that this opportunity for becoming spiritual Israel was accorded first of all to fleshly Israel; and that the Gentiles, nevertheless, according to the words of the prophets, would be called in to fill up, to complete the elect number that God had predestinated to this glory. Doubtless he showed that the call involved suffering, sacrifice and self-denial now on the part of those who would share in the glories of the heavenly Kingdom as it will be established at the second coming of Messiah, and the resurrection of the Church, which is his body.

As is always the case, the truth proved a separator, and we are not surprised to find that among those who were interested enough, and curious enough, to desire to hear the Apostle, some believed and some disbelieved. The truth in the harvest time of this age has a similar effect: it is a sickle which both gathers the wheat to the garner and separates the tares. Paul was not responsible for the effect of the truth upon his hearers. He earnestly desired to do them good, and used his very best endeavors to present the truth wisely, but the responsibility lay then with the hearers, not with Paul, nor with the Lord. It is the Lord's intention that the truth shall attract only the one class – the pure in heart, the Israelites indeed – and that it should separate and antagonize those who are not in the right condition of heart, but are moved even in their religious devotions by selfishness. So we find matters today; not all are ready for the present truth. Some who are noble and generous in many respects have a prejudice of mind, or heart, which hinders them from being able to receive the good tidings. With some it is love of the sect, or party, with which they are identified, and whose teachings must be more or less antagonistic to the truth because of the error they contain; with others the difficulty is the fear of man, which bringeth a snare – the fear of greater unpopularity and the realization that faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ would mean self-sacrifice. The Lord is using just

such testings now as then to separate the wheat from the tares, the gold from the dross. We can not expect that he will do otherwise for us or for any, and our prayers and endeavors must be in the direction of thorough honesty with the Lord, with the brethren and with his truth – the love of the truth being above all things else. The Lord's declaration respecting the class that will fall in this time of testing is that he will send them strong delusion, that they will believe a lie, because they received not the truth in the love of it. – 2 Thess. 2:10,11. [R3209 : page 186]

The good work thus promptly and thoroughly begun, we doubt not, was continued by the Apostle with fervency during the remainder of the two years he was a prisoner. He was not privileged to go out and make public discourses in Rome, for at that time the Emperor was not only the head of everything social and political, but also the ecclesiastical head of the world, and any new religion would be under special restraint in Rome, the seat of the imperial government. Hence, in all probability Paul's condition as a prisoner – *at liberty to receive all who would come to him* – was the best not only for him, but for the cause he represented. We are reminded here that some are kept prisoners at home by family duties, or illness, or other bonds of obligation or necessity, and that where such conditions prevail the Lord's people should both pray and expect that the Lord would bring to them such as might be benefitted by their ministries of the truth. Let us each be zealous to use our opportunities, whether our advantages be great or small, and let us rely upon it that the Lord knows our condition and is able to change it according to his good pleasure and wisdom. Under the existing conditions, no one was able to forbid the Apostle, or to restrain him, from speaking with the utmost confidence and boldness the truths pertaining to the Lord Jesus and the Kingdom of God which he would establish at his second advent – the present Gospel age being for the selection and polishing and testing of those who will be joint-heirs with him in that Kingdom. Let us be faithful and let us see to it that our ministries, both public and private, be along these lines – that we do not permit any other gospel to take the place of

this one which the Lord has committed to us. We note incidentally that we are living in a day of many gospels – the gospel of socialism, the gospel of health by proper living, the gospel of faith cures, mind cures, hypnotic cures, etc.; the gospel of various sciences; the gospel of the power of the will, etc., etc. Whatever their advocates may say about these gospels, let us remember that none of these is the gospel which the Lord and his apostles committed to us; let us inquire for the old paths and let us keep them faithfully until by and by we shall hear the Master's words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of thy Lord." Then we shall know as we are known; then we shall understand much better than the various theories of the present time could possibly instruct us. If we win the great prize it must be, in any event, at the cost of our present earthly lives; and, hence, the gospel of health is in some respects in direct antagonism to the gospel of sacrifice which we preach. By this we do not mean that the Lord's people should be negligent of health; but we do mean that it should in their estimation be so secondary to the gospel of God's dear Son and the glory to be attained through him and through association in his sacrifice, that earthly life and earthly health and earthly physical development should be loss and dross in comparison.

Here the narrative of the Apostle's work ends. Tradition tells us that the Apostle was liberated at the end of the two years; that he again visited the churches of Asia Minor and, subsequently, made a visit to Spain, preaching the gospel; and that later on he came to Rome again a prisoner without favor, and that he suffered martyrdom after spending a considerable time imprisoned in the Mamertine prison, a dread dungeon in Rome. Tradition says that his Roman citizenship saved him from crucifixion, and that he was, instead, decapitated. St. Paul's Cathedral at Rome is said to have been built near the site of his execution.

It was probably during this latter imprisonment that the Apostle wrote his epistles to Timothy and Titus, in one of which (2 Tim. 4:7,8) he declares, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I



have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also who love his appearing." As we note the noble character of this dear brother in the Lord, we all desire to emulate it and thus to be copies of the Lord Jesus. And now we have approached, we believe, close to the termination of the narrow way, close to the time when we hope to hear the Master's "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Let us, therefore, be encouraged the more to buckle on tightly the armor, and to fight the good fight faithfully to the close, that we may with the Apostle share the crown of rejoicing which the Lord has promised to all who love him supremely – even unto death.

