

SAVE YOURSELVES FROM THIS GENERATION

– ACTS 2:32-42. – JANUARY 17. –

Golden Text: – "They continued steadfast in the Apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in prayer." – Acts 2:42.

LESS than two months had elapsed since the Apostle Peter denied his Lord with cursing. But today's lesson shows him the leader of the apostles and the special mouthpiece of the Lord in the opening work of the New Dispensation at Pentecost. How marvelous is the change from weakness to strength, which may come to those who are rightly exercised by life's experiences, as he was! His very stumbling strengthened his character, by arousing him to the necessity of taking the right stand at any cost. Each of God's children should learn this lesson--and should be helped by his defeats, as well as by his victories.

One of the Apostle's promises is to this effect – that "all things shall work together for good to those who love the Lord" with loyal hearts.

St. Peter preached a most direct sermon, taking for his text the miraculous events of Pentecost, which had drawn the crowd together. He had no apologies to make, but declared himself and his brethren disciples of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus' claim to the office had been abundantly demonstrated by his mighty works and words, "Never man spake like this man." Did they query if this were not the same Jesus that had been crucified, less than two months before? The query was answered most pointedly. Yes, with wicked hands you crucified and slew the Lord of glory. Did they ask how could a Messiah thus ignominiously suffer and how could a dead Messiah be of any use – of whom they preached? The Apostle's answer was a ready one, that it pleased God that a suffering Saviour should be provided and that his death should be

the redemption price for Adam and his race; and on this account forgiveness of sins might now be preached. Proceeding he declared that our Lord was not a dead Messiah, but a living one, for, although put to death in the flesh, God had raised him from the dead, and that his disciples were witnesses of the fact, and of his ascension.

The account given us is a meager one, but we can imagine the Apostle saying, "Let me prove to you from the prophets, whom you acknowledge, that these very things were foretold of the Messiah, Jesus; for instance, the most remarkable thing of all, his Resurrection. Did not the Prophet David foretell of the same, 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (sheol, hades the grave); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption'! This, "said Peter," was not true of the Prophet David. He died. His soul was not saved from sheol. He still awaits resurrection. But all of this was apparently true of Messiah, whom David, in the figure, represented. Christ's soul was not left in hades. God raised him from the dead the third day. Now he is highly exalted – a Prince and mighty Saviour, able to save you, able to save all who come to him; for the Father hath highly exalted him, that he might be the **[R4308 : page 10]** Saviour of you and of the world, not only as respects spiritual interests, but our temporal interests as well."

JOEL'S PROPHECY OF PENTECOST

Proceeding, the Apostle quoted Joel's prophecy and showed that a portion of it foretold the Pentecostal blessing. He was not led of the spirit to show that there were two parts to that prophecy, and that only one part was fulfilled at that time, and that the other part was to be fulfilled afterward. "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh" will be fulfilled in the future, after the second coming of Christ. That was not yet "meat in due season." However, the quotation was sufficient for its intended purpose. His hearers were pricked to the heart – cut to the heart. They felt terribly, as

they thought how true were his words, and how apt his Scripture quotation. They saw themselves as members of their nation red-handed murderers of the Messiah, for whom they had been looking for centuries. The great trouble which would certainly come upon their nation, and to which their prophets referred, they saw would be a reasonable penalty for their great sin. What must they do?

Contrition and repentance must necessarily precede any thoroughgoing reformation of character – then or now. If, therefore, any one shall read these words and realize that he himself has been living carelessly, as respects his blessings of God and his faithfulness to the Truth, it is well that he should awaken from his lethargy with a start, knowing assuredly that the end of that way will not have the divine approval. Such should cry out to the Lord for help from the weaknesses of his own nature, and from the delusions and snares of the Adversary; peradventure he may be delivered. In answer to their query the Apostle declared most graciously, "Brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." For if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. The matter is bad enough. The guilt is great as it is; but surely the Lord knows that those poor men who cried "Crucify him!" and those who helped to do it were, to a large degree, under the influence of our great Adversary, through ignorance and superstition and blindness, into which he had led them. Doubtless the number of those who have sinned wilfully against clear light and knowledge and opportunity, on the contrary, is small, especially if we exclude those sins attributable to weaknesses through the heredity of sin.

THE GOSPEL OF MERCY

The Pentecostal message was a Gospel of mercy, of forgiveness, of sympathy, even for those who had crucified the

Lord. Like the other sermons of this Apostle, and like the sermons of all the apostles, this sermon contained not one suggestion of eternal torment, but was full of mercy and grace – "speaking peace through Jesus Christ our Lord." The result was that three thousand were prompt to accept Jesus as the Messiah. They were convinced by their reason and by the evidences presented in the sermon by the Apostle and others of the brethren; thus they complied with the advice of the Apostle. Temporarily their sins were covered by the merit of the Lord's sacrifice, but for the full blotting out of those sins, they, with others, must wait for the second coming and the resurrection. The new bodies of all the faithful in Christ will be without spot or blemish. All sin will have been blotted out. Thus, as the Apostle Paul says, "It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." – I Cor. 15:43,44.

St. Peter's message to them was, "Repent ye therefore, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the holy Spirit; for the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord your God shall call."

Christ's sacrifice for sins was not intended to justify people living in sin, but to justify those who, renouncing sin, sought to live separate from it and to come into harmony with God. This is still our message. No one has a right to alter or amend it in any degree. The divine law condemns sin in the flesh still. The divine provision for the covering of the sins of those who believe in Jesus applies only to such as seek to put away sin, and to strive for righteousness. For such alone are all the divine arrangements and blessings. Baptism for the "remission of sins" was to the Jew only, to those who had already been baptized into Moses in the sea and the cloud. The sins thus figuratively washed away did not include original sin, with its death penalty, but merely minor transgressions against the Mosaic Law on the part of the

Covenant of the people. The symbolic washing represented a return to loyalty, to obedience to God, to the extent of their ability, so far as their hearts were concerned. Thus coming into accord with Moses, the typical Messiah, they would be by faith transferred to his antitype, Christ.

This washing or cleansing of the Jews, preparatory to their acceptance in Christ, continued until the middle wall of partition was broken down between Jew and Gentile, until the natural branches, those who did not receive fellowship in the Body of Christ, were broken off. Since then, baptism for the remission of sins, John's baptism, is entirely wrong, according to the Scriptures. (For details on this see DAWN-STUDIES, Vol. VI., Chapter 10.)

The Apostle pointed out that the promise of the great blessing through Messiah belonged to Israel according to the flesh, and that those promises had not yet lost their vitality – had not yet lapsed. Hence it was for them and their children, as well as for all mankind,

"EVEN AS MANY AS YOUR GOD SHALL CALL"

Everywhere the Scriptures remind us that no man taketh this honor to himself – the honor of being a member of the Body of Christ, the honor of being a member of the Royal Priesthood, etc. Only those called of God, drawn by the Father, can now come unto the Son and receive all of these blessings. This remains true to this day. The pity is that even some of those who have received and accepted the call are not sufficiently awake to rightly receive it. Our lesson assures us that this is but a small portion of the population. With many other words St. Peter exhorted and testified, saying, "Save yourself from this untoward generation." How successful was this message which was backed by the holy Spirit may be readily seen from the statement that three thousand

gladly received the message and were baptized and continued steadfast in this teaching, and in fellowship and prayers.

"SAVE YOURSELF FROM THIS GENERATION"

Again we are in a Harvest Time. The Harvest Time of this Gospel Age is now in progress, as then was the Harvest of the Jewish Age. Now, as then, there are tests and stones of stumbling, purposely permitted of the Father for our proving, testing, development. Not the Head of the Body is now to be crucified, but the members – especially the feet of the Body of Christ, yet **[R4308 : page 11]** upon the earth. The great Adversary has blinded in a most marvelous manner some, of whom better things might have been expected. Our Lord's words are proving true – that his message would cause a measure of strife, which would thus reveal, manifest, those who are of a wrong spirit, but indirectly bring blessings to the faithful, who are willing to suffer with him and to lay down their lives for the brethren. The persecutors number amongst them some of the great and noble and religiously prominent of the world. What is our attitude? Are we sympathizing with this condition of **[R4309 : page 11]** things, or are we standing loyally, firmly for the Truth, the Lord?

As it was then, in the Lord's providence, that he drew the attention of those in a wrong attitude to the true conditions of things, that they might recover themselves from the snare of the Adversary, so he is now doing here. He is willing and able to expose the wrong doing, and to call the attention of the honest-hearted to the true situation. It then remains with themselves, as free agents, either to continue to endorse the wrong, or to stand out distinctly for the right. The Scriptures clearly indicate that the present generation is an untoward one – one that is unfavorable to righteousness. The Scriptures give delineations of the selfish spirit of our day, the loveless spirit, with its anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife, backbiting and slandering tendencies, and they tell

us to what these will ultimately lead – to the great time of trouble, with which this Age will end.

What should we do? The Apostle Peter's words are appropriate: "Save yourselves." Do not wait to try to save Christendom. Let each one of us get his own heart right with God. It is an individual matter – who will stand and who will fall. According to the Scriptures and according to Israel as a type, the many will fall to the few who will remain standing. To save ourselves, we must take prompt, energetic action. Our repentance must be full. Our turning from the wrong ways must be positive. The promises are unto you and to your children, and to many afar off.

