

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

– ACTS 4:5-20. – JANUARY 31. –

Golden Text: – "They were all filled with the holy Spirit,
and they spake the words of God with boldness."

– Acts 4:31.

THE healing of the lame man was not a mental healing, not a faith cure, but a bona-fide miracle, straightening the ankle-bones and giving to the ligaments strength never before possessed. The miracle served to advertise the new Faith. A great crowd gathered from all parts to the temple. Pharisees, doctors of divinity and Sadducees, teaching their respective theories to inquiring crowds, were left without auditors. All attention was given to the cripple and to the two men who had effected his cure. The Apostle sees the opportunity to preach Christ, the Messiah, and to explain that it was he who had been cruelly crucified. Apparently the preaching and the discussion went on for about two hours, when it was interrupted by the arrest of the apostles, St. Peter and St. John. They were placed under guard for the night, because it was too late for the meeting of the Sanhedrin or Law, which by jurisdiction could try a case only in day time. Who were the accusers? Surely not the man who was healed, nor the common people who witnessed the miracle and gave God glory! Who then? Alas! it was the professedly most religious, most holy, most pious teachers of the people who, beholding what would thus draw away from their own teachings, were angry at the apostles, the more so that it was charged against them publicly that they had really crucified the Messiah a few weeks before.

Alas! for the perversity of human nature. But has it not been always so – that the persecutors of the Truth have been those who had greatest reason to be its servants? Our lesson opens with the account of the trial of the apostles before the Sanhedrin Court.

Caiaphas, the very one who condemned Jesus, was present, as were other ecclesiastics. If the apostles wondered that the Lord had permitted them to be stopped in their preaching and be imprisoned for the night, they probably saw when they were before the Sanhedrin the good reason for it all. God thus provided that the most learned, the most influential, red-handed with the blood of Jesus, should be brought face to face with the truth of the same. As the apostles answered the questions propounded, these clerics must have perceived that the Spirit of Christ in his followers was still able, not only to perform miracles, but to endow those humble fishermen with eloquence and courage to fully defend their position and voice the Truth.

Let us learn this lesson – to look through all of life's experiences for the accomplishment of the Divine purposes. When we become discouraged with trials or difficulties, yet know that we are faithfully serving the Lord and in line with the teachings of his Word, we should have faith to believe that the end of his dealings with us will fully justify every trial and difficulty between.

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform."

"BY WHAT POWER – IN WHAT NAME?"

There was no disputing the fact that the lame man, known for years to all the frequenters of the temple, had been healed. He had been seen jumping, walking and praising God. By their questions these clerics would give the inference that they believed the curing work had been accomplished by Satanic power. The trial was evidently to be conducted along this line – to prove the apostles emissaries of Satan. But the blessing upon St. Peter was in full harmony with the promise that when he would be called upon to stand before magistrates and princes,

language would be given him. From his lips poured forth such a stream of argument as quite overwhelmed his questioners. He told them in whose name his miracles had been performed – in the name of the one whom they had crucified some months before. He told them in the name of whose power he had wrought the miracles, namely, the power of God.

He properly made no apologies for his Master, nor for his having been numbered with the wicked. He charged straight home the responsibility of his death upon them, and then quoted them from the prophecies, "This is the stone which was set at naught by the builders, which is become the head of the corner." (Acts 4:11.) Neither was there salvation in any other than the one that they had crucified as a criminal. Astounding boldness, courage, ability! No wonder we read that they marveled at the boldness and the courage of these apostles, who they perceived were unlearned and ignorant men! No wonder that they took knowledge that these had been with Jesus and learned of him!

The same principle still holds good. Whoever the Lord may use as his mouthpiece will be endowed with corresponding ability to render the service for which the Lord has called, if he abide faithful, as did the apostles. We need not fear the attitude of the opponents, whether in high or low positions, if we are the Lord's, devoted to his cause. "He who is for us is more than all they that be against us." Why should we not have courage? Notice, nevertheless, that while the Apostle manifested such courage in speaking of the Truth, there was nothing proud, domineering or boastful or slanderous in his utterances. He told the Truth in a simple manner. Let our course be similar.

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They soon stopped the speaker. They were not anxious to have matters thoroughly opened up. They had heard enough.

They stood them aside until they had conferred. What they were afraid of was the spreading of the thing. It was not with them a question of right or wrong, of truth or falsity, of God or Satan, but the matter of the spread of religious views which would nullify their influence.

Their conclusion was that they could find no fault with the matter, but that they would threaten the apostles and try to restrain them with fear, so that the New Doctrines might not spread and upset their system and lower their dignity in the honor of Messiah, and weaken the power of the nation. They seemed to fear what has already come to pass, namely, that the religion of Jesus would excel Judaism in numbers and in influence. How remarkable was the influence of Jesus and of his twelve apostles! That spirit of Jesus which they discerned in the apostles reminds us of the poet's verse: –

A Persian fable says: One day
A wanderer found a lump of clay;
So redolent of sweet perfume,
Its odors scented all the room.
"What art thou?" was his quick demand,
"Art thou some gem from Samarcand,
Or spikenard, in this rude disguise,
Or other costly merchandise?"
"Nay, I am but a lump of clay."
"Then, whence this wondrous perfume – Say!"
"Friend, if the secret I disclose,
I have been dwelling with the rose."
Sweet parable! And will not those
Who love to dwell with Sharon's Rose,
Distil sweet orders all around,
Though low and mean themselves be found?
Dear Lord, abide with us, that we
May draw our perfume fresh from thee.

Of this thing we may be sure, that, however many of the Lord's people are by nature "chiefly the mean things of this world and the things that are naught," nevertheless if they become copies of God's dear Son, they will lose the meanness from their hearts and instead will be partakers of his grace, his spirit, his holiness.

"WE CANNOT BUT SPEAK THE THINGS"

When recalled before the Sanhedrin and told that the decision was that they should be discharged, but that they should be cautioned, warned, threatened, that they should not preach any more in the name of Jesus, the apostles modestly, courteously, but very boldly said, Whether your attack be right or not, we must follow our own conscience; "We cannot but speak the things we have heard." How very proper this reply! Yet how much courage it must have required for men without any education and without much wisdom to have to stand before magistrates and those of high estate! Why could they not refrain from preaching! Why would not the apostle's words apply to them, "Be subject to the powers that be." The answer is that while we are to be subject to earthly powers, as respects earthly things, we have a still higher responsibility in respect to the spiritual, the heavenly things. Our heavenly Father prepared the way for the Gospel by the sending of his Son. And our Lord said to his apostles, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." – Mark 16:15.

So long, therefore, as the apostles could reasonably, properly find hearers for their Master's Word, they preached it. And so it must be with us. We must not be intimidated. While obedient to the powers that be respecting every earthly way, we, like the apostles, cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. To keep the message secret, to put our light under a bushel, would mean our own failure to progress, the dwarfing of our New Nature, and ultimately disobedience to our Master; and obedience

to earthly powers along this line would mean to us failure as respects a place with Jesus in his throne. It is overcomers whom the Lord is now seeking! There could be no overcoming if there were no trials, and tests, and character development.

Let us, then, while obedient to every earthly law and regulation, feel perfectly free to do the Lord's will in every matter, even the smallest, even to the extent of bringing upon ourselves the disapprobation of the world and the worldly, even though it bring us stripes, imprisonment. We have not the crown yet, but the cross, and whatever will help us to take it up and bear it faithfully will be a cause for thanksgiving.

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