

[R4329 : page 44]

"THY MONEY PERISH WITH THEE"

– ACTS 8:4-25. – FEBRUARY 28. –

Golden Text: – "And the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." – Acts 8:6.

OUR preceding lesson told us of the zeal and faithfulness of Deacon Stephen. Today's lesson deals with the faithfulness of Deacon Philip, who was one of those who fled from Jerusalem under the persecution which arose following Stephen's death. He went to live in the city of Samaria, and, his earthen vessel being filled with the holy Spirit, he was a burning and shining light there, and speedily many of the Samaritans believed in Christ. The gift of miraculous healing and casting out of demons attested that Philip was a servant of God, and, as was intended, served to draw attention to the message which he delivered. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and thus caused great joy.

Simon, the magician of Samaria, had long been a spirit medium amongst them, practising witchcraft, sorcery, the black art. His power had been recognized, and he himself had been free to claim personal greatness because of the power of the demons exercised through him. But now the power of Christ being brought into sharp contrast with the demoniacal power and works, the people of Samaria recognized this promptly. Many of them made a full surrender to the Lord and were baptized. Amongst these was the magician himself. Deacon Philip was not the Apostle Philip, and hence was unable to confer the gifts of the holy Spirit upon others, which was an Apostolic privilege exclusively. He therefore sent to Jerusalem, and forthwith [R4330 : page 44] Peter and John went to Samaria and laid their hands upon the believers, and imparted to them the miraculous gifts which were a part of the Lord's provision for the

Church at that time. Not only for the convincing of outsiders, but also for the uplifting of each other in their meetings, the gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues were given, serving practically as instead of the written Word of God.

We remember that they were the same John and Peter to whom our Lord a few years before had said, "Into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" with the Gospel, "for I am not sent, save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And this is the same John who, with his brother James, was refused the privilege of purchasing bread for their needs, and asked our Lord, "Wilt thou that we command fire to come down to consume these men and their city?" We remember our Lord's answer, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of. The Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Now we find John quite willing to join with Peter in recognizing the Samaritans as brethren – fellow-members of the one Body of Christ; and very willing to confer upon them the gifts of the holy Spirit. What a [R4330 : page 45] change, and why? Ah! John was seeing things from a different standpoint. He was no longer actuated by a pride for his Master that would have been willing to destroy his enemies, but now, controlled with a spirit of love, he realized that the Samaritans and all mankind were under the blinding power of the Adversary, and he was as anxious to save their lives as he had been previously willing that they should be destroyed. And is it not so with each one of us? In proportion as we have received the Spirit of Christ, we have learned what love and sympathy towards fellow creatures really mean. We, like the apostles, are drinking of the same spirit which controlled our Master.

But why should the Lord bless Philip's preaching at this time, when previously he forbade any preaching of the Gospel to the Samaritans? The explanation is found in the dispensational

change which had meantime occurred. "The middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles had been broken down." It crumbled at the end of the seventieth week of Jewish favor, three and a half years after the cross, Cornelius being the first Gentile convert. This preaching at Samaria was probably three years after the conversion of Cornelius. The Samaritans claimed a relationship to the Jewish Law Covenant, but, as our Lord explained to the woman of Samaria, their claim was fraudulent. They were as separate from the Covenants and promises of Israel as were the other Gentile nations. To this day the Samaritans hold to their old traditions and claim to have a high priest, but entirely without right or authority.

As the old Law Covenant given through Moses was wholly Jewish, Israelitish, and as the New [Law] Covenant to be instituted by Messiah (Head and Body) will be wholly Israelitish, and as the original Abrahamic (Sarah) Covenant *blessed only those who exercised the faith of Abraham*, it follows that such of the Samaritans as came truly into Christ became spiritual Israelites, while the others, like all the Gentile nations, will during the Millennium have the opportunity of becoming naturalized, fleshly Israelites under Israel's New (Law) Covenant, as the only means of coming into harmony with God.

"SIMONY" IN OLDEN TIMES AND NOW

When the sorcerer, Simon Magus, beheld the Apostolic power – that by the laying on of the hands of the apostles miraculous gifts were imparted to the believers – he offered them money, if they would confer upon him this Apostolic power. Apparently his mind had assented to what he had heard and seen, but his heart was not radically changed. He did not appreciate the matters in which he had a share as one of the believers. It took the Apostle's sharp word to awaken him to a realization of the fact that he was now dealing with God and holy things, and that

his failure to appreciate this implied that he was not begotten of the holy Spirit. St. Peter said to him, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord if, perchance, the thought of thine heart shall be forgiven thee, for I see that thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity."

It is not for us to judge the heart, although we are commanded to judge the outward conduct and to discern the difference between the true Vine and its grapes, and the thorn-bush and its thorns. Without attempting to judge the hearts of any, we suggest to all the wisdom of seeing to it that nothing like the spirit of Simon Magus gain any control over us. This may be a special danger in this our day when the power of money is so great. As material things are all moved by the lever of wealth, it is not surprising that many conclude that the world's conversion is merely a matter of dollars and cents, and that those who control the money are the real masters of the situation. There may indeed be some who pride themselves in their money power and who think of it as having authority and direction in the work of the Lord. Let such beware of "Simony." Let them beware of the Apostle's words, "Thy money perish with thee." We are not of those who despise money. But it must be recognized as a servant of the Lord and of the Truth, and not as a master – not as a controlling force. To thus estimate it is to dishonor the Lord and to show that we have failed to grasp the spirit of his Truth.

THOSE THINGS WHICH PHILIP SPAKE

Our Golden Text refers thus to Philip's preaching: "He preached Christ." Some dear Christian people make the mistake of preaching on sociology, the beauties of nature, the things of the world. Others continually dabble with errors and errorists.

Such things may have their time and place in connection with the message; but all who would serve the Lord should remember that we are commissioned to preach the Gospel of Christ only. Christ and his message constitute the light which came into our minds – the light which we are to let shine for the blessing of others. The darkness hateth the light and battles against the light; but the light is to keep on shining. Thus said our Lord, "Let your light so shine before men that, seeing your good works, they may glorify your Father which is in heaven." There it is again. The light is not merely the message which we bear upon our lips, but also the influence which emanates from our daily lives. More and more we are convinced that the will of the Lord is that his message shall be borne by those who are pure of heart. "Be ye clean that bear the message of the Lord's house."

