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"FULL OF GOOD WORKS AND ALMS DEEDS"

– ACTS 9:31-43. – MARCH 14. –

Golden Text: – "And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole; arise and make thy bed. And he arose immediately." – Acts 9:34.

THE opening verse of our lesson informs us that after the persecution which scattered the Church (following Stephen's death) there came a lull and rest time. "So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the holy Spirit, was multiplied." How much is here recorded in a few words! And how will the principles here set forth apply to the Lord's dealing with his people today? The Scriptures give us the illustration of the Lord's dealings with his people in the words, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest." (Deut. 32:11.) Thus does the Lord at times permit trials, persecutions, etc., which outwardly seem to imply the wrecking of most precious interests, and sometimes cause surprise to his people by the roughness and jarring conditions. Nevertheless, under Divine supervision, the stirring up of the nest and the throwing of responsibility upon his people can be made advantageous to them, strengthening, helping them. Then comes a time of rest and opportunity for spiritual edification, comfort, growth in grace and knowledge. Happy are those who, in the time of the stirring up of the nest, are rightly exercised by the Lord's providences and taught of him and made more and more active in his service – the service of righteousness, truth and love. It brings them preparation for the period of rest and development.

But to others who are not rightly exercised by the siftings, the shakings, the stirrings up of the nest, the experience is different. They are sifted out, alienated, [R4335 : page 56] and

develop a hard spirit, foreign to the Lord, and out of accord with his Word. The one class goes on from grace to grace and from strength to strength; the other goes back into the outer darkness of the world. Thus, as the Apostle says, our message is a "savor of life unto life to some, but of death unto death to others." – 2 Cor. 2:16.

"THE SAINTS WHICH DWELT AT LYDDA"

This lesson gives a little insight to the condition of things in the early Church. The Truth was sufficiently unpopular to keep out the majority of those who love this present life and the praise of men more than the future life and the Divine approval. The edification, the comfort of the holy Spirit, and the walking in the fear or reverence of the Lord already mentioned (v. 31), is illustrated by the statement of verse 32, that St. Peter in his travels came to Lydda, to the saints who dwelt there. At that time, under those conditions, to be a Christian was to be a saint, a holy person, a sanctified or set apart person. And so it should be still. But, alas! popularity has brought under the name Christian not only wolves in sheep's clothing, but goats and ring-streaked and speckled and black sheep, as well as saintly ones. We are to remember, however, the declaration, "The Lord knoweth them that are his." Therefore, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" – depart from inequity (injustice) and from everything that is unrighteous (2 Tim. 2:19); in other words, let them all be saints, "For this is the will of God (concerning you), even your sanctification." – I Thess. 4:3.

We can, without pride or boastfulness, record that the number of saints for whom the light of Present Truth has an attraction are saintly, and also that it is leading the honest-hearted who receive it into a condition of consecration or saintship. The multiplying evidences to this effect, borne in

upon us day by day and year by year, are comforting, strengthening assurances of Divine favor accompanying the Divine Word, just as we should expect. And more than this: The saintliness of heart seems to be increasing in lengths and breadths and heights and depths of Christian character. Incidentally, we remark, that nothing that has been presented in these columns for many years seems to have been more helpful to the saintly and those seeking saintliness than "the VOW." We doubt if the same number of people, able and willing to take that Vow, could be found in all the denominations of Christendom. We believe that as saintliness progresses amongst our readers, our lists of those who have taken this solemn Vow, this solemn promise to the Lord in the name and strength of Jesus, will continue to increase, and that it will mean an increase of spiritual power and Christian grace and strength of character to them all.

At Lydda St. Peter found a palsied man bed-ridden for eight years. He was not one of the saints, for miracles of healing were rarely, if ever, performed by the Lord and the apostles upon believers. If sickness comes to those who are of the "household of faith," it is to be considered as of Divine permission, with a view to correction or to opportunities for growth in grace – as amongst the "all things" which shall work together for good to those rightly exercised thereby. The instantaneous healing of Aeneas was used of the Lord to advertise the Truth, after a manner not necessary at the present time. We read, "All that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw and turned to the Lord." The work at that time was of setting up the Church, bringing it into notice, establishing it, and gathering to it all "Israelites indeed" worthy of the Truth, worthy of being saved out of their own nation and the blindness and the trouble coming upon the same. The work of the present time is different. It is a gathering out of the wheat from the tares. We walk by faith, not by sight and by miracles.

"SHE WAS SICK AND DIED"

St. Peter stopped at Joppa, near to Lydda. There one of the saints took sick, but was not healed and died. Similarly Jesus healed many of the sick; but he allowed his special friend, Lazarus, to be sick and to die, without relieving the distress. As subsequently Lazarus was awakened from the sleep of death as an evidence of divine power and an evidence of Restitution times (Acts 3:19-21), so with Tabitha (Greek, Dorcas), she died, but, through St. Peter, the Lord awakened her from the sleep of death as a miracle and demonstration of the Divine power accomplishing the work of the Gospel message and making it forceful to the people.

A BEAUTIFUL CHRISTIAN WOMAN

Tabitha, in the Syrian language, then and there prevalent, signifies beautiful, and its Greek equivalent, which carries the same thought of beauty, signifies gazelle; the gentleness, the timidity and the bright, sparkling eye of the gazelle are the characteristics indicated **[R4336 : page 56]** by the name. We know not if the saintly woman revived from death was beautiful of face, but the account justifies us in acknowledging her to have been beautiful of heart, of character. The statement, "This woman was full of good works and alms deeds which she did," tells us that she was beautiful in the Lord's sight and in the sight of all his saints – provided, of course, that her good deeds were prompted by love of heart. For we should always remember the Apostle's words, "If I should give my body to be burned as a martyr, or if I should give all my goods to the poor, yet have not love, it would profit me nothing" – it would be without esteem in the mind of him who searcheth the heart and to whom motives in those of this age are everything.

We read that "All the widows stood by weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she

was with them." These words remind us of our Lord's expression respecting another woman, "She has done what she could." Such mourners at the death-bed give eloquent testimony to saintship. It is not recorded that all of the widows were saints, and quite probably some of them were not, for St. Peter put them all forth while he prayed. We are to have in mind that while the saints are God's peculiar care and should, therefore, be likewise the peculiar care of one another, nevertheless we have in a broad, general sense, a relationship to the entire world of mankind and whensoever we will may do them good. The Apostle urges us to "Do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." – Eph. 6:10.

The widows of olden times had a peculiarly hard lot for various reasons; hence the frequent reference to them in the Scriptures as objects of charity. Under the civilized arrangements of our time, induced and fostered by the spirit of Christianity, good provision is made for widows and orphans and thus in some measure our opportunities for charity are diminished. Nor is it either Scriptural or wise to always pass by the provisions of civilization for the care of the poor, the afflicted widows and orphans, and to institute private benefactions, more expensive, and, in some cases, more troublesome, and, in some instances, less advantageous. The "saints" should seek upon this, as upon every subject, the spirit of a sound mind, which cometh from above. There are still, however, opportunities for the exercise of benevolence in matters temporal – and especially along spiritual lines. Few know of the heavenly manna of the Gospel. Few are able to prepare and to give to others the Bread that came down from heaven. Few are able to help sinners to wash and be clean, and to point them to the robe of Christ's righteousness and to assist them in putting it on, and to show them how it is to be kept "without spot or wrinkle" or any such thing.

Few are ready to counsel others on how to get rid of the spots and wrinkles if they do get these upon their robes – that the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord cleanseth us from all of our errors and misdeeds of ignorance. These are the real saints, and they should all be so diligent, so zealous, that when their "change" shall come, there may be many able and willing to praise God on their behalf, many living epistles, to be known and read of all men, and changed from knowledge to knowledge and from glory to glory, through their active assistance as brethren, as saints, as ambassadors for God!

