

[R4399 : page 155]

## "COME OVER AND HELP US"

– ACTS 15:36; 16:15. – JULY 4. –

**Golden Text:** – "Come over into Macedonia and help us."  
– Acts 16:9.

TO-DAY'S lesson is connected with the introduction of the Gospel into Europe. After the conference at Jerusalem, noted in a previous lesson, Paul and Barnabas remained for a time at Antioch. But seeing that there were many laborers there and that a larger field was little worked, a second missionary journey was planned. Barnabas and his nephew John Mark went in one direction, while with St. Paul went Silas (Sylvanus), with whom he had become acquainted at the Jerusalem conference and who is reported to have been a Roman citizen, as was St. Paul. It is with this latter couple that we have to do in this lesson. Their course lay through Syria and Cilicia, Derbe and Lystra. In these places they confirmed the [R4399 : page 156] faith of such as had already been accepted of the Lord through the Apostle's first missionary tour, and the working of the Truth during the interim. It was at Lystra that Timothy was found, a young man of Jewish mother and well trained in the Scriptures by her and his grandmother – his father being a Greek. We note that amongst the things presented to the Churches was the decision of the Jerusalem conference that the Jewish Law should not be considered binding to the Gentiles, except in certain features noted in a former lesson.

After good success in the mission up to this point the Apostle had in mind a journey through Asia Minor, but apparently things went unfavorable until the Apostle concluded that the Lord was hindering their efforts and in perplexity began to think of other fields of labor. His moment of uncertainty was the Lord's opportunity for directing him. He dreamed that he saw

a man dressed in the costume of the Macedonians beckoning to him and saying, "Come over and help us." The Apostle accepted this as of Divine leading and promptly began the journey which took him into Europe. We have here an evidence of God's supervision of all the interests of his Church. He was not averse to permitting the message to go into Asia Minor, for it did go there later, possibly at a more opportune time. But this was the time for sending the message to Europe.

Evidently the Lord could have directed his message southward through Africa and away from Europe, but there is a "due time" connected with every feature of the Divine Plan – and now, by Divine arrangement, the message of God's grace in Christ was to go to the Greeks, who at this time were recognized as the foremost people of the world in literature and the arts.

It is supposed that it was about this time that Luke, the physician, became attached to Paul's company. A man of education, a scribe, as well as a physician, the Lord evidently provided him as St. Paul's amanuensis, that thereby the Apostle's letters should reach many of the Churches of that time, as well as the Lord's people from then until now. Thus it came that Luke wrote not only a version of the Gospel, but also the Book of Acts and nearly all of St. Paul's epistles. Here we have another illustration of the privileges of the various members of the Body of Christ. Luke could not be the Apostle Paul nor could he do St. Paul's work; but he could be used of the Lord honorably and efficiently in a greater spread of the Truth.

So it is with us. We cannot be apostles. We cannot do anything very great; but, if filled with the Spirit of the Lord, it is our privilege to be used to some extent in some service of the Truth. And any service for the Lord and for the brethren, even to the washing of feet and any menial service, is, as our Lord shows, honorable and a privilege.

## LYDIA OF THYATIRA

Philippi, one of the chief cities of Macedonia, in Greece, appears to have been the first place for the preaching of the good tidings in Europe. As usual, on the Sabbath day the Apostle and companions sought for some who worshiped God, who hoped for the Kingdom that God had promised, knowing that such would be the better prepared to receive the message he had to deliver; that Jesus had appeared as the Redeemer and had laid the foundation for the Millennial Kingdom in the sacrifice of himself; that the blessings of his sacrifice would ultimately be made available to every creature, but that now, in advance of the dealing with the world in general, the Lord is calling out a Spiritual Israel, a "little flock," to be his kings and priests with Jesus in the administration of the Millennial blessings.

Apparently there was no synagogue in Philippi, and matters may have looked very unfavorable to Paul and his companions. However, they heard of a little religious meeting held every Sabbath by the river side, outside the city gate. It was a prayer meeting principally and place of Divine fellowship. Not having the facilities of a synagogue they probably had no Scripture parchments, and hence no reading of the Law, but merely prayer and worship. All this was favorable to the Gospel message the Apostle had to present. He spoke to those who resorted thither, commending the importance of their worshipful condition of heart and the importance of praise to the Giver of all good. Then he proceeded to declare the good tidings of the sacrifice of Jesus, of his death and resurrection, and his Second Coming in power and great glory. He showed surely that the invitation now being given was for joint-sacrifices with Jesus whose reward would be joint-heirship with him in the Millennial Kingdom, as members of *his Body*, the Church.

However many or few were at the meeting there was one present whose heart was in the right condition to receive the message – a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple. Dyes were much more expensive in olden times than now and the secret knowledge of how to make them was turned to financial profit. Thus it is supposed that Lydia was in quite comfortable circumstances financially. Not only did the Truth open her heart, enlightening the eyes of her understanding, but she was prompt to obey it in full consecration; and prompt to symbolize that consecration in water baptism – "She and her household."

It is not always that religious parents have religiously inclined children. Several instances of the kind are mentioned in the Scriptures. Personal experience teaches us also that the parent who is earnestly consecrated to the Lord and guided by his Word has generally a good influence upon those nearest to him and directly under his care. Such an influence should be hoped for, prayed for, sought for by every parent. But it cannot be obtained except by carefulness, circumspection of word and deed. These in subjection imply that the very thoughts of the heart are brought into captivity to the will of God in Christ. Nevertheless parents who have failed to discern the Truth and recognize its responsibilities until their children have outgrown parental instruction must not chide themselves unmercifully if their children do not respect them and their religious convictions. Rather they should remember that the Lord is thoroughly acquainted with the situation and will hold them accountable only for what they do or do not after they have come to know him and to an opportunity for understanding the instructions of his Word respecting their own lives and the training of their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

### **"AND SHE CONSTRAINED US"**

The fact that Lydia's household believed implies that she was the mother of adult children. And these were so thoroughly

under her influence that they worshiped with her the true God, neglecting the idolatries prevalent in Philippi. We may infer that she was a widow, since her husband is not mentioned. Hence it was her right, without conference with anybody, to invite the Apostle and his companions to share the hospitality of her home. She seems properly to have realized that, instead of honoring them, she was honoring herself and her home by having such guests – the ministers of God, the brethren of Christ – under her roof. Note her language when inviting, "She besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us." The latter statement implies that the Apostle was not too ready to force himself upon anybody, that he did not urge, saying, Surely myself and companions who have preached to you should be served by you in temporalities – though **[R4400 : page 156]** that was the Truth. Rather the Apostle made no reference to temporalities. Indeed, after the suggestion of Lydia had been made it was apparently not too quickly accepted, but with the indication that the disciples of Jesus had no desire to intrude upon others. This is implied in the statement that they were "constrained," gradually drawn or led to accept invitation. How beautiful it is to see God's children wisely exercised in such matters! How much more is their influence upon one another for good! **[R4400 : page 157]**

This lesson may be considered as specially teaching Divine supervision of the true Gospel and its ministers. Yet how diversified God's dealings and how necessary that his children in ministering the Truth should have fullest confidence in his wisdom, love and power! Note the sharp contrast that, after specially guiding the apostles to this place and then to a very small meeting and apparently one family of converts, the Lord next allows what seems to be a great catastrophe to befall his faithful servants. This trial came through the evil spirits. A young woman, possessed (obsessed) by an evil spirit (one of the fallen

angels), was used for fortune-telling, etc., the spirit working through her, divining or giving intelligence of things that were lost, telling fortunes, etc. She was a slave girl and very profitable to her owners – a syndicate apparently of influential men.

For several days, as the Apostle and companions went to and from the home of Lydia attending to the Lord's work, this obsessed girl followed them, shouting in a loud voice, "These be the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." Of course, the girl did not know them, but the evil spirits knew them. To what extent they forecasted the results we may not definitely know, but quite possibly what occurred was what they had premeditated, namely, that the Apostle would cast out the evil spirit and that this would bring upon them and any converts a violent attack from the owners of the girl and their friends and all whom they could arouse to a frenzy of excitement, of wrath and rioting. Or the evil spirit may simply have told the truth without considering the possibility of the Apostle commanding it to come out of the woman – possibly supposing that they would be rather pleased with a testimony from any quarter. But we read that St. Paul was grieved as day after day this testimony was made. He was not grieved that a testimony was borne to the Truth, but grieved that it should come from such an evil source, for he knew that it would have no respect for the Truth; for any of the fallen angels who would have respect for God and the principles of righteousness would not seek to obsess humanity when it knew that it would be to their injury and contrary to the Divine will.

The S.S. teachers' instruction books will probably suggest to them that this woman had hysteria or was somewhat demented. But this is out of accord with the facts of the case, as Scripturally set forth, and quite contrary to the words of the Apostle. He said not a word to the young woman, assuming that she was not at all accountable. He addressed the evil spirit as

such, and commanded it in the name of Jesus to come out of the woman – just as Jesus and the apostles under his instruction had frequently cast out these spirits.

### **WITH A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION**

Just as the owners of the swine were angry with our Lord because of the loss of their swine, when the "legion" of demons cast out of the man entered the swine and the owner suffered loss, so here; while the Apostle and all who had proper hearts would rejoice that the woman was free from the evil spirit's power, her masters, who profited by her sad condition, were made angry. Their pocket-books were touched. They could not legally attack the Apostle because he had done the woman no harm. But they could have revenge and hence raised a riot, claiming that these men with the new religion were interfering with the rights of the people of Philippi, which was a Roman province in Greece.

And the Lord permitted all this; yea, permitted the rioting to reach considerable proportions. Paul and Silas were carried before the rulers at the market-place for the imposition of sentence. The rulers, who held office specially for the preventing of rioting and for preserving order, were greatly excited and rent their garments as an indication of their distress and dissatisfaction that such a disturbance should be brought to their city. The thought was that the men against whom the populace would thus rise up must be guilty of something and deserving of punishment. They knew not that the evil spirits had to do with the arousing of the riot. As St. Paul elsewhere expressed it, "We contend not with flesh and blood merely, but with wicked spirits in influential positions."

To satisfy the mob, to restore peace quickly, the missionaries were publicly beaten, presumably with rods, and then were committed to the prison. Alas, we say, what a reward

for missionary effort! What a recompense for sacrificing their lives for the Lord and the Truth – that these men should be evil-spoken of, evil thought of and evilly treated!

Let us remember that the God who *changes not* is our God, and has supervision of the interests of the Church to-day as then. Let us remember that he requires of us to-day, as of those missionaries, that we be willing to represent him, willing to endure hardness and thus to make full proof of our ministry – of our service for Christ and his message. Would it require faith on the part of the missionaries to accept such experiences as providential and not to think of them as evidences of the Lord's disfavor or neglect? So must we learn similar lessons of faith, in the School of Christ, and be glad to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and the apostles, and learn to rejoice in tribulations, as well as in prosperity.

=====