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THE BEREANS THE MORE NOBLE

– ACTS 17:1-15. – JULY 18 –

Golden Text: – "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." – Psa. 119:11.

LEAVING Philippi the missionaries, Paul, Silas and Timothy, went a journey of about one hundred miles to the southwest and stopped at the city of Thessalonica, made famous by the fact that two of St. Paul's epistles were addressed to the Christians of that city. En route they passed two cities, where apparently they found no opening for their message, no hearts prepared. Philippi was one of the few cities where the Gospel made any headway, that had not first come under the influence of Judaism to some extent. Evidently the scattering of the Jews throughout this region had more or less acquainted their neighbors with the true God and the observance of his laws and respect for his revelations and for the promised Messiah.

At Thessalonica the missionaries found a Jewish synagogue and, in harmony with their usual custom, they attended worship there and for three Sabbath days they [R4408 : page 169] reasoned with the attendants from the Scriptures. The word here rendered *reasoned* implied a dialogue or discussion. The Apostle discussed the Bible with the Jews. This form of preaching the Gospel, which has fallen considerably into disuse amongst Christians, is an excellent one. We have endeavored to revive it amongst the friends of Present Truth everywhere by specially commending to them the Berean Studies and such discussions of the Word with the aid of helps. The effect is excellent. In this way many obtain clearer conceptions of the Truth than they would get from any ordinary discourse. True, the "Pilgrims" usually deliver discourses, because their visits are but occasional. But even these we urge to give in each place at least one sample of a properly-

conducted Berean Study, that the dear friends may become accustomed to this early method of indoctrination.

This method of discussion was usual with the Jews, but they needed just what the Lord sent them in the Apostle, namely, some one to explain the Scriptures, some one to answer their questions and to show them and to help them to find the answers to their own questions in the Scriptures. So to-day it is important that a Berean Study have a wise and an intelligent leader, of sufficiently humble mind to be worthy of the Truth himself and to be willing to call attention to it through whatever channels the Lord may be willing to use for its dissemination. Not only is it true that "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall," but it is also true that pride blinds the mental vision and hinders many from being able to see the Truth who otherwise might be burning and shining lights – showing forth true light. Instead, many are so anxious to shine forth a light of their own that they get between the people and the true light. The Lord is willing to help us to humble ourselves in proportion as we are diligent for his service, willing to be nothing ourselves and careful to recognize as leaders only such as hold forth the words of life without seeking undue prominence for themselves in the Church.

IT BEHOVED CHRIST TO SUFFER AND TO RISE

After telling us that St. Paul reasoned or discussed with the Jews the Gospel message something of his method is explained; namely, he opened the Scriptures to them, explaining what they had not previously noted respecting the fact that it was necessary for Christ to suffer (death) and to rise from the dead before he could be the King promised. The Jews knew of the Scriptures which **[R4408 : page 170]** referred to his sufferings, but they ignored them and grasped only those which referred to our Lord's Millennial reign of glory, honor and power. The Apostle showed

the connecting links – that death reigned over the race through the power of sin inbred, ingrained, and was in harmony with the Divine sentiments, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." He showed that none could be released from this condition without a Redeemer. Messiah would indeed reign over his Kingdom, the world, but previously a redemption must take place, a lifting of the curse. Then he produced the facts of Jesus' death, the Just for the unjust, and that his resurrection was exactly what was declared by the prophets, and the necessary thing, for him to carry out in due time the foretold blessing of Israel under the New Covenant and the blessing of the world through Israel. He showed that first, however, an elect class must be gathered to be associated with the Lord in his Kingdom and that these must demonstrate their worthiness by laying down their lives in his service in consecration. The sum of his argument was, "This Jesus whom I preach unto you is the Messiah."

Some of the Jews believed the message and took sides with Paul and Silas, but evidently only a minority. With them were some devout Greeks, quite a number also of prominent women. The division time had come. The "wheat" amongst the Jews in Thessalonica must be separated from the "chaff" class, as elsewhere; they were being gathered into the Gospel garner, into the spirit dispensation. They were being transferred from Moses to Christ, from natural Israel to the new Spiritual Israel, called to be a "royal priesthood, a peculiar people," for a Divine purpose.

Of course, only a minority of the Jews were in a proper attitude of heart to receive the good tidings, and the effect upon the remainder was to embitter them, because the arguments were too strong for them and because, not being humble-minded, but proud-spirited, they became jealous of the success achieved by these strangers who had been in the city but a few weeks and who, nevertheless, had already made considerable impression upon

Gentiles, whom they had been unable to influence and to convert to Judaism.

Having no truthful argument, no logic wherewith they could overcome the arguments of the missionaries, the unbelieving Jews resorted to Satan's usual tactics of misrepresentation, slander, arousing prejudice, hatred, malice, etc. They incited an uproar in the city – a mob, which made an assault upon the house of Jason, with whom the missionaries were lodging. Not finding the missionaries, the mob, under leadership, took Jason and other believers before the magistrates, saying, "These that have turned the world upside down have come here also." Jason has received them, and thus is a participant in their wrong doing. They are traitors to this government and its honorable Emperor Caesar, for they teach another King called Jesus.

This was almost the exact charge made against our Redeemer when he was brought to Pilate's judgment bar. And there was a measure of Truth in it, for the Caesars not only claimed to be civil rulers of the world, but also claimed the title *Pontifex Maximus*, or chief religious ruler. While the Kingdom that Jesus and the apostles preached is a heavenly one, a spiritual one, the message includes the thought that in due time this heavenly rule or authority would be extended to the affairs of earth and Messiah's Kingdom be world-wide – under the whole heavens. We can readily see how such a proclamation might be construed as treasonable from the world's standpoint, but surely the Jews had no excuse for using their influence along these lines, for they well knew that all the hopes and promises in which their nation rejoiced led up to just such a Kingdom hope. Nevertheless, their pride and hatred blinded them to the injustice of their course, when they incited the heathen multitude.

It will not at all surprise us if, in the near future, we should be similarly charged with treason because we preach "the

Kingdom of God's dear Son" about to be established in power and great glory; and that its establishment will take place in the midst of a period of social distress and anarchy. It will not surprise us, either, if false Christians (Christians not in the proper attitude of heart to receive the message of Present Truth) should be the very ones to incite the multitudes and the rulers against us.

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

This charge was made by the Jews. They realized that there was a conflict on between Judaism and Christianity, and that wherever the two came in contact there could be naught else than a clash and conflict, and one or the other be turned upside down. Similarly, some of those who at present are blinded to Present Truth rail at us, using almost the same language. And the truthfulness of the assertions cannot be controverted. The Gospel of Christ did create differences in the Jewish system then, as the Gospel Truth is doing now in Christendom. And this is what Jesus foretold when he said, "Think not that I have come to send peace upon the earth. I have come to send a sword. A man's foes shall be they of his own household." Our experiences, like the experiences of the apostles, corroborate the Truth of our Lord's statement. An irrepressible conflict is on. However, had the Jews only properly understood the matter they need not have given themselves such concern, but might have known that comparatively few would accept the message of the Gospel – the few going out from them would scarcely be missed.

And so it is today. Our dear friends in the various denominations are fearful that Present Truth will capture their people by the wholesale. But they are mistaken. It will take only the select, the "elect," and leave the remainder. The wheat are comparatively few in proportion to the tares. And only the wheat is being gathered. The tares must be left in the bundles – in sectarian bodies. And it is better so. They must not in any manner

get in amongst the wheat ready for the garner – the separation amongst the wheat and the tares should not, and could not, take place in the past, but must and will take place now in the harvest of this Age.

This attack upon Jason and others apparently was not permitted of the Lord until the work of propagation had been well accomplished and those who had an ear to hear had a good opportunity to hear the message. The rulers of Thessalonica put Jason and the other believers under bonds to guarantee against a certain forfeit of money or property that these Christian missionaries should raise no further disturbance. As a result Paul and Silas realized that their work at Thessalonica was at an end and that they must not jeopardize the interests of the cause and their friends by their further public utterances. Paul agreed that they should leave the city quietly, secretly.

"THEY SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY"

The next stopping place was Berea, and there, as usual, the missionaries went first to the synagogue. They were agreeably surprised to find the Jews at that place so honest-hearted. We read, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Many of them, therefore, believed – Jews and Greeks, men and women. Here is a suggestion to us – to all. We should have a judgment and conviction respecting the Divine Word, but it should not be so unreasonable a one as would hinder us from receiving a further knowledge from the same source. We are to try the spirits, the teachings, the doctrines.

This does not signify, however, that we "are to be blown about by every wind of doctrine." We should know in whom we have believed and having once been convinced we should not be easily turned aside from a properly grounded faith. If we are

satisfied that we have been building upon the Rock Foundation furnished us in the Divine Revelation we should expect that any further light coming to us would not be contradictory to [R4409 : page 171] that which we have received and found Scriptural and harmonious with the Divine character. We should expect that all further light from the Divine Word would be consistent with the foundations of our faith. Anything that would set aside or make valueless the first principles of the doctrines of Christ should be promptly rejected.

If, for instance, anyone attempted to prove to us that we were justified by faith in a Covenant we should promptly reject it and assure him that we were justified by faith in the precious blood of Christ and that the substitution of a Covenant for the blood would be setting aside the very foundations for our faith, upon which we have been building. Similarly all doctrines which ignore the fall of man and, therefore, ignore or deny that he was created perfect and in the likeness of God should be set aside because, if the fall of man be denied, the redemption is necessarily denied and everything else built upon that doctrine of redemption. As a matter of fact, the various religious theories of the world require very little thought or study on the part of any Christian who has built his faith, not upon human traditions, but upon the Word of the Lord. The doctrine of the Ransom, that Christ died for our sins and that we have forgiveness through faith in his blood, and reconciliation thus to God will generally prove, test, decide, the various new doctrines presented to us and show us quickly that they are not of God, nor in harmony with the Divine Plan, of which the Cross of Christ is the center.

We must be on guard even in respect to doctrines which acknowledge the precious blood. And a clear discernment of the Divine Plan is necessary to this end, and this implies the searching of the Scriptures daily. It is not sufficient that we have used the Divinely provided helps. We are to remember that our memories

are treacherous and that if we are not imbibing the Word in some form we are apt to lose valuable connecting links, leaving us open to some of our great Adversary's covert attacks.

PERSECUTED IN EVERY CITY

If the missionaries of the Cross were vigilant and earnest, so were the servants of error. The Jews of Thessalonica learned that the missionaries were at Berea and forthwith began to foment strife and to raise a disturbance amongst the people. The missionaries concluded that this was a sign that they should move forward. Let us consider how much we might gain by following such a course! Let us be on the alert to watch for the leadings of the Lord's providence and, while not fleeing persecution in the ordinary sense, be ready to move when persecution seems inevitable and when apparently it might be considered as an indication from the Lord that he had service for us in some other field of labor. "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another." Thus persecuted St. Paul went next to Athens and thither Silas and Timothy followed him later.

"THY WORD HAVE I HID IN MINE HEART"

The Golden Text reminds us that not only the Word of the Lord is necessary as a guide to a knowledge of him, but that it is valuable to us and necessary, after we have found the Lord and become members of his family, begotten of the holy Spirit. Moreover it is necessary that we do more than know about the Scriptures and have an appreciation of their teachings. We must get their Truths into our hearts. There are certain points which underlie the Divine Law and all of its regulations bearing upon us, and these points cannot be comprehended at once. Day by day as we persevere in the study of the Truth, as we meditate upon God's Law by day and by night, we come to clearer views of these great principles of Truth – Justice, Love and Wisdom – which underlie all of the Divine Government. In proportion as we attain this

attitude of heart and mind we know the Lord not only in the sense of appreciating his glorious character, but in the sense that we are enabled to put those points into operation in our daily lives – in our deeds, our words, our thoughts. Whoever does not attain to this heart appreciation of the Divine arrangements will be sure to sin against the Lord, to keep his Covenant of consecration imperfectly and those who so do will fail to gain the highest prize, if, indeed, they be accounted worthy of eternal life upon any plane of being.

Let us then not only search the Scriptures daily and obtain intellectual appreciation of the Divine character, but let us meditate upon these eternal verities in our hearts. Let us familiarize ourselves with these points of Divine Government. Let us come more and more into sympathy with them – come into fullest harmony with our Creator and his requirements!

