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## "I HAVE MUCH PEOPLE IN THIS CITY"

– ACTS 18:1-22. – AUGUST 1. –

**Golden Text:** – "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." – John 16:33.

ST. PAUL made but a brief stay at Athens, the Lord's providence guiding him to Corinth. Silas had remained for a time at Berea, and Timothy at Thessalonica, and later he returned to Philippi. Meantime St. Paul was apparently considerably cast down. His epistle to the Corinthians, written later on, clearly implies his discouragement and possible sickness. He wrote, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." (1 Cor. 2:3.) His rough experiences at Philippi, his small success at Athens, the slenderness of his purse, and his need of fellowship, contributed to make him rather downcast, and he informs us that the Lord encouraged him with a vision. Soon after his arrival at Corinth he found Aquilla and Priscilla his wife. They were tent-makers, and this being Paul's trade (as every Jewish youth was required to learn a trade) he abode and labored with them. Of this period of his affliction he wrote to the Thessalonians, "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you, in all our affliction and distress, by your faith." (1 Thess. 3:7.) And later he wrote of his experience to the Corinthians, saying, "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." – 1 Cor. 4:11-13.

Many of us can find a lesson in St. Paul's experiences. If God permitted him to be in want, to be traduced, slandered, oppressed – if he needed such experiences in order to bring out the best that

was in him and to make his epistles the more useful to the Church, possibly the Lord's dealings with us at times may be with the same end in view – our preparation for further usefulness in his service.

### **PAUL WAS PRESSED IN SPIRIT**

Notwithstanding all of his discouragements and the fact that his tent-making labors barely sufficed to provide for him things decent and honorable, he never forgot that his chief mission in life was the preaching of the Gospel. If the earning of his daily bread hindered his preaching during the week he at least took his Sabbath days for the more important work when he could reach a congregation of the Jews. We read that he reasoned with them in the synagogue every Sabbath day. But apparently he was under a measure of constraint and did not speak in his usual boldness and vigor, perhaps because of the lack of moral support, which is an important factor with all and an essential to many. But finally Silas and Timothy arrived, bringing with them not only good fellowship and encouraging news from Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi, but also, as the Apostle tells us, a gift – quite probably from Lydia, the seller of purple dyes, supposed to have been comfortably circumstanced. The effect of these encouragements is intimated. Paul was pressed in spirit – he felt a fresh vigor urging him to still more vigorously present his message and bring matters to a focus and crisis at the synagogue. After testifying with great boldness and finding his message repelled by the majority of the synagogue, St. Paul forced the crisis himself by shaking his garment as though he would not even take from them the dust, saying to those who had opposed and blasphemed, "Your **[R4416 : page 185]** blood be upon your own heads. I am clean. From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." There are times when positiveness is absolutely necessary, even though it cause a division amongst those who profess to serve the same

God. There are times when much more good can be obtained thus than by a continuance under disadvantageous conditions.

The same is true today. Oil and water will not mix, and time spent in trying to blend them is altogether wasted. When positive bitterness and hatred are manifested, as in the case under consideration, it is better to withdraw. But neither the Apostle nor we would recognize as proper or at all allowable that the Lord's people should quarrel and take offense one with the other over trifles unworthy of consideration. The shaking off of the dust was not only what our Lord suggested but a custom of the time, a warning as it were, that the Apostle felt that he had discharged his entire duty and left the responsibility upon their own shoulders.

The effect was good in two ways. It helped Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, to take a decided stand, whereas otherwise he might have been stunted in his spiritual development. Crispus decided for the Lord Jesus and took his stand with the Apostle and a few others. Secondly, the fact that the Jews had repudiated the Apostle and his message would draw the attention of the Gentiles more particularly to his Gospel. And some of these already believed. The new meetings were held in the home of Justus, a reverent man who resided near the synagogue. Thus Paul's message in the synagogue would continually remind the Jews as they attended this synagogue worship and would be a continual invitation to them to come in and hear more respecting the fulfilment of the prophecies in Jesus. The result was that a considerable number of the Corinthians accepted God's grace and were baptised, thus symbolizing their consecration. Let us, too, learn that opposition is not necessarily an injurious thing to the Lord's cause. It is safe to say that a most dangerous condition is the stagnant one.

Evidently the Lord saw that his servant Paul needed some special encouragement at this time and hence another vision was granted in which he was told, "Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to harm thee, for I have much people in this city."

What an insight this gives us to the Divine supervision of the Gospel message and its servants! How these words remind us of the promise that the Lord will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will, with every temptation, provide also a way of escape! That vision and its message, we may be sure, was not for the Apostle merely, but for us also and for all of the Lord's people from that time until now. The same God is rich unto all that call upon him and able to shield and to deliver all of his servants and will allow them only such experiences as his infinite wisdom sees will be advantageous to his cause, and work out for his servants a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The Lord's statement that he had much people in Corinth teaches us a lesson also. It shows that the Lord knows the hearts of all – and has a care, not only for his saints, but also for those who have not yet heard of and received his grace, but whose hearts are in a favorable attitude of honesty, sincerity. A further lesson comes to us in this connection. We are to remember that the Lord is his own superintendent of missions and is able and willing to guide his consecrated servants, not only as to direction and place of service, but also as respects the time they shall remain to accomplish his will and the character of the experiences it will be necessary for them to have in order best to accomplish his purposes. The more our faith can grasp this situation, the more we can rely upon the Lord and use his wisdom instead of our own; the more successful will we be as his servants; and the more happy and contented; because realizing that all things are working together for good to us and **[R4417 : page 185]** for all who are his, submitted to his guiding care.

## A YEAR AND SIX MONTHS TEACHING

Corinth was nicknamed the Vanity Fair of the World, because it was a center of frivolity, pleasure-seeking, etc. It is credited with having been one of the most licentious and profligate cities of its day. It may at first seem very strange to us that this vilest of the great cities should yield larger spiritual results than any other, so that the Lord would specially specify that he had "much people" there and would providentially detain his ambassador there a year and a half, while in other places he had been permitted to remain only a few days or a few weeks. The philosophy of the matter seems to be this: Outward morality frequently leads to a pharisaical spirit of self-righteousness, which is most pernicious and a deadly foe to true righteousness. On the other hand, where sin stands out glaringly it has a repulsive effect upon the pure in heart, upon all who love righteousness, and this repulsion from the evil seems to prepare such hearts the better for a genuine consecration to the Lord and for his message. This theory holds good, at least in the missionary work at Corinth, as in contrast with that of places much more respectable in reputation.

The lesson for us in this connection is that we should be on guard in our own hearts against this self-righteous spirit of outward observance, which lacks true holiness, true sanctification. Is it not along this line that the Lord found fault with one of the seven Churches, saying, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth? Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Rev. 3:16,17.) This is our Lord's charge against the present state of the Church, so rich in earthly advantages, so rich in spiritual privileges, so self-satisfied. Let us be on guard lest in any manner or to any

degree such a lukewarmness should come over us and we come under Divine disfavor.

### **"BE OF GOOD CHEER"**

Our Lord's words in the Golden Text should comfort us, as they have comforted his people for the past eighteen centuries: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." There is no suggestion that we can escape similar tribulation. Indeed, if we escape the sufferings of Christ we will be denied a share in his coming glories. Hence, we should not desire to escape tribulation, but rather go on courageously; nevertheless, not too boastfully, not too courageously, but in meekness, in fear, in trust of the Lord's promises that he has overcome and is able to succor us in temptation's hour, and will do so if we but abide in his love and seek his protection. It is in view of this promised aid that we are exhorted to "be of good cheer." "Greater is he that is for us than all they that be against us." Not only will victory be ours, but, more than this, it is ours already. "Nothing shall by any means hurt you." What may seem to others to be injurious to us, must, under Divine supervision, work out blessings.

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