

[R4466 : page 265]

"THE WILL OF THE LORD BE DONE"

– ACTS 21:1-17. – *SEPTEMBER 12.* –

THIS lesson indicates to us how the Apostle and others of the early Church were subjected to difficulties, disappointments and opposition, as we of today are. The fact that the Lord's power was with them, the gifts of tongues, of miracles, of healing, the casting out of devils, etc., was offset by the other fact that their course of life was not, by any means, smooth. Even when on missions of mercy and peace, even when not doing evangelistic work, they were directly battling with the Adversary and his forces of darkness. Leaving Miletus, St. Paul and his companions were dependent on natural laws and regulations. No swift yacht happened [R4466 : page 266] to sight them and take them on board and carry them to their destination. Instead, they were obliged to take a cargo sailboat, which stopped here and there in the interest of its business, quite regardless of the important Jew and his eight companions aboard. Truly surprised will some of these sailors be when, by and by, during the Millennium, they will come forth and be brought to a knowledge of the Truth and learn that once they had the privilege of carrying the noble St. Paul. We may be sure that any acts of kindness performed to him or his companions will be duly remembered and rewarded, in harmony with our Lord's promise that a reward shall be given to those who give even a cup of cold water to even one of the least of his disciples.

We are to remember that "the world knoweth us not, even as it knew him not." If humble of mind we shall not expect great things for ourselves or special attentions from those with whom we are in company – nor from the Lord should we expect miracles. Rather we should esteem that a miracle of the Lord's grace is manifested in us – in the favor which has brought to us

the good tidings and the privilege of being its servants – ambassadors of God. Besides, under these conditions, walking by faith and not by sight, we shall doubtless make better progress as New Creatures in character development than if the Lord carried us along on flowery beds of ease without storm, without opposition, without difficulties. The difficulties call forth faith and draw our hearts to the great Fountain of blessing, and thus are amongst the "all things" working for our spiritual welfare.

While the ship was unloading her cargo at Tyre, St. **[R4467 : page 266]** Paul and his companions looked up some of the Truth people, with whom they had evidently a special season of fellowship during the seven days of waiting. This reminds us of how the Lord's followers in the present time love to meet the Pilgrims on their journeys and how the Pilgrims with yearning hearts seek for those who know and love the Redeemer, "Even as many as the Lord our God has called." Here the Apostle got a message from some of his friends urging him not to go to Jerusalem; but he continued his journey, nevertheless. When leaving the friends of Tyre, men, women and children accompanied them to the ship, for the city evidently was at a little distance from the dock. Then on the beach together, in communion with the Lord and with each other, they asked a blessing upon those who went and upon those who remained. How this reminds us further of present experiences and the love, the fellowship, the interest which we have in each other – stronger than any earthly tie!

A stop of another day afforded another opportunity to meet the brethren at Ptolemais – another One Day Convention, we may be sure! The next stopping place was at Caesarea, at the home of Philip, the Evangelist, who was one of the seven deacons chosen at Jerusalem – the martyr Stephen being another of the seven selected for the care of the temporalities of the Church at the time when an unsuccessful attempt at communism was permitted of

the Lord as a demonstration of the inexpediency of such an arrangement in the Church.

Incidentally, it is mentioned that Philip had four virgin daughters "which did prophecy," but just what is signified by this we may not surely know. We are not to assume hastily that these four young women were public teachers in the Church, in the face of the Apostle's clear statements on the subject. They may have had some public occupation along the lines of public speaking or teaching – possibly they were school teachers. The teaching of that time was not, as now, through the study of books, but by oral presentations or prophecy. We prefer to understand the passage in this light and in harmony with the general teaching of the Scriptures, which everywhere commits to the brethren the public teaching in the Church.

"SONS AND DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY"

The marginal reference in our common Bible identifies this reference to these four virgins with the prophecy of Joel, "Your sons and daughters shall prophecy; your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." We see no connection between the prophecy and this statement respecting Philip's four daughters. Indeed, there is not even a suggestion that they had made a consecration of themselves to the Lord or received the holy Spirit. The fact that they were virgins would imply nothing of this kind. Incidentally, it may be well for us here to point out in few words what we do understand the words of the Prophet Joel to signify.

St. Peter identifies the prophecy as a whole with the Pentecostal blessing upon the Church ten days after our Lord's ascension. This does not mean, however, that the prophecy was fulfilled as a whole there. St. Peter says this which they witnessed was that, or a portion of that of which the Prophet Joel spake. Is there any indication that the holy Spirit was poured out upon the

sons and daughters of believers at Pentecost? None whatever! It came only upon the consecrated believers themselves. Do all the young Christians who receive the holy Spirit have special experiences in seeing visions? And do all old, experienced Christians have special experiences in dreaming dreams? Assuredly not! Properly not! The prophecy divides into two parts; one relating to this Gospel Age and the other relating to the Millennial Age. The Lord hid the understanding of the matter to some extent by referring to the Millennial Age blessings first and to this Age and its blessings afterward.

The two ages and their blessings are distinguished, therefore, by the expressions, "In those days," as signifying the Gospel Age, and "After those days," as signifying the Millennial Age. We are still in the Gospel Age, styled "In those days." And we still have the blessings promised in this Age, namely, the bestowment of the holy spirit upon God's servants and handmaidens regardless of age, sex or national distinction. This blessing began at Pentecost and will close with the anointing of the last member of the Body of Christ. Then will begin the other part of the blessed promise, namely, "After those days I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." This blessing surely does not apply to the present time; and just as surely it will have fulfilment under the ministration of the Millennial Kingdom. Then will come the time when "Your sons and your daughters shall prophecy," shall teach. That will not be a teaching *in* the Church, nor *of* the Church, but a teaching of the world by the world, under the supervision of the glorified Christ on the spirit plane, and the perfected Ancient Worthies on the human plane as the earthly representatives of the heavenly Kingdom.

Now notice the expression, "Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions." We prefer a different translation, which, we believe, gives the intended thought, namely, "Your young men will see the glorious visions

(of Restitution, blessings, etc., in process of fulfilment) of which your ancient men dreamed (the things respecting which they vaguely hoped and dimly understood and greatly longed for)."

"WEEP AND BREAK MINE HEART"

Agabus was possessed of the spirit of prophecy, after the manner of the ancient prophets, so that he foretold future events. He was well known to the Church. It was he who had prophesied the great famine throughout the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. (Acts 11:28.) He came to Caesarea while St. Paul was there, and, taking St. Paul's girdle, bound his own hands and feet and declared that the holy Spirit testified that thus the Jews at Jerusalem would bind St. Paul, the owner of the girdle, and deliver him to the Gentiles. This prophecy was fully in harmony with other predictions of harm to the Apostle. No wonder, then, that his friends who accompanied him and others at Caesarea urged him to forego the visit and thus escape the harm indicated to be performed if he went. Ordinarily we would have supposed that the advice was good and that it were not wise to go into difficulty. But St. Paul apparently had some other advice from the Lord, **[R4467 : page 267]** under which he was operating – something compulsory upon him, which led him to brave anything to fulfil his duty. We are not to think of the Apostle as stoically, coldly going into this trouble. Such a thought is dismissed when we notice his reply to his insistent friends. Full of feeling for them, as well as for himself, he replied, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Heroic words! Noble sentiments! Faithfulness personified!

Evidently the Lord was testing the Apostle, developing in him character, stability, faithfulness. Not that he did not have these qualities before, but that all these experiences would tend

to deepen and fix that character. He intimates to us that he went to Jerusalem under a vow, under some solemn pledge to the Lord, in faithful performance of some duty. The question now was, Would he keep this vow? Would he fulfil the obligation or would he be turned aside from it by fear of what man might do to him or by the entreaties of friends? We rejoice in the Apostle's spirit, in his faithfulness, his courage. Since he understood it to be the Lord's will that he should go to Jerusalem, he knew that the Father would overrule all things, in harmony with the counsel of his own will.

Apparently his visit to Jerusalem was opportune, we might say necessary, to the cementing of the "household of faith," and to the assisting of some of them to a clearer position in regard to the obligations of the Law and the liberty from the Law to those who accepted Christ. Besides, from this place the Lord had ordained that the Apostle should go to Rome to declare his name there also, in the political capital of the world; and that he should first declare the Gospel to Agrippa and Festus and other notables, and through them be called to the special attention of the Emperor and others in authority at Rome. It was quite proper that the Apostle's friends desisted from further entreaty. First, because they recognized that he was doing the will of the Lord; and because, in the second place, further effort would evidently fail to move him from his purpose – prove fruitless. Third, because they were making it still harder for him to bear, breaking his heart.

Let us all remember that all of the Lord's special dealings with his people during this Gospel Age are with a view to developing them in character, not only good character, but fixed character. It is not sufficient that we accept Christ, nor sufficient that we should preach him to others. To be fit for the heavenly Kingdom we must develop characters in harmony with our Lord – gentle, yet firm; sweet, yet strong. This is signified in the terms

of our discipleship. We are to copy our Teacher, who is also our Redeemer. We are to let his light shine. It is important that we see this fact. The difficulty apparently with the majority of people is that they do not see and do not understand the purpose of life; hence valuable opportunities and precious lessons are wasted upon them.

Mr. Marden has recently said, "I know a man whose accomplishments have been the marvel of all who knew him, who in his boyhood made the resolution: 'Let every occasion be the great occasion, for you cannot tell when fate may be taking your measure for a larger place.' If he was in school, he kept thinking, 'I must not skip the hard problems, for they may rise up in my manhood [R4468 : page 267] and testify against my faithfulness as a boy, and may defeat me. I must see an opportunity in every lesson and cultivate a habit of overcoming, a habit of faithfulness and accuracy.'"

This is merely an elaboration of what the Good Book says, "Do with thy might what thy hand findeth to do, for there is neither wisdom nor knowledge nor device in the grave whither thou goest." And again, "He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is greater."

Difficulties in the way would not prove that it is not the right way. Bunyan's Pilgrim, in traveling toward the heavenly city, found the Hill of Difficulty in his way. And our Lord forewarned all who would walk in his steps that their pathway must, of necessity, be full of tribulation – testings. The reward is to them that overcome. There could be no overcoming unless there were difficulties.

HOW TO DECIDE THE LORD'S WILL

The Apostle does not tell us the basis of his confidence in doing the will of the Lord in going to Jerusalem, but we may be

sure that he had substantial reasons for believing that he was walking in the Lord's way. His entire character shows us that he would be too cautious, as well as too faithful, to go in any direction contrary to the Divine will.

As to how we may decide as to what is and what is not the Lord's way for us, we find that the rule which George Mueller tells us he followed is so nearly the one which we follow ourself that we take pleasure in quoting it: –

"I seek in the beginning to get my heart in such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, whatever it may be. Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If I do so, I make myself liable to a great delusion. I seek the will or Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone, without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the holy Spirit guides us at all, he will do it according to the Scriptures, and never contrary to them. Next, I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God's will, in connection with his Word and his Spirit. I ask God in prayer to reveal his will to me aright. Thus by the prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to deliberate judgment according to the best of my knowledge and opportunity, and, if my mind is thus at peace, I proceed accordingly."

HIGHLY HONORED MASON

In due time the Apostle and his companions started for Jerusalem. We read, "We took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem." This word carriages is not now generally in use. It is old English and signifies baggage or luggage; bag, baggage; lug, luggage; carry, carriage.

Mnason of Cyprus, for a long while a disciple, with whom the travelers lodged at Jerusalem, met the travelers at Caesarea and with some of the brethren at the latter place accompanied them to Jerusalem. They were a happy company of probably a dozen, yet a fearful company, in view of their expectation that something would surely befall their beloved Brother, the Apostle Paul – because, "If one member of the Body suffer, all the members suffer with it." Arrived at the home of Mnason still other brethren welcomed them, though the regular meeting and official greeting did not come until later through St. James, who seems to have been the chief or spokesman amongst the brethren.

Mnason evidently appreciated his guests and enjoyed the privilege of their entertainment. But how much his joy must have been subsequently enhanced we can only imagine. The future years of the Apostle's life, his prominence before the Church, the blessings that went from him to all in a public way, must have been with him, also, in the course of daily life and have blessed its amenities. While it was a great honor to entertain the Lord, as Lazarus and Mary and Martha did at Bethany; a great honor to entertain the Apostle as Mnason did, it is also a great honor today to entertain any of the Lord's disciples, whether weak and little or notable in the eyes of the world. Every Christian must have this desire, if he have the brotherly love. And each one who entertains a prophet may expect a prophet's reward – a reward in proportion to the honor of the prophet in the sight of our Great King, whose ambassadors **[R4468 : page 268]** we all are. While it would be far greater honor, in one sense, to entertain the Lord himself than to entertain any of his brethren, nevertheless personal attention to our Redeemer being impossible he has assured us that he will accept any and everything done to the least of his brethren, as done to himself.

BE PATIENT, BRETHREN

We sometimes wonder why our Lord doth place us
Within a sphere so narrow, so obscure:
That nothing we call work can find an entrance;
There's only room to suffer, to endure.

Well, God loves patience! Souls that dwell in stillness,
Doing the little things or restful quite,
May just as perfectly fulfil this mission;
Be just as useful in the Father's sight,

As they who grapple with some great evil,
Clearing a path that every eye may see,
Our Saviour cares for cheerful acquiescence
As much as for a busy ministry.

And yet he does love service – where it is given
By grateful love that clothes itself in deed;
But work that's done beneath the scourge of duty,
Be sure to such he gives but little heed.

Christ never asks of us such heavy labor
As leaves no time for resting at his feet;
The waiting attitude of expectation –
He oftentimes counts a service most complete.

He sometimes wants our ear – our rapt attention –
That he some sweetest secret may impart.
'Tis always in the time of deepest stillness
That heart finds deepest fellowship with heart.

Then seek to please him, whatsoe'er he bids thee –
Whether to do, to suffer, to lie still;
'Twill matter little by what path he led us

If in it all we sought to do his will.

J. C. LARDENT.

