

A SOLDIER OF THE CROSS

– 2 TIMOTHY 4:7. – *DECEMBER 19.* –

Golden Text: – "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

WAS there ever a nobler soldier of the Cross than St. Paul – the Redeemer alone excepted? Soldiers of fortune and patriots have indeed left their marks in the world and on the pages of history, but not one of them has left so indelible a mark as St. Paul. The motive power influencing others has generally been selfishness. But the motive power of the Christian is the reverse – love. Others hazarded and laid down their lives in self-interest, or in the interest of their kin or tongue. St. Paul, copying his Master, laid down his life for Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, to assist in gathering the "elect" to be the Bride of Christ – that ultimately through the glorified King and his glorified Bride, all the families of the earth may receive the blessing which God waits to give to "all the families of the earth, through Abraham's Seed." – Gal. 3:29.

St. Paul's courageous life reminds us of the words of the poet:

–

"Be not like dumb, driven cattle,
Be a hero in the strife."

God is seeking only for heroes now. By and by he will deal with the remainder, helpfully. The "elect" must all be courageous, "conformed to the image of his Son" – heroes. Hence the promises to the Church are "to him that overcometh." And let us remember that Scripturally considered this character which the Lord seeks may be developed in very humble stations – the butcher, the baker,

the machinist, the housewife, the washer-woman – all these may develop the overcoming qualities which the Lord will reward.

When writing the words of our study St. Paul realized that the close of his career was near – his course was finished.

He recognized as a Christian that he had certain lessons to learn in the School of Christ and this was a part of his course of preparation for joint-heirship with Christ in the glories of the Millennial Kingdom. The course included not merely theory, but also practice. He not only theoretically learned about Christ, but experimentally. He became a partaker with him in the sufferings of this present time. And sympathetically he was permitted to enter into a large degree of knowledge of the "mystery" of the Divine Plan hidden from the world.

Not only had his own course of instruction been a thorough one, but he had been given a post-graduate course as an ambassador for his Lord and Redeemer and as an Apostle for the brethren, the Church. Moreover, he recognized the fact that all such as became members of the Body of Christ are so directly under the Divine supervision and regulations that their times are in God's hand – all of their affairs of life, temporal and spiritual. As the Master's death could not occur "until his hour was come," so likewise it is with his consecrated members.

He had kept the faith and the faith had kept him. Many do not realize how important are knowledge and a correct faith. "My people perish for lack of knowledge" is the Lord's testimony. And their faith can keep pace only with their knowledge, for faith must have a basis. A correct life depends greatly upon a correct faith. Why did our forefathers burn one another at the stake in a diabolical manner? Because they were governed by error. False doctrines, styled by the Apostle "doctrines of devils," had been presented to them and they had believed them. And the legitimate outcome of the wrong belief, the wrong faith, was wrong doing.

Believing that God purposed the torture of his creatures for **[R4533 : page 375]** centuries in Purgatory or for untellable millions of years in eternal torment, they copied the misconception of the Almighty in their lives, to our horror.

But St. Paul had kept the faith – the true faith once delivered unto the saints – faith in the Redeemer's sacrifice; faith in its application on our behalf; faith in our justification by the Father on that account; faith in the glorious promises of God's Word; faith in the Lord and faith in the brethren. Surely it means something to keep the faith – especially when **[R4534 : page 375]** we realize that our great Adversary, Satan, is on the alert continually to take it from us or turn or twist it to our loss or injury.

The crown mentioned, the Apostle had seen for many years with the eye of his faith as a part of the Lord's promise. He had absolute confidence in the Lord and in the promise he had received from him. That crown had been his cause of rejoicing for many years, not because of pride or ambition, but because of love and benevolence. He would love to receive that crown because it would be the mark of Divine appreciation and love for him; and a mark of his faithfulness. He esteemed it because it would afford him untold opportunity of blessing his fellowmen in association with his Lord and the brethren on the plane of glory during the Millennium.

He hoped for this crown, but did not hope to receive it at death. He knew the Bible teaching on the subject of resurrection – that this was his God's provision for the communication of his blessing, first for the Church, and subsequently for the world. He knew and taught that there would be "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." (Acts 24:15.) He desired to have a share with his Redeemer in all of his glorious Kingdom work and he knew that it could not begin until the completion of this Gospel Age, when all the elect Church, as members of the Bride

of Christ, would share in "his resurrection," to glory, honor, immortality and glorious Kingdom privileges. – Phil. 3:10,11.

It was for this reason that he proceeded to declare that the crown was ***laid up*** for him – awaiting him – not at death, but at the time of his resurrection. That crown the Lord would give to him and to all others in the attitude of heart to appreciate his revelation at the Second Advent – "that day." True, not many at the present time love his appearing. The majority, not only of the world, but also of Christians, seeking but not finding in pleasures, riches, honors of men, have certain ambitions along these lines which they would like to satisfy first, and then possibly they might be willing for the Lord to establish his Kingdom. But, no! by the time their lives have been spent in such pursuits, they are usually thoroughly disappointed and bewildered and generally further than ever from seeking the Kingdom.

None but the faithful will receive this crown. Thank God, the remainder will not be tortured, but, on the contrary, will be blessed by their crowned brethren, from whom, as the Christ of God, will go the blessings of restitution through the agency of the Millennial Kingdom. Eventually all the blind eyes of understanding will be opened – eventually all will see the great Messiah, though invisible to the natural spirit. Then every knee shall bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God.

St. Paul closes his exhortation by reciting that in his trial before Nero some in whom he had full confidence had forsaken him, and he concludes that the Lord, nevertheless, stood with him and strengthened him and that he had every confidence in his care to the end of the way.

=====