

OBEYING GOD RATHER THAN MEN

– FEBRUARY 6. – ACTS 4:1-31. –

THE COURAGE OF GOD'S SERVANTS – ST. PETER THE SPOKESMAN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN – THE WISE MEN MARVELED – THE APOSTLES IGNORANT AND UNLEARNED – NOT THE SPIRIT OF FEAR, BUT OF A SOUND MIND AND OF COURAGE – TAUGHT IN THE SCHOOL OF JESUS – WONDERFUL RESULTS – WHEN TO OBEY AND WHEN TO DISOBEY.

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." – 1 Corinthians 16:13.

ST. PETER and St. John, arrested for preaching Christ as the Healer of the lame man in the Temple, were called to answer before the Jewish High Court – the Sanhedrin, composed of seventy learned Jews. These sat in a circle, and had their prisoners before them. When we remember that the Apostles were illiterate fishermen, unaccustomed to public speaking and to contact with the great and learned, we may well be amazed at their courage and at the straightforward presentation of the Gospel given there by St. Peter. It astonished the Sanhedrin, too. They wished to arraign the Apostles, not for the good deed of healing the lame man, but rather for their preaching of Jesus.

However, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, St. Peter wisely and properly drew attention to the fact that they were on trial really for the healing of the sick. Again he disowned any power on the part of himself and his companions. Admitting that they were merely ordinary men, he credited the miracle wholly to Jesus. What a lesson is here for all who would represent the Lord as His ambassadors! As

St. Paul said, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus." – 2 Corinthians 4:5.

Under any circumstances, how courageous indeed were the Apostle's words: "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole!" St. Peter was not only preaching that Jesus was not a deceiver but the real Messiah, whom the Jews had long expected, but, additionally, he was declaring that the Sanhedrin had murdered the Messiah. It was the truth; and it was necessary to utter the truth. To have evaded the point would have shown fear; and the Apostle would have failed to make a right and proper impression on the Sanhedrin and the auditors.

Some one might suggest that St. Peter did not use gentlemanly language – that he should not have made such a home-thrust at the Sanhedrin. Mr. Benson, in *The North American Review*, gives a definition of the term gentleman which seems to fit this case. We quote:

"How do you define a gentleman, then?" said the lawyer, leaning forward at a certain point of the conversation. 'The gentleman, it has been said, is a man who is never offensive unintentionally,' said the parson. Two of the guests murmured 'intentionally,' by way of correction; and the parson smiled. 'No,' he said, 'a gentleman is sometimes offensive when honor and reason demand it, but then he means to be. The man who is not a gentleman is often offensive when he does not mean to be.' 'But is he always a gentleman when he is intentionally offensive?' asked the lawyer. 'The gentleman is,' said the parson, with a smile."

In St. Peter's case it was not a time for quibbling. It was a time when a gentleman was in duty bound to use his opportunity, in no unkindly way, in placing the truth before his hearers. And how much St. Peter crowded into a few words, according to this record! He

identified Jesus the Nazarene, the one who had been crucified, as the Messiah, the One whom God had approved, as was manifested in the raising of Him from the dead.

THE SANHEDRIN PERPLEXED

Next the Apostle quoted to them from the prophecy of David (Psalm 118:22), saying, "This is the Stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the Head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." If there was a force, a sting, in these words to his hearers, it was because they were so seriously in the wrong. How fortunate it would have been for them if they had been humble-hearted, like those who heard St. Peter on the day of Pentecost! Then they also would have cried out in consternation, "Men and brethren, what must we do?" But, alas! education, honor of men, high station, often put the possessors of these at a disadvantage.

The Sanhedrin were rich, not only financially, intellectually and in honors of men, but also in education. To them forcefully belong the words of Jesus, "Woe unto you rich!" – you are at a disadvantage. Pride, honor of men, self-conceit, hinder many such from receiving the simple Message of the Gospel. Thus we perceive that **[R5840 : page 28]** there are compensations in the Divine arrangement, and that in some respects poverty is a blessing in disguise. Hence the assurance of the Word that not many rich, not many great, not many learned, not many noble would be among the chosen of the Lord or would receive positions in the Bride class and in the Heavenly Kingdom. – 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

Perceiving the boldness of St. Peter and St. John, and noting that they were unlearned and ignorant, the Sanhedrin marveled, and "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Ah, yes! of Jesus also some one had said, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" – in any of our schools. (John 7:15.) They knew of His

power with the people through the Spirit of the Lord and of His straight-forward presentation of the Truth. They recognized these men as of the same character – filled with Jesus' Spirit. And to this day this is true of the followers of Jesus. As the Apostle wrote, "God hath not given unto us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7.) All of the Lord's people should remember this **[R5840 : page 29]** point and should cultivate such a spirit and be copies of the Lord Jesus and of the faithful Apostles, so that of all such people might take knowledge that they have been with Jesus and have learned of Him.

But let no one forget that there is only one way of coming into relationship with God – through the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Apostle indicates in this discourse, "There is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." We must have faith in Jesus. We must understand that He died for the sin of the world. We must make a personal acceptance of Him as our Savior. We must consecrate our little all to follow in His steps faithfully, even unto death. On these conditions we become His disciples; and having become disciples, learners in the School of Christ, and having been begotten of the Holy Spirit, we are privileged to show forth more and more His praises and to let our light shine before men, that they, seeing our good works and our likeness to the Master, may glorify God on our behalf.

The Sanhedrin were perplexed as they perceived that the disciples had so strong a case, and had really turned the tables upon them, charging them before the people with being the real culprits – murderers of the Son of God, the Messiah. As they looked at the man who had been healed, they perceived a great miracle. They could say nothing. So they put forth the Apostles from their midst, that they might discuss the case privately. They could not deny the miracle, and they were afraid of what it might lead to if talk of this kind about Jesus and about their being His murderers should spread amongst the people to any degree. They thought best to let the disciples go,

charging them, threatening them, not to preach any more in the name of Jesus.

COURAGE IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Then was shown the marvelous courage of the Apostles. They replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

The Bible directs the followers of Jesus to be subject to the powers that be. (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17.) But while seeking to be thus law-abiding in every respect, Christians are to recognize that there is a still higher Law and a still higher Ruler, and are to be subject to the worldly powers only in the absence of a contrary admonition from the Higher Power – from God.

God had commanded the disciples through Jesus that they should be God's mouthpieces to preach the Gospel Message that the death of Jesus was efficacious for the cancellation of sins; and that He who was slain was by and by to come and set up His Kingdom, and to bless the world by releasing it from the bondage of sin and death. They were also to invite all who had faith to believe this Message to associate themselves as disciples of Jesus, loyal and faithful to the Prince of that Kingdom which is not yet set up. By such faithfulness they would manifest the faith that was in them and their loyalty to God; and on account of this they were promised a share with Messiah in the Kingdom which He would establish.

It was therefore the duty of the Apostles, as it is the duty of all the followers of Jesus, to make known the Gospel Message wherever there are hearing ears, and not to fear what man may do – although it would be our duty not to offend against the laws by holding a meeting where the crowds would interfere with traffic, or otherwise be in conflict with legal regulations. The Apostles were not interfering with the regulations of the Jewish Law in speaking in public, as they did

in the Temple. Their courage was really authorized by the Law; and the Sanhedrin, in forbidding them, went beyond its bounds.

The Church, young in faith, had no doubt been greatly distressed by the imprisonment of the leading disciples; and when they were released, then a general meeting for rejoicing and praise to God was held, thanking the Lord for the courage given to the Apostles, for the promises of His Word, and for the miracle which had led up to all this. As a consequence, we read that all were so encouraged that "they spake the Word of God with boldness"; and that "with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all."

Our Golden Text, in full accord with the lesson, is properly an exhortation to all of God's people everywhere to be faithful and loyal to God and His Cause. Let us each apply it to himself: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

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