

AENEAS AND DORCAS

– **APRIL 9. – ACTS 9:32-43. –**

ST. PETER'S PREACHING TOUR – VISITING THE SAINTS – A TERM MUCH MISUNDERSTOOD – A PARALYTIC HEALED AT LYDDA – ST. PETER CALLED TO JOPPA – DORCAS AWAKENED FROM THE SLEEP OF DEATH – A BEAUTIFUL CHARACTER – THE FRIEND OF THE POOR – PURPOSE SERVED BY THESE TWO MIRACLES.

**"In all things showing thyself an example of good works."
– Titus 2:7.**

PERSECUTORS never like persecution for themselves. Those who have the mind of Christ are never persecutors. They feel it to be their bounden duty not to assist things which they believe to be wrong; they may even find it necessary or expedient to denounce the wrong, to show up its inconsistencies, and in some instances to name the active agents in wrong teachings and wrong doings – as the Apostles have done in their writings. But as for persecuting others, the Lord's people can take no part in this. They are hindered by the spirit of love, the mind of Christ, which directs that we should do to others as we would have them do to us – the Golden Rule, our "perfect law of liberty."

The persecution which scattered the disciples throughout all Judea, and of which Saul of Tarsus was one of the leaders, subsided shortly after he became a Christian, and was followed by a period of rest, recuperation, edification. While Saul's changed course may have had something to do with this, in all probability a trouble which arose about this time between the Jews and their Roman rulers had more to do with it.

About the year 38 A.D. the Emperor Caligula, who had but recently come into his office, promulgated an edict that his statue should be set up in various quarters of the empire and worshiped. When the Jews learned that it was the intention to put these statues in Jerusalem, and even in the Temple itself, as well as elsewhere, their indignation and trouble knew no bounds. They gathered in great masses, young and old, to entreat the local governor to intercede for them that such a desecration of their Holy Temple and Holy City and Holy Land should not be permitted. While the governor made every effort to have the Emperor change the edict, the most he could accomplish was a command to leave the Temple untouched. But many altars were raised to the Emperor outside of its gates; and news came that all the synagogues of Alexandria had been turned into temples to Caesar. This state of affairs lasted until January 24, 41 A.D., when Caligula was murdered.

A SEASON OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

It is not surprising that such outside persecution and interference with their own religious rites and liberties caused the Jews to relax their persecutions of the Christians, and thus brought about the period of rest mentioned in today's Study. The record says that the churches were edified. We get the thought, therefore, that this time of peace was a time of upbuilding amongst the little groups of the Lord's people in Palestine. There is a two-fold sense in which the Church may be built up or edified; in numbers and also in the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. Apparently the infant Church was edified in both ways; for the declaration is that the believers walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures declare that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm 111:10.) This is not a selfish fear, not a fear that the Lord will eternally torment or otherwise unjustly deal with His creatures, but a reverence of the Lord which recognizes His greatness and His goodness, and fears to do aught that would be displeasing to

Him or that would separate from His love and favor. This proper kind of fear, which is the beginning of wisdom, will never be lost so long as the wisdom is maintained.

But reverence of God was not the only grace developed in the early Church. To it was added the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit, mind, disposition of God. This the primitive Church was cultivating, developing it in their hearts, walking in it – that is, living it. The word comfort signifies united, cemented; and the thought of the statement as a whole is that not only was the Church multiplying in numbers and being built up together as God's holy Temple, but that the various "living stones" were being cemented or bound together by the Holy Spirit.

MEANING OF THE TERM "SAINT"

From our Study we learn that although the Apostles made Jerusalem the headquarters for their work, nevertheless they went hither and thither throughout Judea, meeting with the Lord's people scattered by the previous persecution, and forming little congregations everywhere. **[R5875 : page 93]** In one of his tours St. Peter came to Lydda, the chief city of the Plain of Saron (Sharon), about ten miles southeast of Joppa. His special mission, we are told, was the visiting of the saints.

This word "saints" signifies holy ones, those set apart, sanctified believers in Christ. There is much opposition to the use of the word today, attributable, we believe, to two reasons. One is that the vast majority of professing Christians well know that they are not saints, not sanctified, not living as near to the Lord as they could live – not separate, even in heart, from the world, the flesh and the Devil. Such persons have strong reasons for disliking the word "saints," realizing that it would exclude them and nearly all of their friends and special associates in Christian work.

Another reason for opposition to the word "saints" is the fact that in the Dark Ages it became customary for the Roman and Greek Catholic churches to canonize, or legally set apart as objects of reverence, certain persons respecting whom, after several centuries had elapsed, nothing especially evil was remembered, but only things esteemed as honorable and praiseworthy. The word saints thus became separated from living Christians; and, indeed, this may have been because there were few Christians so faithful as to be representatives of saintship.

Still another reason why some dislike the term "saints" is that they consider it to be rather boastful – some would even say hypocritical. Having lost sight of the doctrine of Justification by Faith, in its proper application, they have become accustomed to think of all Christians as "miserable sinners" and to pray for them as such – overlooking the fact that there are some in whom "the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled," because these "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," the merit of Christ covering all their unwilling shortcomings. – Romans 8:4.

The Lord's people, however, are to remember to apply and to take pleasure in all the names and practises authorized by Apostolic usage. Thus the term "saint" certainly approves itself to us. Almost all of the Epistles of the New Testament are addressed to the saints; and those professing Christians who cannot properly apply the term to themselves cannot properly apply to themselves the exceeding great and precious promises contained in those Epistles; for all the promises are addressed to the saints, are meant for the sanctified in Christ Jesus. Let it be borne in mind, however, that the word "saint" does not signify actual perfection merely, as in our Lord's case, but also those reckoned holy through Him; and that the Apostles, who were saints and who classed themselves with the saints of God, declared respecting themselves, "We also are men of like passions with you." – Acts 14:15.

The term "saints," then, properly applied in the Church, refers to those who, although originally "children of wrath, even as others," have been rescued from that condition of condemnation, have been washed, cleansed, and thus brought into accord with God through the forgiveness of their sins and through the covering of their weaknesses and blemishes; and who have become the "sanctified in Christ Jesus" by making full consecration of themselves to live, not perfect lives – an impossibility while in the flesh – but as nearly perfect as they may be able, the Lord's grace making them continually "holy, acceptable to God," through the merit of Christ Jesus. Let us never be ashamed of this name "saints," if it present before our minds saintship, holiness, separateness from the world; for this is the very thought which should be there continually. It is a thought which will enable us the better to live separate from the world, as the Master indicated. – John 17:16.

The healing of Aeneas, the paralytic, was a very notable evidence of the power of the Lord, similar to the healing at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. (Acts 3:1-11.) Here, as always, St. Peter made sure that none should think that the power which he exercised was his own. He distinctly affirmed that Jesus the Messiah, whom their rulers had crucified, had performed the cure, and therefore was not dead, as they had supposed, but risen.

The fame of this miracle spread abroad and resulted, we are told, in the drawing of many unto the Lord and to the Church. Thus did the Lord establish the Church and attract to it those who were in the right attitude of heart, using miracles then, as now He uses other means. Those miracles, as heretofore pointed out, cannot have lasted much longer than the Apostles themselves; for the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were granted only through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles, and The Twelve had no successors, St. Paul taking the place of Judas. The Heavenly Jerusalem had twelve foundations, and no more; and in them were written the names of the twelve Apostles, and no others. – Revelation 21:14.

ANOTHER NOTABLE MIRACLE

One of the saints at Joppa was a woman apparently of means and education. If her name represented her appearance, she was very beautiful; for Tabitha in the Syriac language, Dorcas in the Greek, signifies graceful, beautiful. But this woman was famed for a grace and a beauty entirely separate and distinct from whatever she possessed of these qualities naturally. Hers was the beauty of a meek and quiet spirit, full of love and helpfulness. Evidently she was a burning and shining light for the Lord in that vicinity. She did what she could. She served the Lord, His brethren and all who needed help. According to the best opportunities afforded her she helped the poor, particularly widows, who as a class were at that time apt to be in a very trying position, especially if poor.

The Greek text indicates that Dorcas had been in the habit of assisting the poor with garments, etc., doubtless assisting them also with words of encouragement and helpfulness, and ministering to them the Truth. Under these circumstances it is not strange that her death should have produced sorrow, especially amongst the beneficiaries of her charities and amongst the numerous friends which a beautiful, Christlike spirit of this kind is sure to make.

Apparently Dorcas took sick and died suddenly, at about the time that others of the saints at Joppa heard that St. Peter was at Lydda and had cured Aeneas. Immediately they sent for the Apostle, probably with no thought that he would perform such a miracle as that of bringing Dorcas back to life, but rather with the thought that they had lost a highly esteemed member of their little group and that St. Peter could give them some consolation at this time. In those days there was neither telegraph, telephone nor mail service; and consequently some of the brethren became the messengers to take the word to the Apostle – to request his presence without delay.

St. Peter went at once with them to Joppa. As he entered the death-chamber, he saw an affecting scene. Poor widows and others

were lamenting the loss of their friend, and showing the garments which she had made for them. This was surely a noble tribute to the usefulness of her life. No millionaire has ever left monuments which will endure so long, or which will reflect so much glory upon his character, as were left by this humble woman. And even the humblest and poorest of us may to **[R5875 : page 94]** some extent emulate her example and leave behind us when we die some such monuments of love and some such testimonies of appreciation.

It is sad indeed when any, especially of those who have named the name of Christ, die and leave none who sincerely, truly, mourn for them and miss them. Such a condition testifies to a life that was either selfish or misunderstood. We who are looking forward to the close of our journey, and that before very long, should see that our lives are spent day by day in such a manner that some will be the happier for them; and that our decease will be recognized by some, at least, as a loss.

St. Peter's most notable miracle was the bringing of Dorcas back from the portals of death. Like the other miracle recorded in our lesson, it was peculiar to that time and for the purpose of the establishment of the Church. We are not to suppose that it was the Lord's purpose that all of His people during the Gospel Age should be thus snatched back from death, or that they should all be relieved from beds of sickness, or that they should all have powers such as the Apostle here exercised. There is a ministry of evil – of calamity, sickness, death, etc. – which has often been valuable indeed to the Lord's people, inculcating various lessons and developing various fruits of the Spirit – meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love.

