

[R5889 : page 123]

## **"LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES!"**

– *MAY 14. – ACTS 13:13-15,42-52. –*

ST. PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY TOUR – HIS SERMON AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA – EFFECT OF HIS DISCOURSE TWOFOLD – VIOLENT OPPOSITION FROM THOSE BLINDED BY SECTARIAN PREJUDICE – MISREPRESENTATION AND SLANDER EVER THE ADVERSARY'S METHOD OF FIGHTING THE TRUTH.

**"I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth." – Verse 47.**

FROM Antioch Paul and Barnabas went to the seaport town of Selucia, where they took ship for the island of Cyprus. This island was as about as good a place to begin as any, and had the advantage of being the home country of Barnabas, who was familiar with the dialect of the people, their customs, etc. With them went a cousin of Barnabas, John Mark, writer of the Gospel of Mark and son of one of the Marys at Jerusalem.

Although Paul and Barnabas fully appreciated the fact that Gentiles might now have access to the blessings of the Gospel, nevertheless in every place they entered into the Jewish synagogues. The Jews already believed Moses and the Prophets, and therefore expected Messiah. Hence they would necessarily be in a much better attitude of mind to receive the Gospel Message than would be the Gentiles, who knew nothing of such matters and who therefore would require more instruction. Indeed, probably the larger proportion of converts between the time of our Lord's resurrection and the fall of Jerusalem, A.D. 70, were made amongst the Jews; and up to that time comparatively few Gentiles accepted Christ.

The missionary tour probably consumed considerable time, as the three went from village to village, preaching Christ, until they reached the city of Paphos, at the far end of the island. There they found Sergius Paulus, a man of good judgment, the governor of the island. Even before the missionaries got there, he had a hearing ear; and the Adversary, noting this, was at work upon him through Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer or magician, who had ingratiated himself with the proconsul and was esteemed his friend. We are not to wonder that a man of sound judgment, as the proconsul is represented to have been, should be so interested in the magician and his doings. On the contrary, we should remember that similarly there are some men of ability today who are to some extent under the influence of the same Adversary and his agents – spirit mediums. Besides, the magicians in olden times were mixtures of scientist and miracle worker, and usually very bright men.

### **CONFLICT BETWEEN TRUTH AND ERROR**

When the proconsul heard something respecting Paul and Barnabas, he sent for them, desiring to know more. Then came a conflict between the powers of light and the powers of darkness, between Truth and Error. There is no harmony between the two; they are opponents at every point. And so in this case, as soon as the magician discovered that the proconsul was coming under the influence of the Truth, he used his every power to prevent it. This furnished occasion for a remarkable manifestation of Divine power through the Apostle Paul, who denounced the magician by a plain statement of his case and declared that he would become so blind that he could not see even the sun for a season. The blindness came upon Elymas gradually – first, a mistiness, which subsequently settled into complete darkness.

This manifestation of Divine power was convincing to the proconsul. It was not that this incident converted him; but that having already heard the teachings, and being in the process of

comparing these with his previous views and with the presentation of Elymas, he was enabled by this incident to reach the right conclusion and to decide his matters on the Lord's side. [R5889 : page 124]

### **DEPARTURE OF JOHN MARK**

St. Paul and his company did not tarry at Paphos, but departed for Asia Minor. When they came to Perga, in Pamphylia, there John Mark discontinued his service and returned to Jerusalem. Hardship or discouragement or home-sickness – we know not what – evidently quenched his zeal as a servant of the Lord for a time, assuredly much to his disadvantage. Whatever the cause, the Apostle Paul evidently considered it quite insufficient, for on another occasion, when Barnabas suggested that Mark accompany them similarly, St. Paul declined. (Acts 15:36-40.) This he would not have done had Mark's desertion been fully justified by necessity.

There is an element of encouragement in Mark's experience, however. Later on, he evidently became a devoted soldier of the Cross and was again accepted to the Lord's service; and we find that the Apostle Paul made acknowledgment of appreciation of his faithfulness. (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11.) The Lord is very merciful to us in our weaknesses and imperfections; and as He restored Mark, undoubtedly He is willing also to restore all who will similarly learn a lesson from their failures, and who earnestly strive for reinstatement and for the privilege of service.

### **PREACHING AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA**

The first stop in Asia Minor was made at Antioch of Pisidia. The usual custom was followed – of going first to the Jewish synagogue. There the missionaries were recognized as strangers and also as men of talent. After the regular services of the synagogue had been introduced by the reading of the usual lesson from the Law,

the two were invited to address the assembly – Jews by birth and Jewish proselytes from the Gentiles.

The Apostle Paul was the speaker and made a telling address. He recognized the fact that his hearers had faith in God's promises regarding the coming Messianic Kingdom. He did not need, therefore, to emphasize the Kingdom feature in his discourse. Rather, his hearers needed to see that there could be no Kingdom and no permanent blessing of all the families of the earth, such as was implied in the Promise made to Abraham, unless in some manner Divine forgiveness of the sins of the world could first be obtained.

The trend of the Apostle's address, therefore, was to show that in the past God had established a typical kingdom, which had never reached the grand stage essential to the fulfilment of the Abrahamic Promise; and that the thing necessary and lacking was a REDEMPTION of the world and the forgiveness of sins. Then he presented to their attention Jesus as the Messiah – not merely a crucified Messiah, but also a risen One, who, because of His death for the sins of the world, was able to save to the uttermost all that should come unto God through Him. Having put the matter squarely before them, the Apostle offered his hearers forgiveness of sins as the very essence of the Gospel of Christ.

Forgiveness of sin is still the essence of the Gospel, although mankind now, as then, are generally loth to accept it thus. It disappoints them by condemning them and declaring that all are sinners; that "there is none righteous, no, not one"; that all need just such a redemption as God has provided in the Sacrifice of Christ. It disappoints also in that it shows a necessity for repudiation of sin in the heart and, so far as possible, in resisting it in all the conduct of life.

Few have an ear to hear this Message. The majority are ready to say, "Preach unto us smooth things! Praise us for our religious

fervor! Point out to us how far superior we are, not only to the heathen world, but to the masses of those about us. Tell us that we are God's people, and that He could not get along without us. Do not tell us that we are sinners, under condemnation as others are; and that all who would come unto God through Jesus Christ must come by the same narrow gate of faith, repudiation of sin, and heart-consecration to do God's will."

### **TWOFOLD EFFECT OF THIS DISCOURSE**

The Apostle's discourse had a twofold effect. The honest-hearted realized the Truth regarding God's perfection and their own imperfection, and recognized their need of just such a Savior as the Apostle had preached. These were speedily drawn to the missionaries, who recognized their right attitude of heart and assured them that they were already in God's grace, or favor; that now the Message of salvation through Jesus was an additional unfolding and development of the same favor that had already been extended to the Jews; and that they should continue in the grace of God – continue to let God guide them in His way – continue to be the recipients of His mercies and blessings, which now were multiplied to them through Christ Jesus and the Atonement work which He had accomplished. Others were much less prepared for the Apostle's words, and rather inclined to be envious of the attention shown the missionaries and their teachings.

News of the new religion – supplemental to the Jewish – spread throughout the little city, in which Judaism had evidently gained a good foothold and great respect. The next Sabbath the whole city gathered to hear the Message of the missionaries – the majority probably coming merely out of curiosity, to see the difference between these doctrines and those of the regular Jewish teachers. Such attention to two strangers and their new doctrines, which threatened an overthrow of Judaism, naturally awakened a spirit of

jealousy in those interested in forms and ceremonies, honor amongst men, and denominational pride.

As a result, they contradicted St. Paul's statements with blasphemy. This does not mean that they blasphemed God's name, but that they slandered, or blasphemed, the Apostle and Barnabas, speaking evil of them. We may surmise that they misrepresented the motives and the characters of the missionaries, etc. This is the usual course of those who fight against the Truth. It has ever been thus. The Truth cannot be gainsaid; it is irresistible. But it can be misrepresented; it can be denied. The presentations of the Truth can be distorted, and its messengers slandered, vilified. The Adversary seems to adopt this method on every occasion. It is the method now in vogue. Those who oppose Present Truth dare not meet it openly in public discussion; but they distort and misrepresent it, and speak evil of its advocates.

## **TWO LESSONS FOR OUR DAY**

The missionaries were not discouraged by the opposition. Rather, they were the more courageous, and brought to the point where they explained to their vilifiers the fact that they were rejecting God's favor, God's Plan, to their own loss. The two pointed out that God had in His mercy long favored Israel; and that in sending the Message of Messiah to them first He was still favoring them; but that according to His instructions it was the duty of His representatives to proceed and to tell the Gospel to whoever had ears to hear – to the Jews first, but also to the Gentiles. They showed that the Lamp of Truth which God had now lighted was not for the Jews exclusively, as had been His previous favors; but, as the Prophet had already declared, it was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles" also – salvation unto the ends of the earth. – Luke 2:32; Isaiah 42:6; 52:10. **[R5889 : page 125]**

This feature of the Gospel especially aroused the opposition of such Jews as were in the wrong condition of heart, but was

proportionately attractive to the few who were in the right attitude. So it is today. The Message now due to Christendom is – more Light! It shows that the Lamp of God's Word of promise, which at the beginning of this Age was permitted to bless both Jews and Gentiles in proportion as the eyes of their understanding were opened to see it, is shortly now to give place to a greater Light; that whereas the Word of God has been a Lamp to the feet and a Lantern to the footsteps of the faithful for over eighteen centuries, the Sun of Righteousness is soon to rise and flood the whole world with the light of the knowledge of the goodness of God.

Those of God's people in the right attitude of heart will be gladdened by this unfolding of the Truth. No feelings of jealousy will be theirs. But the majority, full of sectarian plans and selfish sentiments, and blinded largely by false theology and by misrepresentations of God's Word, are violently opposed to any thought of Divine mercy being extended to every creature – not only to those who have not yet gone to the prison-house of death, but also to the twenty billions who have already gone down into death in ignorance of the only name given under Heaven or among men whereby we must be saved. But the faithful, the honest-hearted, will ultimately rejoice in the lengths, the breadths, the heights and the depths of God's Plan, to be consummated during the Millennium by the glorified Christ, Head and Body.

### **"ORDAINED TO ETERNAL LIFE"**

Many of the Gentiles were glad as they heard that God's favor was broader than they had previously supposed. Some, we may infer, were merely pleased that something had been shown up that was broader than the Jewish teachings. But some others, we are assured, believed in the true sense of the word – accepting Christ as their Redeemer and their Lawgiver. And so today we see two classes amongst those who favor Present Truth. Some hail it with joy, and gratefully serve the Lord more fervently than ever. Some are merely

glad to find that there is no Scriptural ground for the popular theory of eternal torment for the vast majority, but are not especially drawn by Divine love and mercy.

The more the Truth spread, the more angry became its opponents, the Jewish leaders; and what they could not oppose with argument or with logic they did oppose successfully with prejudice and superstition, arousing these baser sentiments by misrepresentation. Thus they secured the cooperation of some of the most honorable and notable people of the city to such an extent that the missionaries were obliged to depart.

The record is that "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." The word "ordained" here may properly be translated *disposed*. Thus we get the thought that as many of those as heard the Gospel and its offer of everlasting life, and who were disposed to accept the terms, became believers – obedient to the faith. So it still is. Wherever the Truth goes there are some who like it, and others who dislike it; some who appreciate the doctrines and rewards which it represents, and some who prefer the pleasures of sin or the affairs and rewards of the world. This is the time for each who has heard the Message to make his choice. Soon the number of the Elect will be complete; and then their work will begin – the blessing of mankind – the blessing of the non-elect.

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