

The Book of Acts: Its Life Lessons

(See Topic for August 1.—Acts 27. 18-44.)

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THE Book of Acts was written by Luke, who also wrote the Gospel called by his name. In the Gospel we have the history of the Church in its founding; in the Acts we have the history of the Church in its extension. In the Gospel we see our Lord preaching the gospel of His kingdom, stating and illustrating its principles, and gathering about Himself a band of followers. In the Acts we see His followers preaching the Gospel of His kingdom, and bearing witness to the name of their Lord and Saviour throughout every land. In Acts 1: 8 we have the key verse of the book. In this verse we have the programme of the Christian Church; and in this book Luke gives us an account of the manner in which this programme was carried out in actual history. First, there is

THE AGENCY OF THE HOLY GHOST

In the work and life of the church. "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses." The followers of Christ are baptized with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This baptism makes them effective witnesses. Men filled with the Holy Ghost are called to carry on the work of the Church—men who, through the Spirit, are gifted with wisdom and power and faith and boldness and joy. The reader will readily find many passages in this book where the agency of the Holy Spirit is distinctly recognized in the life of the early Church. (Read Acts 2: 4; 8: 31; 9: 32; 6: 3, 5; 8: 29; 9: 17, 31; 11: 24; 13: 52, and numerous other passages.) The Book of Acts has been aptly called the Gospel of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit is still in the Church, and it is our privilege to seek His presence and power in our lives.

THE EXTENSION OF THE KINGDOM.

Again, this witness of the disciples made effective by the power of the Spirit, is to be given to all races of men, beginning at Jerusalem. Christ's kingdom on earth can be extended only through the witness of His disciples, and that witness is to begin at home, in Jerusalem. Yet it is not to be confined to their own home or country, but to be carried to all men everywhere. In this book Luke traces the gradual advancement of that kingdom from Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria, through the various provinces of Asia Minor, through Macedonia and Greece, in Europe, until we find the Church of Christ established in Rome, the capital of the Gentile world, and the great Apostle himself living there in the home of the Gentile. Now the writer's task is finished, for he has traced the progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome—from the heart of the Jewish world to the heart of the Gentile world.

There are lessons here for us:

1. Our work for the Master should commence at home. Let us not despise the little opportunities for work that we have around us. Unless we embrace these, we are not likely to have the greater opportunities that we sometimes long for.
2. But our efforts for the Master should not be confined to our own locality. We must see to it that the Gospel is preached throughout the whole Dominion—not only to those of our own kith and kin, but to the foreigner who may be within our borders.
3. The measure of our responsibility is greater than our Dominion. We must cultivate a larger vision and a larger sympathy. Our work is not done till we have become witnesses to the uttermost part of the world.
4. For this work we need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Ours is more than a Herculean task, and the presence of the Spirit we are bound to succeed.

In our lesson to-day we see

PAUL ON HIS WAY TO ROME.

Apparently he goes as a helpless Jew, in the custody of soldiers, but in reality he goes as a good soldier of the Lord, commissioned to take possession of the chief citadel of the heathen empire. Apparently he is a prisoner in chains, but in reality he is the champion of liberty. A prisoner in the hands of the Roman Government, he is nevertheless an ambassador of the Lord. Though a so-called prisoner, he is still the freest man on board the vessel. Plato said of Socrates that he could not be imprisoned. It was not Socrates that was changed, but the prison that was changed by his being in it. A prison is no longer a prison when it contains such souls as Socrates and Paul. When Paul and Silas were thrust into the jail at Philippi that jail was changed into a sanctuary of praise, for at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. The safety of the passengers on this vessel depended on the presence of this so-called prisoner, himself a preacher of a greater salvation.

God's servants may be bound, but His word is not bound. God often furthers His cause through the bonds of His fol-

lowers. John is banished to the Isle of Patmos, but while there he writes the Book of Revelation. Ezekiel is held as a captive in Babylon, but his spirit is free, and God gives him visions of His glory, and thus we have the Prophecy of Ezekiel. John Bunyan is confined within Bedford Jail, but this gives him an opportunity to give to the world that immortal allegory, "Pilgrim's Progress." Martin Luther is confined within Wartburg Castle for ten months, during which time he translates the New Testament into the German, and so gave to the German people the Word of God in their own tongue. This translation of the New Testament passed through fifty-eight editions in eleven years. God's servants may be restrained, but His word runs and has free course. Paul is held as a prisoner in Rome, but during that time he writes for the permanent edification of the Church those two precious epistles—one to the Colossians and the other to the Ephesians—as well as two others—one to the Philippians and the other to Philemon. Notwithstanding all the difficulties which may be in the way of the progress of the Gospel, so long as the Christ of God is above us exercising that authority which He possesses in heaven, and so long as the Spirit of God is within us, baptizing with power, we are certain of victory.

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Amusement and Recreation

AMUSEMENT has always occupied a very important place in human life. The expenditure of time is so constituted as to demand diversion from the ordinary routine of life. This must be diversion; rest will not suffice. Our mental make-up will not tolerate idleness.

There is a vast difference between amusement and recreation. Recreation seeks a change in another form of activity. It calls for the expenditure of energy. This is all that is necessary in some lives of peculiar temperament, the person of material inclination or rather of puritan disposition, and 'tis sufficient for the greater part of all lives; but sometimes there comes upon us the desire for amusement proper—that which changes the current of thought, yet with little expenditure of energy. The mind is occupied, but not taxed. The man who is engaged in physical pursuits is confronted with the same condition of affairs. The body will not stand the constant grind of routine activity. Not only does it tend to impair the strength of the parts used, but it leaves unused parts unenveloped.

The language indulgence in healthful, harmless, amusements serves to promote the strength of mind and body.

Ruskin says: "When men are rightly occupied, their amusement grows out of their work." There are doubtless some characters of which this is true, but we must deal with humanity as a whole, and this is pitched too high for the ordinary nature. When carried to excess all forms of amusement become harmful. They should be taken up after the regular hours for our regular work. When they interfere with our business they should be curtailed. Cicero had it about right when he said: "Sport and merriment are at times allowable, but we must enjoy them as we enjoy sleep and other kinds of repose: when we have performed our weighty and important affairs."

The difficulty arises when we attempt to select the amusements most attractive and according to personal tendency most helpful.

I don't bring the charge against the Church as a whole, but some Christian people have entertained such an extreme view on this question that the door of the Church has been blocked for many a young person who would otherwise desire to be numbered among us.

Young people have a strong natural desire for merriment, and we propose to take away from them their forms of amusement, and in many instances we have little to offer them of a wholesome nature. Religion has to do with every department of life, and we cannot give all of our attention to one department without neglecting some other. In fact, if all our attention is given to the spiritual side of our natures, and the social is left undeveloped, we defeat the very end toward which we are striving, because we separate ourselves from the mass of humanity, and our usefulness to them is, to say the least of it, seriously impaired.

I am glad to say that agencies are in operation in the Church, which will in a great measure solve this perplexing problem. The Epworth League, with its social department, is one very potent agency. The Baraca and Philathes Sunday School classes are others. These bands of young people will in themselves do a great deal toward developing the social element in the young people of the Church and our community.

The pastor should give these agencies a large amount of liberty in their affairs, of course retaining the position of a wise director.—H. M. Timmons, in *Texas Christian Advocate*.