

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

SUNDAY, Aug. 12th, 1877.—Paul and Silas in Prison.—Acts xvi. 22-34.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 28-34.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.”

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xvi. 16-34. Tuesday, vs. 18; Luke viii. 26-40. Wednesday, vs. 24; Genesis xxxix. Thursday, vs. 25; Romans v. 13-21. Friday, vs. 30, 31; John iii. Saturday, vs. 31; Romans iii. 21-31. Sunday, Rev. vii. 9-17.

ANALYSIS.—I. The apostles beaten. Vs. 22. II. The apostles imprisoned. Vss. 23, 24. III. Thanksgiving in prison. Vs. 25. IV. Earthquake. Vs. 26. V. The jailer alarmed for his soul. Vss. 27-31. VI. Converted and Baptized. Vss. 32-34.

QUESTIONS.—How did the apostles in Philippi come into conflict with Paganism? What girl had an evil spirit? By whom was she owned? Why was she of value to them? What did she say of the apostles? Was her cry sincere? How did Paul put a stop to it? What was the result of this miracle upon the girl herself? What upon her owners? How were their charges against the apostles false?

Vs. 22. Why did the magistrates hasten to punish the apostles? What was their first act of punishment? How were the apostles beaten? Does Paul ever refer to this afterward? 2 Cor. xi. 24.

Vs. 24. What is the next thing done? Why were the apostles thrust into “the inner prison”? Why were their feet put into stocks?

Vs. 25. How did these persecuted ones pass the night? Whose attention was drawn to them? Why?

Vs. 26. What miraculous intervention of God now took place? What were its effects?

Vs. 27. Who was roused from sleep by it? In what condition did he observe the prison to be? Why did he meditate suicide at once?

Vs. 28. How did Paul prevent the jailer’s rash deed? Why was Paul anxious to save his life?

Vs. 29. After securing lights or torches, what did the jailer do?

Vs. 30. What proof is there that the jailer did not pray simply for temporal salvation?

Vs. 31. What is the jailer urged to do? What is meant by faith in Christ?

Vs. 32. Who, besides the jailer, listened to Paul’s teachings?

Vs. 33. Who are meant by “he and all his”?

Vs. 34. What common faith now pervaded the jailer’s household? When bidden to depart out of jail the next day, what does Paul say? Why was it a manly assertion of personal rights?

Thus far the apostles were undisturbed in Philippi. But the scene soon changed. As if to show that Christianity is advanced more by adversity than prosperity, the apostles were suddenly called away from the quiet place of prayer and exhortation by the river-side, silence, and imprisoned. The occasion was the conflict, now actually begun, between Christianity and Paganism. The sorcerer in Paphos was a Jew; they were Jews who turned the idolaters of Lystra against the apostles. But the farther Christianity travels westward, the closer does it come into contact with pagan supremacy over the minds of men.

The question of demoniacs is, a most difficult one. The degrees and modes of their presence vary. In the times of Jesus their workings were manifest. They recognized him as “the Holy One of God.” So after his day they recognized his apostles to be the “servants of the Most High God, who preach the way of salvation.” At Philippi, Paul came in contact with “a certain damsel possessed with the spirit of divination,” that is, prophecy. The prophecies of such persons were usually made known by an internal muttering or ventriloquism. Augustine calls this damsel a “female ventriloquist.” She was the property of several owners.

EXPOSITION.—The lesson brings the two apostles before us in three distinct aspects: as victims of malice (vss. 22-24); as friends of God (vss. 25-27); and as heralds of salvation (vss. 28-34).

I. The Work of Malice.—Verses 22-24.—The persecutors consisted (1) of the two or more chief instigators who owned the restored maid, and whose loss of gain was the prime cause of their wrath (vss. 19-21); (2) of the populace of

Philippi, as aroused by the accusations of those instigators; (3) of the chief officers of the city, which in a “colony” were two in number (dunmivri), with the title of “Prætors,” translated “magistrates” in English Version; (4) of the executors of the prætor’s command, who were merely agents of the law, viz., the constables, “(commanded” in verse 22); and the jailer. We can distinguish between these classes as to their motives and spirit, though doubtless all shared more or less in hostility to Paul’s teaching.

The charge was partly true (vs. 21), as Paul’s doctrines were new, contrary to the Roman religion, and brought in by foreigners, who were Jews, most hateful to Romans, and just now in special odium and banished from Rome. See xviii. 2. But wrong is none the less wrong when framed into a law; and persecution, even if legal, is still persecution.

The sentence was given without the form of trial (vs. 37), and was herein unlawful, however true the charges. The reason for this illegal act was evidently, in part, fear of the populace, and in part, blind hate. The sentence was that Paul and Silas should be stripped naked, and beaten with rods in the presence of the assembled multitude (vs. 37), and then imprisoned. This was Roman custom in dealing with great criminals who were not Romans. Not till afterward was the fact known that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, as no opportunity was given them to speak in the fury of the hour. The extent of the beating (many blows) was determined by the intensity of the excitement. See 2 Cor. xi. 24, 25.

The stocks was a heavy piece of wood in which the feet were confined, sometimes so as to distend the limbs most painfully. There were stocks also for the hands, and for the neck. The apostles being in prison, the crowd went to their homes to rest.

II. God’s Presence.—Verses 25-27.—The two prisoners were kept awake, not more by pain of body, than by flooding joy of soul. They “praying praised God” (vs. 25), that is, poured out to God their souls in song, using doubtless, according to the custom of saints then and ever, the magnificent Psalms of the Old Testament, with which the minds of Jews were stored.

The word translated “heard” means “listened.” This was to them a new experience, and we may well believe that the minds of some of them were thus prepared to receive the gospel as afterwards preached.

The earthquake was God’s friendly presence as power to deliver. How far the opening of the gates and doors, and the loosing of the prisoners was the natural effect of the shock, whether wholly, or only partially, is a point of no importance.

The jailer had been asleep. His apartments, or house, so separated from the cells, that the voice of song had not reached him. See vss. 30-34. The great suddenness of what had happened is evident in the fact that he seems to have been aware only of the effect, and not of its cause. His thought was that all the prisoners had broken jail and escaped while he was asleep, and hence that he would be disgraced and put to death.

III. Salvation Proclaimed.—Verses 28-34.—The jailer’s life was saved first. Christianity cares for man, soul and body, and for body less than soul only because the body is less than soul in worth, as being merely its servant or organ. So did Christ and his apostles, and so do all Christians care for men’s temporal interests all the more because of their love of man. The jailer’s act may have been known to Paul either by sight or by revelation. Paul knew the jailer’s motive, and hence removed the motive by saying “We are all here.”

God’s Spirit flashed into his conscience conviction of sin, of righteousness, and of divine judgment, and with it the certainty that Paul as Silas were God’s accredited messengers. He may have heard them speak before, or even after their imprisonment.

Salvation for the soul is now assured to the jailer, and to his house. The condition is, as ever, faith; but the meaning of verse 31 is not that the faith of the jailer would save the rest of his household, but that the nature of his conversion, and all Scriptures show, he believed, and all were saved in believing.

How suddenly they accepted Christ is shown in verse 33 by the words “the same hour of the night.” It has been sometimes said that there was no water near for immersion, but there is no evidence that there was a lack of water; but quite the reverse. Paul’s demand for his rights” (vss. 37-40) was to put his case and cause in a better light, and so help the Philippian Christians.

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—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, Aug. 19th, 1877.—Thessalonians and Bereans.—Acts xvii. 1-14.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”—Acts xvii. 11.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

The people of Philippi were Romans, who hated the Jews. They caught Paul and Silas, and charged them with being Jews and troubling the city. The officers tore the clothes off of Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten many stripes with rods on their bare backs. They were then put in an inner prison, and their feet made fast in the stocks. But at midnight the other prisoners heard them praying and singing praises unto God. All at once there was a great earthquake; the walls of the prison shook, the gates and doors flew wide open, and the chains of every one in the prison were loosened. The jailer, waking suddenly, saw all the prison doors wide open; and, supposing all the prisoners had escaped, drew a sword to kill himself—for he knew that he would be put to death for not taking better care of the prisoners. But Paul cried out, “Do thyself no harm; we are all here.” Then the jailer called for lights and went in to where Paul and Silas were, and, after falling trembling at their feet led them into a better room, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” The jailer then washed their sore backs, and, in sign of their belief, he and his whole family were baptized.

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest. DORA’S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROBERTSON. CHAP. XXXI.—HUGH CHATS WITH DOROTHY.

Throughout that week Hugh was looking out for Lisa, but she did not come. He was eager to give her the half-crown, and the thought of the pleasure she would have in receiving it, and he in giving, was uppermost in his mind all the week.

On the Saturday when Dorothy Sharpe came to work he at once told of the kindness he had met with. It was such an event in his life to receive half-a-crown, that he could not resist the temptation to tell of it to the only person who entered the house from one month’s end to another, although Matthew was frequently telling him to keep all his business to himself, and not to gossip with Mrs. Sarah.

“Do you know, Mrs. Sarah,” he began, while washing up the breakfast-things on Saturday morning, “we had such a kind gentleman call this week. He comes from the place where my grandmother used to live, though Mr. Pedder says he’s got a grand house in London, too. He’s so kind: he once gave mother half-a-sovereign to pay our fare to London; and what d’you think he gave me on Tuesday?”

“Another, very likely,” replied Mrs. Sarah.

“No; of course he wouldn’t give me so much. But he gave me a whole half-crown!”

“What’s his name, Hugh?”

“Oh, it’s Mr. Barnett; and he’s ever so rich, Mr. Pedder says. And he wanted to pay for me to go to a good school; but Mr. Pedder wouldn’t let him.”

“The fool!” exclaimed Mrs. Sarah, unguardedly.

“Mrs. Sarah!” said Hugh quietly, pausing in astonishment as he was wiping a saucer, “isn’t it wicked to say that?”

“Wicked! who are you talking to about wicked? Have you learnt your Catechism yet, I’d like to know? No, I’ll be bound you haven’t, brought up by such a man as Matthew Pedder,” said Mrs. Sarah angrily.

“I learnt my Catechism with mother,” answered Hugh, “and I haven’t forgot it. Mr. Pedder never teaches me any, nor he doesn’t say bad words to me.”

“Bad words, indeed! Well, that’s sauce from a bit of a boy like you, I must say!” exclaimed Mrs. Sarah. “No, it’s no bad words to call a fool a fool. It’s Scriptural, is that. Didn’t the Lord call the man as broke down his barns a fool? Well, Matthew Pedder’s jest as much of a fool to hinder a rich man giving ye a bit of eddication. He’ll never give ye any. Haven’t I been on at him about it for weeks, and weeks past, and he won’t stir? I guess he sticks too close to his money.”

“No; he’s going to send me surely next week or the week after,” said Hugh.

“Well, that’s what comes of my going on at him, then; and you’ve got me to thank for that,” she promptly replied. “And so I s’pose he’s nabbed this half-crown off ye to pay for your schooling, eh?”

“Oh, no; I’ve got it for my very own, and I’m going to give it away,” answered Hugh. “I’m sure Mr. Pedder’s too kind to take it off me.”

“Oh, you’re going to give it away, are ye?” said Dorothy, with a gracious smile. “Ah well, that’s what you should do, as you’ve no need for it yourself, and Matthew Pedder don’t want it. That’s a good boy now. Only you don’t know many to give to, I s’pose,—no one as really needs it, except, p’raps, a poor hard-working widow like me. But it ain’t much that I get, being like a stranger in a strange land about these parts; and I keep myself too respectable-looking for anybody to think as I need help. But the Lord knows every thing; and sometimes He does put a half-crown or a shilling in my way through somebody as have got it to give away; and it’s a great help and blessing to a poor struggling body like me.”

“Yes,” replied Hugh, who was rather obtuse just now; “but I know somebody a deal poorer than you, Mrs. Sarah. And that’s who I’m going to give my half-crown to,—a little girl that’s got a drunken father, and no mother, and she’s got to sweep crossings ever so long to get enough money to pay their rent; so I’m going to give her this money of mine for it, so that for one week she needn’t work so hard. And I know she’ll be so glad of it!”

Dorothy’s face grew dark during this speech. “You’d better go and fling it in the gutter at once,” she said, angrily. “It’d do just as much good as giving it to a drunkard’s child: of course he’ll get it in drink and spend every farthing of it in drink; and, if he don’t, it ain’t right to give to bad people of that sort, neither parents nor children, to encourage ‘em in their wickedness.”

“But little Lisa ain’t wicked,” asserted Hugh, rather vigorously; “she’s a very good girl, and she loves the Lord Jesus, and tries all she can to please Him. And she’s so good to her father, though he’s such a bad drunkard, and leaves her to get food and fire as she can. But yet she keeps close to him, to look after him and try to make him better, and she prays for him.”

“Oh, she’d do better, whoever she is, to go and leave him, instead of encouraging him in his wickedness. If she left him to himself he’d very soon be brought to justice, and get locked up out o’ mischief, and that’s the best thing as could happen to him,” said Dorothy, impatiently.

“Lisa doesn’t think so,” replied Hugh, quietly. “I’m sure she’s as good a Christian as my mother was, though she’s only a little girl, not so old as me. And she says that a Christian is one that tries to do as the Lord Jesus did, and He was always doing good in a kind spirit, to bad people as well as good. And so I think Lisa is a real Christian when she tries to follow His example. If she wasn’t kind and merciful to her father, I’m sure I shouldn’t think she was worth being called a Christian.”

“Humph!” uttered Mrs. Dorothy, feeling slightly uncomfortable at these words. “Bite o’ boys and girls like you don’t know nothing about these things; and it ain’t becoming for a ignorant little boy like you to be trying to say

who’s Christian and who isn’t. What d’you know about it? All you’ve got to do is to learn your Catechism and the Commandments, and stick to ‘em; and do as you’re told by older people that knows what’s right and wrong better than you.”

“This is what I’ve learnt from older people,” Mrs. Sarah,—“I mean from my mother,” answered Hugh. “She was always teaching me good things. Besides I learn lots at the Sunday-school, and out of my Bible, too. Mr. Pedder often lets me read to him; it was only last night I was reading something that made me think little Lisa is a true Christian.”

“What’s that?” asked Dorothy, rather sharply.

“It was the text, ‘If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.’ When I read that out Mr. Pedder said, ‘Now that’s something to prove people by, whether they’re Christian or not.’ Because what sort of spirit was His?” And I said that it was loving and forgiving and merciful, and then I thought Lisa was like that, so she must be a Christian.”

“Oh, it isn’t that what makes a Christian,” said Dorothy. “It’s jest believing!”

“But it’s because Lisa believes in the Lord Jesus, that she tries to be like Him and do what pleases Him,” answered Hugh. “I found this out from things she’s said to me. And I think it will be the best thing I can do to give her my half-crown, because I know it will be doing good, and she won’t waste a penny of it. Once she gave mother and me a half-penny, that was all she had in the world. Now this will be like a reward for it, and I’m so glad I can pay her back so well.”

“Pretty good interest that!” exclaimed Dorothy. “Better than she’d get at the Bank of England! Well, I must say I don’t think it’s a wise thing or a right thing to do. You should save by all you get in case you should ever meet with that poor old grandmother of yours. But p’raps you’d rather give money to strangers than to them belonging to you!”

“No,” answered Hugh, decidedly. “If mother was alive I should give it straight to her, of course; or if I had found grandmother I should give it to her. But I haven’t anybody belonging to me to give it to, so poor Lisa Maurice shall have it.”

“Well, if there’s no one to stop you from wasting it, I s’pose you must do it,” said Dorothy much annoyed. “But I think you ought to be made to save it. And so I dare say Matthew Pedder offered that good gentleman when he wouldn’t let him pay for your schooling, so that he’ll do nothing else for ye, eh?”

“Oh no, he wasn’t offered; he was as kind and as pleasant as he could be,” said Hugh. “And he offered to do something for me; but of course I don’t need anything, with Matthew Pedder so kind.”

“You don’t know what you’ll need, so I jest advise ye not to lose sight of Mr. Barnett. Everybody’s got to look out for themselves in a world like this. And you don’t know how soon Matthew Pedder might turn ye out, nor how soon you might like to leave him of your own accord.”

These words, suggesting a doubt that his good relations with Matthew Pedder might not continue, made Hugh feel very uncomfortable. He felt sorry that he had allowed himself to talk to Mrs. Sarah as he had done, and he very soon got out of her way. But when he returned to the shop, Matthew’s kindness and cheery manner soon restored his equanimity, and he tried to comfort himself by saying mentally, “I’m sure Mr. Pedder and I like each other too well to wish to part.”

Mrs. Sarah resumed her work in very ill-humour. She felt out of sorts with herself and all mankind. Little Hugh would not have regretted that morning’s short talk with her, could he have known how one item of it was henceforth to work in her, for her good.

At her work, in her small dealings with the world, in her cold, unhearty attempts to serve God at church, in thinking of her past, especially in connection with her treatment of her lost daughter, the words were constantly recurring to her mind, pricking her conscience as thorns prick the hand. “If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.”

(To be Continued.)