

The Freeman

AN EVANGELICAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER FOR NEW BRUNSWICK AND NOVA SCOTIA.

REV. J. McLEOD.

"THAT GOD IN ALL THINGS MAY BE GLORIFIED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST."—PETER.

(EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.)

VOL. XXXII.—No. 10.

SAINT JOHN, N. B., FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 1885.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON XI.—March 16.

(For Questions see Star Quarterlies and Lesson Papers.)

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA.

Scripture Lesson.—Acts 26: 1-18.

DAILY READINGS.

M. Paul before Agrippa, Acts 26: 1-18.

T. Paul's early life, Phil. 3: 1-14.

W. Christ promised, Jer. 33: 10-26.

T. The dead to be raised, 1 Cor. 15: 12-26.

F. Persecution foretold, John 16: 1-12.

S. The Gospel message, Isa. 40: 1-11.

S. Gospel blessings, Isa. 55: 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. Acts 26: 15.

TOPICS.—Paul's Introduction.

Charges Stated.

His Conversion.

TIME, A. D. 58.

TOPICAL TREATMENT.

Connecting Link.—Soon after Festus was appointed governor, he went to Jerusalem, where the high priest renewed the charges against Paul, asking that he might be brought to that city for trial.

Intending to kill him on the way. Festus would not consent to that, but summoned them to Caesarea, to meet Paul face to face, and make their charges against him. They went but provided nothing, and Festus, unwilling to offend them, asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem to be judged, whereupon Paul appealed to Caesar. Soon after, Agrippa visited Festus and expressed a wish to see and hear Paul himself. We have here a part of Paul's speech before that king.

I. Paul's Introduction. The hearing granted to Paul by Agrippa was not a new trial. That was impossible. Agrippa had no authority to conduct such proceedings. Festus could do no more in that direction, for Paul had appealed to Caesar. The occasion was more of the nature of an entertainment given up by Festus for the amusement of his royal visitors; it was gratified by his curiosity, rather than for any serious purpose. The audience was called into his presence. The Herods were fond of display. To please their vanity, Festus made a grand procession of the chief men of his court, arrayed in all the splendor of their elaborate costumes, and with a great display proceeded to the magnificent audience room of the royal palace. He opened the hearing with a brief statement of the condition of the case and the purpose for which they had been called together, when Agrippa, as the superior in rank and the one for whom this entertainment had been arranged, indicated to the prisoners that he might speak for himself. Paul was, in all respects, equal to the occasion. He had seen royalty before, and knew his august auditor and his family thoroughly. He was not daunted by the marvelous display of the pomp and splendor of place and power. None of those things affected him. He looked about him and saw before him an opportunity to tell again the story of his own wonderful conversion to Christianity, and to preach repentance to men who had much to repent of, and to make known to those who, more than anything else, needed its purifying and stimulating influence. With all the grace and skill of an accomplished orator he briefly opened his defense, and with little delay proceeded to relate his Christian experience. Agrippa, himself a Jew and for several years an official of the Sanhedrin, was well acquainted with all the questions involved in the case, and it would be a pleasure to discuss the points at issue before one so well qualified to pronounce a decision concerning them.

II. The Charges Stated. He began by referring to the fact, probably not unknown to Agrippa, for Paul was no obscure or unknown fanatic, that he was a Jew, and formerly one of the strictest Pharisees among them all; he had lived long in Jerusalem in his earlier years, where he had been a pupil of the renowned rabbi, Gamaliel, and had obtained a standing such that, even when a comparatively young man, he had been named of the Sanhedrin, and as such engaged in persecuting the disciples of Christ. The Jews knew all these things and could testify concerning them if they chose. His people had long cherished a hope, based on the promise of God, that a Messiah would come to deliver them from their oppressors and make them a nation of the living and the dead. This hope he believed had been realized in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. The corner-stone of his faith in Jesus was the fact of his resurrection from the dead, after his crucifixion by the Jews, and for this hope and faith he had been bitterly persecuted and falsely accused by the Jews. Agrippa believed, could certainly raise the dead, and there was the best of evidence that he had done so in the case of Jesus Christ.

III. His Conversion. In the report of this speech, given us by Luke, we have not the details of the argument, but only the principal points presented by Paul. He proceeds to rehearse the story of his conversion. In this account, the ruling trait of his character is clearly presented. What he believed to be right, he drew without flinching and with hearty zeal. He threw himself into the work of persecuting the Christians with the fury of an insane man. He went from one synagogue to another to find the disciples of Jesus and followed them to far distant cities. It was while he was on such a journey to Damascus that Jesus himself had appeared to him at midday, in the glory and splendor of a blazing light that far outshone the brightness of the sun in the Syrian sky above him. Under its power he fell prostrate upon the earth, and there heard a voice calling him by name and saying, "Why persecutest thou me?" The irresistible conviction that this was, indeed, through no other than the voice of God, flashed through his soul, and he asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" and had received the direct and positive answer, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest," and a further communication in regard to Paul's future life, which was to be an entirely different life from that which he had been leading and which he had marked out for himself. The conversion of the great apostle to the Gentiles may be said to have consisted of two parts, the enlightenment of the mind, and the renewing of the life. These, with more or less distinctness, appear in every genuine conversion. It may be always easy to analyze the experience and to define the separate parts, but they are there and will, sooner or later, be developed.

Paul was called, in the hour of his conversion, to a great work, and was promised great protection and divine assistance, for, surely, he who sent him to the work, would not forget him in the work. He was to be God's agent in opening the eyes of the Gentiles, and in turning them from darkness into light and

from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." To no nobler work could he have been called, and in this work he was every disciple of Christ permitted to take a part.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS.

I. We should always be ready to give a reason for our hope.

II. The resurrection of Jesus certified his claim to the Messiah.

III. The Gospel turns men from sin to holiness for a purpose.

TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY.

I. The relation of Paul's early life to his success as a preacher.

II. The authority of personal experience.

III. The faith that was in Paul.

GOD'S SIGNALS.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUTLER, D. D.

On a bright May morning I rode across the verdant plain of Rehphaim, which lies on the Bethlehem road south of Jerusalem. I recalled the wonderful encounter with the Philistines on that plain, when God ordered King David to "fetch a compass behind the mulberry trees, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going (or a rustling) in the tops of the mulberry trees, that thou shalt bestir thyself for the Lord shall then go out before thee." That sound in the tree-tops—perhaps like the sound of the march of an army in the air—was to be the signal for an advance. It was the token of the Divine presence. David heard and obeyed the signal. When God moved, he moved. The result was a glorious victory; and the Philistines were swept away like chaff before a gale. This miracle incident in Jewish history is full of practical suggestion. God ordains special signs at special times. Faith must watch Providence and be on the lookout for the signals. When God moves it is our time to move. If we move with him, success is quite certain to us; if we move without him, then the failure is our fault. How clearly was the Divine signal manifested to the little company in the upper room at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost! The Holy Spirit descended, and the apostles fell into line with the Spirit's leadings; when the Spirit worked, they worked, and thousands were converted in a single day! Equally clear was the signal to Martin Luther to "move on the enemy's works," and within the Reformer's lifetime the spiritual face of one third of Europe was changed. Why the Reformation ran along the lines of certain races and nations and not others, is to us a mystery; but that God's hand was in the movement, no sane man can question.

If the history of all the most powerful revivals is studied this same truth appears—the signals of the Divine Spirit were seen, and were obeyed. God led the way, and then his servants bestirred themselves. No one plausibly does God indicate seed-time and harvest-time to the farmer than he often indicates to pastors and churches that the time has come for them to put in the sward and reap. The lives of such pastors as Dr. Lyman Beecher, and Dr. Spencer, and such evangelists as Charles G. Finney, Dr. Kirk and Dwight, were full of such illustrations. Dr. Beecher watched for the signals of the Spirit, as a sea-captain watches for a favorable wind, and when he heard the rustling of the breeze in the rigging, hastens to spread his canvass. I have no doubt that God has often given these gracious indications of his presence when human indolence or unbelief has failed to observe them. God was ready; his servants were not, and the cloud passed away without rain. Seasons of awakening often come unexpectedly; but the measures of success is always the measure of the readiness of Christians to co-operate with the Holy Spirit. When God works we must work; every moment then is golden.

My own experience as a pastor has tallied with this truth, almost without any exception. There have been times when my people were expecting a revival; but no special outpouring of the Spirit came; at least, there was no special awakening of the impenitent, or conversion to God. I have been able to hear the rustling of the breeze in the rigging, but I have failed to observe them. God was ready; his servants were not, and the cloud passed away without rain. Seasons of awakening often come unexpectedly; but the measures of success is always the measure of the readiness of Christians to co-operate with the Holy Spirit. When God works we must work; every moment then is golden.

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