

PAUL: A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"YE PHILIPPIANS"

(Philippians 4:15)

"These are the tones to brace and cheer
The lonely watcher of the fold,
When nights are dark, and foemen near,
When visions fade, and hearts are cold,

"How timely then a comrade's song
Comes floating on the mountain air,
And bids thee yet be bold and strong -
Fancy may die, but Faith is there."
- Keble

FOR a busy, footsore, heart-weary man, misunderstood and misrepresented, pursued by many anxieties and cares, there must be someplace where the heated machinery can cool, and the soul unbend in the atmosphere of love and on the couch of tender sympathy.

Even JESUS needed a Bethany.

It is well when this is found within the precincts of Home; when the door which shuts out the rush and glare of life shuts us in to love and sympathy, and those tender ministries which are the peculiar province of a woman's life.

How little does the great world realize the large share that woman's influence has had in nourishing the patience and courage of its noblest heroes! In the privacy of the domestic life will be found those tender hands that wash the stripes, pour in the oil, and enable the soldier again to take the field.

To many, however, of the world's greatest benefactors, though they have stood in profound need of this tender sympathy, the home life has been denied. Theirs has been a solitary and lonely lot; partly because of the exigencies of their position, and partly because it has been difficult to find, or reveal themselves to, a kindred soul.

This was largely the case with Paul. A self-contained, strong, heroic soul, he resembles the lofty mountains of his native Tarsus, whose slopes are clad with rich verdure and vegetation, while their summits rear themselves in steep and solitary majesty. Few have been dowered with a tenderer, warmer disposition.

The minute and particular greetings with which his Epistles close, the rain of hot tears in parting from his friends, his anguish of mind in having hurt those whom he was compelled to admonish and rebuke, his longing for companionship are evidences of the genuineness and tenacity of his affection. But it was his appointed lot to have no settled dwelling place no spot he could call Home.

Yes, without cheer of sister or of daughter;
Yes, without stay of father or of son;
Lone on the land and homeless on the water,
Pass I in patience till the work be done."

Yet the Apostle had marvellous powers of attracting men and women to himself.

We have seen how he threw the mantle of his magnetic influence over Silas and Timothy; and the Galatians were ready to give him their eyes. But he was now to win a group of friends who would never cease to love him whilst life lasted; whoever else was alienated and weary, they would be true; whatever trouble threatened to engulf him, it would only elicit their more profuse ministrations; and Philippi was to become to him the one bright sunny spot in all the earth, more than Tarsus which had disowned him, more than Jerusalem which would cast him out, and next to the "**far better**" of Paradise.

Hearts I have won of sister or of brother,
Quick on the earth or hidden in the sod.
Lo, every heart awaiteth me, another
Friend in the blameless family of GOD."

LUKE

The beloved physician seems to have met him first at Troas.

This could hardly have been by prearrangement, as the Apostle found himself, so to speak, forced to take his journey to that ancient seaport, famous for its traditional interest as the scene of the Siege of Troy, and thriving on its mercantile relations with East and West. All the northern provinces of Asia Minor sent their produce thither for shipment to Macedonia and Greece, and there the merchants of the West, men of Macedonia, would bring their freights in exchange.

It is conjectured that Luke, himself a native of Philippi, had followed in the wake of commerce to pursue his profession as a physician to his countrymen. Paul's temporary sojourn in the crowded ghetto may have induced a return of the acute disease from which he had suffered in Galatia, or he may have been laid low by malarial fever, to deal with which the nearest available physician was summoned, and this was Luke. In any case here the two men met; and here in all likelihood the servant of GOD won his medical attendant for the Saviour. In the enthusiasm of an ardent attachment the new disciple elected to become his fellow-traveller, so as to be able at all times to minister to the much-suffering and frail tenement of his friend's dauntless and vehement spirit.

He is immediately taken into the closest confidence; forms one of the little group to whom one morning Paul tells of the vision of the man of Macedonia; helps to formulate the conclusion, in which Silas and Timothy and he agreed, that the Apostle's path lay across the blue waters of the AEgean, dancing and sparkling in the morning light; goes forth to seek a passage in one of the many craft that lay at the wharves; and records with manifest love of the sea and knowledge of the land the successive stages of their voyage and journey to Philippi.

How dear he became to the Apostle, and how tenaciously he clung to his charge, is clear from two expressions penned, the one from the hired house of the first Roman imprisonment, the other from the chill prison cell of the second. "**Luke, the beloved physician**"; "**only Luke is with me**" (Colossians 4:14; II Timothy 4:11).

LYDIA

She was probably a widow; a woman of considerable business capacity, with energy enough to leave her native city of Thyatira, and cross the sea to establish herself in Philippi as agent for the sale of the purple-dyed garments for which her native town was famous.

The word indicates that she disposed of the finest class of wares; and she must have possessed a considerable amount of capital to be able to deal in such expensive articles. She was withal an eager seeker after GOD. The Jewish community at Philippi, being too small and poor to have a synagogue of its own, was obliged to meet by the riverside in an enclosure or garden screened from public observation. But thither she repaired as the Sabbath came round, with members of her household, listening to the Jewish Scriptures, and seeking after GOD, if haply she might find Him, not realizing that He was not far from every one of them.

On one memorable Sabbath, when only women were present, four strangers, Jews, appeared in the little circle, "**sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.**"

This was the first Gospel sermon in Europe.

And it is somewhat remarkable that it was addressed to a handful of women in the open air. Lydia was the first of a great succession of holy women, who have welcomed the Lord JESUS as their Sovereign and Spouse. And the open air has been the scene of the greatest victories of the Cross.

The result of that morning service was Lydia's conversion; whether she received the Apostle's message of the crucified and living Lord at once or gradually, is not clear most likely her heart opened as a flower to the sun; but the result was that she, with her entire household, came over to believe in JESUS, whom Paul preached, and she felt as sure about her own conversion as she was eager for Paul to come and abide in her house: **"If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there."**

It was a blessed change, which led to far-reaching consequences in her own life, and in Paul's.

She must have been a woman of considerable determination and perseverance, to have overcome Paul's reluctance to be dependent on any of his converts. **"What is my reward then?"** he asks on one occasion. **"That, when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel without charge . . . It were better for me rather to die, than that any man should make my glorying void."**

He would bear anything rather than risk the imputation of the suspicion that he was making profit out of the Gospel. Rather than this he wrought day and night, that he might be chargeable to none; and with his own hands ministered unto his own necessities and to those that were with him. But Lydia was able to override all his objections **"She constrained us,"** is Luke's reflection as he reviews the scene. So the four companions in travel found asylum and entertainment in her hospitable home.

How much this large-hearted and resolute woman did in after days, it is impossible now to decipher from the record of the past.

We know of four separate occasions in which the Philippian Church sent supplies to their beloved founder and teacher (II Corinthians 11:9; Philippians 4:10-18). And this was very probably due to Lydia's foresight and generosity. No other church performed so large a ministry, because no other church could perform it.

As Paul intimates, they were for the most part in deep poverty. And it is probable that the Philippians would have been as paralyzed as the rest had it not been for Lydia and her household, who thrived on the proceeds of their trade. It has even been surmised that Paul owed much of the comfort of after days, when he spent two years in the Palace of Caesarea waiting for his trial, and two more years in his hired house at Rome, to the same source; and it may have been some inkling of the well-to-do friend who held Paul dear, that induced Felix to keep him in bonds.

A statement gained credence in the early church that Paul and Lydia were wed, but there is no foundation whatever for this in Scripture; and the probabilities against it are overwhelming.

The whole argument of I Corinthians 7 and 9 may be adduced to show that the stories of Lydia and Thekla are alike inadmissible. We are rather inclined, therefore, to think of Lydia as a noble, true-hearted, and devoted friend of the Apostle, who counted it her privilege as well as her joy that he should reap temporal benefits in return for the spiritual blessings which he had so richly sown in her heart; and her reward will be one day to hear from the Master's lips that in making the burdens of his servant lighter she had been ministering to Himself, and that having received an Apostle in the name of an Apostle, she must have an Apostle's reward.

MINOR CHARACTERS are cast on the canvas, drawn from life, and filling up the picture.

The hysterical girl, demon possessed, who marked and followed the evangelists, designating them servants of the Most High GOD, who proclaimed the way of salvation.

The syndicate of owners who fattened on the proceeds of her divination, as she showed miners where to find the gold, girls - the day to wed, merchants - the period to set forth their ventures; and who were correspondingly chagrined when Paul's challenge to the spirit emancipated his wretched victim and ended their hopes of further gain.

The Roman magistrates, who strangely forgot the high traditions of their office, were swept off their feet by the urgency of the rabble, and, without going through even the formality of a trial, tore the clothes off the backs of the accused with their own hands, and laid "**many stripes upon them,**" uncondemned, being Romans.

Looking back on the way these petty officials treated him, Paul recalls how much he suffered and how shamefully he was entreated (I Thessalonians 2:2).

There was also Silas, who well justified Paul's choice of him, for he showed himself well able to bear shame and suffering for JESUS. It was good that Mark was not there! How would he have stood it? But from these our thought turns to the third principal actor in this scene, the story of whose conversion has shed the light of unspeakable comfort into myriads of broken hearts.

THE JAILER

A rough, coarse man, probably! What else could be expected from one who had spent his early days in the Roman army, and his later ones amid the hardening and brutalizing experiences of a provincial Roman prison?

When superiors did not scruple to act in defiance of law and decency, their subordinate could hardly be expected to be too particular. Barbarous usage would certainly be meted out by his hands to the two Jews, about whom he had received the significant hint that he was to keep them safely.

The inner prison was a dark underground hole beneath his house (Acts 16:34); into this he thrust them; they would probably lie extended on the bare damp ground, their bleeding backs in contact with the soil, and their legs stretched to such an extent by the stocks as to almost dislocate their hips.

By midnight the two prisoners became so happy that they could no longer contain themselves, and began to sing, chanting the grand old Hebrew Psalms, and in the intervals praying. No doubt they were in the best of company, and found their souls overflowing with exuberant joy. "**Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name.**" It was an unwonted sound to the prisoners who stood or lay around in the pitch dark, their chains stapled to the walls not one of them thought of sleep; "**the prisoners,**" we are told, "**were listening.**"

An earthquake broke in on the singing, the doors flew open, and the staples left their places. The jailer being roused from sleep came into the prison yard, and found the doors open.

As Paul and Silas caught sight of him standing against the glimmering starlight, to their horror they saw him draw his sword and prepare to kill himself rather than face an ignominious death for his infidelity to his charge.

With a loud voice Paul arrested and reassured him; then the call for the light, the springing into the cell, the trembling limbs, the courtesy that led them out, the inquiry for salvation, the answer of peace, the motley midnight audience which gathered around the two servants of GOD, the loving tendance of their wounds, the baptism, the hastily prepared food, the glad rejoicing of the transformed believer and of all his believing house.

One event crowding on the heels of another, and making a swift glad series of golden links which bound the jailer ever after to his Saviour and to Paul.

He doubtless became one of the members of the Philippian Church, a community of singular purity and loveliness, to whom the Apostle wrote his tenderest words without a syllable of rebuke. He could only thank GOD upon every remembrance of them, and in every supplication for them made request with joy. They were beloved and longed for, his joy and crown. He longed after them all in the tender mercies of CHRIST JESUS. They were his Bethany, his Zarephath, his Well of Bethlehem.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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