

I Go a Fishing

"When thou shalt be old, another shalt gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God"—John 21:18

OUR readings during the last week (John 20 to Acts 11) have focussed on the death and resurrection of Christ; the command to his disciples to go forth and preach the Word to all people; followed by the illustration of the manner of their going forth and carrying this message to Jew and Gentile. First to the Jew, as in the early chapters of Acts; and then the opening of the door to Gentiles, depicted by the call of Cornelius; which avenue has brought the Truth to us.

Turning back to John 21, we find Christ with his disciples in Galilee. Assembled with Peter (v. 2) were Thomas, Nathaniel and the 2 sons of Zebedee, James and John, and 2 others. Peter is back at his old profession—

"I go a fishing."

Those with him declare—

"We will go also."

They toiled all night and caught nothing. Their efforts were in vain. At the end of the fruitless night Christ stood on the shore, but they did not know him. He spoke to them and asked how successful they were. They replied—

"We have caught nothing."

They were fishing on the wrong side of the boat (v. 6)—

"Cast the net on the right side of the ship..."

—the correct side—

". . . and ye shall find."

The result was instantaneous and unbelievable. The situation was such that the net began to break; then they realized their Master was present.

We go back 3½ years. We have a similar circumstance, at the same place, on the same body of water—on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples had not comprehended the work unto which they had been called.

In Luke 5, the call & selection of the 12 disciples is recorded. It is also noted in Matt. 4 and Mark 1. The record in Luke 5 speaks of the call of these men in connection with an event similar to John 21. Christ had been speaking to the multitude on Galilee's shoreline. Then he commanded Peter to launch one of the fishing boats out into the deep waters. Peter remonstrated with the Master—

"We have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net."

The result of their obedience to Christ was the enclosing of a great multitude of fishes, and the net began to break. To save the situation, their 2 partners James and John assisted them—James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

The command at this time by Christ was clear and unmistakable, though obviously missed by the disciples in the circumstances recorded in John 21. Peter and the 3 others, Andrew, James, John, were told:

"Fear not, from henceforth ye shall catch men."

They became fishers of men (an illustration from the prophets of God), fishing for Israel from the nations, in the latter days; a commission later embodied in Mark 16:15—

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

They certainly were not doing this when Peter said on the shores of Galilee—

"I go a fishing."

—and the others agreed with him. Intervening had been 3½ years of instruction. These 3 men, Peter, James and John, became very close associates of Christ. In the most intimate circumstances in the ministry of the Lord, these men are closely allied with the works of the Master. These 3 are comprehended in the fulfillment of the prophecy—

"Ye shall sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel."

But many lessons, trials and heartaches stood between their service and their glorification. These are that James and John who, when Christ and his disciples were rejected by the Samaritans, said—

"Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and destroy these men, as did Elijah?"

Christ had named these 2 men "Boanerges, the sons of Thunder."

There was no mistake in this naming. The "Sons of Thunder" applies to the glorified saints together with Christ in the destruction of the ungodly of the world. This is illustrated in Rev. 10:11, where John is advised, subsequent to the sealing up of the events of the 7 Thunders, that he—

"Must prophesy again before many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."

This is when the saints are the Sons of Thunder, typically represented by James and John, and their name Boanerges. Names have very great significance for us, if we will but search their applications.

"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."

—said Christ unto these men, in the land of Samaria. How important that we realize that it is only by humility now, that we can attain to the position with James and John, as "Sons of Thunder," when the Thunders shall not only shake the heavens (the ruling places in the earth), as saith Haggai—

"Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (2:6)

On which Paul comments—

“‘Yet once more’ signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb. 12:26-27).

It was a hard lesson for James and John to learn, to shake the dust of Samaria off their feet. It must be learned by us. How important that we are impressed by this record!

Again the mother of these 2 men requests that her sons might sit, the one on the Master's right hand and the other on his left, when the Kingdom was established. Yes, she and they firmly believed in the Master and his Kingdom, but they wanted to be first!

Another hard lesson for these followers to learn. Each has his position in the Kingdom, There will be .s striving for pre-eminence. It will be "he that doth serve." It is service unto which all of us are called. Jesus answered them—

"These positions are reserved for those for whom it is prepared; they are not mine to give."

However, this incident, following some unwarranted indignation by the other disciples (they were still quarreling at the last supper which should be the greatest), led to a searching question by Christ to James and John, and a reply from them of great significance—

"Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

Boldly they replied—

"We are able!"

The Master's response directly confirmed that they should drink and be baptized as was he in the fullest sense, a sense in which all the faithful are involved—

"Ye shall drink indeed of the cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" (Matt. 20:22-23).

It was not long after this that these 2, and also Peter, (who had with the other disciples, declared their intention of standing with Christ, even unto death) fled, and left the Master alone. They were not able to drink of the cup that Christ was about to drink, the cup of death. They were not able to join with him in the baptism of death—

"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

They could not drink with him. They were not ready. They were to learn the lesson, as Jesus had declared, that the world would persecute them, as it had persecuted him—

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would

love his own."

This will be the determining mark, if we are loved by God or not. If we are of the world, the world will love us. If we are not, it will hate us (John 15:18-19)—

"Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

What an example Christ has given us! Are we sufficient for these things? It is important that we realize that we are NOT sufficient **of ourselves**. Paul, writing to the Corinthians impresses this fact (2 Cor. 3), He tells them that they were his epistle, written in the fleshly tables of the heart—

"We have trust through Christ to Godward."

"We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God."

God is the One in Whom we have our sufficiency, if we have our confidence in Him. Beginning 2 Cor. 4, he says—

"Having this ministry, we receive mercy, & we faint not."

This illustrates that the circumstances of our present life are important adjuncts to our eternal salvation (v. 15)—

"All things are for your sakes."

Notice this statement: "ALL things" — nothing excluded—**everything** that is happening is for our sakes, brethren and sisters!

". . . that the abundant grace, might through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God."

—if we do not faint, and are renewed day by day, by the Word of God (v. 16). Paul speaks (v. 17) of our light affliction (our "light affliction"!—it really seems heavy some days, but it is still light. It must—

"Work in us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

And then we learn (v. 18) that the things we see daily, and the things which trouble us daily that seem so real, are only temporal (passing). But the things not seen are eternal.

Because these men walked in Truth, they would be put out of the synagogue. We read of this happening in the case of the blind man in John 9, when his parents would not commit themselves that Christ had restored his sight. Christ further said—

"He that killeth you will think he doeth God's service."

Again we refer to John 21: 15-17, where the Master is speaking to Peter.

(This appears to be related to the threefold denial of the Master by Peter: "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." This followed Peter's confident declaration that he would die with Christ.)

Now we find Christ interrogating Peter later in Galilee concerning his love for his Savior. Upon the third questioning, Peter indicated some disturbance, and declared (v. 17):

"Lord, thou knowest all things! Thou **knowest** that I love thee!"

To which Jesus gives charge:

"Feed my lambs . . . Feed my sheep."

—the young and the old—a duty to "Get on with the work! You are not going back to your fishing"—

"When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself and walkest whither thou wouldest."

He had free choice, he did what he wanted; he walked where he wanted.

"But when thou art old . . ."

—which may indicate that Peter was middle-aged at this time—

". . . thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."

Peter would carry this in his mind from then on—

"This spake Christ, signifying by what death he should glorify God."

Then the imperative command:

"FOLLOW ME!"

He would follow his Master unto death, and ultimately to glorification. That was the charge; that was the commission: "Get on with the work; become fishers of men." As Paul said to the Romans (6:4)—

"We are buried with Christ by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life."

Again in Romans 12:1—

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Paul told the Philippians that Christ was to be magnified, (glorified) in his (Paul's) body, whether by life or death. Therefore in life or death we can glorify God, if we now walk in the steps of Christ's example.

Thus we see the urgency of **getting on with the work**. It is a full time occupation. There will be no time to "go a fishing." Every moment, every hour, every day, all through our lives.

We have risen with Christ, and while we are alive, we must "magnify God in our bodies." There must be an undefiled condition before the Father.

The duration of that work is always in the hand of God. We know, brethren and sisters, by sad experience, that there comes a termination of our labors, sooner or later; and we must face this reality. These disciples, by the Master's words, had been made to understand this—

"Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done."

In the Acts, we have seen this working out. In Acts 7 we find events related to what Christ said should happen. Here is Stephen, called out for a special work, full of zeal, knowledge, and the Holy Spirit, able to convince others of the power of the Word of God, because he loved the things of the Lord.

His accusers were "cut to the heart" by the power of the Spirit-sword in his mouth. They stoned him to death. Did not Christ say, "He that killeth you will think that he doeth God's service"?

"And they cast him out of the city" (v. 58)
—without the camp: "Let us go forth unto him, bearing his reproach."
"And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (v. 58).

We turn to ch. 9 (after reading in 8:1, "And Saul was consenting unto his death") and find that Saul continued his persecution of the ecclesia (9:1-2)—

"Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,

"And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

Notice—no distinction is made between men and women. All alike come under his persecuting hand. That was Paul's own determination. It was not God's will.

We have read in Acts 10 and 11 that persecution, rather than hindering the Truth, was causing it to spread. Acts 9:4—

"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"
What an instantaneous change in the humbled Saul!—

"He, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (v. 6).

"I will send a man unto you, Ananias by name, who will tell you what you must do"—it is imperative. And something else had to happen. Beside something to be done, something had to be endured. Ananias was instructed, as he demurred at approaching the feared Saul (vs. 15-16):

"Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

"For I will show him how great (or many: RV) things he must suffer for my Name's sake."

The list of these things is in 2 Cor. 11. He endured many more things than we will ever be called upon to bear, plus the care of all his brethren and sisters. So he could say—

"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

And we must bear those marks of identification, in degree, as well. To the Colossians he said (1:24)—

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his Body's sake, which is the Ecclesia."

Paul was showing the various other ways the believers would suffer with Christ. Each one fills up in some way the sufferings of Christ if they are truly part of "The Seed." Christ was not a substitute; he was a representative, an example, a fore-runner, of a way to salvation—

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Persecution, set in motion by this man who became the great apostle to the Gentiles, caused the spread of the Truth, rather than stopping it—

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the Word" (Acts 11:19).

Because these men had the zeal of the Lord's House In their hearts, persecution caused the flame to burn more brightly. Turning then to Acts 12:1—

"About this time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the ecclesia."

This is one of the most outstanding historical milestones of Scripture. There is only one time, a period of 3 years, when that statement could be made, that "Herod was the King." He was the grandson of the king who sought to destroy the infant Jesus. He is known in history as King Herod Agrippa I. The only time he was king was between A.D. 41 and 44.

The terrible death that this man suffered, recorded at the end of Acts 12, indicates that the disciples therefore had been preaching about 14 years from the death of Christ.

These historical highlights prove conclusively the accuracy of the writers of the Word of God, as they were guided by God's Spirit. v. 2—

"He killed James, brother of John, with the sword."

No details of the life and activity of this disciple are given from the time he was fishing on Galilee's waters, until this final climax of his work. No judgment and no trial. Simply "killed with the sword." What was it that Paul wrote to the Hebrews in the list of faithful (11:36-38)?—

"Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment.

"They were stoned, (like Stephen) they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword.

"Of whom the world was not worthy."

The fact that James' death pleased the Jews is an indication that James was very active in the proclamation of the Truth. But now his service was over. Quick and painless, a stroke of the sword, and he rested from his labors for the coming of the Lord. v. 3—

"Because Herod saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter."

Here was the leading proponent of the Truth at that time. How would we feel, brethren and sisters, to see one of our members taken away and killed by the authorities, and then another upon whom we leaned for support & help cast into prison? v. 3—

"Then were the days of unleavened bread."

The time of the Passover, 14 years before, Peter had said that he would stand with his Master; followed the same night with—

"I know not this man of whom ye speak!"

14 years later he DOES stand with his Master, a prisoner for the Truth. James becomes a type of those who endure unto death, that they might obtain a crown of life.

The ecclesia prays earnestly for the deliverance of their brother Peter, that the same end would not come to him. The Passover comes to an end—

"And when Herod had apprehended Peter, he intended after Easter ('Passover' is the correct rendering) to bring him forth to the people."

Peter knew why the delay. He knew that their religious scruples would not permit his death during the feast. He would realize that at its termination his end was to come. Would he not be contemplating what Christ had said—

"When thou art old (14 years later) they shall lead thee (as a prisoner) where thou wouldest not.

"This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God."

What of the body of believers? v. 5—

"Prayer was made without ceasing of the ecclesia unto God for him."

"Without ceasing—praying unto God." The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man (of the brethren and sisters) can avail much.

Elijah was a man of like passions as we are. He prayed to God and it rained not for 3½ years. And he prayed to God again and the rain came and blessed the land, even for an unrepentant nation. The wonderful mercy of God!

Peter was cast into the inner prison. Peter is a type of the righteous, bound by the world generally, by 4 quarternions of soldiers; the 4 watches of the night, 4 men in each watch—the 4 world powers which have had the ascendancy over the righteous from the time of Nimrod down to the present: all through the night watches, all through the period of unleavened bread when the Passover must be kept.

This is our time of Passover, we are bound by 4 quarternions of soldiers, by the sin-nature from which we are earnestly praying to be released.

Prayer was made "without ceasing" for Peter (Paul later said, "Pray without ceasing") down to the 11th hour, just before the end of the Passover—

"And the angel of the Lord came upon him."

To the assembly of believers, and to ourselves, brethren and sisters, there is here contained a type of death and glorious resurrection. Death is illustrated in the taking away of James; the sleep of death is represented by Peter bound in prison; the glorious resurrection is illustrated by what follows.

At a time when men have turned completely from God, and are seeking to go to the extremities of the universe, and glorifying themselves as Herod did in the end of this chapter, the angel of the Lord shines in the prison. The events are significant in our age. It applies in all ages. v. 7—

"He smote Peter on the side, and he raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly.

"And his chains fell off from his hands."

The voices of the "souls from under the altar" arising as incense unto the throne in the heavens was heard. The day of resurrection is at hand. It is typified in the events we are now reading—

"Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me."

Follow the angel from the shackles of death. Said Christ of Lazarus (John 11:44)—

"Loose him and let him go."

What glorious, thrilling words—

"AND FOLLOW ME."

"And he wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision."

The same reaction was in the hearts of those faithful who were delivered from 70 years Babylonian captivity—

"We were as them that dream" (Ps. 126:1).

They could not comprehend it—

"He wist not it was true."

To our sleeping brethren and sisters, the angelic summons will be a joyous, if yet fearful, occasion. And it will be as difficult to comprehend, in its sudden urgency. (v. 10)—

"When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened unto them of his own accord:

"And they went out and passed on through one street; and the angel departed."

Nothing could restrain the power of God, not even the iron arm of Rome. And to Peter was afforded the opportunity of convincing others of the glorious prospect of resurrection, through which (like Isaac many years before) he had been received in a figure (compare Heb. 11:19).

The effectual earnest prayer of his brethren and sisters had brought it about. Peter came to the living assembly, a type of:

"Those that are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord."

And what were they doing with their time? v. 12—

"Many were gathered together praying."

Praying for the fulfillment of the purpose of God. Praying for the salvation of their brother. It will be difficult for us to comprehend the knock on the door. v. 13—

"Peter knocked at the door of the gate, and a damsel came and hearkened, named Rhoda (a rose)."

The wilderness shall blossom as the rose, and break forth into singing, with joy unspeakable. Because she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran and declared that Peter was at the door. And we who receive the summons and the command will find it equally difficult to believe. They said, "Thou art mad."

"But she constantly affirmed that it was even so."

When they came to the realization, they were overjoyed. Their prayers had been answered, because they had spent the night of their probation, the Passover period of unleavened bread (keeping themselves unspotted from the leaven of the world) praying unto God.

What joy for us, brethren and sisters, if that day finds us praying for our brethren and sisters. Then shall we be prepared, when the knock comes at the door, to respond with joy, if yet with fear.

—E.F.H. June 1970 Berean
