

"Almost Persuaded"

"For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end"—Hebrews 3:14.

When we come to the table of the Lord, do we thoroughly realize the great privilege that has been granted to us? When we examine ourselves, can we be always satisfied that we value the privilege of daily companionship with "*the Glorious Gospel of our blessed Lord*"? We should never forget it is by the goodness of our Father in heaven that we are enabled to assemble ourselves together once more, to remember Jesus our Redeemer, and to let our thoughts dwell on all that he has done for us.

What has persuaded us to come here this first day of the week? Was it the urgent desire to render unto our Father in heaven homage and worship that is due unto His Holy Name? By coming here each week *have we grown in grace*, and in godly virtues, in sincerity and sobriety, and in our walk and conversation? God is working out in each of us a testing process. From that process, do we feel cleansed and purified, do we truly feel that from week to week we can say with sincerity—"Master, it was good for us to be here"?

Or are we content to come week after week and be quite forgetful of the great task that lies before all of us—to "work out our own salvation"? And that word "work" means in itself *effort and labor*. Happy are we if we realize fully what it means.

When we give these things our serious consideration, what do we find the results to be? By taking the right attitude we will leave with a blessing; for we will be in that frame of mind that gives a new determination, we feel that our faith has grown, that our strength and courage has been fed and watered; and we can feel that we are ready to go out against the world with all its deceptions and temptations and snares. By "casting our bread upon the waters" it has returned to us many-fold. In John 6:51 are these words—

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever."

The disciples could not understand what he said unto them, and from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (John 6:66). They had been "*Almost Persuaded*," but the Scriptures tell us:

"Let every man be FULLY PERSUADED in his own mind."

In Acts 26 there is recorded the incident of Paul before King Agrippa. Reading that chapter, no one who understands the Truth can fail to be stirred in their Faith!

Reading v. 1 we can picture in our minds Paul standing fearlessly before the assembled chief captains and principal men of the city. Then King Agrippa said unto Paul—

"Thou art permitted to speak for thyself."

Then Paul stretched forth his hand and answered for himself. (Acts 26:1). We are safe to assume that the writer of the Acts has given us but a very brief outline of all that Paul had said. Paul's defence may have been of considerable duration, for during his discourse he is interrupted by Festus, who said in a loud voice—

"Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."

But Paul answered,

"I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner . . .

"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know thou believest."

Then Agrippa said unto Paul—

"ALMOST thou PERSUADEST me to be a Christian."

There is but very little known of Agrippa, but from Paul's testimony he was undoubtedly familiar with the writings of the prophets. Because of that knowledge, and also, because of Paul's sincere and powerful speech, Agrippa was "*Almost Persuaded*" to become a Christian. But like many others, that was as far as he got—"Almost Persuaded." Perhaps the thought of all he would have to give up overwhelmed him; many are like him.

Agrippa would have to give up his position, his wealth, his prestige and power, and become as a child in humility, to become a servant of Christ. So he chose to not serve Christ. He let the golden opportunity go by of changing his pitiful, perishing earthly crown as "King" Agrippa, for a real enduring crown of victory which could have been his. Both he and his crown are now in the dust—lost forever. Yet, he was "*Almost Persuaded*."

There are some things worthy of note in the prominent personages in that drama. We know that Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa, who 16 years before had murdered James the brother of John. He was the grandson of Herod Antipas who had killed John the Baptist, and great-grandson of Herod the Great who murdered the children in Bethlehem, after the birth of Christ. Bernice the queen was Herod's sister, acting as his wife.

Festus could see no difference between Paul and his accusers except that Paul believed Jesus had risen from the dead; while his accusers maintained that Jesus was dead.

It would seem that Festus had considerable respect for the dominating personality of Paul, for no ordinary prisoner could have called forth such a display of pomp and splendor. Also noticeable is Paul's extreme courtesy throughout the whole proceedings, although he must have been well aware of the dissolute character of Agrippa.

It can be readily recognized that Paul considered the matter of the resurrection of Jesus as the one great issue. To the carnal mind of the heathen Festus such a thing as a resurrection from the dead could only be thought of by a madman. But Paul, with the greatest courtesy, reminds Festus that Agrippa was aware of the story of the resurrection of Jesus. And when we read vs. 31-32, we can realize that they were agreed that Paul was innocent—

"And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar."

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In Matthew's Gospel (19:16) we find another instance of one who was "*Almost Persuaded*":

"And behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

"Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but One, that is God."

Then Jesus named the commandments that the young man must keep if he would enter into life. And he answered and said—

"All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet? And Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.

"But when the young man heard that saying he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions."

Yet, he had been "*Almost Persuaded*"! In Mark 12:25 we read—

"And one of the Scribes came and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?"

And Jesus named the commandments to him, and the Scribe said to him—

"Well, Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other than He."

And when Jesus saw he answered discreetly, he said to him—

"Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God."

All of these men were not far from the Kingdom. They were "*Almost Persuaded*"—but they lacked the strength of will and the courage to give up the worldly things that Christ required of them, and requires of all that would follow him. They passed across the stage of life and into the silent oblivion of the graves. How many others have been "*Almost Persuaded*" to accept Christ, but the seductive pleasures of the world seemed far more attractive than to take up the Cross and follow Jesus Christ; for that means trials, that means giving up those little personal pleasures that many think they cannot do without. But what do we read?—

"Therefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

King Agrippa, the rich young man, and countless others, have laid much value on their titles, their positions of honor, and all those things that seem so desirous and precious to the worldly.

But what are these things in the sight of God? They are just *weights* that must be laid aside for that which is of far more value. How many there are who in their desire to indulge in passing pleasures are unwittingly placing a stumbling-block in their own way; These things may seem small at first but they grow as they are fed by the desire for greater enjoyment of the worldly things. But, "Can a clean thing come from an unclean?" Can the things of the world be of value to anyone *if they have their mind fully set on that precious jewel which a loving Father has invited us to run for*—"a Crown of Righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8)?

Is there not great wisdom in casting aside the weights that would hinder us, as they have hindered countless others of all generations in the world's long and sad history, who have had to face the same decision and have turned the other way, although they were "*Almost Persuaded*"?

Why do we hold on to even a *few* of the worldly treasures? God has declared we cannot successfully do that—"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." If we let anything interfere or come in the way of our serving God, are we not serving Mammon? In the Revelation we find these words—

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16).

There is a question that all in the Truth must answer: are we "*Fully Persuaded*"? We would like to be in the Kingdom, but is our heart, and soul, and mind *fully occupied* in winning the race? Let us give heed to the Scripture which saith—

"Give yourself wholly to these things."

In Heb. 11:13 we are told—

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were PERSUADED of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

And in Romans (4:18) Paul says of Abraham—

"Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations." And being FULLY PERSUADED that what God had promised He was able also to perform."

Let us turn the thoughts of these things to ourselves. If we are "*Fully Persuaded*" of the Truth of the Gospel, then are we not "*Fully Persuaded*" of what it can do for us? It will guide our feet past snares and pitfalls which the world lays before us in such tempting displays. In time of sorrow (and who can escape sorrow?) it will bring comfort. If we live just for the present, then we will suffer with the world.

Is there not *wisdom* in striving to find that peace of mind, that calmness, that sublime serenity which comes with the fulness of Faith? To not think it a *sacrifice*, the giving up of once-desirable things; but rather to think of it as a *privilege*, and as an opportunity to be called to work for Christ, that we might have something acceptable when he comes.

Would not our gift to him be to be able to stand before him at the bar of judgment as faithful stewards and servants? What else could we offer him? Nothing. We will have no gifts, no jewels, no treasures of any kind. Just ourselves.

If we are found acceptable, happy will we be in that day. Every day we see that *the world is not happy*—how could it be? All things that man has received from a beneficent Father, they take the glory of unto themselves. The people weary themselves with their vanities.

But those who live by the Truth become reconciled to God, and live in a more peaceful state. They have their heartaches and deprivations. They have to carry a cross which many times can be a cruel trial, trying to live as saints in an evil world.

But with all the trials we are "*Fully Persuaded*" we can be happier; we can have more interest in life than those who know not God, and make no effort to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The world has all the fear and fretfulness propagated by its lusts and vanities, and its cravings for positions of honor and power.

Do we fully realize our *great opportunity and privilege* of being in the favorable position of knowing God, and by being known of God? If we do realize it, then we know how difficult it is to express, and that it is impossible to exaggerate the glory that will be ours in being—

"Fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of the Household of God."

Brethren and sisters, beware of those who have become a dead branch on the vine, whose desire is more of the world's goods. You will find them standing in the way of sinners; and in the seat of the scornful. Their hearts have become hardened and they stoop to many follies in which they blithely profess to see "*no harm*."

But such as they, we fear, are only laying up wrath against the day of wrath of the righteous judgment of God, Who will render to every man according to his deeds. Listen to the words of Paul:

"For the which cause I also suffer these things. Nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know Whom I have believed, and am PERSUADED that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

Paul had not committed gold or silver, for these he had none. But by his life he had formed and laid up a character that will shine for all time. Yea, in the day when the true eternal values shall be made manifest he shall receive the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give him; and not to him only, but to them also that love his appearing; for he had fought the good fight.

"Let us go and do likewise."

—C.H.T.
