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Paul as a missionary

WILLIAM CHARLES LEWIS.

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In an attempt to form a true estimate of St. Paul and his work, no field of his activity deserves more thoughtful consideration than the one which relates to him as a missionary. Only after most careful research relative to this field of his labors, can a right judgment be formed of what he has done for the Christianization of the world. Indeed, as the centuries roll on, Christendom realizes more and more, the fact that it owes him a great debt of gratitude.

It is the aim and purpose of this paper, to show in a brief manner, that he was one of the greatest missionaries that the world has yet produced.

In the first place, it is fitting to make a survey of his missionary labors; for a knowledge of the fruits which were the result of his aggressive efforts and intense desire for the salvation of all men, is a potent factor in enabling us to arrive at an intelligent decision.

After spending a few years in preparation for the great work to which he was called, Barnabas and he started out from Antioch of Syria, on a missionary tour. Cyprus was first visited. Shortly after the arrival at Salamis, they entered into the synagogue, and declared the truth of the Gospel as best they could, but apparently with little success. As a matter of fact, Saul of Tarsus was not long in learning that the field of labor, had been ill chosen; but this did not discourage him,

for he was a moral hero filled with a Christian enthusiasm. As true heralds of the cross, they went through the island, preaching in every accessible synagogue, and exhorting men to attain a higher plane of living.

It was at Paphos where an event happened which was a great triumph for the Christian faith. When the sorcerer was struck blind by the power which Saul could command, Sergius Paulus the Roman proconsul, who stood nearby, was moved by the Holy Spirit to accept the principles which the missionaries were so earnestly advocating. It seems safe to say that Saul's successes, at this time, were probably the means of bringing about his recognition as leader of the forward movement; for, from this time on, it is no longer Barnabas and Saul, but it is Paul and Barnabas.

At Perga, their next stopping place, John Mark who had hitherto been in their company, took his departure from them, the cause of which, we do not know. From Perga they went to Antioch of Pisidia where their success was chiefly among the Gentiles. Being intensely earnest, however, in their presentation of the Gospel, they remained long enough to establish a vigorous church.

Iconium was next visited. When they arrived at this place, they entered into the synagogue, as was their custom, and declared the word of truth so effectively, that many Jews

and Greeks accepted Christ as their Savior. Such brilliant triumphs, however helpful they were in strengthening the Christian Church and the Apostles' faith, could not but alarm the unbelieving Jews.

As soon as Paul and Barnabas learned that a plot had been formed against them, they hastened on to Lystra where their success was marvellous until interrupted by hostile Jews who had come from Antioch and Iconium. Their persecution at this place, must have been severe, for the Biblical narrative informs us that Paul was even stoned and dragged out of the city for dead. Being only slightly injured, however, he was able on the following day, to go to Derbe.

Now, instead of continuing their journey eastward, which was the easiest way of reaching home again, they preferred to turn back in the direction from which they had come, in order to encourage the disciples whom they had brought to a knowledge of the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus. After revisiting most of the places, they sailed from the port of Attalia to Antioch of Syria.

This first great missionary tour of the Apostle Paul gave him a most valuable experience. In the course of this journey he had dared the perils of land and sea; he had suffered in the hands of violent mobs until he was willing to give himself up wholly toward filling up the sufferings which

were lacking on the part of Christ. The missionary fervor which he possessed at this time, inspired him to attempt even greater achievements than he had hitherto accomplished for the glory of his God and Master. It was impossible for him to remain in quietude and at ease, when he had a burning desire to see all men saved. The Spirit of God was upon him, and he had a message to deliver.

After going up to the council at Jerusalem, for the purpose of settling the controversy relative to the attitude of the Gentiles to the law, he was again ready to visit the churches which he with the help of Barnabas, had founded. He chose Silas as his colaborer, and then visited these churches.

Looking about in search of new fields for missionary enterprise at this time, it was most natural for him to turn his attention toward Asia; for there was that most noble city of Ephesus which was very attractive on account of its great influence and population. But the Holy Spirit was doing His work in restraining him from the course which he ought not to pursue. So abandoning his visit to Asia, he and Silas went through Galatia where his delay on account of sickness was providential in bringing salvation to many. The Holy Spirit was leading him toward the great field of Europe where he was to plant the standard of the cross on a

heathen soil.

At Troas he received a revelation of God's will relative to the designed field, which enabled him to form a more definit plan for the future. His great desire for the salvation of others was now intensified.

He next went to Neapolis, and thence to Philippi where he established his first church in Macedonia. While there, he was persecuted for the first time, by the Gentiles, simply because he had stopped the soothsaying of a certain maid. He and his companion were finally beaten in a most unmerciful manner, and put in prison. After some providential occurrences, however, they were released and so left the city.

Paul, determined that his work should be more effective, next visited Thessalonica where he put forth most strenuous endeavors and was rewarded with great success. Severe persecution being brought upon him as a result of this brilliant success, he left Thessalonica and went to Beroea where his labors were soon terminated by Jews from the former place. His work in the province of Macedonia was now brought to a close.

He next moved toward the learned city of Athens. There he met princely thinkers and philosophers whom he endeavored to show the true religion. After a short visit he went to Corinth where he remained for a long time.

When he finished his noble work at Corinth, his second

great missionary tour was at an end. It had been a most fruitful one. In making it he had been successful in establishing churches in the great provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. It had occupied about two and one-half years of persistent endeavor on his part. In its course, he had travelled about twenty-five hundred miles. Though insulted in the grossest manner, though beaten and imprisoned, he still manifested the genuine missionary spirit which gave him courage to brave most formidable dangers.

From Antioch he started out on his third missionary tour. After visiting the churches of Galatia and Phrygia, he turned toward the great city of Ephesus. Even in the city in which the goddess of Diana was almost universally worshiped, he labored very earnestly in striving to make it clear to all that the Christian religion should have the supreme sway.

His third great missionary tour and his great work in the East, being now finished, it was not long before he formulated a new plan, in accordance with which, he visited again the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, and then went up to Jerusalem with great anticipations that he would be able to go from ~~thence~~ there to Rome, and thence to Spain. Though entreated time and again, not to go up to Jerusalem, he was persistent in his determination, by the help of God, to be there on the day of Penticost.

So after considering the scope of his labors, it is almost impossible to give him full credit for what he has done for mankind. Without the moral heroism which he manifested and that which he stimulated in others, our Western civilization could not perhaps be what it is to-day.

In the second place there were two principles in his character, which reveal to us the secret of his unparalleled success, and which made him what he was as a missionary.

One of these principles was his love to Christ, which was a most powerful factor in his life; it was this love which made him great; it was this love which gave him a supreme desire to seek the welfare of those about him; it was this love that enabled him to put the Gentiles on a level with the Jews, and that sent him out as an Apostle to the former; it was this love that moved him to brave innumerable dangers by land and sea for no purpose other than that of showing them the word of truth and of helping them to secure the rich blessings which he himself enjoyed; it was this love that gave him the courage to go up to Jerusalem, when he was warned and entreated on every hand not to go, when he knew that perhaps he would meet death there. With his heart filled with the love of Christ, he could say: "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

The other principle was his trust in God. In studying his first European tour, one cannot fail to see how prominent this element in his character, became in each successive step. It waxed stronger and stronger, so that when he reached Athens, he was not afraid to face the wisest philosopher and tell him of the story of Jesus and His love.

Whatever he undertook, he put his whole soul into it and trusted God for the result. In going up to Jerusalem the last time, he felt that he was doing God's will; and for that reason no entreaty of bosom friend or fear of death could stop him. With such intense faith he was ready to do anything for his Lord, however great the sacrifice involved, might be to him.

Finally, it may be said that the foregoing considerations by showing us what he did and what he aspired to do, for the Christianization of the world and by revealing to us the source of his power, warrant us in asserting that he was a missionary of the highest order. When we consider his great work as an Apostle, his lofty aspiration for the beautiful, the good, and the true, his intense desire to be a soul winner at any cost, we have a higher conception of the possibilities of those who are thoroughly consecrated to the service of God. His influence still lives, and will continue to live until the final consumation of all things.