

Mr. Bryan's Bible Talks

A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR NOV. 6

(Acts 21:27-40 and 22:1)

And when the seven days (of purification) were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him.

Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

And all the city was moved, and the people ran together; and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple; and forthwith the doors were shut.

And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them; and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was and what he had done.

And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude; and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?

Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stair, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying:

Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.

As this is the first of a series of Bible talks that will appear every week in the Saturday (or Sunday) editions of a list of newspapers throughout the country, and which will be reproduced in this and subsequent issues of The Commoner, it may not be out of place to explain to the reader the plan that I shall pursue.

I am addressing a large Bible class made up of newspaper readers scattered throughout the entire country—the largest Bible class in the world—and my purpose is to show how the lessons of the Bible can be consistently applied by all of us to our everyday, twentieth century lives.

Man needs spiritual nourishment as imperatively as he needs food for the body. If the emaciation of the soul were as apparent to the eye as emaciation of the body, it would be easy to throng the tables where ethical food is dispensed as it is to fill the dining room. I hope, through the medium of these weekly Bible talks, to increase the interest in the Bible of those who are habitual attendants upon church and Sunday school, and to bring to a study of the Bible those who have allowed worldly cares to keep them from enjoying constant contact with the Holy Scriptures.

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PRESIDENT HARDING SAYS: "STUDY THE BIBLE"

"I have always believed in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures," writes President Harding, "whereby they have come in expression to men of the word and will of God. I believe that from every point of view the study of the Bible is one of the most worthy to which men may devote themselves, and that in proportion as they know and understand it, their lives and their actions will be better."

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I believe that devoutly; and with our president I also believe "that from every point of view the study of the Bible is one of the most worthy to which men may devote themselves, and that in proportion as they know and understand it; their lives and their actions will be better."

May we together, in these weekly Bible talks, come to know and understand the Bible better, that we may all enjoy life more abundantly.

A GREAT SOUL UNAFRAID

The text of today's Bible talk is found in the account of the Apostle Paul's return to Jerusalem.

A quarter of a century before his conversion had taken place, even while on his way to persecute the new sect that called themselves Christians. During all those twenty-five years, he had been steadfast in the ministry of the Master, carrying His word throughout Asia and Europe to Jew and Gentile, and making thousands of believers.

He had suffered many things in the course of his ministry. Now, as he set his face towards Jerusalem, it was prophesied to him that there he would be bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles.

His reply was characteristic of a great soul undaunted and unafraid. "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

So he had gone up to the Holy City. There it was told to him that it had been said of him in Jerusalem that he had taught all the Jews which were among the Gentiles (in foreign lands) "to forsake Moses . . . neither to walk after the customs."

To disprove this false report, to show that he himself kept the law, Paul, the next day purifying himself, entered into the temple, "to signify the days of purification."

It was when this period of seven days was almost ended that the mob, told of in today's text, came down upon him. And before taking up the central thought of today's talk, attention should be called to the fact that this mob, which threatened the life of Paul and called to his rescue the chief captain, Lysias, was brought together by a false rumor.

THE SIN OF "SUPPOSE"

It was charged that Paul brought Greeks into temple. In our text we learn that the Greek referred to was Trophimus "whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple."

What an indictment will be found upon the books against Dame Rumor in the last day! Property has been destroyed, hopes wrecked, and even lives taken because rumor led people to suppose.

I was once asked to give, for a symposium on the subject, an answer to the question, "What would happen if for one day, every person told what he knew about other persons?" My answer was that nothing could be of less advantage to the public or of greater harm.

In the first place, half of the evil that we think we know about other people is not true. It comes to us upon the authority "they say" and we have no time to verify the statement even if we have inclination to do so.

Of the half that is true, most of it ought not to be told. "To err is human," and there is enough wrong doing in every life, to make all charitable. What excuse can there be for dragging forth from their hiding place the sins that have been repented of? Or the mistakes that have brought those who committed them in agony to high resolve? Gossip is uncharitable.

And it is probable that those who were so quick to make false accusation against Paul were actuated by reasons entirely different from those which they proclaimed.

Even a little experience in life is sufficient to convince any one that the indictments made by clamorous tongues do not always state the real cause of offense. As Demetrius, the silversmith of Ephesus, when he feared Paul's success in preaching the Gospel to the Ephesians would rob him of his business of making shrines for the city's goddess, concealed a selfish reason in his praise of Diana, so today we find mercenary motives cloaked in righteous indignation.

But to come to the paramount thought of

today's talk, so beautifully set forth in the words of the Psalmist:

"God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble,
Therefore will not we fear."

It is an excellent text with which to begin this series of articles, and Paul furnishes us with as good an illustration as history presents. God was his refuge and his strength; God was his present help in every time of trouble, and, because of his trust in God, Paul knew not fear. He says of himself (II Cor. 11:23-27) that he was

in labours, more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

And yet Paul's faith never wavered. He was an example of what one can endure who believes and is ready to testify to his belief, by life if that be God's will, by death if his death is required.

"THE CULTURED CROWD"

Tolstoy administers the severest rebuke that I have read to what he calls "the cultured crowd," viz., those who regard religion as a superstition, good for the ignorant, but who think that one can outgrow the necessity for religion when he reaches a certain stage of intellectual development.

The great philosopher declares that everyone who has experienced religious feeling knows that it does not rest upon a vague fear of the unseen forces of nature, but does rest upon man's consciousness of his finiteness amid an infinite universe and of his sinfulness. And this consciousness, Tolstoy adds, man can never outgrow.

It is a consciousness of our finiteness that makes us appreciate a refuge such as those have who believe in a God, all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving.

We are constantly confronted by our limitations. Our hands can lift but a few pounds, while the hands of the Almighty piled mountain upon mountain. Our wisdom is of little worth; we are daily confronted by problems that confuse us and confound us. It is relief at such times to look up to the measureless Mind that planned a universe and wrote His laws upon all things, animate and inanimate.

We find it difficult to be neighborly to a few whom we know personally—difficult to consider their interests and our own at the same time. Our hearts can but feel rebuked when we think of the goodness of a Heavenly Father whose care extends to all His children, however scattered and however ungrateful they may be.

It was to teach us this boundless love—a love whose limits are so far flung that even an enemy cannot escape from it—that Christ reminds us that God maketh His "sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

THE PRICELESS PRIVILEGE

This is so large a theme that it is hard to compress within the limits of this weekly talk all that one might say on the priceless privilege that God's creatures have in finding in Him a refuge in every time of trouble. William Cullen Bryant has made this thought the climax of one of his greatest poems, "The Ode to the Water Fowl." After describing the flight of the bird between its northern and its southern homes, he puts into exquisite language the lesson of our golden text:

"He, who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright."

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENSE TOWARD GOD, AND TOWARD MEN

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR NOV. 13

(Acts 24:10-27.)

Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:

Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but 12 days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

And they neither found me in the temple dis-