

Milk & Honey

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Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul's Reaction To One Of The Greatest Cities Of His Time

Acts 17:16-34

G. Campbell Morgan

The first declaration of this passage is that he was waiting in Athens. That in itself is an arresting and suggestive word, for it reminds us that we shall see how a Christian man waits in a godless city. There are three things to note as to the impression which the city made on Paul.

1. ***It Aroused His Interest.*** We are impressed with the fact that he was not impressed by things which would impress other men. All that splendid history of Athens, running back at least four centuries before he came to the city, was ignored. Of the whole of the outstanding names of Greek thought, Paul hardly referred to one. It was the very home of art, but there was no reference to the art of Athens by Paul. It was the center of philosophy. He did come into contact with certain of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers; but it is a very remarkable fact how in his dealing with them, he ignored their peculiar philosophies, or only referred to them to show their folly. Here was a man indifferent to the very things which had peculiarly arrested attention, to the very things which had caused other men to write at length of their beauty. But this man Paul saw everything, and Luke summarizes his outlook upon all these things by one phrase "full of idols"! This man was unimpressed by the things which impressed others. These very things of history, of art, of philosophy, were not alive; they were dead. So when we are inclined to criticize Paul because he was not impressed, though he was in the midst of things of art and philosophy, we should remember that they were not living, but dead. Notwithstanding the splendor that remained, there was lack of life everywhere in Athens when he came to the city. But what did Paul see in Athens? Two things impressed him. First the city was full of idols; secondly, one altar arrested his attention, an altar that bore an inscription, "To An Unknown God."

2. ***It Stirred His Emotion.*** What was the effect produced upon him by what he saw? "His spirit was provoked within him." In the midst of the beauty and the glory and the art and the philosophy and the history of Athens, proud and

wonderful Athens, this man Paul was in a rage, was provoked. The emotion produced was not piquant and passing, the emotion of a tourist. He was provoked because he knew that these idols and temples and altars all meant that these men were made for worship, and for God; and he knew that these idols, temples and altars issued in that diffusion of devotion that had broken up the individual man, disorganized society, and made Athens what she was. This little Jew, this great Christian, had no time for a description of art, of painting, and the things of beauty, because his heart was hot and angry in the consciousness of the degradation of humanity, issuing from humanity's false attempts to satisfy its profoundest need, that of God, with all its idols and its temples. Men were worshipping everything, and therefore were worshipping nothing. At last the little Jew, the great Christian, found one altar to an unknown God, and that altar for him was the focussing of a tragedy. Paul saw and read into it the ultimate agony of idolatry; that, unable to satisfy itself with its many gods, restless by the very diffusion of devotion, it travels out beyond and knows nothing, and yet is sure that in the beyond is the thing it wants; and it erects an altar to the unknown God. It was the rage of truth with a lie, it was the anger of the constructive against the destructive. It was the passion of a man who found in Athens capacity for God, and that capacity degraded and spoiled for lack of God.

3. ***It Inspired His Service.*** He began his work, first in the synagogue, and then in the market-place, where perchance Socrates four hundred years before had stood. The burden of his talking had been that of Jesus and the resurrection. Think of the fitness of it; it was the gospel for a dead city; Jesus and the resurrection. He knew full well that by that risen One alone, could Athens arise from the ashes of her dead self to higher and to nobler things. The impression he made on them was not the same in all cases. There were those who spoke of him with contempt.

We are far from the Athens of Paul. Yet sometimes I think how near we are. History is interwoven with the influence of Christ, and men are forgetting Him. Art has been glorified by making Christ its supreme subject, and is drifting away from Him. Philosophy has been permeated with the conceptions of Christ, and is now inclined to ignore Him. We are largely living in the past, and our cities are as full of idols as was Athens. The influence of

Continued on Page 3

Little Things God Uses

Robert Crozier

The “bigger is better” philosophy of our society has permeated the local assembly. Our God is greater than all of man’s programs and systems and He chooses to bless His Word regardless of the number of saints involved.

Do you remember singing as a child?....

“Shamgar had an ox goad, David had a sling,
Dorcas had a needle, Rahab had some string,
Samson had a jawbone, Moses had a rod,
Mary had some ointment, But they all were used of
God”

Hear Moses questioning God, “*Who am I, that I should go?*” (Ex. 3:11). Hear Gideon asking, “*Wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor...and I am the least in my father’s house*” (Jud. 6:15).

We’ve been taught through the years – and it’s true – that God is more concerned with availability than with ability. He is looking for the “*willing hearted*” and “*wise hearted*” saints (mentioned in Exodus 35) who make themselves available to the Lord and His people in the assembly – those who will say with Isaiah, “*Here am I; send me*” (6:8).

The Greatness of Little Things

The old Braid Scots saying is “Guid gear gangs in wee book” which simply means that size isn’t everything; though something may be small in size, its importance may be far greater than we think.

When Israel returned from their seventy-year captivity in Babylon, they needed to be reminded of the importance of “little things.” Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, work immediately commenced in Jerusalem to restore the temple, which lay in ruins. When it was completed, it proved to be significantly less impressive than the one previously built by Solomon. God had to remind His people through Zechariah not to despise “the day of small things” (Zech. 4:10). Encouraging them, He declared: “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former” (Haggai 2:9). Though it was physically smaller, God promised that its glory would be greater.

Elijah had to learn the importance of “little things.” When standing before Ahab, he courageously spoke for God in a day of spiritual declension—and suffered the consequences. Led to Cherith, he had his daily needs provided at the brook there; God miraculously fed him by means of ravens that brought him food both morning and evening. When the brook dried up, Elijah enjoyed God’s provision from another source, being directed to the house of a destitute widow in Zarephath (1 Kings. 17:8-16). Upon approaching

her, Elijah requested a “little water” and a morsel of bread. Her response was touching: “As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread; only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1 Kings 17:12, NKJV). Her impoverishment was indeed great; her possessions consisted only of a little flour, a little oil, a few sticks, and very little reason to attend to his needs since she was convinced that she was about to die. In addition to this, Elijah asked her to make a “little cake” for him first and then for herself, with the promise that her supply would not run dry.

As the apostle Paul stated to the Corinthian assembly: “Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness” (2 Cor 9:10, NKJV).

There were other “little things” that surfaced in the ministry of Elijah—each one carrying weighty lessons for him—and for us. After the events on Mt. Carmel and the execution of the prophets of Baal at the brook Kishon, Elijah returned to Carmel to pray for rain. Now the Lord had already commanded Elijah to show himself to Ahab to say that He would send the rain (18:1). But amazingly, when he prayed no answer came! It took **seven separate petitions** for Elijah’s request to be answered and when the answer did finally come, it appeared, not as a fierce storm but in the form of a “little cloud” as small as a “man’s hand” (1 Kings 18:44).

There was still another “little” lesson that Elijah needed to learn in his ministry. Despite God’s marvellous work in his life, this servant of the Lord was not without his deficiencies. After great spiritual victories, he lapsed in his faith, after seeing the fearful message of wicked Queen Jezebel, who threatened his life. Cutting himself off from his servant, Elijah departed into the wilderness for a season of self-pity (1 Kings 19).

Even though he was ministered to by an angel of the Lord, Elijah continued his aimless wandering for forty days and forty nights, arriving finally at Mt. Horeb (Sinai). There the Lord would teach him another lesson. Instructed to go out to the entrance of the cave, Elijah strangely remained where he was (v.11) as the Lord sequentially signalled His approach via a strong wind, an earthquake and a fire. However, Scripture records that the Lord was not in either of them. After the fire, however, a still small voice was heard – a gentle whisper indicating the presence of the Lord. With this, Elijah shamefully wrapped his face in his mantle and then went out to the entrance of the cave, pouring out his complaint to the Lord. It was not until then that Elijah moved to the entrance of the cave. What object lesson was

Elijah? His complaint focused on Israel's stubbornness to be moved by the powerful manifestations of God through His ministry. He lamented that he was the sole faithful witness in all of Israel. What a warning to us today not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

We also see the value of little things in the life of Elijah's protegee, Elisha. In 2 Kings 4:8-17, we read of a notable woman of Shunem who honoured this venerable servant of the Lord by providing a "little chamber" in her home—a place where he could rest during his ministry travels. It served as a spiritual "get-away" where he could come aside from the demands of the prophetic ministry in order to be refreshed and renewed. Simply furnished, it proved to be a continual blessing as he often passed through the area. As a result of her hospitality, this well-to-do but childless woman conceived and had a child within the year—a direct consequence of the assistance she gave to the Lord's worker and work.

Finally, in 2 Kings 5, we have yet another example of the importance of "little" things. When a "little" maid was taken captive by the Syrian army, it was her selfless testimony for the Lord which triggered the event that led to the healing of Naaman the Syrian. She could have remained silent and been resentful of her situation, but she was willing to share the words of life with her national enemy. It was a little word by a little maid that effected a great change in the life of the leper commander and opened up the land of Syria to the blessings of the God of heaven.

Henry Law once said "Great doors swing on small hinges." Events most momentous often hinge on details and circumstances so seemingly trivial and insignificant. The Bible frequently draws our attention to some innocuous incidents, which were to have the greatest impact on those involved in them. For example, apart from those mentioned above, we have many more, including:

A crying babe (Moses) in the bulrushes (Exodus 2:6)

Haman at the gate - A sleepless king (Ahasuerus)
(Esther 6:1-2)

Samson in prison. His hair began to grow (Jud.16:22)

Elisha.....A mantle

Isaiah.....A burning coal from off the altar

Jeremiah.....An almond rod

Moses.....A rod

Elisha's widow.....A cruse of oil

David.....A sling and 5 smooth stones

Shamgar.....An ox goad

Samson.....The jawbone of an ass

Dorcus.....A needle

Gideon.....Pitchers & Lanterns

Rahab.....A piece of cord

Jael.....A Tent Peg

Little boy.....2 loaves & 5 small fishes among 5,000

May we be preserved from the folly of always looking at the big thing, to the exclusion of what is really important... and may He give us eyes to see, minds to discern and hearts to value the little things of life. *

Continued from Page 1 - Paul's Reaction To One...

Christ has made impossible the erection of material altars, or the putting up of images that we worship, but the spirit of idolatry is still with us; and I very much question whether one can find any temple, or altar or idol in Athens, that cannot be reproduced in the great cities of today. We are still worshipping Athene, in the deification of the mental; and Demeter too, the earth mother, in the apotheosis of the physical; and Zeus, the god of force, even until this hour. We also have our altars reared, even to philosophy, most certainly to rumour. Rumour, the base goddess, has had her scriptures issued morning by morning until the very life of man is made restless by her lying. We are worshipping shame; there are altars to shame upon our highways everywhere. We are still idolaters. The Epicurean is with us still; indifferent. The Stoic is here still, gathered into so-called ethical societies. Where are the Christian men and women of the city? *

Continued from Page 4 - Stand Fast

identified with what He is doing for Christ in the world? There is no honor like it, and no favor from God so great as to be allowed "in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

4. "Stand Fast In The Lord" (Phil. 4:1)

In saying this, Paul was not telling them to do something that he knew nothing of himself. In every circumstance, and at every moment, the Lord was the first Person before his heart. He was looking at everything, and holding everything, in connection with the Lord. I think that is standing fast in the Lord. If we were thus standing fast in the Lord do you not think it would often make a great difference? Perhaps half of our lives would have to drip out of existence, and the other half be strangely altered! Everything that could not be connected with the Lord would have to go, if we were truly standing fast in the Lord. Have you never fancied that you had some great grievance, and got so under it that you felt you must go to the Lord about it? It was a mountain when you began, but somehow as you told Him about it, it grew less and less, until at last you were heartily ashamed that you had ever mentioned it to Him, or allowed it a place in your heart?

May the affectionate words of the beloved apostle be treasured, and heeded, in all our hearts! *

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*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able
to stand against the wiles of the devil. Eph 6:11*

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Stand Fast

C. A. Coates

We need to take it to heart that there is an immense power continually at work to move our souls away from the great fundamental realities of Christianity. All our natural tendencies are to drift away from what is of God. Hence we have in the Holy Scriptures repeated exhortation to "Stand fast."

1. "**Stand Fast In The Faith.**" (1 Cor. 16:13)

It seems to me that at Corinth, where so many grievous things called for rebuke and correction from the Lord, the root of all the evil was that the believers there had failed to "stand fast in the faith." Neither the sectarian divisions, the legality, nor the carnality, which had come into that assembly, would have had a place there if the saints had been, in the power of the Spirit of God, standing fast in the faith. Many souls are not at perfect rest before God because they have not yet seen that Christ must be everything for them, and that it is only as being "in Christ Jesus" that they can have any place in God's presence. Some believers that I know remind me of a dissolving view – one picture is beginning to fade and another is beginning to come, but for the present all is confused and indistinct. They have begun to distrust, and to be dissatisfied with themselves, but they have not yet altogether given themselves up. Christ has yet a certain place in the faith and the affections of their hearts, but they do not know what it is to be "in Christ Jesus," and to have Him as their "Wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." You will never have true Christian experience and joy until you learn in your soul that there is nothing about you – as in the flesh – but material for the judgment of God. If the Queen gave some poor man a high position, everybody

would expect her to furnish him with means to stand in that position with comfort to himself and credit to her. It is not less so with God, and when you take this new position you find that there are wonderful revenues connected with it.

2. "**Stand Fast In The Liberty**" (Gal. 5:1)

The epistle to the Galatians is most solemn, because it shows how soon we may be drawn away from Christian liberty. The Galatians had heard a clear and full gospel from the apostle Paul, had been soundly converted to God, and had received the Holy Spirit. Mark the subtle way in which the enemy went to work in Galatia! There is a real danger that those who have escaped to the free country may go back to the land of slavery. They did not know that in going back to the law and ordinances they were returning to man in the flesh, and glorying in the flesh of which God had said that it should not "glory in His presence." They had got off the ground of being "in Christ Jesus," and therefore had got out of touch with the Spirit of God, and were in legal bondage. Paul recalls them to their true position and privilege, and exhorts them to "stand fast" in it.

3. "**Stand Fast In One Spirit**" (Phil. 1:27)

There is a danger of being selfishly occupied with our individual blessings, and forgetting that we are identified with a great and holy cause. The testimony and cause of God and of Christ is committed to us, and the maintenance of the whole depends upon each individual being true to his post. The strength of a British regiment depends upon every man that is in it, and every man feels in measure that he is responsible for the whole. You may say, and if you are like me you will say, "I am such a poor weak thing I can do little or nothing." It may be so, but do you bless God that He has called a poor heart like yours to the honor and joy of being

Continued on Page 3