

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 54 Spiritual Prosperity

Reading: Acts 9. 23-31

23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he

had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Address

The early churches had been experiencing a very dark and sad and solemn time. Really, one person was responsible for it: Saul of Tarsus. And there did not seem to be any way of deliverance. They prayed, they cried to the Lord, but there did not seem to be any way of deliverance. But they got deliverance and they got it in the opposite way from what they expected. God does “move in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.” I am sure they must have thought perhaps Saul would be stopped, perhaps even he would die. But instead the Lord graciously dealt with him and made him who was an enemy into a friend, that he might preach the faith he once laboured to destroy.

“Then had the churches rest.” It came in a strange way, didn’t it? But the Lord can do “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” “*Then* had the churches rest.” They longed for it, they prayed for it, and they got it, but it

was not in the way that they expected. “Throughout all Judæa” in the south, “and Galilee” in the north, “and Samaria” in the middle – it was all the churches. And what followed, beloved friends, was a period of real, spiritual, gospel prosperity. So often it has been otherwise. There have been times of trial and danger and difficulty and persecution, and the churches have flourished, and then there has come peace, and there has been a decline.

It was so in our own country. If you read the history of the church of God in the late 1500s and then throughout the 1600s, the appalling persecution they suffered, the cruel persecution, and they longed for one thing: if only they were allowed freely to have the privilege of worshipping God. In the year 1689 it was granted. They could worship freely. No-one could intervene. And what happened to all that wonderful prosperity? There began an age in the chapels, an age of barrenness and lethargy and spiritual decline. We do need to watch when things go well. “Then had the churches rest,” and we should be very grateful that amidst all the dreadful happenings in the world and in our own country we still have the freedom of worship. May we not abuse it; may we not take it for granted.

“Then had the churches rest ... and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” If you will, this is a beautiful little summary of what real, spiritual prosperity is in the church of God. And the thought on my mind this evening: this is the prosperity that we should seek. These are the things we should pray for here at Bethel and throughout our churches. They “were edified.” Beloved friends, do seek this, when you come to the house of God on the Lord’s day and in the week, that you might be edified. I do pray this myself, that the preaching might edify. It will not always be a clear blessing, a clear word, a clear deliverance, but pray that it might edify. We think of the promise where the Lord says that His Word is for “edification, and exhortation, and comfort” – in that order. It is a sad thing if the preaching of the Word does not edify. “Then had the churches rest ... and were edified.” Now that is the first thing. It is a blessed congregation where week by week they are edified.

And then secondly, they were “walking in the fear of the Lord.” That is prosperity. It did not just end in the chapel. They did not leave it behind when they went home. It was the sanctifying effect of the truth. They walked it out. They walked it out before the Lord. They sought His glory and they walked in His fear. And so there was a witness to the world and there was a witness that they had been edified. Let us be clear, it is this that honours and glorifies the

Lord; not just the hearing, but the bringing forth of fruit to eternal life. And this is the fruit that is brought forth: “walking in the fear of the Lord.” That is the second thing in real prosperity for us to pray for.

And the third thing: “the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” O may we know it! As a congregation we need comfort, don’t we? A sense of sin and guilt – we need comfort; concern about eternity – we need comfort; trouble about the dark days in which we live – we need comfort; the bodily afflictions, the family afflictions, the sorrows that many have – we need comfort. It is the blessed work of the Holy Ghost, as we sing: “Breathe comfort where distress abounds.” O may the Holy Ghost comfort our hearts. Well, is it not His gracious name: the Comforter? “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name,” “He shall testify of Me”; “He shall take of Mine, and shall shew it unto you.” O we do need to pray for the powerful, gracious work of the Holy Ghost in our midst and attending the preaching of the Word and especially in our hearts, breathing this comfort. That is the third thing.

And the fourth and final thing is: they “were multiplied.” There was a godly increase in numbers and in grace.

Well, this is real prosperity, spiritual prosperity in the church of God, and this is what we need, and this is what we seek, and this is for the honour and glory of God, and this is for our real good. Now may we be enabled to pray for it and seek it and find it.

“Then had the churches rest ... and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Monday, 1st June, 2009

