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BE OF GOOD CHEER.

“And the night following, the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”—ACTS xxiii. 11.

PAUL had very recently gone into the temple to deliver his message, when the uproar became so great that they cast him out, and closed the doors against him. The excitement continued in the streets, until it was reported that the whole city was in a tumult because of this man. Then the centurions sent officers to arrest Paul; he was hurriedly taken to the castle. On his way he said unto the chief captain, “May I speak unto thee?” and only received reply, “Art

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not thou that Egyptian which before these days madest an uproar?" etc.

Paul then asked permission to address the people, and when he declared himself a Jew, silence reigned. So he stood upon the stairs for a pulpit, with a crowd around him, and rehearsed his own wonderful story,—how, as he was walking to Damascus, the Spirit of God came upon him, and he was stricken to the earth. We know not how many times Paul told this story, but we know he was never weary of declaring to the multitude and to the rulers how God for Christ's sake forgave his sins,—that he was stricken only to be saved.

Oh, that men everywhere to-day were as ready as was Paul to tell the story of their conversion! There is a freshness and force that carries conviction with such a story,—for it is not the work of man, but the operation of the Spirit of God.

It is a glad day for our souls when we hear Christ's proclamation, "By

grace ye are saved!" "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin!" We then look down from "the everlasting hills" from the sunlight of God's love to the plain below where we once walked in despair and darkness. So I beseech you never to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ; never be ashamed to tell what He did for your soul on such a day or hour. Thus did Paul recount with utmost accuracy every circumstance, overlooking no single point of that event which became transcendent to him, nothing less than a change from darkness to light. We are apt to put far from us the experiences of the men of the Bible, as though they could not have been persons of ordinary existence and belonging to the walks of common life.

We forget that they were men clothed with human frames and passions, ambitions and thoughts. Paul was a representative of the love of power and rule. Educated among the

most learned of his time, taught in all the knowledge of the schools and of the synagogues, he had much of which to boast. And yet, under the power of the Holy Ghost, he became a humble follower of God. He became what the world calls peculiar. And such will all of us become, when, leaving the ordinary walks of life, we please to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ,—are made to “KNOW HIM,” and His resurrection, life.

We sometimes think, I love this world so well that I would like to live here always; here is enough to satisfy me. Ah, what do we know of the splendors that await us there?

Luke was a physician who went about doing good. Mark, Matthew, and the others were common fishermen, of no character, of no reputation, until Jesus, walking by, said, “Follow me.” Take the Old Testament history. Look at the prophets of old. We shall find that every one of them, without exception, was taken out of

life as it was found, and is found to-day. They were not brought from impossible heights beyond our touch or reach, but in commonest lot let to see the light of God, and thus to know His will and do His work. Every man is as distinctly called of God to do His will and walk with Him as was Gideon, or Joshua, or as was Moses, that greatest of generals as well as the meekest man upon the earth.

Paul must suffer persecution, but he must tell the story of the cross of Christ. Then were the multitude as eager against him as they were against his master. “Away with him!” they cried; “we will not hear anything more about this religion!” Bound with chains, he was brought to the castle a prisoner. The next day came the summons to stand forth and give his reasons, and to account for this extraordinary disturbance. Then again before the governors, and centurions, and officers, he tells his straightforward story; who he was, what his

early life had been, what God had done for him, what he expected to do for God. Again, fearing the madness and fury of the people, the chief captain commanded Paul to be remanded to the castle's dungeon. Then come the words I have brought to you as my text: "And the night following THE LORD STOOD BY HIM, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." In the same way the Lord stood by Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, and Gideon, Barach, Elijah, and Elisha, and all the prophets of old. Then we have it reiterated by Paul in the New Testament, not only in the instance before us, but memorably on that passage as prisoner to Rome, the Lord stood by him.

God just as truly stands by His people to-day. Although we see no form we have the Word of His Power. The prophets saw His form as that of an angel standing by them. Gideon,

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threshing wheat, saw Him sitting upon a rock in front of the barn. Joshua saw Him before the walls of Jericho. There came an unknown man and stood beside him, and Joshua, seeing that he was a stranger, said, "Art thou for us, or the children of the enemy? Dost thou belong to this army, or the army of Jericho?" It does not matter whether He stands by us in human form or not, if our "windows are opened towards Jerusalem," looking for the "coming of the king."

Also, the *place* matters not. God knows where we are. You may be in your chamber upon your knees or in the house of God. You may be in the Sabbath school as teacher or pupil; in your daily vocations, in kitchen or parlor, workshop or office, — it matters not. God knows, and as surely as you are His child. He *stands by you*. And when the time comes that you need to realize His presence, when you are in the dungeon of dis-

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truss, the prison of sorrow, you will find, as Paul found, that the Lord stands by you, saying, "Be of good cheer."

Another spirit stands by us when we are cast down; out of temper, irritated, disappointed because things seem to go ill with us. It is at such moments to him that "hath ears to hear" Jesus says: "Be of good cheer. My peace I give unto you." Oh, there is a grasp of faith,—a grasp that even the weakest can take,—that simply touches the hem of His garment, and makes Christ real. In the trial you realize that He is by your side, as Moses knew He was in the burning bush. How can you know this? Because He has stood by all His sons in all the ages past. "*Now* are we called the sons of God!" Washed in the blood of the Lamb!

A lady sat by the bedside of a wounded, dying soldier, and knowing he was soon to die, she said to him:

"If this should be death to you, are you ready to meet your God?"

Putting his hand upon his heart, he said, "Yes, for He lives here."

To make sure she said: "Does Christ reign in your heart?"

"Oh, yes; He lives in my heart by faith." And the sound came as if far off, as if he were already crossing the valley of the shadow of death.

• But shall we wait until death comes? No! Thrice no! The child of God knows by faith the presence of his crucified Redeemer, who lives and walks with him, and carries him safely through life. The world looks on, and, perhaps, sees no difference, as we walk and look the same as other men. Our garments are the same; there is nothing to distinguish the people of God unless the sight is given, and the dark eyes have the understanding to see in the faces of Christians, who are washed in the blood of the Lamb, a divine light, tell-

ing the story that Christ reigns in their hearts.

There rests upon all the saints of God a crown of glory. There are no people to be so envied. There are kings and queens of the earth who wear crowns beset with diamonds and sparkling gems, and hungry eyes look at them and long to possess such crowns of wealth. But God's dear children who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb are "kings and priests unto God." There is grandeur beyond that of any king that ever sat upon any throne in this world. It is to be a king and priest unto God, and this is my privilege and yours if we have been washed in the blood of Jesus.

It mattered not to Paul that he was in prison, for God stood by him. It matters not to you what are the difficulties that surround your life, for God stands by you so that no evil shall overtake you, and everything shall be according to His will and

Almighty power. You remember when Peter was in prison, God stood by him at night, and the prison doors were opened; the chains fell off his feet and he walked to the house of those who were praying for him. The prayer was answered, and yet they almost questioned that it could be true.

Not long ago a man stood in a prayer-meeting not far from the city of Boston and told the story of his conversion. He said he had never forgotten his mother's prayers and her anxiety for his conversion. He had never forgotten how she pleaded with him as the only child, and the one upon whom her heart's affections were poured out. He left home and went to sea. One night as he was walking the deck on his watch, the thought of his mother's prayers came to him; he seemed to hear her pleadings with God. He was so overwhelmed with a sense of his position that he went below and brought up his long-neglected

Bible. He read chapter after chapter with the spirit of God upon him; and finally, there under the dome of the sky, with only the broad sea before him, he bowed upon that deck and gave his heart to God.

He reached home to find his mother had gone home to God, and to learn that she had spent the last hour of her life pleading with God for the conversion of her boy. She had craved his soul for Jesus ever since he was born. She told God that he was now a man, a sailor at sea with no hope, and she could not die without the assurance of his salvation. God answered and rested her soul in the assurance, so that as she breathed out her soul in prayer and praise the gates were opened for her to sweep through. The spirit of God came upon that young man, and as he afterwards learned, at the very hour that his mother lay dying he was converted to God.

O beloved! I cannot tell you how

my heart bounds within me at the thought that God hears and answers prayer! It is not a matter of sentiment; it is not a passing thought that we urge upon you, not simply an emotion that tells you that a crown of unspeakable glory awaits you if you are washed in the blood of the Lamb. It is better than all that, it is the sacred knowledge of the King, for God *stands by you to make true His word*. "What things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Prayers have been made true thousands and millions of times. Only realize when you pray that God stands by you, that His spirit rest upon you and never leaves you.

The Lord stood by Paul as he was in that castle in prison, and said to him, "As thou didst bear testimony of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou in Rome also." It was God's commendation of Paul's work. It proves to us that God knows what we have been doing yesterday, and the day before,

and all our past lives up to the present moment. God stood by Paul, and made him realize that not only was He there to be his helper in prison, but He said, "Paul, you did this service for Me in Jerusalem; I will not forsake you now." Perhaps Paul was discouraged, and thought, "I should not be in prison if God was taking care of me;" no doubt these thoughts came into Paul's heart, such thoughts will come to men, they come to us.

Perhaps a man does not succeed in his business. He has tried to be faithful. He says, "I have given my tenth to the Lord, and I have tried to walk in His paths. Why should these calamities come upon me!" Now is the time to remember the promises, to stand upon them. Take the one that is the summing up of the whole, "All things work together for good to them that love God," and "I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU."

He stood by Paul to commend his

work in the past, because Paul had boldly preached the gospel in Jerusalem, suffered persecution there, and lifted up the cross of Christ. God knew it, and said, "Paul, you are to do this in Rome also." There can be no greater honor put upon any man than to be chosen of God for a godly and distinct service. It matters not whether we count our converts by the thousands or see none at all. God said to Paul, "I knew that you *preached* for me in Jerusalem. My Word shall not return unto me void; I will take care of all that; you have nothing to do with results; and as I, have stood by you in Jerusalem, I will stand by you in Rome also."

The lesson comes home to our own hearts; our service is accepted, and is pleasing to Him if rendered with an eye single to His glory. Paul *counted not his life dear*. Are we willing to take the same step, to lay all upon the altar? How my heart throbs with

love and admiration for the grand old hero! I look forward to the time when we shall be gathered to the heavenly kingdom and walk the golden streets, if I may but take Paul by the hand, look into his face, and hear those glorious words he uttered on earth echo and re-echo through heaven's arches, "My grace is sufficient for thee!"

Now to our story. Forty young men bound themselves under a curse that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Notice now how all the little details are under the knowledge of God. We are told that Paul had a sister, and that sister's son overheard this oath which bound these men together. He asked permission to see his Uncle Paul in the prison. It was granted, and he told Paul the plot he had discovered. Paul told one of the centurions and requested that the young man might tell his story to the chief captain. You

see all this is just as familiar and natural as any every-day matter pertaining to our lives now, and just in this natural way God worked for his deliverance. Here is the plan of escape. Two centurions were commanded to make ready two hundred soldiers, and horsemen three score and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night. "And to provide them beasts to set Paul on."

Beloved, no evil shall befall you, for God holds you safely. Paul's work was not finished, and every man is immortal till his work is done. However the wicked may plan to destroy, no life can be taken until God sends forth His Word; when your work is finished, He will take you to himself. Until then, He stands by you, a wall to your enemies, as He stood by the children of Israel on those walls of the crystal sea. Then, when they had safely passed over, He rolled back the

fearful tide, and utterly destroyed the hosts of Pharaoh.

Oh, if there is a heart here discouraged because of its difficulties, and sorrows, and sins, remember that the blood of Jesus cleanses you to-day, if you will but come. Then, from this hour, God stands by you; there can no accident happen to you, no evil befall you. You are as dear to Him as the apple of His eye, and He guards you as we guard our eyes. He will never leave or forsake you; He stands by your side to uphold you. If there is a child of God here to-day, questioning about that love that is so full and yet so free, one who hardly dares to lift his eyes to heaven, remember He says, "There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." The enemy of souls makes you fear to declare your freedom, and insinuates, How do you know you are saved? You may

boldly say, I know by the Word of God that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth me from all sin.

History tells us of a certain man, a favorite of the king, who had committed a crime. He was brought to trial, and when the day came, he walked to the bar before a crowded courtroom as unconcerned, apparently, as if he were in his own parlor at home. There was not a ruffle upon his brow, no pallor upon his cheek; his eyes were as quiet as if nothing were being done to disturb his peace. As the evidence grew stronger and stronger against him, his countenance changed not; his pulse beat as quietly as if there were no judge and jury to condemn him. The people wondered at his hard-heartedness and indifference. When the evidence was all in, and the verdict was rendered "guilty," all eyes were turned upon him, but his color did not abate: his eyes wore the same calm expression they had all

through the trial. Just as the judge was about to stand upon his feet to pronounce the sentence, the prisoner stood up, drew out a paper and laid it upon the table. It was a pardon for all his crimes, and sealed with the royal signet. Now, at last it was known to the spectators the real reason of his unflinching demeanor. It mattered not to him that he was declared guilty, or how many witnesses were brought against him: *he had the pardon*; he was a free man to walk out of that judgment-hall without condemnation resting upon him.

Beloved, there is a pardon offered to you in this Book and sealed with a Royal Signet. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." The pardon reads thus: "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." God stands by you and reads the pardon to your soul to-day, His covenant that cannot be broken, reads

to you that the blood cleanseth and the Spirit of God abides. He reads to you of the glories of yonder city and tells you there is a crown awaiting you. You have only to walk with Him until the gates are opened, and then to share the throne with Jesus, there to dwell with Him forever and forever.