

## The Believer's Outlook

Acts 13: 6-12; Acts 17: 16-23; Acts 18: 1-3; Acts 19: 1-5; Acts 21: 1-4; Acts 28: 11-15

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I have in mind, as helped of God, to speak of what we might call the thought of Outlook. In what way are we looking? What are we seeking? I read these Scriptures, because there is one thought that is common to them, and that is, you get Paul **finding** certain things, and what he finds surely is an evidence of what he was looking for; because, dear brethren, we usually find what we set out to find. The outlook of Paul in the Acts is delightful; it is progressive, it becomes more spiritual as he moves on.

It was not always so with Paul. The first thing he was looking for was something diametrically opposed to this pathway — he desired letters to Damascus, he was set against those who were in the way, those who were following Christ in the way that was everywhere spoken against, in the way that was delightful to heaven. He is moving in an entirely opposite way to the one in which he is moving in the Scriptures we have read, he is moving against the light, he has himself before him — a Pharisee of the Pharisees. If you look at him in Judaism with his back to the light, he is the greatest person there, but when he is apprehended, what a change there is! It says of Barnabas — a good man filled with the Spirit — that he went to Tarsus to find Saul, and, having found him, he brought him to the brethren; and there is a marvellous transformation in Saul. As moving with his back to the light he is the greatest person in Judaism; but, as moving with his face to the light, he is the least of all saints. What a transformation! It is not now a question of what he can do, he has not his own movements before him, but this great light banishing all thought of himself, and he is becoming a man of one object set to gain the greatness and glory of the knowledge of Christ.

Well, through mercy, that is where we have been put; we have been found and we have been put among the brethren. I would like you to sit down, dear brethren, and take spiritual stock of that; found in the mercy of God, brought to the brethren. What a delightful position! You say, You are making much of the brethren. Indeed I am; why should we not? Understand who I mean when I refer to the brethren — I am referring to the lovers of Jesus. What a blessed company! Can you find a more august company on earth? a more dignified company? than the lovers of Jesus. I count it the greatest honour to be found through the mercy of God amongst the lovers of Jesus — do not you? What a mercy to be put amongst the lovers of Jesus! That is where Saul was put; they took him to Antioch, and for twelve months he was local at Antioch with the lovers of Jesus; and the Holy Ghost adds this most significant sentence, "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." What a delightful touch! Saul is brought to Antioch and put amongst the disciples, the followers of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit goes on to say, "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." I love that sentence, He is put amongst Christ's ones, those who are Christ's. You say, it is simple. It may be, but take account of the dignity of it! Christ is the Anointed; and there His own are put, and they are called the anointed ones. They belong to the anointing, the fragrance, the sweetness, the blessedness, of the anointing is upon them. I wonder if you have taken account of yourself, beloved brother or sister, as amongst the anointed company, those who are Christ's, the anointed One. And now, as being found in such an exalted, dignified company, Paul moves out with an entirely different outlook — as I said, that is where mercy has put us.

I desire, as helped of the Lord, to follow for a moment the movements and outlook of this young

Christian who has been with the brethren for twelve months, in the favour and dignity of the anointing. He is moving out — what is he going to find? Well, in the first Scripture we read, he finds that God is working. That is a delightful discovery to make! I wonder if we have discovered that God is working in our road, in the office in which we work, in the workshops, in the schoolroom; I wonder if our eyes have been opened, in the power of the anointing, to take account of the fact that God is working. He is working. You know what it says in Luke 15, a most searching Scripture although a blessed one — "He calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." Beloved brethren, pardon the practical application, but if the blessed God put His hand upon some sheep in your road tonight, are you near enough to Him for Him to call you in and tell you about it? Are these things mystical? Indeed they are not, they are practical and real. "He calleth together his friends and neighbours . . .;" He will not hide what He does from His friends. He said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? (Gen. 18: 17). If we only knew, in the power and dignity of the anointing, what it is to move nearer to God, there is no limit to what He would tell us. Paul took account of the fact that God was working, and we need to do that, Paul found it, he found the work of God in the deputy, and He consolidated His work, and Paul did not hinder it. Paul found that, alongside the work of God was the opposition of the devil; wherever God is working, the devil is cognizant of it, and he is bound to attack. That is what he is set against; he is not set against us as individuals, we are too small for him, but, as being the subjects of the work of God, we become good prey for him; he wants to stop that work if he can. So you find, alongside this work of God, there is a subtle work of the devil; the Holy Spirit speaks of this man as "son of the devil," the subtle work of the devil is there, alongside this precious work of God. How important it is now to see the way Paul acts, what a significant matter that it is just at this juncture his name is changed to Paul — Paul meaning small or little. When he takes account of the movements of the enemy, he does not attempt to circumvent them in his own power, he retires into smallness — "Saul, who also is Paul" — it is very significant that that comes in just there. It is a good thing, dear brethren, when we see the opposition of the enemy, to retire into our own smallness and allow the blessed God to work, and He will work. He did work, look what Paul was able to do; blindness falls on this sorcerer, he is entirely discomfited and he moves away, led by the hand. He is led by the hand, a blind man. Paul would understand his position, he had been led by the hand, but this man was moving out, not being led into the city where the things of God are ministered to the brethren, but led away. But though Paul has done this wonderful thing, calling down blindness on the greatest man in the island, and might have shone, he had so retired into smallness that it says, the deputy was astonished — not at what Paul had done — but "at the teaching of the Lord." What a consolidating of the work of God! how blessed to move with an outlook like that! to so move that the work of God might be consolidated in the hearts of men, or, as Matthew puts it, "That they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Well now, Paul passes on and he comes into Athens, he moves into a great city, a city which was, I suppose, up-to-date and modern — indeed the Scripture says it was. Everything new which went on in the world reached Athens. If a stranger went to Athens, he caught the same spirit. "All the Athenians," we are told, "and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing." There was a catching spirit at Athens; but Paul was not caught by it; his outlook was different. It is a good thing, dear brethren, when we are not caught by the spirit that is abroad in men's cities. This great city — like the great cities around us — was marked by learning, superstition and religion, and there is a great danger, if our outlook is not right, of our being caught by the same spirit. If our eyes are not set on Christ we are in grave danger of being caught by what prevails in men's cities. But Paul was not caught by it, he moves into Athens as a priest, as considering for God. It is a good thing to always retain in our affections priestly quality. A priest will always think

first for God, and, as Paul moves to Athens, he moves as a true priest, he is concerned as to what is for God, and he feels it that there is nothing there for God. He sees something between the affections of every person in Athens and God. I plead for that, that **we** may feel it. The people we do business with, those we rub shoulders with in the world, does it ever strike us in a priestly way that they are given up to idolatry? How a priest would feel this, how he would feel what God was missing in the men He had made for His pleasure! So Paul's spirit was painfully excited within him. What an outlook this is, the outlook of one who thinks and feels for God. Things, I believe, become so ordinary to us, and we move in such routine, that our sensibilities become blunted, and we have little concern as to whether the people around us are moving pleasurably to God. It is not that we speak to them about it, but we would move amongst them as Paul did, so that the moment the opportunity came, we might be ready to speak to them, as he did — ". . . Him declare I unto you." He was moving in the presence of God, his outlook was Godward, he waited for his opportunity, and his affections were so filled, as it were, with the blessedness of God, that he was able to speak of God and to speak of Him in a way that affected both men and women. What a wonderful service, what an outlook! That is the way to move in the world. You have to do your work, and, if you are employed, you should put all your ability into your master's work. You are not paid to preach the gospel, you are paid to do your work; but you can be so moving that, the moment the opportunity is given you of God, you are able to speak with power — not of the God you have read about, but of the God you know. Elsewhere Paul could say, "**My** God" — he knew the God of Whom he spoke.

In Acts 18 Paul departs from Athens and comes to Corinth, and what he finds there is a Christian household, and it says, he "found a certain Jew named Aquila . . . with his wife Priscilla." They were good Roman saints — Romans enjoins us to be subject to the powers that be, and so they were; but they are found at Corinth, and, as being there, they are good Corinthian saints, because what marks the assembly at Corinth is that when things had failed outwardly, all that was precious to God was taken care of in the households of the brethren. If you think of the interests of Christ, they were safe in the household of Chloe, she was not afraid for her household to be associated with the interests of Christ. And it says the household of Stephanas had addicted themselves to the service of the saints. It is a delightful thing to find a household where you can be at one with the occupants at once; it says, Paul found these two were of the same craft. Do not forget that Luke writes the Acts, and he writes with a moral touch, Paul found that their business was his business, that their outlook was his outlook, that what they were set for, he was set for. It is a delightful thing to find that, to move into a home, a little sphere of responsibility, where difference has been set, and is maintained, between it and the world. God has set the light of redemption between our households and the households of the Egyptians. You find the features of Christ there, and you find that which is precious to Christ is honoured and revered there; His precious Name is mentioned, God is brought in at every meal. What a blessed thing it is that there are households where the honour of Christ and the glory of His precious Name and the features that are pleasing to God are seen! What a testimony! what a new meat offering, is coming out from these dwellings. Paul found a spot like that — and we find them, we delight to find them. Think of this delightful household where you never get the man spoken of without the woman, or the woman without the man; and where they were able to take even a man like Apollos and teach him the way of the Lord more perfectly. What a home! what an outlook!

Paul moves on. He moves from Corinth now to Ephesus, through the upper regions; he takes the high road, breathing a spiritual atmosphere as he moves to Ephesus — and what is he looking for? He is looking for assembly material — that is what you find at Ephesus. I wonder if we are doing that, dear brethren. I wonder if our movements amongst the brethren are on the high level, whether we are looking for that unique response for the heart of Christ such as was found at Ephesus. Are we content

to move amongst the brethren on social lines? If we are moving on spiritual lines, we shall not have partiality, as James said, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect to persons," (James 2: 1). And Paul is moving on that high plane, he wants to find out — not what there is socially amongst the brethren, he is not concerned as to their bank balance, as to how many rooms they have or the size of them — he is content to go to any home, however large or small it is. He is looking for assembly material, and he finds it; and so shall we, dear brethren, if we look for it. He finds twelve men with John's baptism. Can you find the brethren who have John's baptism? Whatever do you mean? you say. John's baptism is this, that the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Look at the Psalm 29; all the trees are brought down and then a new generation is brought to light and every one of that new generation is standing in the temple, and saying Glory, giving glory to God. Paul found twelve men with John's baptism, men who were prepared to admit that they must go out of sight before the greatness of Jesus. As soon as he brought in a spiritual ministry in relation to the Lord Jesus, although they had been baptised, it says, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus; that is, they went out of sight in the light of that Person. that is the kind of ministry to bring in, to be able to discern right material, and our outlook to be such that we retain it for response to the heart of Christ. And what a unique response; I suppose there was not a grander conception of the assembly seen than at Ephesus. I know it failed; but here there were twelve men with John's baptism, and God is able to build on that the greatest conception of the assembly the world has ever seen.

Paul moves on again, taking ship. He had a good many journeys, he was always ready to serve the brethren. and he moves on to Tyre now. You say, What is that? Tyre is man's commercial world. We all have to go there. We know what Tyre means, we know who its prince is — prince and king of Tyre is one of the appellations of Satan. What is Paul's business in Tyre? What is he looking for? He is looking for disciples. Think of it, dear brethren; you move out to another city, you have to go there on business. But how blessed to be on the lookout for followers of Jesus. Bowing one's head in thanks for a meal in a restaurant has sometimes brought them to light; a word in a railway carriage may have precious compensation in the discovery of a kindred heart. The choicest material in this scene are the followers of Christ, and how truly blessed to be on the lookout for them.

Dear brethren, may the Lord help us as to these things, that we may set our hearts in relation to what is precious to Christ. You say, Is there any encouragement in it? Indeed there is. They are taking Paul a prisoner and sending him to Rome, he is going to stand before the lion, Nero. He is coming to it that eventually he has to stand there alone, only that it says there, "The Lord stood with me." Note that word, note those little prepositions. In Acts it says, "The Lord stood **by** him;" there were features about Paul sometimes in the Acts that the Lord could not commit Himself to fully, but the Lord stood by him, and He will, even in our mistakes, dear brethren — the Lord will stand by us. But when you come to Timothy, it does not say, "The Lord stood **by** me," but "the Lord stood **with** me." When he went to Rome, what about the brethren? They have not seen him yet, but they cannot wait till he gets into the city, they come out as far as the three taverns — they come out, they cannot wait. And it says, when Paul saw the brethren, he thanked God and took courage. What a delightful touch! The Lord is no man's debtor; if we are set for what is of God, depend upon it — there will be definite **present** compensation for those whose outlook is in that direction.