

James 2:19 (T.W.P. Wolston, Editor) 209282

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IT is a fact asserted by the Word of God, that all will at length acknowledge Christ to do Him homage. And it is a fact too that the realities of eternity will lay hold of every soul, sooner or later. In short, every soul will at length be convicted of its sins, of the reality of God, and of eternal judgment.

It is a melancholy reflection that so many—perhaps my reader amongst the number—think little about the enormity of their sins, pay little heed to the flight of time, slight God's revelation of His love, and Christ's work and precious atoning blood. Their indifference is but short-lived. Earnest, and downright earnest, they will be one day.

There will be no unbelievers in heaven. There, all will sing the praises of Him whose worth they first learned on earth. To His praise alone is due their place in glory, as they will stand faultless in His presence with exceeding joy. There will be no unbelievers in hell. The flames of hell will have taught them what they would not believe on earth. There no skepticism remains, no infidelity exists. There, no disbelief in the atonement of Christ lives, nor doubt as to the eternity of punishment. But, alas! their belief, rather than lightening their load of grief and unavailing regrets, only dismisses bright hope, and drops them into the arms of everlasting despair.

The apostle James, urging upon his readers the deep need of reality, says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well,

THE DEVILS ALSO BELIEVE, AND TREMBLE."

There seems almost a startling, fierce irony in the phrase, "Thou doest well." He seeks to waken up to the need of reality the head-believers, the lip-believers, whose canting talk carries with it nothing but the condemnation of a false profession. Outward works with James are the result of inward faith. And mark, works must not be the outcome of fear, but of faith. There have been plenty of "dead works," the offspring of fear, since the day when Cain offered a bloodless sacrifice, the result of his own toil. The law said, "Do, and live;" an impossibility, not because the law was lacking, but the sinner was impotent. The Gospel says, "Believe, and be saved;" and the result is—works of faith are the happy, spontaneous outcome. "Believe, and do," is what the apostle urges.

With startling force he emphasizes "Thou doest well," with the expression "The devils also believe, and tremble." Miserable demons long accustomed to look forward to their final doom, do not seem to grow therefore callous and indifferent. They tremble! And yet it may be my reader is filling up his short life of sin and pleasure in easy indifference, almost contemptuous unconcern.

Let me draw your attention to another scene.

Aged, and emaciated with long toil and privations, with the marks of persecution upon his person, stands the great Apostle of the Gentiles. Once the chief of sinners, now not a whit behind the chiefest of the apostles, Felix, who had summoned him to his bar, saw little in his outward appearance. Undaunted, nay, compelled by the love of Christ, Paul reasoned—as I would fain reason with you—of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. Smaller and meaner did Felix appear in his own eyes, and greater and grander did the prisoner appear, as the words of the earnest evangelist rang into his heart, and convinced his conscience. The barbaric splendor of his own court paled before him, as there loomed before him that GREAT WHITE THRONE, before which he, must appear, naked, unmasked, without an advocate to plead his cause! And, oh! how horribly dark and contemptuous and lustful his life appeared to him, as the prisoner at the bar by his burning eloquent words obtained such a moral ascendancy over the mean truckler and maladministrator of Roman justice! Forsooth! as Paul reasoned of righteousness and temperance, there sat beside the judge, the evidence of his guilt, — Drusilla, his paramour, —torn from the embraces of her lawful husband!

And now the cordon of persecution was drawing closer and closer round "Paul the aged," soon to end in months of incarceration in the imperial city of Rome,—soon to end in trial before the impious, wicked emperor, Nero,—soon to end in martyrdom, the last stroke of physical agony only introducing him into the blissful presence of the One who in the height of his mad career of blasphemy and persecution, albeit religious, had struck him down to the dust, and then bound him to Himself forever! Thrice-blessed Saviour!

One turns from such a bright sunset to inquire what were the results of his address. Only this—

FELIX TREMBLED.

Alas! he put away from him the warning voice, He cried, "Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Never do we read of that season occurring. Two years did the prisoner remain in his power. At the close of that time, Portius Festus came into Felix room, Scripture is fatally silent about the fate of the trembling procrastinator.

Reader, we would plead with you not to trifle or tamper with the searchings of your heart—with your anxiety about your sins, your future. Thank God, when you are awakened and alarmed. Do not push away the warning, like Felix. Do not close your eyes, and slumber on. If this printed page speaks to you,—if you see the infinite, superiority of the prisoner at the bar to the judge upon the bench,—if you would fain have the faith and the peace Paul enjoyed in such circumstances, read on whilst we introduce you to another scene.

Years back the devil made an attack upon Paul and Silas at Philippi. Successful he doubtless thought he was, —but we shall see. At midnight, in the inner prison, dark and noisome, with their feet fast in the stocks, their backs bleeding from the stripes laid upon them by the brutal

jailor, they were so happy, that perforce they must pray and sing praises to God, and the prisoners wondered as they heard their song of worship.

Suddenly there was a great earthquake. The foundations of the prison were shaken. Every door was opened. Every prisoner's band was loosened. The jailor-awaking from his sleep, and knowing he must pay the penalty of the prisoners' escape by his own death was preparing to anticipate his fate by committing suicide. Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do thyself no harm; for we are all here."

THE JAILOR TREMBLED,

brought Paul and Silas out, and fell before them, saying, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He trembled, —not with the despairing dread of the damned demons, nor the momentary dread of the careless Felix, —for fear begot in his soul a desire for God's salvation.

The process was divinely rapid. Brutally he had scourged God's servants just a few hours previously; at midnight, wrapped in unconscious slumber, rudely awakened by the earthquake, God in grace visited his soul with a moral earthquake.

Saved from suicide, he becomes anxious, —not about his prisoners' escape, not about his own life being imperiled, —but about his own soul's eternal salvation. It seems too rapid for our ken, but, thank God, His grace and His power worked thus in his soul.

And, oh! reader, listen to the sweet, gracious, simple answer that fell from the lips of the servants of God: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Was Satan successful then in locking the preachers up in prison? No, the jailor was converted, —the first man in Europe whose conversion is recorded.

He simply drank in the message, and, believing and rejoicing, he washed the stripes his own hands had inflicted, so shortly before, and set meat before them. Thus quickly and sweetly did he evidence his faith by his works.

Yes, belief in Christ, and Him alone, was the means of his salvation. Christ had died—had finished the work of salvation. Salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast,"—it is "to him that worketh not, but believeth."

Then, dear unknown reader, may you with more light and knowledge than the jailor, possess the same simple trust in Christ, and the same simple trust in the Word of God. So shall you be able to rejoice in the knowledge of a present salvation. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." A. J. P.

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