

The City

by J.C. Ryle

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a Divine revelation and the need for Christians to feel concern for the souls of others, highlighting the darkness of heathenism and the need for Christian missions.

Scripture: Acts 17:16

Topics: "Evangelism", "Idolatry"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the profound impact of St. Paul's experience in Athens, where he was deeply stirred by the city's pervasive idolatry. Ryle highlights that despite Athens being a center of intellect and culture, it was spiritually dark, showcasing the need for divine revelation and the inadequacy of human wisdom without God. St. Paul's response was one of compassion, sorrow, and zeal, leading him to actively engage with the people and preach the Gospel of Jesus and the resurrection. Ryle calls for modern Christians to reflect on their own feelings towards the lost and to take action in spreading the Gospel, just as Paul did in Athens.

Transcript

THE CITY:

OR,

THE SIGHT WHICH STIRRED ST. PAUL.

BY THE LATE

J. C. RYLE

(1816-1900)

ACTS XVII. 16, 17.

"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

"Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him."

Perhaps you live in a town, or city, and see more of bricks and mortar than of green fields. Perhaps you have some relative or friend living in a town, about whom you naturally feel a deep interest. In either case, the verses of Scripture which head this page demand your best attention. Give me that attention for a few short minutes while I try to show you the lessons, which the passage contains.

You see face to face in the verses before you no common city and no common man.

The city is the famous city Athens-Athens, renowned to this very day for its statesmen, philosophers, historians, poets, painters, and architects,-Athens, the eye of ancient Greece, as ancient Greece was the eye of the heathen world.

The man is the great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul-St. Paul, the most laborious and successful Minister and Missionary the world has ever seen-St. Paul, who by pen and tongue has left a deeper mark on mankind than any born of woman, except his Divine Master.

Athens and St. Paul-the great servant of Christ, and the great stronghold of old heathenism,-are brought before us face to face. The result is told us: the interview is carefully described. The subject, I venture to think, is eminently suited to the times in which we live, and to the circumstances of many a dweller in London, Liverpool, Manchester, and other great English towns in the present day.

Without further preface I ask you to observe three things in this passage:-

I. What St. Paul SAW at Athens.

II. What St. Paul FELT at Athens.

III. What St. Paul DID at Athens.

I. First, then, What did St. Paul SEE at Athens?

The answer of the text is clear and unmistakable. He saw a "city wholly given to idolatry." Idols met his eyes in every street. The temples of idol gods and goddesses occupied every prominent position. The magnificent statue of Minerva, twenty-six cubits high, according to Pliny, towered above the Acropolis, and caught the eye from every point. A vast system of idol-worship overspread the whole place, and thrust itself everywhere on his notice. The ancient writer, Pausanias, expressly says, that "the Athenians surpassed all states in the attention which they paid to the worship of the gods." In short, the city, as the marginal reading says, was "full of idols."

And yet this city, I would have you remember, was probably the most favourable specimen of a heathen city which St. Paul could have seen. In proportion to its size it very likely contained the most learned, civilized, philosophical, highly educated, artistic, intellectual population on the face of the globe. But what was it in a religious point of view? The city of wise men like Socrates and Plato-the city of Solon, and Pericles, and Demosthenes,-the city of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Thucydides,-the city of mind, and intellect, and art, and taste,-this city was "wholly given to idolatry." If the true God was unknown at Athens, what must He have been in the darker places of the earth? If the eye of Greece was so spiritually dim, what must have been the condition of such places as Babylon, Ephesus, Tyre, Alexandria, Corinth, and even of Rome? If men were so far gone from the light in a green tree, what must they have been in the dry?

Reader, what shall we say to these things? What are the conclusions to which they irresistibly draw us?

Ought you not to learn, for one thing, the absolute need of a Divine revelation, and of teaching from heaven? Leave man without a Bible, and he will have a religion of some kind, for human nature, corrupt as it is, must have a God. But it will be a religion without light, or peace, or hope. "The world by wisdom knew not God." (1 Cor. i. 21.) Old Athens is a standing lesson which we shall do well to observe. It is vain to suppose that nature, unaided by revelation, will ever lead fallen man to nature's God. Without a Bible, the Athenian bowed down to stocks and stones, and worshipped the work of his own hands. Place a heathen philosopher,-a Stoic or an Epicurean,-by the side of an open grave, and ask him about a world to come, and he could have told you nothing certain, satisfactory, or peace-giving.

Ought you not to learn, for another thing, that the highest intellectual training is no security against utter darkness in religion? We cannot doubt that mind and reason were highly educated at Athens, if anywhere in the heathen world. The students of Greek philosophy were not unlearned and ignorant men. They were well-versed in logic, ethics, rhetoric, history, and poetry. But all this mental discipline did not prevent their city being a "city wholly given to idolatry." And are we to be told in the nineteenth century, that reading, writing, arithmetic, mathematics, history, languages, and physical science, without a knowledge of the Scriptures, are sufficient to constitute education? God forbid! We have not so learned Christ. It may please some men to idolize intellectual power, and to speak highly of the debt which the world owes to the Greek mind. One thing, at any rate, is abundantly clear. Without the knowledge which the Holy Ghost revealed to the Hebrew nation, old Greece would have left the world buried in dark idolatry. A follower of Socrates or Plato might have talked well and eloquently on many subjects, but he could have never answered the jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts xvi. 30.) He could never have said in his last hour, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Ought you not to learn, for another thing, that the highest excellence in the material arts is no preservative against the grossest superstition? The perfection of Athenian architecture and sculpture is a great and undeniable fact. The eyes of St. Paul at Athens beheld many a "thing of beauty" which is still "a joy for ever" to artistic minds. And yet the men who conceived and executed the splendid buildings of Athens were utterly ignorant of the one true God. The world now-a-days is well-nigh drunk with self-conceit about our so-called progress in arts and sciences. Men talk and write of machinery and manufactures, as if nothing were impossible. But let it never be forgotten that the highest art or mechanical skill is consistent with a state of spiritual death in religion. Athens, the city of Phidias, was a "city wholly given to idolatry." An Athenian sculptor might have designed a matchless tomb, but he could not have wiped a single tear from a mourner's eye.

These things ought not to be forgotten. They ought to be carefully pondered. They suit the times in which we live. We have fallen on a sceptical and an unbelieving age. We meet on every side with doubts and questionings about the truth and value of revelation. "Is not reason alone sufficient?"-"Is the Bible really needful to make men wise unto salvation?"-"Has not man a light within, a verifying power, able to guide him to truth and God?"-Such are the inquiries which fall thick as hail around us. Such are the speculations which disquiet many unstable minds.

One plain answer is an appeal to facts. The remains of heathen Egypt, Greece, and Rome shall speak for us. They are preserved by God's providence to this very day as monuments of what intellect and reason can do without revelation. The minds which designed the temples of Luxor and Carnac, or the Parthenon, or Coliseum were not the minds of fools. The builders who executed their designs did better and more

lasting work than any contractor can do in modern times. The men who conceived the sculptured friezes, which we know as the Elgin Marbles, were trained and intellectual to the highest degree. And yet in religion these men were darkness itself. (Eph. v. 8.) The sight which St. Paul saw at Athens is an unanswerable proof that man knows nothing which can do his soul good without a Divine revelation.

II. I ask you to notice, in the second place, what St. Paul FELT at Athens. He saw a "city wholly given to idolatry." How did the sight affect him? What did he feel?

It is instructive to observe how the same sight affects different people. Place two men on the same spot; let them stand side by side; let the same objects be presented to their eyes. The emotions called forth in the one man will often be wholly different from those called forth in the other. The thoughts which will be wakened up and brought to birth will often be as far as the poles asunder.

A mere artist visiting Athens for the first time would doubtless have been absorbed in the beauty of its buildings. A statesman or orator would have called up the memory of Pericles or Demosthenes. A literary man would have thought of Thucydides and Sophocles and Plato. A merchant would have gazed on the Piræus, its harbour, and the sea. But an apostle of Christ had far higher thoughts. One thing, above all others, swallowed up his attention, and made all else look small. That one thing was the spiritual condition of the Athenian people, the state of their souls. The great Apostle of the Gentiles was eminently a man of one thing, Like his Divine Master, he was always thinking of his "Father's business." (Luke ii. 49.) He stood at Athens, and thought of nothing so much as Athenian souls. Like Moses, Phineas, and Elijah, "his spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."

Of all sights on earth, I know none so impressive, none so calculated to arouse thought in a reflecting mind, as the sight of a great city. The daily intercourse of man with man, which a city naturally produces, seems to sharpen intellect, and stimulate mental activity to an extent which dwellers in rural parishes, or other solitary places, cannot realize. Rightly or wrongly, the inhabitant of a city thinks twice as much, and twice as quickly, as the inhabitant of a village. It is the city "where Satan's seat is." (Rev. ii. 13.) It is the city where evil of every kind is most rapidly conceived, sown, ripened, and brought to maturity.-It is the city where the young man leaving home, and launching into life, becomes soonest hardened, and conscience-seared by daily familiarity with the sight of sin.-It is the city where sensuality, intemperance, and worldly amusements of the vilest kind, flourish most rankly, and find a congenial atmosphere.-It is the city where ungodliness and irreligion meet with the greatest encouragement, and the unhappy Sabbath breaker, or neglecter of all means of grace, can fortify himself behind the example of others, and enjoy the miserable comfort of feeling that "he does not stand alone!"-It is the city which is the chosen home of every form of superstition, ceremonialism, enthusiasm, and fanaticism in religion-It is the city which is the hot-bed of every kind of false philosophy, of Stoicism, Epicureanism, Agnosticism, Secularism, Scepticism, Positivism, Infidelity, and Atheism.-It is the city where that greatest of modern inventions, the printing-press, that mighty power for good or evil, is ever working with unsleeping activity, and pouring forth new matter for thought.-It is the city where the daily newspapers are continually supplying food for minds, and moulding and guiding public opinion.-It is the city which is the centre of all national business: the banks, the law-courts, the Stock-exchange, the Parliament or Assembly, are all bound up with the city.-It is the city which, by magnetic influence, draws together the rank and fashion of the land, and gives the tone to the tastes and ways of society.-It is the city which practically controls the destiny of a nation. Scattered millions, in rural districts, without habitual concert or contact, are powerless before the thousands who dwell side by side and exchange thought every day. It is the towns which govern a land.-I pity the man who could stand on the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, and look down on London without some

emotion, and not reflect that he sees the heart whose pulsations are felt over the whole civilized globe. And shall I wonder for a moment that the sight of Athens "stirred the spirit" of such a man as the great Apostle of the Gentiles? I cannot wonder at all. It was just the sight which was likely to move the heart of the converted man of Tarsus, the man who wrote the Epistle to the Romans, and had seen Jesus Christ face to face.

He was stirred with holy compassion. It moved his heart to see so many myriads perishing for lack of knowledge, without God, without Christ, having no hope, travelling in the broad road which leadeth to destruction.

He was stirred with holy sorrow. It moved his heart to see so much talent misapplied. Here were hands capable of excellent works, and minds capable of noble conceptions. And yet the God who gave life and breath and power was not glorified.

He was stirred with holy indignation against sin and the devil. He saw the god of this world blinding the eyes of multitudes of his fellow-men, and leading them captive at his will. He saw the natural corruption of man infecting the population of a vast city like one common disease, and an utter absence of any spiritual medicine, antidote, or remedy.

He was stirred with holy zeal for his Master's glory. He saw the "strong man armed" keeping a house which was not lawfully his, and shutting out the rightful possessor. He saw his Divine Master unknown and unrecognised by His own creatures, and idols receiving the homage due to the King of kings.

Reader, these feelings which stirred the Apostle are a leading characteristic of a man born of the Spirit. Do you know anything of them? Where there is true grace there will always be tender concern for the souls of others. Where there is true sonship to God there will always be zeal for the Father's glory. It is written of the ungodly, that they not only commit things worthy of death, but also "have pleasure in them that do them." (Romans i. 32.) It may be said with equal truth of the godly, that they not only mourn over sin in their own hearts, but mourn over sin in others.

Hear what is written of Lot in Sodom: "He vexed his soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." (2 Peter ii. 8.) Hear what is written of David: "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not Thy law." (Psalm cxix. 136.) Hear what is written of the godly in Ezekiel's time: "They sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst of the land." (Ezek. ix. 4.) Hear what is written of our Lord and Saviour Himself: "He beheld the city and wept over it." (Luke xix. 41.) Surely it may be laid down as one of the first principles of Scriptural religion, that he who can behold sin without sorrowful feelings has not the mind of the Spirit. This is one of those things in which the children of God are manifest, and are distinguished from the children of the devil.

I call your special attention to this point. The times demand that we look it fully in the face. The feelings with which we regard sin, heathenism, and irreligion are a subject of vast importance in the present day.

I ask you, first, to look outside our own country, and consider the state of the heathen world. At least six hundred millions of immortal beings are at this moment sunk in ignorance, superstition, and idolatry. They live and die without God, without Christ, and without hope. In sickness and sorrow they have no comfort. In old age and death they have no life beyond the grave. Of the true way of peace through a Redeemer, of God's love in Christ, of free grace, of complete absolution from guilt, of a resurrection to life eternal, they have no knowledge. For long weary centuries they have been waiting for the tardy movements of the

Church of Christ, while Christians have been asleep, or wasting their energies on useless controversies, and squabbling and wrangling about forms and ceremonies. Is not this a sight which ought to "stir the spirit"?

I ask you, next, to turn back to our own land, and consider the state of our great cities. There are districts in our great metropolis, in Liverpool, in Manchester, in Birmingham, in the Black Country, where Christianity seems practically unknown. Examine the religious condition of East London, or of Southwark, or Lambeth. Walk through the north end of Liverpool on Saturday evening, or Sunday, or on a Bank Holiday, and see how Sabbath-breaking, intemperance, and general ungodliness appear to rule and reign uncontrolled. "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." (Luke xi. 21.) And then remember that this state of things exists in a professedly Christian country, in a land where there is an Established Church, and within a few hours of Oxford and Cambridge! Once more I say, ought not these things to "stir" our hearts?

Reader, it is a sorrowful fact that there is around us in the present day a generation of men who regard heathenism, infidelity, and irreligion with apathy, coolness, and indifference? They care nothing for Christian Missions either at home or abroad. They see no necessity for them. They take no interest in the Evangelistic work of any Church or society. They treat all alike with undisguised contempt. They despise Exeter Hall. They never give subscriptions. They never attend meetings. They never read a Missionary Report. They seem to think that every man shall be saved by his own law or sect, if he is only sincere; and that one religion is as good as another, if those who profess it are only in earnest. They are fond of decrying and running down all spiritual machinery or Missionary operations. They are constantly asserting that modern Missions at home or abroad do nothing, and that those who support them are little better than weak enthusiasts. Judging by their language, they appear to think that the world receives no benefit from Missions and aggressive Christian movements, and that it would be a better way to leave the world alone!

What shall we say to these men? They meet us on every side. They are to be heard in every society. To sit by, and sneer, and criticise, and do nothing-this is apparently their delight and vocation. What shall we say to them?

Let us tell them plainly, if they will only hear us, that they are utterly opposed to the Apostle St. Paul. Let us show them that mighty model of a Christian Missionary walking the streets of Athens, and "stirred" in spirit at the sight of a "city wholly given to idolatry." Let us ask them why they do not feel as he felt, about the idolatry of China and Hindustan, of Africa and the South Seas, or about the semi-heathen districts of London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and the Black Country. Let us ask them whether 1900 years have made any difference in the nature of God, the necessities of fallen man, the sinfulness of idol worship, and the duty of Christians. We shall ask in vain for a reasonable answer: we shall get none. Sneers at our weakness are no argument against our principles. Jests at our infirmities and failures are no proof that our aims are wrong. Yes! they may have the wit and wisdom of this world upon their side; but the eternal principles of the New Testament are written clearly, plainly, and unmistakably. So long as the Bible is the Bible, charity to souls is one of the first of Christian graces, and it is a solemn duty to feel for the souls of the heathen, and of all unconverted people. He who knows nothing of this feeling has yet to become a learner in Christ's school, He who despises this feeling is not a successor of St. Paul, but a follower of him who said, "Am I my brother's keeper?"-even of Cain.

III. I ask you to observe, in the last place, what St. Paul DID at Athens. What he saw you have heard; what he felt you have been told; but how did he act?

He did something. He was not the man to stand still and "confer with flesh and blood" in the face of a city full of idols. He might have reasoned with himself that he stood alone,-that he was a Jew by birth,-that he was a stranger in a strange land,-that he had to oppose the rooted prejudices and old associations of learned men,-that to attack the old religion of a whole city was to beard a lion in his den,-that the doctrines of the Gospel were little likely to be effective on minds steeped in Greek philosophy. But none of these thoughts seem to have crossed the mind of St. Paul. He saw souls perishing; he felt that life was short, and time passing away; he had confidence in the power of his Master's message to meet every man's soul; he had received mercy himself, and knew not how to hold his peace. He acted at once; and what his hand found to do, he did with his might. Oh! that we had more men of action in these days!

And he did what he did with holy wisdom, as well as holy boldness. He commenced aggressive measures alone, and waited not for companions and helpers. But he commenced them with consummate skill, and in a manner most likely to obtain a footing for the Gospel. First, we are told, he disputed "with the Jews" in the synagogue, and the "devout persons" or proselytes who attended the Jewish worship. Afterwards he went on to "dispute," or hold discussions, "in the market daily with them that met with him." He advanced step by step like an experienced general. Here, as elsewhere, St. Paul is a model to us: he combined fiery zeal and boldness with judicious tact and sanctified common sense. Oh! that we had more men of wisdom in these days!

But what did the Apostle teach? What was the grand subject which he argued, and reasoned out, and discussed, both with Jew and Greek, in synagogue and street? That he exposed the folly of idolatry to the ignorant multitudes,-that he showed the true nature of God to the worshippers of images made with hands,-that he asserted the nearness of God to us all,-and the certainty of a solemn reckoning with God at the judgment day, to Epicureans and Stoics, these are facts which we have recorded fully in his address on Mars' Hill.

But is there nothing more than this to be learnt about the Apostle's dealings with the idolatrous city? Is there nothing more distinctive and peculiar to Christianity which St. Paul brought forward at Athens? There is indeed more. There is a sentence in the 18th verse of the chapter we are looking at, which ought to be written in letters of gold-a sentence which ought to silence for ever the impudent assertion, which some have dared to make, that the great Apostle of the Gentiles was sometimes content to be a mere teacher of deism or natural theology! We are told in the 18th verse that one thing which arrested the attention of the Athenians was the fact that St. Paul preached "Jesus and the resurrection."

Jesus and the resurrection! What a mine of matter that sentence contained! What a complete summary of the Christian faith might be drawn from those words! That they are only meant to be a summary, I have no doubt. I pity those who would cramp and pare down their meaning, and interpret them as nothing more than Christ's prophetic office and example. I think it incredible that the very Apostle who a few days after went to Corinth, "determined to know nothing but Christ crucified," or the doctrine of the cross, would keep back the cross from Athenian ears. I believe that "Jesus and the resurrection" is a sentence which stands for the whole Gospel. The Founder's name, and one of the foundation facts of the Gospel, stand before us for the whole of Christianity.

What, then, does this sentence mean? What are we to understand St. Paul preached?

(a) St. Paul at Athens preached the person of the Lord Jesus,-His divinity, His incarnation, His mission into the world to save sinners, His life, and death, and ascension up to heaven, His character, His teaching,

His amazing love to the souls of men.

(b) St. Paul at Athens preached the work of the Lord Jesus,-His sacrifice upon the cross, His vicarious satisfaction for sin, His substitution as the just for the unjust, the full redemption He has procured for all, and specially effected for all who believe, the complete victory He has obtained for lost man over sin, death, and hell.

(c) St. Paul at Athens preached the offices of the Lord Jesus,-as the one Mediator between God and all mankind, as the great Physician for all sin-sick souls, as the Rest-giver and Peace-maker for all heavy-laden hearts, as the Friend of the friendless, the High Priest and Advocate of all who commit their souls into His hands, the Ransom-payer of captives, the Light and Guide of all wandering from God.

(d) St. Paul at Athens preached the terms which the Lord Jesus had commanded His servants to proclaim to all the world;-His readiness and willingness to receive at once the chief of sinners; His ability to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him; the full, present, and immediate forgiveness which He offers to all who believe; the complete cleansing in His blood for all manner of sin; faith, or simple trust of heart, the one thing required of all who feel their sins and desire to be saved; entire justification without works, or doing, or deeds of law for all who believe.

(e) Last, but not least, St. Paul preached at Athens the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He preached it as the miraculous fact on which Jesus Himself staked the whole credibility of His mission, and as a fact proved by such abounding evidence that no caviller at miracles has ever yet honestly dared to meet.-He preached it as a fact, which was the very top-stone of the whole work of redemption, proving that what Christ undertook He fully accomplished, that the ransom was accepted, the atonement completed, and the prison doors thrown open forever.-He preached it as a fact, proving beyond doubt the possibility and certainty of our own resurrection in the flesh, and settling forever the great question, "Can God raise the dead?"

These things and many like them I cannot doubt St. Paul preached at Athens. I cannot for one moment suppose that he taught one thing at one place and one at another. The Holy Ghost supplies the substance of his preaching in that rich sentence, "Jesus and the resurrection." The same Holy Ghost has told us fully how he handled these subjects at Antioch in Pisidia, at Philippi, at Corinth, and Ephesus. The Acts and the Epistles speak out on this point with no uncertain sound. I believe that "Jesus and the resurrection" means-Jesus and the redemption He effected by His death and rising from the grave, His atoning blood, His cross, His substitution, His mediation, His triumphant entrance into heaven, and the consequent full and complete salvation of all sinners who believe in Him. This is the doctrine St. Paul preached. This is the work St. Paul did when he was at Athens.

Reader, have we nothing to learn from these doings of the great Apostle of the Gentiles? There are lessons of deep importance to which I venture briefly to invite your attention. I say briefly. Time forbids me to dwell on them at any length. I only throw them out, as seeds for private thought.

(a) Learn, for one thing, a doctrinal lesson from St. Paul's doings at Athens. The grand subject of our teaching in every place ought to be Jesus Christ. However learned or however unlearned, however high-born or however humble our audience, Christ crucified-Christ-Christ,-Christ-crucified, rising, interceding, redeeming, pardoning, receiving, saving-Christ must be the grand theme of our teaching. We shall never mend this Gospel. We shall never find any other subject which will do so much good. We must sow as St. Paul sowed, if we would reap as St. Paul reaped.

(b) Learn, for another thing, a practical lesson from St. Paul's doings at Athens. We must never be afraid to stand alone and be solitary witnesses for Christ, if need be, -alone in a vast ungodly parish, in our own land, -alone in East London, in Liverpool, in Manchester, -alone in Delhi, or Benares, or Peking, -it matters not. We need not hold our peace, if God's truth be on our side. One Paul at Athens, one Athanasius against the world, one Wycliffe against a host of Romish prelates, one Luther at Worms, -these, these, are lighthouses before our eyes. God sees not as man sees. We must not stand still to count heads and number the people. One man, with Christ in his heart and the Bible in his hands, is stronger than a myriad of idolaters.

(c) Learn the importance, let me rather say the necessity, of asserting boldly the supernatural element as an essential part of the Christian religion. I need not tell many who read these pages that unbelievers and sceptics abound in these days, who make a dead set at the miracles of the Bible, and are incessantly trying to throw them overboard as useless lumber, or to prove by ingenious explanations that they are fables and no miracles at all. Let us never be afraid to resist such teaching steadily, and to take our stand by the side of St. Paul. Like him, let us point to the resurrection of Christ, and confidently challenge all fair and reasonable men to refute the evidence by which it is supported. The enemies of supernatural religion never have refuted that evidence, and they never will. If Christ was not raised from the dead, the conduct and teaching of the Apostles after He left the world is an unsolved problem and a perfect mystery, which no man in his senses can account for. But if, as we believe, the resurrection of Christ is an undeniable fact which cannot be disproved, the whole fabric of sceptical arguments against supernatural religion is undermined, and must fall to the ground. The stupendous miracle of the resurrection of Christ once admitted, it is sheer nonsense to tell us that any other smaller miracle in the Bible is incredible or impossible.

(d) Learn, for one thing more, a lesson of encouragement to faith from St. Paul's doings at Athens. If we preach the Gospel, we may preach with perfect confidence that it will do good. That solitary Jew of Tarsus who stood up alone on Mars' Hill appeared at the time to do little or nothing. He passed on his way and seemed to have made a failure. The Stoics and Epicureans probably laughed and sneered as if the day was their own. But that solitary Jew was lighting a candle that has never since been put out. The Word that he proclaimed in Athens grew and multiplied and became a great tree. That little leaven ultimately leavened the whole of Greece. The Gospel that Paul preached triumphed over idolatry. The empty Parthenon stands to this day, a proof that Athenian theology is dead and gone. Yes! if we sow good seed, we may sow it in tears, but we shall yet "come again with joy, bringing our sheaves with us." (Psalm cxxvi. 6.)

I draw towards a conclusion. I pass from the consideration of what St. Paul saw, and felt, and did at Athens to points of practical importance. I ask every reader of this paper to-day what ought we to see, to feel, and to do?

(1) What ought we to see? It is an age of sight-seeing and excitement. "The eye is not satisfied with seeing." (Eccles. i. 8.) The world is mad after running to and fro, and the increase of knowledge. The wealth, the arts, the inventions of man are continually gathering myriads into Great Exhibitions. Thousands and tens of thousands are annually rushing about and gazing at the work of men's hands.

But ought not the Christian to look at the map of the world? Ought not the man who believes the Bible to gaze with solemn thoughts on the vast spaces in that map which are yet spiritually black, dead, and without the Gospel? Ought not our eyes to look at the fact that half the population of the earth is yet

ignorant of God and Christ, and yet sitting still in sin and idolatry, and that myriads of our own fellow-countrymen in our great cities are practically little better than heathen, because Christians do so little for souls?

Reader, the eyes of God see these things, and our eyes ought to see them too.

(2) What ought we to feel? Our hearts, if they are right in the sight of God, ought to be affected by the sight of irreligion and heathenism. Many indeed are the feelings which the aspect of the world ought to call up in our hearts.

Thankfulness we ought to feel for our own countless privileges. Little indeed do the bulk of English people know the amount of their own daily unpaid debt to Christianity. Well would it be for some if they could be compelled to dwell for a few weeks every year in a heathen land.

Shame and humiliation we ought to feel when we reflect how little the Church of England has done for the spread of Christianity hitherto. God has indeed done great things for us since time days when Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer went to the stake,-has preserved us through many trials, and has enriched us with many blessings. But how little return we have made Him! How few of our 15,000 parishes do anything worthy of the cause of Missions at home or abroad! How little zeal some congregations show for the salvation of souls! These things ought not so to be!

Compassion we ought to feel when we think of the wretched state of unconverted souls, and the misery of all men and women who live and die without Christ. No poverty like this poverty! No disease like this disease! No slavery like this slavery! No death like this-death in idolatry, irreligion, and sin! Well may we ask ourselves, Where is the mind of Christ, if we do not feel for the lost? Reader, I lay it down boldly, as a great principle, that the Christianity which does not make a man feel for the state of unconverted people is not the Christianity which came down from heaven 1900 years ago, and is embalmed in the New Testament. It is a mere empty name. It is not the Christianity of St. Paul.

(3) Finally, reader, what ought we to do? This, after all, is the point to which I want to bring your mind. Seeing and feeling are well ; but doing is the life of religion. Passive impressions which do not lend to action have a tendency to harden the conscience, and do us positive harm. What ought we to do? We ought to do much more than we have ever done yet. We might all probably do more. The honour of the Gospel, the state of the Missionary field abroad, the condition of our overgrown cities at home, all call upon us to do more.

Need we stand still and be ashamed of the weapons of our warfare? Is the Gospel, the old Evangelical creed, unequal to the wants of our day? I assert boldly that we have no cause to be ashamed of the Gospel at all. It is not worn out. It is not effete. It is not behind the times. 'We want nothing new, nothing added to the Gospel, nothing taken away. We want nothing but "the old paths"-the old truths fully, boldly, affectionately proclaimed. Only preach the Gospel fully, the same Gospel which St. Paul preached, and it is still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," and nothing else called religion has any real power at all. (Rom. i. 16.)

Need we stand still and be ashamed of the results of preaching the Gospel? Shall we hang down our heads, and complain that "the faith once delivered to the saints" has lost its power, and does no good? We have no cause to be ashamed at all. I am bold to say that no religious teaching on earth can point to any results worth mentioning except that which is called doctrinal, dogmatic theology. What deliverance on

earth have all the modern schools-which scorn dogmatic teaching-what deliverance have they wrought? What over-grown and semi-heathen parishes in the metropolis, in our great seaports, our manufacturing towns, our colliery districts, have they evangelized and civilized? What New Zealand, what Red River, what Sierra Leone, what Tinnevely can the high-sounding systems of this latter day point to as a fruit of their system? No! reader, if the question, "What is truth?" is to be solved by reference to results and fruits, the religion of the New Testament, the religion whose principles are summarised, condensed, and embalmed in our Articles, Creeds, and Prayer-book, has no cause to be ashamed.

What can we do now but humble ourselves for the past and endeavour, by God's help, to do more for time to come? Let us open our eyes more, and see.

Let us open our hearts more, and feel. Let us stir up ourselves to do more work-by self-denying gifts, by zealous co-operation, by bold advocacy, by fervent prayer. Let us do something worthy of our cause. The cause for which Jesus left heaven and came down to earth deserves the best that we can do.

And now, reader, let me close this paper by returning to the thought with which it began. Perhaps your lot is cast in a city or town. The population of our rural districts is annually decreasing. The dwellers in towns are rapidly outnumbering the dwellers in country parishes. If you are a dweller in a town, accept the parting words of advice which I am about to offer. Give me your best attention while I speak to you about your soul.

(1) Remember, for one thing, that you are placed in a position of peculiar spiritual danger. From the days of Babel downwards, wherever Adam's children have been assembled in large numbers, they have always drawn one another to the utmost extremities of sin and wickedness. The great towns have always been Satan's seat. It is the town where the young man sees abounding examples of ungodliness; and, if he is determined to live in sin, will always find plenty of companions. It is the town where the theatre and the casino, the dancing room and the drinking bar, are continually crowded. It is the town where the love of money, or the love of amusement, or the love of sensual indulgence, lead captive myriads of slaves. It is the town where a man will always find hundreds to encourage him in breaking the Sabbath, despising the means of grace, neglecting the Bible, leaving off the habit of prayer. Reader, consider these things. If you live in a town, take care. Know your danger. Feel your weakness and sinfulness. Flee to Christ, and commit your soul to His keeping. Ask Him to hold you up, and you will be safe. Stand on your guard. Resist the devil. Watch and pray.

(2) Remember, on the other hand, if you live in a town, you will probably have some special help which you cannot always find in the country. There are few English towns in which you will not find a few faithful servants of Christ., who will gladly assist you and aid you in your journey towards heaven. Few indeed are the English towns in which you will not find some minister who preaches the Gospel, and some pilgrims in the narrow way who are ready to welcome any addition to their number.

Reader, be of good courage, and never give way to the despairing thought that it is impossible to serve Christ in a town. Think rather that with God nothing is impossible. Think of the long list of witnesses who have carried the cross, and been faithful unto death in the midst of the greatest temptations. Think of Daniel and the three children in Babylon. Think of the saints in Nero's household at Rome. Think of the multitudes of believers at Corinth and Ephesus and Antioch in the days of the apostles. It is not place but grace that makes the Christian. The holiest and most useful servants of God who have ever lived were not hermits in the wilderness, but dwellers in towns.

Reader, remember these things, and be of good cheer. Your lot may be cast in a city like Athens, "wholly given to idolatry." You may have to stand alone in the bank, the counting house, the place of business, or the shop. But you are not really alone, if Christ is with you. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Be bold, thorough, decided, and patient. The day will come when you will find that even in a great city a man may be a happy, useful Christian, respected while he lives, and honoured when he dies.

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