

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Paul's Companions: Luke and Demas

A short while ago, I did something I had been meaning to do for a long while. Over the previous several months, I had noticed that preparations were being made to demolish my old school. So, just in time, before demolition began, I called in at the school office, introduced myself as an old pupil, and was escorted around the school, refreshing my memory about the layout of the classrooms, cloakrooms, and so on. My old classroom was still there, even my old desk. After all those years! But what surprised me most was that the Physics and Chemistry laboratories seemed to me to be exactly the same as when I last saw them, sixty years ago. Considering the tremendous advance in scientific knowledge and equipment since then, I was amazed that I could not detect any change at all since the last time I set foot inside the door.

It set me off thinking. Where are they all now? That is, my old friends and classmates, the class of 1944? To refresh my memory, when I got home I wrote their names down. Surprisingly, after all these years, the mind still retains most, if not all, of their names, nicknames, whereabouts in the classroom they sat, what subjects they were good at, their various idiosyncrasies, and so on.

Where are they all now, I mused? How are they getting on? What have they made of their lives? Are they indeed still alive? If so, are they quite content with how their lives have turned out? More importantly, are they committed Christians? Indeed, are they Christians at all? Do they know the Lord Jesus Christ as their own, personal Saviour and Lord? Are they rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins? Do they believe that 'the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). Do they accept the clear testimony of scripture, that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4). Are they quite certain that they are ready for heaven, while still living on earth? Are they rejoicing in the Lord? Have they been useful in the Lord's service? All these questions, and many more, surged into my mind.

On the other hand, if they are no longer with us, did they depart out of this life with the assurance of salvation, confident in the possession and enjoyment of eternal life? Had they come to realise the truth of the Lord's own words, recorded in John 6:47, "Verily, Verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life".

I wonder if similar thoughts went through the Apostle Paul's mind when he passed salutations back and forth between the various individuals and groups of Christians he met from time to time? Today we are going to think about two of them, Luke and Demas. We shall hope to get help by looking at what we are told about them. In each case, we shall compare how they began their Christian lives and service, and how they finished their course. For instance, a straightforward summary of Luke's life and service could be: Luke started well and he finished well. On the other hand, it would have to be said, sadly, of Demas: Demas started well, but he finished badly. Now, that sounds a little harsh. We have to ask ourselves the question, Does the Bible record fully support such statements?

In Colossians 4:14 we read, 'Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.' Demas is spoken of here together with Luke. In verse 11, both Luke and Demas are included, at this stage, in the group of Paul's fellow-workers at Rome. In Paul's personal letter to Philemon, written about the same time, Demas and Luke are spoken of in verse 24, again jointly, and again as fellow-labourers of Paul. However, a few brief years later, in Paul's last preserved letter, he writes to Timothy that 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica' (2 Timothy 4:10), adding, in the next verse, 'only Luke is with me'.

The two erstwhile fellow-workers are not now mentioned in the same breath. Others are referred to in between their names. Perhaps a slight estrangement has crept in between them, maybe a difference of viewpoint. In any event, they are no longer spoken of as linked so closely together. What possible reason could there be for this?

What do we know about them? Our knowledge of Demas is limited to the three brief mentions to which we have already referred. Much more is recorded about Luke. As to his travels, it is noteworthy that in Acts 16:10 Luke uses the personal pronoun 'we' for the first time. In this way he indicates that he had joined the company of Paul at Troas, and accompanied the Apostle to Philippi. Apparently, Luke remained there for a while. In Acts 20:5 he is again with Paul and went with him to Jerusalem. We do not hear of Luke while Paul was imprisoned there for more than two

years. However, as soon as Paul was about to be sent to Rome, we hear of Luke at various stages of the journey, in Acts 27 and 28. He was at Rome with Paul when the Apostle wrote the Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon. He was also with Paul during the latter's second imprisonment. We learn from 2 Timothy 4:11 that, while others had forsaken the aged Apostle, Luke remained totally loyal to him. Very touchingly, Paul records, evidently with great pathos, "Only Luke is with me." No wonder that Paul refers to him as 'Luke, the beloved physician' (Colossians 4:14). He was certainly Paul's fellow-labourer. But what a delightful expression to use! 'Luke the beloved physician!' Luke was not only an excellent doctor, good at his job. He evidently lived and worked in a way that earned not only the respect but also the personal friendship and affection of Paul. On the other hand, in his own writings Luke was very careful to avoid referring to himself at all, unless it was essential for the continuity and accuracy of the narrative. He gave due prominence to the work of God by Paul and His other servants. By the leading of the Holy Spirit, Luke was used of God for the preservation of a faithful record.

What was it that encouraged such a man as Luke to commit himself so unreservedly to the Christian way of life and service? What was the spark that fired him up to support the Apostle Paul to the point where he was willing to suffer hardship so as to be available to the great Apostle in his travels and missionary endeavours? After all, Demas had the same experiences and opportunities. Yet, he would appear to have become weary of the cost and sacrifice involved. Why the difference?

Let us consider the negative side first. We have read of Demas that he had given up his work with Paul, 'having loved this present world'. We also read in Galatians 1:4 that there is such a thing as 'this present evil world'. There is certainly much evil in the world, which is dominated by the devil, Satan, who is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). However, altogether apart from the evil that is in the world, there are many things that appeal to Christians which, even if not evil in themselves, can certainly be a distraction which militates against a Christian's commitment to serve His Lord and Master as unreservedly as he would like. We only have a certain amount of time and energy. How we spend them determines to what degree and in what measure we are available to serve the Lord Who 'hath loved us and given himself for us', as we read in Ephesians 5:2. It is clear that there were many things in the world, and enjoyed by the people of the world, that Demas found attractive. His enjoyment of them, and the reduction in time left for the Lord's things, would certainly militate against Demas being as fully committed as he previously had been. Of course, it is not completely unknown amongst new Christians, that, after the first flush of enthusiasm has cooled down, things that were initially thrown off as being unsuitable for a committed Christian, are taken up again on the basis that 'there's no harm in it'. We must guard against anything that would diminish our capacity to take up every opportunity that presents itself to serve the Lord.

I well remember as a young adult coming to the conclusion that most men would be reasonably content if they had four things. I am not suggesting that I am giving them in any, or even my own, order of priority. Obviously, that will vary from person to person. In any case, these are the things that I thought of then as being within the reasonable reach of the normal young man, and with which he might be reasonably content, from a natural point of view. Firstly, a decent job. Secondly, a comfortable home. Thirdly, a reliable car. Fourthly, and, of course, to most young men, supremely important, a nice wife, with loving children to follow in due course.

Now, no one would say that any of these desirable objectives is evil in itself. However, we are so constituted that any of these things can easily become an obsession. Otherwise keen young Christians can spend so much time, and effort, either securing them, or enjoying having them, that their concentration is diverted from their Christian service. They become less useful in the Lord's work than they otherwise would have been. Even worse, their personal communion with their Lord might well lose its sharpness, and depth of devotion. The result is their lifestyle becomes little different in practice to many decent-living, respectable persons who have no Christian faith at all. Whether this was true of Demas is not for me to say. Certainly, something had happened to divert him from his previous level of commitment to his Lord and Saviour.

Another early memory is the very wise remark of a mature Christian friend who was a big help to me in many ways. "You know", he said to me one day in conversation, "we might not be worldly minded, but there is still the danger that we might become earthly minded, concentrating so much on natural, earthly things to the point where we lose the focus of our spiritual life." How wise! How necessary a reminder of the tendency that is with each of us to reduce our level of commitment as the days go by! Certainly, the temptation to settle down to a life of relative ease gets no less appealing as we grow older. Indeed, as time goes by, we are increasingly prone to relax our concentration and give way to temptations we would have strenuously resisted when we were younger, and, perhaps, when we were more determined to do the right things for the right reasons, whatever the appeal of natural things. Let us be honest enough with ourselves to accept the warning, and keep things in proper perspective.

Now for the positive side. Luke was the writer of the third Gospel, and also the Book of Acts. In his Gospel, he gives what he calls 'an orderly account of the things most surely believed amongst us'. In his introduction to the Book of Acts, he summarises his Gospel as being 'a treatise of all that Jesus began to do and teach' during His life upon earth, 'until the day in which he was taken up' to heaven. In the Book of Acts itself, usually called the Acts of the Apostles,

we read about what the Lord Jesus Himself continued to do through His servants after He Himself had gone back to heaven.

It is well worth considering that Luke had a very special, personal appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Above all, Luke evidently had a special sense that the Lord Jesus, Who is truly the Lord from heaven, in coming into the world became, was, and now, in heaven, continues to be, a real, perfect man. He had a special sense of the moral perfection of the Lord Jesus. He had a special sense that everything that the Lord Jesus did during his life on earth was done in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is Luke who records the fact that the Lord Jesus, in His life on earth, was full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:2). This is a particularly significant and happy theme that emerges when we give due attention to the detail of Luke's Gospel. One of the many charms of this gospel is the joy and blessing experienced in following through the many facets of the Lord's glory depicted in the wonderful themes dovetailed into the text.

Whether Luke received this by direct revelation from the Lord in heaven, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, or to what extent some of the detail was gained in discussion with the Apostle Paul as he shared some of his own experiences with Luke, is very much a secondary matter. It is certainly true that Paul is the particular Apostle who in his writings refers to the Lord Jesus as a man. It could be that it was the shared appreciation of the perfection of the moral beauty of the Lord's manhood that gave them such a strong common bond. In any case, the Holy Scriptures give us God's word, and God's words, brought to the immediate servant who first penned them, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The prophetic part of Luke's Gospel emphasises that the day will surely come when the Lord Jesus will have universal control of the whole world. Indeed, we learn from Revelation 17:14 and again in 19:16 that He shall be universally recognised and acclaimed as 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'. This evidently gave Luke the incentive and commitment to keep going on with his Christian life and service without giving up.

In any sphere, the existence of a powerful, dynamic, charismatic leader makes a tremendous difference to the fervour and loyalty of their followers. Luke's intense appreciation and understanding of the finest qualities of his leader, the Lord Jesus Christ, was not hindered in any way by the apparent drawback that the Leader was in heaven, while Luke, and the other followers of the Lord Jesus, were living on earth.

Luke's commitment was very real. The record of the history of medicine for that period makes it very plain that very prosperous careers were available to successful doctors. Instead of being drawn away by the appeal of fame and fortune, Luke was content to serve his Lord and Master by attaching himself to the Apostle Paul and those who worked with him. There is no doubt that his medical skill, and knowledge of the healing processes of the human body, would be extremely helpful to the group of itinerant preachers and teachers. Incidentally, the human race at large is deeply indebted to the many Christian doctors who have, over several hundreds of years, made great personal sacrifices so that they could be available to help those of their fellow men who were in deepest need.

Returning to our original comparison, I am sure we are now in a position to say with renewed emphasis: Demas began well and ended poorly. Luke began well and ended well. What a contrast! What a lesson! What a challenge! Throughout scripture, we are given examples of errors to avoid, and also good examples to follow. Let us learn, and apply, the lessons demonstrated in the histories of Demas and Luke. Let us respond to the exhortation contained in Galatians 6:9: 'Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.'

Most of all, let us be determined that nothing will be allowed to undermine or diminish our personal appreciation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, or our personal devotion to Him. Let us be fully, unreservedly committed to Him and not be diverted from the level of devotion to Him that His love deserves.

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