

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume IX

Issue 34

Published occasionally for Zion's mourners

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

Luke 4:25-26

The subject of a man's love for a woman and/or a woman's love for a man, forms the basis for a multitude of the songs, novels, and movies which have ever been written. That love which is held out as the ideal in that media of entertainment is one which is faithful, enduring, and most of all exclusive to the one individual who is the object of one's affections. Yet when the subject of the particular love which the LORD has displayed towards the objects of HIS affections is set forth in the scriptures it almost unilaterally causes anger to rise up in those who are confronted with it.

This is demonstrated here as the LORD spoke about the electing grace of GOD in choosing a widow and a leper (Naaman) to be the objects of HIS mercy while passing by the vast majority of those who were in the same plight and yet a part of an accepted religious order.

Most of those who heard the words of the LORD JESUS as HE spoke in the Synagogue became irate and would have cast HIM over a cliff had HE not "passed through their midst." *"And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong."* (Luke 4:28-29)

What could cause such anger when it seems that men universally appreciate and respect the ideal display of exclusive love? Not only that but who would normally despise an account of someone giving aid to a person who was in hunger or stricken with a dread disease? Can mercy ever be considered a bad thing, most especially when shown by the LORD?

Yet just as surely as men appreciate the display of exclusive love between a man and a woman, they will by nature despise the same display when the LORD expresses HIS own exclusive love of a people which HE chose before the foundation of the world. No other scripture causes as much consternation and outright rage as when Paul reiterated the words of the LORD who said, *"As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."* (Rom 9:13)

Men are by nature in rebellion to GOD and only pay lip service to worshipping HIM as long as it is advantageous to them or fits their ideas of what is proper. The natural man loves the religion of his own choosing and adores the god of his imagination. He considers himself and others as worthy of GOD's love and certainly could not fall down in worship before ONE who might hate him and have ordained him unto destruction.

I remember an interchange with a man several years ago wherein a friend of mine was discussing with him as to whether or not there would be any babies in hell. This man was vehemently certain that there could be no possibility of such due to what he perceived was the "innocence" of a child. My friend was equally certain that there was no such thing as an "innocent" human being in the sight of a HOLY GOD and that the only way any human being, regardless of age, could escape hell would be by the imputed righteousness of CHRIST bestowed

according to the mercy of GOD. The “discussion” ended when the man stood up and angrily declared, “I wouldn’t serve a GOD who would send babies to hell.”

Now the fact is that none of us knows whether or not there will be infants in hell but the man who worships at the footstool of an absolute GOD, will not accuse GOD of unrighteousness if HE sees fit to send some there, because he knows that Paul’s testimony is true, *“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.”* (Rom 9:14-16) *“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”* (Rom 9:20-21)

Job testified that he would worship GOD even if the LORD saw fit to destroy him. *“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”* (Job 13:15) These Jews who listened to the LORD’s words concerning the widow and the leper became angry because they realized that HE was apprising them of the fact that the LORD chooses whom HE will to show mercy to and does not do so on the basis of anything having to do with a man’s status, religion, birth, or human choice.

Both this widow of Zarephath (see 1 Kgs.17:9-24) and the leper, Naaman (a Syrian), were Gentiles. The Jews didn’t mind the doctrine of election as long as they alone were included in it, but when the LORD revealed that GOD’s mercy is visited upon whom HE will regardless of human endeavor or status, they became angry. *“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”* (John 1:12-13)

Not only was this widow a Gentile but she was from Sidon which was the city of Jezebel’s nativity, hardly one who would be accepted in the Jews eyes. Does this not demonstrate the LORD’s purpose which HE declared, *“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* (Luke 5:32) Yes there were many widows in Israel at the same time who were equally in need, yet the LORD sent HIS prophet to this Gentile woman who dwelt in a city known for wickedness and thus demonstrated HIS disdain for the acceptable religion of men.

The LORD commanded this widow to feed the prophet, (see 1 Kgs.17:9) even though she didn’t know he was coming or who he was when he got there. In fact she did everything in her power to avoid feeding the prophet. Yet unbeknownst to her the SPIRIT of GOD constrained her heart by HIS word and she was compelled to do the exact will of GOD. *“And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”* (Isa 42:16)

She continually faced an empty barrel of meal and an dry cruse of oil, but true to the prophet’s words they never failed nor was she ever bereft of sufficient provision to fulfill the commandment of GOD. The LORD supplies HIS people faithfully but in such a fashion that they know the only reason they are sustained is that HIS grace is sufficient. *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”* (1Co 10:12-13)

I asked the Lord that I might grow In faith, and love, and every grace;

Might more of his salvation know, And seek more earnestly his face.

’Twas he who taught me thus to pray, And he, I trust, has answered prayer;

But it has been in such a way As almost drove me to despair.

“Lord, why is this?” I trembling cried; “Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?”

’Tis in this way,” the Lord replied, “I answer prayer for grace and faith.

“These inward trials I employ, From self and pride to set thee free;

And break thy schemes of earthly joy, That thou mayst seek thy all in me.”

#295 Gadsby’s Hymns, by John Newton

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