

## LESSON TWO

You are required to read all of Second Chronicles, chapter 20 while you study this lesson. You will be asked on the test if you have done so.

### GOD WORKS WITH MINORITIES WHO ARE WORKING FOR HIM.

Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. . . . Ye shall not need to fight: . . . stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord: . . . fear not, the Lord will be with you.—2 CHRON. xx. 15, 17.

AT the darkest hour of our civil war, when the life of the country seemed trembling in the balance, the Government proclaimed a fast. The people gathered in immense numbers in the churches. Men not often seen there were found there on that day. An eminent civilian in one of our Atlantic cities, who seldom sought God's house on the Lord's Day, was observed on that fast day kneeling devoutly with God's people. When inquired of what brought *him* out to such services, he replied, "I thought it was high time to get *help* somewhere. We are in a tight place, and we need it."

Men often seek God in "a tight place," when they think little of him in other places. It is marvellous how reasonable and proper *prayer* seems to them in such emergencies.

Such was the condition of the Judæan kingdom

at the time of which our text speaks. A fast had just been observed; the entire people had come together to obtain help of God "in a tight place." He gave them their desire, as he commonly does when men in trouble turn to him for relief. And in giving it he announced one of the great principles of his working in the affairs of his kingdom: *he works with minorities who are working for him.* "Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's." Go out against them. The Lord will be with you.

1. The history of the Church is full of illustrations of this law of divine procedure. Dip into it anywhere, and you come upon this divine strategy. Napoleon thought that he knew the world well. He had studied the history of great empires; but he said it was an inexplicable mystery to him, that Christianity, beginning as it did with a few fishermen of the feeblest nation then on the globe, should in his time have risen to be so much more mighty than his own conquests, which had almost all the armies of Europe to back them.

" Oh ! where are kings and empires now,  
Of old that went and came ?  
But, Lord, thy Church is praying yet,  
A thousand years the same."

It was God's way of working with minorities who are working for him. When the Church be-

came corrupt, and needed reform, the same thing was repeated. A few earnest men, who were hunted like wild beasts, in a few years shook the world. The battle was not theirs, but God's.

An old saying of the German reformers, which a modern reformer has untruthfully claimed as his own, was, "One, with God on his side, is a majority." "The battle is not yours, but God's." This fragment of our lesson was the favorite text of Sir Fowell Buxton. He once wrote to his daughter that she would find his Bible opening of itself to the place where this passage occurs. This text it was which gave him courage to move in the British Parliament for the emancipation of slaves throughout the British Empire. When he entered on that conflict, he stood almost alone; when his bill was first read in Parliament, it was received with shouts of derisive laughter. But he bethought him of this text, and began his speech saying, "Mr. Speaker, the reading of this bill is the beginning of a movement which will surely end in the abolition of slavery throughout the British dominions." The old Hebrew prophet never said a truer word. Sir Fowell knew it; for the battle was not his, but God's.

The same phenomenon was witnessed in the first attempt to establish American missions among the heathen. When one of the early meetings of the American Board was held at Bradford, Mass., less than twenty persons were in attendance; and they

were hooted at by boys on the piazza of the hotel where they were in session. Barely sixty-five years have passed ; and at the last meeting of that Board, in Providence, five thousand strangers from abroad were present, and two churches were filled with eager friends.

When the first American missionaries reached India, the English Government refused them a landing. "Go back," was the imperious order: "go back in the ship in which you came." In the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, when it was first proposed to send the gospel to the heathen, reverend clergymen declared against the fanatical scheme. They said that "the heathen were a contented and happy people, and that it was no business of Scottish Christians to disturb them." And this in face of our Lord's express command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Not a century has passed since that time: yet now all Christendom rings with gratulation over the achievement of Christian missions ; and no other class of men are so reverently canonized in the affections of the Church as her missionaries to the heathen world. This is the fruit of God's working with minorities who are working for him.

So uniform has been this method of divine procedure, that we may safely say that great progress of any good cause is seldom if ever secured in any other way. When a good cause becomes popular,

and majorities swing over to its support, the work is substantially done. Probably some new cause is then coming to the birth underneath. Every cause which God originates starts with only Gideon's three hundred.

2. From this law of God's working, it is clear that *in spiritual affairs the balance of power does not depend on numbers*. Votes have very little to do with it. It depends on spiritual forces. It depends on insight into the spiritual wants of the world; on consecration to God's service; on the power of prayer; on spiritual discovery of the side on which God is; and specially on *intensity* of Christian character.

The few who start a great movement towards the world's conversion, and who become its heroes because God has chosen them, are always *intense* men. They see things vividly. They have great visions. They feel profoundly. Their souls are aflame with holy ardor. "His ministers are a flaming fire." Yet they are men of *sustained* enthusiasm. The fire does not crackle and blaze out quickly: it burns like kindled anthracite. In the best sense they are men of one idea, — a vast idea, in which a thousand common ones are centred, yet *one* to which whole souls can be reasonably devoted. So far as this world is concerned, God is possessed of one idea.

Such men are always a power in the world. The world cannot help it, and they cannot help it.

Such men are one of God's powers, imperial in authority, and destined to conquest. In due time numbers will swell around them. Meanwhile it is of very little account how many or how few they are at the outset.

“A little flock: so calls He thee  
Who bought thee with his blood;  
A little flock, disowned of men,  
But owned and loved of God.”

3. It is a great thought on this subject, that *the human race furnishes but a small part of the holy ministries of this world*. The ministry of angels probably swells what we call minorities to secret majorities. “Are they not *all* ministering spirits?” Invisible multitudes probably fill the air with their busy pinions in service to the right. We are surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses. When conflicts deepen on the earth, for and against the cause of Christ, other worlds send hosts of eager combatants to the fray. Probably no child of God is ever left without these unseen auxiliaries. “He shall give his angels charge over *thee*.” Earthly monarchs often form secret treaties of alliance, offensive and defensive, by which each pledges the whole force of his kingdom to the support of the other. Let us have faith to see the unseen, and it may often help our wavering courage to remember that countless myriads are in secret alliance with us.

One of England's great poets says of a noted champion of liberty, —

“Thou hast left behind  
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies:  
There's not a breathing of the common wind  
That will forget thee. Thou hast great allies.  
. . . Winds blow and waters roll  
Strength to the brave.”

But the friend of Christ has allies more imperial than skies and winds and waters. Principalities in heavenly places, beings some of whom probably sway at their will the powers of nature, are his allies.

4. *Success in spiritual affairs often loses the character of a conflict*, so overwhelming and so easy is the working of divine auxiliaries. Thus ran the good cheer to the outnumbered men of Judah: “Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you.” God's help often comes in immense waves of spiritual re-enforcements. Our small calculations and petty fears are overborne. We are lifted up, and carried over the obstacles which daunted us. We can no longer find the perils which alarmed us. This comes about with such ease and stillness that we lose the sense of struggle and of combat.

Revivals of religion often take on this look. The more powerful and pure they are, the more still and godlike. At such periods sanguine be-

lievers are apt to think the age of conflict for the Church is over, and the latter days of peace and tranquil progress are dawning. In the great awakenings in New England, under the preaching of the Rev. Drs. Lyman Beecher and Nettleton, it was a favorite theme of gratulation to them, that probably the closing age of this world's pilgrimage was near at hand, and the golden visions of Isaiah were about to be realized. They seemed to themselves to stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.

5. *Minorities of honest and earnest men, devoted to a great cause, should never be opposed heedlessly.* If it is God's method to begin great changes for good by putting into the hearts of a few men great ideas and great enterprises and great expectation, we need to be cautious how we treat men who *may be* spiritual pioneers. It is the way of the world to frown them down. They are branded with scornful nicknames. Fanatics, madmen, fools, men call them. "The crazy tinker" was the title by which the world labelled and libelled the author of the "Pilgrim's Progress." "Methodists," "Puritans," "Quakers," — all nicknames at first. Not so will the wise and candid treat such men.

Fanaticism may always be detected by its affinity with malign passions. Religious earnestness is not fanaticism. Novelty in religious thought and theory of life is not presumptively visionary.



That men turn the world upside down, is no proof that they are madmen. St. Paul did that. When men are obviously moved by profound convictions, and are in dead earnest in proclaiming them, if they are honest, candid, prayerful, unselfish men, and do not contradict either the word of God or the common sense of men, they deserve a hearing. They *may be* heralds of a new era of Christian progress. Their ideas *may be* from God. The power which moves them *may be* the power of God. Their self-confidence *may be* a divine assurance, prophetic of the future. "The homely beauty of the good *old* cause" may be about to spring into new life and glory in their hands.

Take care that you do not recklessly denounce and deride such men, lest you should denounce and deride God. It is like God to raise up such men, and inspire them, and send them to his people, as he sent the old prophets. A docile spirit will welcome God's teaching, come in what form it may. God usually sends in forms which men have not expected. The true attitude of a Christian thinker and worker toward such phenomena is one of vigilance and candor. Wisdom did not die with our fathers; neither will it die with us. Old men will not carry it out of the world with them. New truth must be expected from new men. The world has yet to see a great many John the Baptists, voices in the wilderness, forerunners of great eras.

Let us, then, be on the lookout for such men. Let us greet them with a God-speed when they make their divine credentials clear. Let us keep our *tastes* in abeyance to our *convictions*. We love what we are used to. We revere the ancient. We all have roots in the venerable past. This is well. Yet the grandest arena of God's working is the future. A Christian's treasure should be there. Ours is a religion of hope, of expectation, of on-looking to golden ages yet to come. Blessed were those Jews in our Lord's time who stood *waiting* for his coming, ready to receive him with open hearts. Blessed, too, are the *foreseeing* men and women of all ages, who are always watching for the morning; praying for great things; working for great things; expecting great things; bending forward, and listening for the prophetic voices; quick to see the great light in the heavens, when it first gilds the tops of the eastern hills.

6. *Within the Church of Christ itself is to be found a minority of believers whom God regards with peculiar complacency.* An eminent clergyman of Philadelphia once expressed the opinion that a majority of the professed followers of Christ do not add any *appreciable* strength to the spiritual power of the Church. It saddens one to think that this may be true. Be it true or not, the fact cannot be doubted that there is within the Church a body of believers of peculiar spirituality of character and consistency of life, who are generally a minority.

There is a church within the Church. St. John in his vision of the future declares, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *first* resurrection. They shall be kings and priests unto God, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Whatever that may mean, it implies *gradation* in the spiritual rank of the redeemed. This tallies with what we see in the Church on earth. There are Christians who always live near to God. They are obviously bent on living as Christ lived. They live as if they belonged to God. Their property they treat as his, not their own. They are always ready for Christian work. A revival of religion never takes them by surprise. They live in a revival perpetually. They are men and women of much prayer. Pastors depend upon them in emergencies, as they cannot upon all professed believers. We always know where to find them, and never find them in the wrong place, on the wrong side, saying the wrong word, doing the wrong thing.

Theirs is not a religion of form, not a religion of intermittent and erratic feeling, not a religion of æsthetic taste, but a religion of deep and controlling principle. As a spiritual power, they are the vanguard of the Church. They are the spiritual aristocracy of Christ's kingdom. These are they who shall sit on his right hand and on his left without asking for the dignity. Princes are they in prayer, conquerors in conflict with the powers of evil, saints to whom the truculent criticism of the world even does not refuse the title.

Almost every large church contains a group of such Christians, few or more, yet commonly a minority. Sometimes they can be numbered on one's fingers. "I have *one* man in my church," said an aged pastor not long ago, — "I have *one* man on whom I can always depend. I do not know that I have another." It is a legitimate object of prayer and Christian aspiration, to be numbered among those chosen few. God looks upon them with complacent joy. Christ sees in them of the travail of his soul. They satisfy him. Like David, they are men after God's own heart. Like John, they are beloved disciples. Like Mary, they have chosen the-good part. Like Paul, they fight a good fight. Their very presence in the world, the world feels as a power on the side of right. Every good cause feels the loss of them when they die. As we stand beside their open graves, we thank God anew for the doctrine of immortality. One star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.