

AWHAT IS THE GOSPEL?@

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Rom. 1:16,17

The gospel of Christ is indeed the wonder of wonders of all the ages. It is so marvelous the greatest minds the world has ever known, have never yet been able to comprehend it. They have set sail in their intellectual craft, and have gone north and south, east and west, but like the sages of the ages, they have turned back saying, **Al**t is past finding out.@

And yet, while it is so wonderful, it is also so simple that the smallest child among you, knowing the difference between right and wrong, can know enough about it to be saved. Indeed, the gospel of Christ transcends all else in its glory.

It causes wise men to wonder at its magnificence. It causes lost sinners to weep at its grace. It causes the armies of the redeemed to glory in its hope. It causes poor saints who, with twisted, broken, emaciated bodies lie upon beds of pain to bask in its peace. It causes young men, old men, mothers, wives, sons and daughters to forsake family, friends, home, wealth, position and possessions to carry its message of life to the bleak blackness of heathen lands across the seas. It causes the hosts of heaven to blend their voices in one grand and glorious anthem of praise to God for its marvelous provisions. It causes the hounds of hell to hide their ghoulish faces in shame because of its matchless brilliance. Tell me beloved, is it any wonder Paul wrote, **AI** am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ!@

It seems to me this *verse* shines like a star in the midnight blackness of this *chapter*, for it has been said that nowhere in all of scripture is there a more terrible description of the heinousness of sin, than that which the apostle gives us in the first chapter of Romans.

It is a description of the human heart. It is a picture of the unregenerate soul. It is a portrait of the awful heinousness of sin. And yet, here in the midst of this darkness, we find this glorious

statement: AFor I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.@"

There is music in the very sound of the word Agospel.@" It means Agood news.@" It is good news about the matchless grace of God. It is good news that, once and for all, God through Christ has burst the bars of sin and death which had imprisoned the souls of people, and has given them the power they needed to be saved.

It is good news to the man who, for years has been blinded by skepticism. It is good news to the woman who, for years, has been overtaken with a fault. It is good news to the man who has sinned so long he thinks he is hopeless. It is good news to the youth who is blinded by passion. It is good news to the girl who has become a slave to sin and has sold the flower of her womanhood for a few mad moments of sensual pleasure. It is the greatest news a sinning world could ever hear and unregenerate people could ever receive. AThe gospel of Christ -- the power of God unto salvation.@"

Some call this Athe simple gospel.@" But Id like to say this evening, there is no such thing as the simple gospel. The gospel of Christ runs the full gamut of the love, the grace, the mercy, and the goodness of God. This evening I want you to see this with me. I want you to push aside every other consideration. I want you to set aside every other thought. I want you to focus your entire being on the single purpose of grasping the gospel, so you will be so moved, so enthralled, so filled with the manifold glories of Christ you will say with Paul, AI am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.@" The first thing I want to say is that --

In His Living Jesus Is Our Example

In I Peter 2:21, we read AChrist suffered for us, leaving us an example.@" J. Wilbur Chapman, to whom I am indebted for this outline, points out the difference between an example and a pattern. He says, AA *pattern is a thing which must be reproduced in exactness. An example is that which must be reproduced in spirit*.@" In other words, Christ does not ask that our lives equal his, but that they resemble his. Not that they are of the same strength, but of the same kind.

Someone has said, ASalvation is easy. All it requires is acceptance. The difficult part is Christianity, for that entails living.@ That means becoming a follower of Jesus in all of its fulness. It means forsaking your past sins. It means righting of wrongs you have done. It means the complete dedication of all you are and ever hope to be to God. That is not always easy, but if we are to win the world to Jesus, then following his example is exactly what we must do.

We must heed the words of the poet who charges,

ABe strong! We are not here to play, to dream, to drift,
We have work to do and loads to lift.
Shun not the struggle, face it.
>Tis God's gift.

It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong.
How hard the battle goes.
The day how long.
Stand up, fight on!
Tomorrow comes the song.@

Beloved, Christ has set a mark for us. He has lifted up a standard. He has established a goal. His heroic example is a perpetual challenge and inspiration to the noblest and the best that is in us. His spotless purity enlists us in the warfare against sin in our lives and in the lives of all those through whom we come in contact. His sacrificial devotion leads us to a selfless abandonment of all we are and have, in an effort to win the lost to the Savior.

Oh, that the example of Jesus might be the aim, the ambition, the aspiration of every one of us. That is the challenge of the gospel. And yet, that is not all the gospel. For, secondly, as Chapman points out --

In His Death, He Is Our Redeemer.

Almost the first thing said of Jesus in the New Testament is this, AThou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.@

That was his mission. To come to a world where people Alove darkness rather than light@and bring God and people together. And oh, how his coming was needed. Sin is an awful thing. It looks so pretty and is so deadly. It promises so much pleasure and brings so much heartache. There is nothing sacred to it. For we are all sinners. To doubt this is to play the part of the fool. In fact, there are only two kinds of people in the world, Asinners@and Asinners saved by grace.@

Indeed, sin is an awful thing. It is a cancer on the soul. It enslaves the appetites, enfeebles the will, entangles the mind. It continually torments and tantalizes the sick sinner, with the cruel scourge of unsatisfied appetites and desires, and unkept promises of pleasure and profit. And no one, no matter how enlightened, how strong, or how lofty, can in his or her own strength, hope to combat and overcome the onslaughts of Satan. Only Christ can break the snare of sin.

My Bible tells me, AThe soul that sinneth it shall die.@ It says, AThe wages of sin is death.@ But, praise God, it does not stop there. There is another scripture. AFor God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life@ (John 3:16).

Beloved, AChrist died for our sins according to the scripture.@ He paid the penalty. He suffered in our stead. He offered himself for you and for me, and there is no other way to be saved. Upon the authority of God's holy word I preach it to you this evening, you will find no other way to be saved than by accepting of Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Oh heart of mine, hear it this morning --

AThere is life in a look at the crucified one.

There is life at this moment for thee;

Then look, sinner, look unto him and be saved.

Unto him, who was nailed to the tree.

Doubt not thy welcome since God hath declared,
There remaineth no more to be done.
Christ Jesus once in the world appeared,
And finished the work He begun.

Then take with rejoicing from Jesus at once
The life everlasting he gives,
And know with assurance thou never canst die,
Since Jesus, thy righteousness, lives.®

Yes, in his living, Jesus is our example and in his dying, he is our redeemer. But even that is not all of the gospel. As J. Wilbur Chapman points out --

In His Burial He Is Our Scapegoat.

I don't believe I ever fully realized the significance of Christ's burial until the other day when I was preparing this message. I was reading Leviticus 16, and there I came upon the scapegoat of the Old Testament (Lev. 16:8,10,26).

You may remember the details of that ancient Jewish ritual. The priest stood with his hand upon the head of the goat confessing the sins of Israel. And then the goat was led away into the wilderness, bearing the sins of Israel. As I read through the story, it struck me that here was the perfect illustration of how Christ meets our sins. He becomes our scapegoat, bearing our sins as far from us, as the east is from the west. They are cast into the depths of the sea. They are put behind God's back, to be lost forever in the abyss of God's forgetfulness.

Therefore, we shall stand before Almighty God, our record clean, our garments spotless, our sin forgiven and forgotten to be held against us no more. Praise God for such a Savior as Jesus our

Lord. Yes, in his burial he is our scapegoat. But that is not all of the gospel. Chapman goes on to say that:

In His Resurrection He Is Our Justification.

Romans 4:25 tells us, AHe was raised for our justification.@ The resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's amen to Christ's work upon the cross. God, in raising Jesus from the dead, and taking him back to himself in glory and seating him at his own right hand, has accepted forever the atoning blood of Jesus as a satisfactory offering for our sin.

It was Sir Joseph Locker who said, AThe resurrection is God's receipt for Calvary.@ When God rolled away the stone from the tomb, and Jesus came forth as conqueror over death and the grave, God, crowning him with the crowns of the ages, put into his hands all authority in heaven and on earth. Through this matchless display of power we have full and final proof that we are justified by the blood of Jesus.

We are able to stand before Almighty God as though we have never sinned. The merit and standing of Christ are bestowed upon us. We are clothed in his righteousness. We are given his power over sin. His victory over death. His triumph over the grave. The black specter of death is forever vanquished and we can shout triumphantly, AOh grave, where is thy victory?@ For we are fully justified by faith in the risen Jesus.

During the awful holocaust of World War II a young soldier was wounded. He was barely able to crawl back to his tent before he died. When they found him, he was lying upon his face, his open Bible before him, his hand glued fast to the page by his blood which covered it. When his hand was lifted, the letters of the printed page were clearly traced upon it. With the ever living promise in and on his hand, they laid him in a soldier's grave. The words of the scripture were these, AI am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he be dead, yet shall he live.@

Oh, beloved, here is the guarantee of our justification. The assurance of the forgiveness of our

sins. The hope of everlasting life in the mansions of glory. Here is a fact. An historic fact. An established fact. Here is something to see, to understand, to believe, to build upon. Here is a way out of sin. Here is a door out of the grave. Here is an entrance into the grace of God. Here is a gateway into heaven.

Trials may beset us. Troubles may oppress us. Temptations may distress us. Here are the hand and the heart of Almighty God reaching out to us in the only begotten, crucified, resurrected Son of God. In the darkest hour, in the most dismal circumstances, in the most distressing conditions, here is the bright and shining hope of God's love and care. Yes, in his resurrection, Jesus is our justification. But, even *that* is not all of the gospel. Chapman goes on to say --

In His Coming He Is Our Hope.

This old world of ours has been the stage of many wonderful events since the hour when God first breathed it into existence by the word of his power. But, to my mind, the second coming of Christ is the crowning event of them all. It is the blessed hope of the Christian church. It is a purifying hope. A pacifying hope. A comforting hope. A glorious hope.

It will be a time when Christ shall reveal his glory. It will be a time of reward for the faithful. It will be a time of joyful reunion for the saints. It will be a time when the pangs of pain, sorrow and disease are forever vanquished, and Acorruption shall put on incorruption . . . and we shall all be changed@(1 Cor. 15:53,51).

In these days of sin, when men's hearts are breaking and when cities are falling far from God, when drunkenness and debauchery are becoming rampant, when pride and greed are ruling the hearts of people, when lust and passion are fast choking the flower of womanhood, when men's plans are failing and their lofty air castles are melting away into shattered shambles, in these days of wretchedness and unbelief, I cannot help but lift my eyes heavenward and cry, AOh, Lord Jesus, how long? How long? Our hearts are hungry for your return. Our souls are anxious for release from this maddening maze. Our spirits long for that perfect peace which can only come when you

appear. So come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!@

Kernie Keagan, Athe singing parson,@tells how one Sunday while he was away preaching, and his wife and little girl were home, a bad storm arose. His wife did not think it wise to take the little girl out in the rain and she decided to teach her the Sunday School lesson at home. The little one climbed into her mother's lap, and listened intently as Mrs. Keagan told her the story of the second coming of Jesus which was the lesson of the day.

When Dr. Keagan returned late that night the child had already gone to sleep. He was exhausted from a long day of preaching and travel and asked his wife to keep things quiet so he could sleep in the next morning.

However, almost at the crack of dawn, his little girl, unaware of her daddy's exhaustion, came running into the preacher's bedroom to receive her accustomed hug and kiss. Dr. Keagan tells how he heard her coming and tried to pretend he was still sleeping. He felt her climb up onto the bed and press her cheek to his. He felt her probe around his face with her tiny fingers, as she tried to mimic the tender caresses she had seen her mother give to him. After a moment she got down and tiptoed away.

The preacher sensed she was still in the room, so he quietly he lifted his head from the pillow and opened his eyes. He saw her there, silhouetted against the sunlight as she stood barefoot in her nightie, gazing out of the spacious window into the morning sky. He watched the child for a moment, his heart pounding with love and thanksgiving to God for such a gift as here, when suddenly, the little girl turned around, and seeing her daddy awake ran into his arms shouting, AGood morning, daddy. Is he here yet?@ After an exchange of affectionate kisses the child repeated her question. AIs he here yet?@ AWho?@asked Dr. Keagan. AJesus! Yesterday mommy told me he is coming back again. Is he here yet?@

Dr. Keagan says as soon as she went about her playing, I dropped to my knees beside the bed and

prayed, AOh God, if only I had her faith. If only I could recapture that attitude of expediency I had as a new Christian. Oh God, make the preeminence of Christ's return the motivating power in all my ministry.@

Beloved, Jesus is coming. He is coming soon. The great question is, AAre you ready to meet him?@ For while he shall come to receive his own, he shall also come to reject the lost. And, if you are not right with God tonight, if you are not saved, if you are not a Christian, there can be no better time than *this* to prepare for his coming. The way is simple.

First, you must **repent**. Jesus said, AExcept ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.@ Second, you must **receive**. You must receive Jesus as your Savior, for scripture says, AAs many as received him, to them God gave the right to be called his children@ (Jn. 1:12). Receive him in his life as your example. Receive him in his death as your redeemer. Receive him in his burial as your scapegoat. Receive him in his resurrection as your justification. And then, you will be able to receive him in his second coming as your hope.

Third, you must **rejoice**. Not only repent, not only receive, but also rejoice together with us that Jesus is coming soon to take his own unto himself. Beloved, the gates of mercy are still ajar. Right now, this very moment, repent of your evil ways, receive Jesus as the Savior of your soul, so you can leave this service this evening rejoicing and singing with the saints of eternity --

ALiving he loved me,
Dying he saved me,
Buried he carried my sins far away,
Rising he justified, freely forever,
One day he's coming, oh glorious day.@