

"THE GOSPEL" - GOD'S POWER TO SAVE

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In writing the letter to the Romans, Paul did not abruptly announce his theme, but rather, led up to it informally. In his introduction, he revealed a long-cherished desire to preach the gospel in Rome; and, that he considered himself to be, as a steward of the gospel, indebted to all men. In spite of the indignities and persecutions which he had suffered because of his preaching, he wrote: "I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

It is to a consideration of this great theme-"the power of God unto salvation"-that we solicit the attention of our readers.

Meaning And Use of the Term "Gospel"

The word gospel means glad tidings, and is so rendered in the marginal readings in the American Standard Version of the New Testament. It is used in connection with several announcements involving the blessing of men. God's promise to the Israelites concerning their ultimate rest in the kind of Canaan is referred to as gospel or glad tidings in Hebrews 4:2.

It is furthermore stated by Paul, that when Jehovah promised Abraham, saying, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3), he was preaching the gospel. Hear him: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed" (Gal. 3:8).

We furthermore see the use of the term gospel when we consider the ministry of John the Baptist, as well as the personal ministry of Jesus. John came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). "After John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14,15).

Let us notice that both John and Jesus made the same announcement, namely: "The kingdom of God (or heaven) is at hand." Mark in his

record calls this message the gospel of God. It was truly good news or glad tidings to those who were earnestly expecting the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom.

These examples of the use of the term gospel in the scriptures are, as has been doubtlessly observed, connected with blessings which were only in prospect.

The Gospel of Which Paul Speaks

But the gospel which Paul declares to be "the power of God unto salvation," is not in nature either prophetic or promissory-it is factual-it is a reality. It involves matters which have been accomplished and blessings which are currently being conferred. Let us read his own comprehensive statement of it: "Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (I Cor. 15: 1-4).

Here is "the sweetest story ever told," set forth in sheer simplicity. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for our sins. It is this last phrase that makes the story a message of glad tidings. Jesus spake of God's redemptive purposes in Himself, when he said: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not his son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him" (John 3:16,17). Again: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). To these we add the words of Paul when he wrote: "Him who knew no sin he (God) made to be sin on our behalf ; that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter stated the same fact in this language: "Ye were redeemed . . . with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ" (I Pet. 1:18,19).

Certainly, if we overlook or remove the ideas of atonement and redemption from the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, we reduce it to the level of a human-tragedy and the telling of it would not be glad tidings. We thus lift up our voices with the apostle Paul in these words: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath

blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ: . . . in whom we have. our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:3 and 7).

The Gospel Must Be Believed

It is important that we note now that although the gospel has sufficiently provided for the salvation of all sinners, it can and will save only those who believe its message. Our text declares that the gospel is God's saving power "to everyone that believeth." That only the believers of the gospel will be saved is not a dogma of men it is a dictum of Christ. Listen to these words of Jesus, as He delivers His commission to the apostles: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15, 16). This is the way of divine love, mercy and justice, and though it may contradict the thinking of mortal men, we must teach it as it is written!

The Gospel Must be Obeyed

This fact is plainly stated in two passages in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, has declared that Jesus will one day descend from heaven "with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:7,8). Peter presented the same thought when he wrote: "The time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (I Pet. 4:17).

How Can The Gospel Be Obeyed?

This question immediately and naturally arises. That facts cannot be literally obeyed is self-evident. Obedience presupposes that there are conditions to be met or commands to be obeyed. An examination of the language of Jesus in Mark 16:16 readily discloses that salvation through the gospel is predicated upon conditions to be fulfilled. These conditions are belief and baptism. Turning to the second chapter of Acts we note that the apostle Peter, speaking by the Holy Spirit, told

those who had been convicted concerning the facts of the gospel, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Thus we may conclude that as the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus are the facts of the gospel, and that by them salvation has been provided for sinners, even so, faith, repentance and baptism are the commands of the gospel, by which the sinner appropriates the salvation which has been provided for him.

That the commands of the gospel symbolize the facts of the gospel is adequately set forth by the Holy Spirit in the 6th chapter of the Roman letter, verses 1 through 4. Let us read: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life."

Let us note: as Jesus died for our sins, so the sinner must die to his sins. This is accomplished through belief in Christ and repentance of sins. Repentance is a determination to forsake sin, accompanied by the act. The best evidence of one's being dead to sin is his aversion to it, and cessation from it.

And now that he has died to sin, the next step is to be buried. As Jesus was buried and resurrected to a new life, even so must the sinner be buried and resurrected to a new life. This is accomplished through the act of baptism. Whereas the love and practice of sin is destroyed by faith in Jesus and repentance from sin, the guilt of sin is removed by God, when the sinner submits to the ordinance of baptism and not until then.

Thus it is that Paul writes in verse 17 of this same 6th chapter of Romans: "Whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered: and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness." In this manner, obedience to the gospel is accomplished.

You Must Decide

Friends, have you been saved by the gospel? If not, then we urge you to believe it and obey it now. Every provision has been made for you by a kind and merciful Creator. The eternal destiny of your soul now

rests in your decision.

Truth Magazine I:12, pp. 6-7, 24-25
September 1957