

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

"...I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

One of the claims made by almost all religions in the world is that through loyalty and faithfulness to their beliefs, one is able to attain salvation, yet the concept of salvation varies greatly from one religion to another. Let us look at a few:

To the American Indian, salvation means spending eternity in a happy hunting ground; for Hindus, salvation means a reunion with Brahma known as Nirvana; before attaining to this ultimate in salvation, the Hindu believes that he will come back to earth several different times in what is called reincarnation. He may come back at one time as an elephant, another time as an insect. What he is when he comes back depends on how well he has used his present life. On his final exit he will find his Nirvana, which is in reality a condition of perpetual unconsciousness. In Buddhism, Nirvana is the state of perfect blessedness achieved by the extinction of individual existence, being absorbed into the supreme spirit.

We cite these as illustrations of the fact that the idea of salvation greatly varies. One thing common to all religions is that **faith** results in salvation. That is what the Apostle Paul tells us concerning the Christian religion when he says, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation"* (Rom. 1:16). The great difference is that the Apostle is speaking of the *true* religion and *true* salvation via faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

Still, this does not give us a great deal of information. If we should ask a dozen people what their idea was concerning the Gospel of Christ, and what Salvation means, we would probably get many different and contradictory answers.

Simply because the Apostle says that the Gospel of Christ is the *power of God unto salvation* does not bring before our minds what is the great hope of the Gospel, in all its completeness, or what Christianity really means, not only for us, but for the entire human race. In the opening verses of this chapter, Paul gives us some help along this line. He speaks of this same gospel and calls it the Gospel of God. Then he goes on further and says it is the Gospel of God *which had been spoken in early times by all the prophets*. Thus, the Apostle is suggesting here that if we wish to find out more about this Gospel, one way to do it is to examine the testimony of all the Holy Prophets of the Old Testament period. Going back to the testimonies of God's prophets, we find that they do, indeed, tell us many wonderful things regarding the Gospel of God.

The word *Gospel* itself simply means *glad tidings* or *good news*. We find the prophets make many wonderful statements which, taken at their face value, sound good and are very descriptive of *good news*. For instance, the prophet Isaiah in the 35th chapter tells us of a time when all the blind eyes will be opened; all the deaf ears shall be unstopped; the lame man shall leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. The same prophet tells us of a time when there shall be a highway, a *way of Holiness*, a roadway on which conditions will be made so plain that *"a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein."* He speaks of a time when the *"ransomed of the Lord shall return with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads,"* and further states that these *"shall obtain everlasting joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."*

Now all of these statements surely are descriptive of *good news*, but they tell us little about all that is meant of the Gospel. Turning to the 65th chapter of Isaiah, we find the prophet gives us further *good news*. He describes a time when *“they shall build houses and inhabit them and plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them.”* Certainly, that is *good news* indeed, but where will these houses be built and where will these vineyards be planted? Are we to understand this to mean that in heaven people will be building houses and planting vineyards? Just what does the prophet mean?

Isaiah again prophesies in the 25th chapter, telling us of the time when *“the Lord will make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, well refined, of fat things full of marrow.”* He tells us that at that same time the Lord will *“swallow up death in victory, and wipe away tears from off all faces,”* and that *“the rebuke of His people will He take away from off all the earth.”*

In this same prophecy, Isaiah tells us of the hearty response of the people when these blessings are dispensed to them, saying, *“Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”* (Isaiah 25:9)

All of these are wonderful promises of *good news* from the pen of only *one* of God’s holy prophets. If we examined the testimony of *all* the prophets, we would be equally thrilled by the marvelous things they have foretold. But to put them all together to form a pattern of meaning that will teach the real plan of God and how that salvation will be brought to all the people takes much study and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In Galatians 3:8 the Apostle Paul gives us further insight when he tells us that *“God preached beforehand the Gospel unto Abraham.”* This statement is very revealing, for many of us have held the idea that the gospel was first preached by the angels on the night Jesus was born into this world. Indeed, that was a wonderful declaration of *good news* concerning God’s plan for the salvation of the world; nevertheless, according to the Apostle Paul, this was not the first time the gospel was preached. No, it was given to that faithful patriarch, Abraham, with this promise: *“In you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed”* (Genesis 12:3). Surely this promise was *very good news* and a wonderful part of the gospel. The Gospel of God is surely not a narrow gospel, nor is it a restrictive message. It is a blessing of *“all the families of the earth.”*

As we trace this wonderful theme song of the Bible down through prophetic testimony of the Old Testament, we find that it *never narrows down*. It is always all-comprehensive, just as was the statement made to Abraham, and also when Jacob was on his deathbed he uttered prophecies concerning things that would happen to the descendants of his twelve sons. He said, concerning Judah that out of his loins would come one whom he designated as *Shiloh*, meaning *peacemaker*. This was really one of the promises of the coming Messiah, for it says, *“unto him shall the gathering of the nations be.”* (Gen.49:10) The implication is that all the nations would come in for blessings through this prophetic One described as Shiloh.

Turning again to Isaiah, in the 9th chapter, we read another prophecy concerning Jesus, the promised Messiah. *“Unto us a child is born and unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. His name shall be called wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”* Then it continues, *“Of the increase of His government and of His peace there shall be no end”* (Isa. 9:6-7). In other words, His government will ultimately reach and encompass all nations, bringing blessings promised to Abraham and to *all the families of the earth*. As the prophecies unfold pertaining to this promised seed of Abraham, we find it becomes associated with the setting up of a

Divine govern- ment in the earth -- the Kingdom for which Jesus taught us to pray: *"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done **on earth** as it is in heaven."*

In Daniel 2:31-45 we have another prophecy concerning this kingdom, one which likens it to a great mountain that fills the whole earth. Daniel said this illustrated the wonderful kingdom of the LORD which would one day fill the whole earth. We see this Kingdom to be just as broad and all-comprehensive in Daniel's prophecies as when the promise was first made to father Abraham.

Continuing on to the time when Jesus was born and the angels announced His birth, we find it had not narrowed down at all. They said to the shepherds, *"Fear not, for behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be unto all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord"* (Luke 2:10, 11). This was indeed *glad tidings, the gospel* or good news which was to be to **all** the people.

In this announcement by the angels, the plan of God took another step forward. Until this time, it was a matter of God's promises reiterated in various forms and expressed in different ways by one after another of the prophets. Now, however, *fulfillment* began. It became more than a promise, for *the Savior was born!*

When we consider this background of thought, with Jesus as the central theme in this glorious Gospel of God (also called the gospel of Christ), it is interesting to note some of the things which Jesus said when He began His ministry some 30 years after His birth.

A rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, *"Good master, what good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?"* (Matt. 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-25; Luke 18:18-27). This man was interested in salvation; he wanted to live. Jesus referred him back to the law given to Israel at Mount Sinai which was epitomized in the Ten Commandments. The reason Jesus did this was because the law had promised that anyone who could keep it would gain life. *"To **the man** that does these things he shall live by them"* (Romans 10:5; Leviticus 18:5; Nehemiah 9:29) was the promise. This rich ruler answered, *"All of these have I kept from my youth up."* The account does not go into all the details, but seemingly the young man realized he was aging just like everyone else, and there was no evidence that keeping the law was benefiting him in the sense of preventing his growing old and dying.

Of course, no imperfect member of the fallen, dying race *could* keep that law. Then Jesus graciously said to him, *"Yet one thing you lack; go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow me"* (Matt. 19:16-22). With that, the young man went away sorrowful. The account says it was because he had great riches, implying that he wasn't willing to pay the price. Jesus was really giving him the qualifications for being a disciple and not just for salvation. To give up his riches was to 'deny himself,' something not required for salvation but for discipleship. When this man left at this point, Jesus went on to say how difficult it would be for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, that it would be easier for a camel to go through the needle's eye gate than for one rich to divest himself of his wealth for Christ's sake.

Much of what Jesus said about riches being a detriment to entering the kingdom of heaven was also bewildering to the disciples, for at this point in time they had not been fully initiated into the gospel with its invitation to a *heavenly calling*. Jesus replied to them, *"I realize this thing is impossible to you, but with God all things are possible."* What Jesus was really doing for the moment was putting them off,

not giving them a direct answer. But this did not satisfy the disciples, and they came back to Jesus again with a statement which they thought would compel Him to give a direct answer to their initial question.

They said to the Master, *"We have left all and followed you..."* In other words, we've done just what you asked this rich young ruler to do -- now what is our reward? You can see what was going on in their minds. These disciples believed and expected that by becoming associates with Jesus, they would then have a part in His kingdom on earth. They also believed that the kingdom promised in the Old Testament would be immediately established in Judea by Jesus and that in some miraculous way He would be enthroned as King of the Jews, and they would be associated with Him.

Then Jesus did give them a direct reply: *"He who has left all and followed me, in the regeneration, shall sit with me on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* Now here, Jesus is reassuring the disciples that He was not overlooking the great objective of His coming to earth and of their being called to be with Him. He describes that great objective as *"the regeneration."*

The Apostle Paul refers to this a little differently in 1 Corinthians 15, that wonderful chapter in which he tells us of the resurrection of (all) the dead. Paul speaks of Adam as *the first Adam* and then speaks of Jesus as the *last Adam*, saying, *"As **all** in Adam die, so in Christ **all** will be made alive"* (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22 & 45).

All of the promises which we have quoted, mostly from Isaiah, describe a blessing of an earthly nature and are spoken of by the Apostle Peter as being descriptive of what he calls the *"times of restitution of all things spoken by the mouth of all God's holy prophets"* (Acts 3:21).

In the Greek text, *restitution* has the meaning of *reconstitution* or *restoration*, giving us the thought that the **original** plan of God in the creation of Adam was for the earth to be man's home, and this will be carried out in the restoration or restitution. While the human race lost life in Adam, they will have life restored in Christ. This restored life will be here on earth which was God's original plan. In both the Old and New Testaments, various terms are used for this restoration process. *Restitution* is the word used by Peter in Acts 3:21. Paul used the word *resurrection* which means a *re-standing*.

All these words emphasize the same thought, that the great objective and hope of salvation for mankind in general is that of being restored to life upon the earth. The word *regeneration* is another one that gives us the same thought, with a shade of difference in meaning, since it emphasizes the fact that those to be restored will be the children of the first Adam who will then become the children of the last Adam, the *re-generated* race.

This is the thought that is brought to our attention in Isaiah 53, where Jesus' suffering and death are described prophetically. In verse 8 we are told there that He would *"be cut off from the land of the living: and there would be none to declare His generation."* But then in verses 10 and 11, it says, *"He shall see His seed. He shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied."* Thus it will be that His family, His seed, His generation will be the *regenerated* human family brought back to life. This will be accomplished during the thousand years of His reign on the earth.

Jesus is telling the disciples that He has not lost sight of this great objective in the plan of God, and that there will indeed be a time of *regeneration*. But, he says, they will NOT be among the ones regenerated *at that time*, for if they follow faithfully in His footsteps, suffering and dying with Him, they will have treasures in heaven and be with Him and have the great privilege and honor of sharing with

Him as *"heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ"* in that work of regenerating the race to life on earth (Rom. 8:17).

We see from this conversation, first between Jesus and the rich Ruler, and then the larger and fuller explanation as He talked with His disciples, that in the *gospel of Christ* there is the free gift of *Salvation* and **also** an invitation extended to a *Heavenly Calling*, an outgrowth of Salvation, and only extended to those who are willing to follow in His footsteps *during the present Gospel Age*. *"IF any man would be my disciple, let him deny self, take up his cross and follow me"* (Matt. 16:24).

This is an *invitation to a High or Heavenly calling and distinct from Salvation!* During the earthly 1,000 year Kingdom of God, salvation will be extended to the world. If they accept Jesus' death for their sins and obey the righteous laws of the Kingdom, they will be given all the help they need to be humanly perfected as was Adam before he sinned; but the *opportunity* to be with Jesus and partake in this *"heavenly calling"* will not be available then. That part of the Kingdom will extend salvation only to life on earth...the life that was lost in Adam will then be completely restored in Christ. As these are awakened from the sleep of death, they will have the opportunity of living forever on a perfected earth which was God's intention from the beginning of Creation.

In Galatians 3:8, we said how Paul tells us this gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham. Then in verse 16 he identifies *Jesus* as the promised seed of Abraham. In verse 27-29 he states, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, and if you are Christ's* (if you are really or actually following in the footsteps of Jesus and belong to Him), *then are you Abraham's seed (through faith, we have Abraham as our father) and heirs according to the promise."* Jesus asked His disciples, *"Who do men say that I am?"* After He heard the answers he asked again, *"But who do you say that I am?"* Peter answered, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Jesus said, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in Heaven. And upon this rock* (this great foundation truth pertaining to Jesus being the Christ which Peter had just uttered) *I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18).

This is the foundation truth of the Bible. Jesus Christ is its central theme and chief corner-stone, and the only means of having this wonderful promise fulfilled, *that all the families of the earth will be blessed*. But as we know, the families of the earth who lived in Abraham's day and before are all dead. The families of the earth who lived from Abraham's day on down to Jesus' time are in their graves; those who have lived since Jesus' time are also still all dead and buried, and *dead people cannot be blessed*.

When this *called-out company, (Acts 15:14) His Church*, is complete, being fully *"conformed to the image of God's dear Son,"* this preparatory work of the great gospel arrangement will be finished; then nothing will prevent the complete fulfillment of the promise to *bless all the families of the earth*. The very gates of hell (Hades is used here, descriptive of the death condition) will be thrown wide open. The prisoners of death will be called forth by the power of God and given an opportunity to receive the blessing of life through Christ and the Church, His Bride. This is God's Divine Purpose.

When we consider just how wonderful the gospel of Christ is, no wonder the Apostle Paul could say, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."* Neither are we ashamed of the gospel of Christ, realizing how it portrays the great Love of our Heavenly Father and the Son of His Love, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our prayer for you reading this booklet is *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him...”* (Ephesians 1:17).

We recommend to you the reading of the booklet **“Why Does God Permit Evil?”** which shows the great wisdom, justice, love and power of our Creator, and His grand design for His creation for all eternity

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