

STEWARDS OF THE GOSPEL

"According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust." I Timothy 1:11.

"But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel." I Thessalonians 2:4.

To open up these great texts in all their length and breadth would be an appropriate exercise for the loftiest intellect and the most spiritual soul. The gospel mentioned herein is the central theme of the New Testament. Christ used the word "gospel" on various occasions. Paul, the greatest exponent of Christianity, mentioned it again and again. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16. "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" I Corinthians 9:16. "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust." I Timothy 1:11.

What is this gospel which is so prominent in the Holy Scriptures? First, let me indicate what it is not. The gospel is not the Bible. While the Bible is certainly the Word of God, there is much in it which is not the gospel. Neither is the gospel a call to repentance, to the amendment of one's ways or to promise to do better in the future. These things are certainly excellent in their places, but they do not constitute the gospel. Nor is the gospel an abstract truth, a speculative proposition or a system of ethics which human reason has formed.

After man had fallen into sin and his fellowship with God had been broken, what we call "the gospel" is the message which was intended to bring about the restoration of that fellowship with Him. Through the glorious gospel of Christ man is offered the opportunity of returning to full fellowship with God which will culminate in his safe arrival in heaven where he will live throughout eternity.

Gospel is a word of deep significance and wide import. It means "good news" or "glad tidings." Rather than being good advice to be heeded, it is good news to be believed. Instead of telling us to do anything, the gospel is simply the glorious message which tells us what God has done for us in order that we might be saved. These glad tidings, which surpass all others in importance, sublimity and joyousness, were purposed in the mind of God and prompted by the love of God. They are designed and adapted to excite joy in all who believe and receive them.

On one occasion the famous Alfred Tennyson asked an aged lady, "What is the news today?" She replied, "Why, Mr. Tennyson, there is only one piece of news that I know--that is, Christ died for all men." Mr. Tennyson remarked, "That is old news, and good news and new news." The best news that has ever been told is that God has done for us that which we never could have done for ourselves, namely, provided a Saviour for us. Paul gives an abbreviated, and yet a complete, statement of it in I Corinthians 15:1, 3-4, which reads as follows: "Moreover, brethren,

I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you..... For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures". This is certainly the best news for our broken-hearted, sinning, suffering and dying humanity.

Christ's gospel is not concerned with what man should do, for there is no good news in that for any sinner, but it is concerned with what God has done already for sinners. The gospel is God's announcement of the fact that He has provided righteousness for unrighteous men. It is called "good news" because to those who are under the curse of sin it carries the message that they are given the opportunity to escape the curse of death. By His death on the cross, Christ Jesus paid the penalty which God was forced to inflict on man because of his sin.

I. The Content Of This Gospel.

Christ Jesus is the person around whom this gospel is centered. The revelation of His person and His accomplished work are the contents of the gospel.

With the exception of Christianity, all religions speak of salvation by character or by conduct. They hold out the hope of earning salvation by merit of one kind or another. But, salvation by conduct or by works is the doctrine of Satan no matter by whom nor where it is preached. Christ alone can save. Salvation is not a matter of merit on the part of the receiver, but it is entirely a matter of grace on the part of the Giver. Salvation is not partly of grace and partly of works; it is all of grace and none of works. Man must accept salvation as a gift from God; otherwise, he will never receive it. This fact is illustrated in a statement by Dr. Alexander MacLaren, the great preacher of Edinburgh. Not long before Dr. MacLaren's death, his associate minister, Mr. Gustart, visited him and inquired, "What are you doing, brother?" Dr. MacLaren replied, "I'll tell you what I am doing, brother: I am gathering all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds and all my evil deeds; and I am going to throw them overboard and swim to glory on the plank of free grace." Man's only hope of salvation is in the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is wonderful news to hear that God has done for us that which we never could have done for ourselves.

1. Christ died for our sins.

Most assuredly this is good news, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Since God's Word thus states we are sinners, it certainly would be foolish for anyone to deny that fact. But, the encouraging thing is that "Christ died for our sins." He paid our sin debt. Although "sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow."

In the gospel we have not merely great ideas of truth, a great personality, or a lofty example of living, but rather a God-conceived and God-executed transaction, namely, the

death of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. In His death on the cruel tree, Christ was reconciling the world to God. On Calvary's cross the purposes of divine love became intelligible, and the great problem of human redemption was solved. "He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again." II Corinthians 5:15. Isn't it glorious to know that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures?" I Corinthians 15:3. But, you may be assured that no man preaches the gospel, no matter how many nice things he may say about Jesus Christ, if he leaves out His vicarious death on Calvary's cross. The very first message of the gospel is the fact of the vicarious atonement of Christ. If His vicarious death is left out, there is no gospel. There is no other way whereby man can be saved than through the shed blood of the blessed and spotless Son of God. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

When Paul referred to "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," He incidentally gave us one of the keynotes of his marvelous life and his wonderful ministry. To him the gospel, which he believed and preached, was the most glorious fact in all history. He gloried in the cross saying, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." Galatians 6:14. Paul was not afraid to proclaim the gospel of Christ to anybody. Not once did he tone down the gospel in the least. He always delighted to dwell upon the good news about Christ. To him the gospel provided adequately for all of man's needs; it forgave the past, it enabled in the present and it provided for the future.

2. Christ was buried.

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I have also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3). There came a day when the sun went down at noon, and all said, "He is dead." That was a terrible day. There was the mob, the scourge, the dripping blood, the voices, the lightning, the earthquake, the dice, the veil rent in the temple and the rich man going to the governor with a request for the dead body. Then Joseph came, and Nicodemus with the spices, and Christ's body was removed from the cross and placed away in the tomb. "He was buried" (I Corinthians 15:4). His kingdom had shrunk to the narrow dimensions of a grave. His regal robes had become a shroud.

3. Christ arose.

When his body was placed in the tomb, it was fastened with the king's seal, and soldiers were placed there to guard it. Early on Sunday morning the angels of the Lord came down, the soldiers fell away, the seal was broken and the stone was rolled away from the entrance to the tomb.

Christ arose from the dead, laid aside His grave clothes and walked out of the tomb. This living Saviour was triumphant over death and the grave. By His resurrection He recovered His challenged rights, regained His waning influence and resumed His miraculous power. Through His resurrection we have received the blessed assurance that the grave is not our goal. In fact, the resurrection of Christ is the whole alphabet of human hope, the certificate of His great mission from heaven and an indispensable part of the glorious gospel in all ages.

II. The Character Of This Gospel.

Neither did the brain of man devise this gospel, nor did his heart conceive it. This good news, which thrills the hearts of men with joy and inspires them with hope, did not come from man, but from the loving heart of Him who yearns for the salvation, the happiness and the usefulness of those whom He has created and sustained, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

This good news is concerned with what the Lord has done for lost sinners. It is good for them to be informed that God loved them enough to send His Son to Calvary's cross to die in order that they might be saved. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for all. So, the very first message of Christ's gospel is the story of His vicarious atonement.

To Paul this gospel was wonderful because of its revelation of the infinite love and the glory of God. A literal translation of Paul's statement in our text would be: "According to the gospel of the glory of the happy God, with which I was entrusted."

What other combination of words could be formed that would be so full of meaning and rapture as these, "The gospel of the glory of the happy God?" How we wish that we had the ability to state clearly the infinite worth, and to explain fully the import, of these divinely inspired and enrapturing words!

Perhaps you never anticipated that such a term as "happy" should ever be applicable to God, but it is. He is happy. He is supremely happy that He gave His Son to die for lost sinners. Moreover, He is graciously disposed to communicate His happiness to His own. Because of His love for them, God takes great pleasure in the happiness of His children. Also, the success of His gospel makes Him exceedingly happy.

Wherever these glad tidings have been proclaimed and believed they have produced wonderful effects. The reception of the gospel message always results in the impartation of great joy, in the transformation of sinners into saints and in the bringing of disciples into glory. For those who accept Christ as their Saviour, the penalty of sin is removed, the power of sin is broken and eventually they will be removed entirely and eternally from the presence of sin.

III. The Custodians Of This Gospel.

Our Lord has been pleased to commit His glorious gospel to His churches. They are the custodians of it. For them to regard this gospel as their exclusive possession would be to thwart the very purpose for which He has committed it. They are responsible for its communication to others. It is their inestimable privilege and imperative duty to share it with all who have never received it. They are obligated to dispense the gospel according to the directions which He has given. He requires them to keep His gospel pure. He is not willing for it to be blended with any of man's theories, nor does He want it combined with an ordinance or anything of that kind. Woe be it unto any church which preaches not the gospel of Christ!

Christ's churches are composed of individuals who, having experienced the life-giving power of the gospel, are prepared to proclaim and recommend it to lost sinners. Christ's program is that His followers in His churches shall proclaim the glorious gospel to the people in all parts of the world. He wants every person to hear the gospel. What our blessed Lord has done for us in saving our souls puts us under a debtorship to be the messengers of this saving knowledge and grace to others everywhere. We owe it to Him to take His message to every creature. It has been committed to our trust in order that we may share it with all who have never received it. This debtorship knows no territorial, racial nor social boundaries. This obligation does not permit any evasions, exemptions or substitutes.

As Christians and church members we are stewards of the gospel of Christ. We are the trustees of the most sacred treasures God has ever given into human hands. Not only are we the depositories of God's truth, but we are also its distributors. We came into possession of this great responsibility when we were saved and added to the church, and as long as we live we are under obligation to pass on to others the light we have received. It is our duty to share this glorious gospel with others freely and unselfishly.

Before these glad tidings can produce their designed effect they must be made known. Good news ought to be told to those whom it concerns most. A cure for any disease ought to be made known to those who are suffering from it. Food should not be kept from the hungry. Water should be given to those who are thirsty and famishing. A way of escape ought to be pointed out to those who are in great peril. The way of salvation should be made known to every lost sinner. Christians are responsible for telling the lost how they may become the children of God. The personal proclamation of this glorious gospel is the duty of every Christian.

All stewards are required to be faithful to their trust. It is a very reasonable expectation that anybody who is entrusted with a responsible position and work will be found faithful in the performance of his duties. Even in earthly matters

a careless and fraudulent trustee is considered among the worst of men. What then shall we say about the stewards of the gospel of the glory of the happy God if they prove to be unfaithful to their trust? We certainly ought to be faithful to our trust. After all, you know, the highest place is not given to brilliance or to success, but to faithfulness. What a happy and encouraging thought that, although it may not be possible for us to be brilliant, wealthy or famous, it is within our power, by God's grace, to be faithful in our stewardship of the gospel! Therefore, let all of us who have received the gospel of the glory of the happy and blessed God be faithful in proclaiming it wherever we go until our Master's voice shall call us from our field of labor to everlasting repose.

"The great world's heart is aching,
aching fiercely in the night,
And God alone can heal it, and God
alone give light;
And the men to bear that message, and
to speak the living Word,
Are you and I, my brothers, and the
millions that have heard.
Can we close our eyes to duty? Can
we fold our hands at ease,
While the gates of night stand open
to the pathway of the seas?
Can we shut up our compassions? Can
we leave our prayer unsaid,
Till the lands which sin has blasted
have been quickened from the dead?

"We grovel among trifles, and our
spirits fret and toss,
While above us burns the vision of the
Christ upon the cross;
And the blood of God is streaming
from His broken hands and side,
And the lips of God are saying, 'Tell
my brothers I have died.'
O voice of God, we hear thee above
the shocks of time,
Thine echoes roll around us, and the
message is sublime;
No power of man shall thwart us, no
stronghold shall dismay,
When God commands obedience, and
love has led the way."