

THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16.

We live in a world of rapid and constant changes. Modes of travel, methods of communication, means of commerce, and inventions for comfort and pleasure change so frequently as to keep the whole industrial world in a stir. We live in a nervous, restless, troubled and changing world.

With all these rapid changes about us, however, there are some things which do not change. Fundamentally man changes but little. His elemental needs, physical, mental and spiritual, remain the same regardless of the changing times in which he may find himself. Man's inherent sin, his proneness to go away from God, the consciousness of his own need in the spiritual realm and his longing for fellowship and communion with the Infinite abide through all generations. In this realm of the greatest need and the deepest longing of men's lives the changing times have wrought havoc for many. Scientific investigators, intoxicated with the joy of a few discoveries in certain realms, have jumped to unwarranted conclusions. They have presumed to speak with the voice of authority in realms beyond their investigations.

Do we have a sure message for such a time and such a world? On every hand the question is being asked: "Have the people of God an adequate remedy for the world situation as it is today? Have they a remedy that is potential and dynamic enough to sound the depths of human need?" In all humility, but with unfaltering and deep conviction, and with boldness unafraid, we answer that they have. And that is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

What is the Gospel? It is the announcement of the good news that God has provided righteousness for unrighteous men. One has said, "The Gospel is the disclosure, demonstration, and donation of the free and unmerited love and mercy of God, disclosed at Bethlehem, demonstrated at Calvary, donated at Pentecost -- the supreme fact of history and the deepest wonder of experience." Through His incarnation, Jesus revealed God to man. Through His atonement, Jesus reconciled man to God. Through His gift of the Spirit, He made possible a new life from above for those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death. At Bethlehem -- God with us. At Calvary -- God for us. At Pentecost -- God in us.

I. The Author Of This Gospel.

The author of this gospel is Christ. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Paul's hope for time and eternity was in a Person, and that Person was Christ. The Person of Christ is the key to the whole conception of Christianity. Historic, apostolic, supernatural Christianity, stands or falls with the Person of Christ. Certain facts about the Person of Christ ought to be emphasized again.

1. He lived.

He took upon Himself the form of a man and came here into the world and lived in the flesh among men. He lived here a Divine life along with the human life. We have a partial record of His earthly life in the Gospels. When we read this charming record we wish we could have lived when He lived here in the flesh. In His life, He became our example. He was not a pattern to be exactly reproduced, but an example to inspire us and to draw us up to the very highest there is within us. We recall that it was said of Him that "Never a man spake like this man." Take any of His words and it is manifest that he speaks the first and last word upon every subject upon which He speaks. He affirms His own omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. He says,

"I am the Light of the world." By this He means that He is all the light the world needs, even all its peoples, in all its countries, throughout all the ages of time. He says, that He is the answer to all the questions that need to be answered, the explanation to all the mysteries that need to be interpreted, and the one who can adequately answer.

Look at His works. "A tree is known by its fruit." This is the invincible test. What shall we say about His works? Wherever He went, He had only to speak and the winds obeyed Him, the storms were quieted at His command, demons fled from the afflicted people, loaves and fishes were multiplied to feed the hungry thousands, and even death fled like a frightened spaniel when it heard the command of Jesus. Jean Paul Richter was right when he said that with Jesus' pierced hands he had lifted empires off their hinges and turned the stream of centuries backward into its channels. Leckey, too, was right when he said that the three short years of the public ministry of Jesus had done more to soften and regenerate mankind than all the disquisitions of all the philosophers, and all the exhortations of all the moralists since the world began.

Look at His character. Flawless, He stands flinging out the challenge, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" And the universal response both from friends and from foes was made by Pilate, "I find no fault in Him." If we would look for the highest example of meekness, we would not look to Moses, but to Jesus, who was unapproachably meek and lowly in heart. For the highest example of patience we would not look to Job, but to Jesus, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. For the highest example of wisdom, we would not look to Solomon, but to Jesus, who "spake as never a man spake". For the highest example of soul-consuming pity, we would not look to Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, but to Jesus who wept alone over the ill-fated, doomed city of Jerusalem. For the highest example of zeal, we would not look to Paul, but to Jesus, of whom it was written: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." For the highest example of love we would not look to John, but to Jesus, Who so loved us as to lay down His life for us. He is the outstanding miracle of all the centuries. The searchlight of criticism has been focused upon Him, both by friends and by foes for the long, long centuries, and yet it has failed to find in Him one suggestion of sin, one ill-advised word, one selfish deed. He is the Universal Man. He was born in the first century, yet He belongs to all the centuries. He was born a Jew, yet He belongs to all races. He was born in Bethlehem, yet He belongs to all countries. Let any man from any country come penitently to this Saviour and put his trust in Him, and he will go his way thrilled with the consciousness that Christ has forgiven his sins, and is helping him to bear the burdens of life.

"Forever God, forever man,
My Jesus shall endure;
And fixed on Him my hope remains,
Eternally secure."

2. He died.

His irreproachable life, matchless teachings, astonishing miracles, and marvelous example would have availed nothing, so far as our salvation is concerned, had they not found their consummation in His death. We see Him nailed to the cross at nine o'clock in the morning and at three o'clock in the afternoon we hear Him say, "It is finished". The life of the Son of God on earth in the flesh is finished. The suffering is finished. The way from the heart of man to the heart of God is finished. The highway from earth to heaven is finished. He is God's Way to man. He is man's way to God. Then we hear Him cry with a loud voice, "Father into thy hands I commend My Spirit," and having said this, "He gave up the ghost." The Saviour

of all men died on the cross. The centurion pronounced Him dead. The disciples recognized His death. He was born as no other was ever born. He lived as no other ever lived. He taught as no other ever taught. He wrought as no other ever wrought. He died as no other ever died.

3. He was buried.

Sometimes we wish that we could have been there to remove the cruel nails from His tender hands, to wash the clotted blood from them, and to prepare His body for burial. But, we must be glad that there were some who loved Him and took His body and prepared it for burial and placed it away in a new tomb. Blessed Joseph and Nicodemus!

4. He arose from the dead.

All night long Friday night, all day long Saturday, and until early on Sunday morning, His body was in a tomb. The tomb was sealed with the king's seal. Soldiers were placed there to guard the grave. But early on Sunday morning, when the angels of the Lord came down, the soldiers fell like dead men, and the seal was broken, and the stone rolled away from the tomb. Jesus arose from the dead, laid the grave clothes aside and walked out of the tomb, a living Christ, and a living Lord, and a living King. Triumphant over death and the grave.

5. He ascended unto the Father.

Forty days He was here on earth after the Resurrection. He showed Himself to the disciples, ate with them, talked with them, showed them His pierced side, and the print of the nails in His hand. Then one day on a hill called Olivet, He told them to wait in Jerusalem unto they were endued with power, and then He said, "After the Holy Spirit is come upon you, ye shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth." "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

6. He is coming again.

We know this because He said, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." While we are looking and waiting for His return, we should live pure, clean, faithful and righteous lives.

There is nothing in these facts concerning the person of Christ to cause us shame. I unhesitatingly take my stand believing in His supernatural birth, absolute deity, vicarious atonement, bodily resurrection, and personal return. And wish Paul, I ask nothing more than to know His will and faithfully follow Him forevermore. I would say with Isaac Watts:

"When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the cross of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingling down;

Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

II. The Adequacy Of This Gospel.

The Gospel of Christ is the one and only adequate remedy for every need and condition of of mankind. It has given birth to spiritual kingdoms. It has laid the corner-stone of our highest civilization. It has inspired our best literature. It has founded institutions of learning. It has emancipated the slaves. It has conserved childhood, dignified womanhood, and glorified the home. It has accomplished social and moral transformations which to the human viewpoint have seemed impossible.

The crowning glory of Christ's gospel is that it may be fully tested and proved in the crucible of experience. Here is the final and supreme test of the power of His Gospel -- the test in personal experience. He enlightens the mind. He arouses the conscience. He awakens the will. He transforms the human heart. He gives the human heart a new purpose and a new will to perform it. He gives a new heart and a new conscience to govern it. He gives a new song and a new voice to sing it. He gives a new spiritual eye and new visions to behold. He gives a new hope and a new faith to realize it. He promises a new home and gives a new determination to reach it.

He reforms the human life. The power of the gospel of Christ changes a man's relation to his fellow man. Transformation is inner, reformation is outer. Transformation is a single act; reformation is a process. Transformation is the power of the gospel in regeneration; reformation is the power of the gospel in sanctification. Transformation is divine; reformation is cooperative. Reformation is the Holy Spirit using our new born faculties. It takes Saul, the persecutor, and makes of him the founder of Christian Theology and a world missionary. It takes a drunkard, like John B. Gough, from the gutter and makes of him a powerful preacher of righteousness. It takes a doubter, like Adoniram Judson, and makes of him a great missionary to Burma. It takes a shoemaker, like William Carey, and makes him the educator of an empire. It takes a mountain boy, like George W. Truett, and makes of him a world-famous preacher of Christ. It takes a sinful soul and makes that soul desire to live a holy life. Christ and his gospel bring things to pass in the home, the community, and the nation. It is this power of the gospel that has erected every church building, Orphans' home, Hospital, and home for the aged and infirm in this world. The gospel has power to perform things.

The vital question inevitably emerges, for every person here assembled, "What is my personal relation to this adequate gospel of Christ?" Are we the friends of Christ? Are we obeying Christ? Do we delight in His service? Are our lives consistent and victorious as His witnesses and workers? Let us as Christ's people, redeemed by His own blood, not hesitate for one moment to dedicate unto him our every talent, our time, our learning, our love, our lives, our money, our all, that he may have His way with all mankind, today, tomorrow, and beyond, forever.

If there are those here who have not accepted Christ, let me plead with you to accept Him now. Remember, you must do something with Him. You must do one of two things with Him. You must accept Him as your personal Saviour, or reject Him. You must confess Him or deny Him. You must be for Him, or against Him. Neutrality respecting Him is utterly impossible. No third course concerning Him is possible. Come to Him without further delay. Publicly acknowledge your unreserved surrender to him, to be your Saviour and Master, today and forevermore. Make a public confession of Him even now as we sing our closing hymn.

"Come every soul by sin oppressed,
There's mercy with the Lord,
And He will surely give you rest,
By trusting in His Word.

For Jesus shed His precious blood,
Rich blessings to bestow;
Plunge now into the crimson flood
That washes white as snow.

Yes, Jesus is the Truth, the Way,
That leads you into rest;
Believe in Him without delay,
And you are fully blest.

Come, then, and join this holy band,
And on to glory go,
To dwell in that celestial land,
Where joys immortal flow."