

DECLARING THE GOSPEL

"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" (I Corinthians 15:3-4).

The topics being discussed during this Week of Prayer are all related to The Living Church. They are as follows: The Living Church...At Work; Encountering The World; Declaring The Gospel; Ministering In Love; and The Church Victorious. This evening, we shall center our thoughts around the theme, Declaring The Gospel.

The rate of both suicides and murders has risen to an all-time high involving not only adults, but also young people and children. Many are convinced that this situation reflects the disintegration of society. Is man completely lacking in hope? Does he not see any way out? Have church members failed in their responsibility in the realm of discipleship? Have we become so languid with the status quo that we are no longer impressed by the urgency of serving in the capacity of salt in today's world.

Contrasted with this hopelessness and desperation is one of the most amazing claims in all history, and that is that the crucified, buried and risen Christ is our hope and the source of the abundant life. With utmost positiveness and simplicity, Paul said, "I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died...as written...that he was...raised to life." There was not any argument about it; Paul knew. It was an attested fact. And because Christ rose, man's two greatest and ever-present enemies--sin and death--lost their power over those who accept the fact of the resurrection.

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 Christ did 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.

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. This glorious gospel of Christ is contained in these matchless words: "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."

The gospel of Christ does not have to do with theories, speculations or guesses, but rather with established and unmistakable facts. The facts that constitute the gospel of Christ are three in number.

I. Christ Died For Our Sins.

What did Paul preach to the Corinthians? Did he begin his message by cautiously telling them how Christ lived, what He taught, how He worked miracles, and the fact that no man ever spoke as He did? Not at all! The very first fact that Paul proclaimed about Christ was that He died on the cross.

What did Paul stress the death of Christ rather than His life? Because "Christ

died for our sins according to the scriptures." It was an actual death. "Christ died." It was a sacrificial death. "Christ died for our sins." It was a predicted death—"according to the scriptures." We are impressed by the marvel of His death, then by the meaning of His death, and finally by the manner of it.

Christ really died. He died on a cross between two robbers. There is something more wonderful than the manner of Christ's death, and that is the reason for it. Our wonder reaches a climax as we ask, "Why did He die?" In fulfillment of an eternal purpose and plan, "Christ died for our sins."

The apostles saw in the death of Christ on the cross the consummate revelation of the love of God. In Christ God was reconciling the world unto Himself. In order to assure wayward, sinful and perverse men of His love for them He made the supreme sacrifice by suffering, bleeding, and dying for them. They also saw in His death on the cross God's judgment upon sin. It represented God's estimate of sin and His testimony against it. Christ took our sins upon Himself. Furthermore, the apostles saw in the cross of Christ the ground of pardon and forgiveness and acceptance with God. Through Christ's death on the cross we have obtained the remission of our sins, we have been brought to God and have been made the righteousness of God in Him.

II. Christ Was Buried.

On that terrible day of the crucifixion of Christ light turned to darkness at noon, and all said, "He is dead." 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. There were those who loved Him enough to remove the cruel nails from His tender hands, wash the clotted blood from His head, His hands and His feet, prepare His body for burial, and place it in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. "He was buried." His kingdom had shrunk to the narrow dimensions of a grave. His regal robes had become a shroud.

III. Christ Arose.

When Christ's body was placed in the tomb, it was fastened with the king's seal, a stone was rolled in front of the entrance, and soldiers were placed there to guard it, whose lives would answer for the safe-keeping of the body entombed therein.

From Friday night until Sunday morning Christ's body lay in the tomb. 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, a living Lord and a living King, triumphant over death and the grave. By His resurrection He recovered His challenged rights, regained His waning influence, and resumed His miraculous power.

Paul proceeded to summon some of the witnesses who had seen the risen Christ with their own eyes and had retained in their minds the memories of what they had seen. He called upon the twelve to give their testimony. They testified that Christ had suddenly appeared in their midst in the upper room without opening the door, of their seeing His physical wounds, and of His eating broiled fish and honey before their very eyes.

Then Paul added, "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep." This multitude, with all sorts of attitudes, claimed to have seen Christ with their own eyes at the same time and place after His death, burial, and resurrection. They remembered what they had seen.

Finally, Paul declared himself to be a witness of the resurrection of Christ. He said, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Prior to the personal appearance of Christ to him on the road to Damascus Paul had spent his energies in trying to erase the name of Christ and His teachings from the face of the earth.

Paul joyfully presented clear and conclusive evidence to the glorious truth of the resurrection of Christ. This truth is the Gibraltar of Christianity, the impregnable rock which cannot be shaken. Christ died and was buried, but He arose and is now alive. Our risen Christ is making His presence felt in the hearts and lives of people in the heart of Africa, in the center of Asia, on the continent of Europe, throughout this great land of ours and on the faraway islands of the seas. Christ died and was buried but He arose and came out of the tomb and lives today to be the Saviour, Friend, and Helper of all who will receive Him and what He offers to us.

The apostle John states the same fact with equal positiveness. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;...That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write me unto you, that your joy may be full" (I John 1:1, 3-4). This is one of the finest examples of responsible discipleship at the point of redemptive concern for one's fellowman.

Two factors evident here are essential for Christians today. One is the absolute firsthand conviction of the reality of the now-living Christ and His life-changing power. The other is the commitment to be involved in order that our fellowmen may become Christians and come to have and enjoy the strength and assistance that is in Christian fellowship. We have the responsibility of declaring the message of hope and life in Christ to today's world.