

GOD'S GLORIOUS 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).

Christ used the word "gospel" on various occasions. Paul, the greatest exponent of Christianity, mentioned it again and again. He said: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16). Paul also said, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (I Timothy 1:11).

Gospel is a word of deep significance and wide import. 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 were purposed in the mind of God and prompted by the love of God, are designed to excite joy in all who believe and receive them. God's glorious 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. It is wonderful news to hear that God has done for us that which we never could have done for ourselves.

The facts that constitute God's glorious gospel are three in number.

I. Christ Died For Our Sins.

On Calvary's cross, in fulfillment of an eternal purpose and plan, "Christ died for our sins." He voluntarily took our sins upon Himself. Through Christ's death on the cross the purposes of divine love became intelligible, the great problem of human redemption was solved, and the remission of our sins was obtained. "He died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:15).

We are impressed deeply by the marvel of Christ's death, then by the meaning of it, and finally by the manner of it.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified our Lord. For three hours He was exposed to the fierce rays of the sun. At noon there came over the land a three-hour period of supernatural darkness. At three o'clock in the afternoon Christ cried, "It is finished," and died.

II. Christ Was Buried.

Joseph of Arimathaea immediately went to Pilate and obtained permission to remove the body of our Lord from the cross, prepared it for burial, and he and Nicodemus tenderly and lovingly laid their Lord in a new sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock in a garden which had been prepared for Joseph's own entombment. With loving reverence they placed His body in the tomb, and then rolled a huge stone in front of the door. "He was buried." Pilate authorized them to seal the entrance to the tomb, which seal no one can break except upon the penalty of death, and to station a strong guard of soldiers on duty to prevent the tomb from being robbed. How ridiculous for men to attempt to thwart the purpose and the power of God!

III. Christ Arose.

But the stone, the seal, and the guard could not keep the Lord of life a prisoner of death. 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. 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.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James observed where they had placed the body of Christ, and then returned to their homes and rested on the Sabbath. At sunrise on Sunday morning they and Salome started to the tomb to anoint the body of Christ as a token of their love for and devotion to Him. These broken-hearted women never dreamed that Christ would come out of that tomb. But, without a particle of faith in or hope of His resurrection in their hearts, they still loved Him Whom they believed was still behind that stone in the borrowed tomb.

As they made their way to the tomb, they were wondering, worrying, and talking about who might roll away the stone from the entrance. Upon their arrival they were amazed to find that their concern had been entirely unnecessary because the stone had been rolled away, and the body of Christ was not there. So often dreaded difficulties are never encountered.

Upon entering the tomb to perform their ritual, possessed with mingled fear and astonishment, the women saw the white-robed messenger of the Lord sitting within the sepulcher. He appeared to be in perfect contentment as though he was celebrating the triumph of Christ. He assured the women that they were no longer to be looking backward to One Who had died, but that they were to be looking forward to One Who was alive.

The words of God's messenger constituted the first sermon about the resurrection of Christ. The message was very short and simple: "He is risen; he is not here; behold the place where they laid him." "He is risen" is the most momentous and meaningful announcement ever made. His resurrection brought the removal of doubts, the relief of distress, and triumph over defeat.

If Christ had not arisen, then He would still be dead, and we would be worshipping a corpse today. If Christ had not arisen, then all preaching would have been vain, empty, deceitful, and worthless. If Christ had not arisen, then there would not have been any hope for aching hearts in any preaching through all the centuries. If Christ had not arisen, all preaching would have been useless. If Christ had not arisen, faith in Him would be worthless. If He did not rise, your faith would be resting on what never happened. "But if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins." Faith in Christ, Who died, was buried, and arose, can take men out of their sins. If Christ be not risen, then the righteous dead would have perished.

"If Christ be not risen," there hangs over all graves and mausoleums of all the ages a darkness that no earthly lamp can lift. In that event, not a single family vault would ever open. Of all the graves, not one would be emptied. Of all the seas, not one would give up its dead. Of all the cemeteries, not

one would ever be disturbed. What a bleak world a dead Christ opens to us! But thank God Christ arose! And thank Him for the fact that all of God's children will arise too! Because Christ arose all of the righteous dead will arise also.

Today we gather around the Lord's table for the purpose of observing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. This meaningful ordinance pictures truth for believers in connection with the past, the present, and the future. It is a commemoration, a meditation, and an anticipation.

Concerning the Lord's Supper three things are to be said:

1. It is a practice.

The proper observance of this ordinance will enrich the lives of believers, increase their love for their Lord, and bring them to a more loyal and faithful devotion to Christ and His church.

2. It is a proclamation.

"Ye do show forth the Lord's death." Its bread speaks of His broken body: "This is my body which is broken for you," and its cup speaks of His blood which was shed for us: "This cup is the new testament in my blood."

3. It is a prophecy of a future event.

It predicts that Christ will return to the earth. He has promised to come again and He will. Every time we observe the Lord's Supper we proclaim to the world that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again according to His own promise.

As the supper points us to the return of the Lord Jesus, it should encourage every one of us to be ready to meet Him at any moment, to seek to live holy and faithful lives for Him, to dedicate self and substance to Him, to strive to win souls and lives for Christ, and to send missionaries to proclaim God's glorious gospel to the people in all the nations. As Christians we should rejoice in that we have been the recipients of God's glorious gospel. As we remember Him, let us do so in the spirit of deep humility, grateful love, faithful obedience, and joyous hope.