

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

"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 on the third day according to the Scriptures." I Corinthians 15:3-4.

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.

Why 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. Crucifixion was the manner of death which was reserved for the worst criminals. The Roman soldiers were familiar enough with death to recognize it when they saw it. Men do not faint when a spear is thrust into a vital organ. Indeed the issue of blood and water from the ruptured pericardium showed that death had already taken place.

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." His death was voluntary and vicarious. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (I Peter 2:24). "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (I Peter 3:18). "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21). "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures."

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 Arimathaea. "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 safekeeping 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 frankly and boldly told the Corinthians 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." With him there was no question about the death, the burial or the resurrection of Christ. He never even attempted to prove them. He merely stated the facts of acknowledged and accepted history. To this day there are no more authenticated events in history than the death of Christ, the burial of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. These facts have long since been removed from the area of philosophical theory into the realm of historical certainty.

Of course, there are those who deny the resurrection of Christ, but their denial does not change or abolish the fact. The denial of the fact is due to a disbelief in the supernatural. The resurrection of Christ is not denied because of any insufficiency of evidence, but the evidence is rejected and repudiated because the resurrection itself is denied. An unbeliever reasons like this: "The resurrection is impossible; therefore, the New Testament is not true." The true scientific method, whether we are treating of this, or of any other subject, is to examine the facts, and then to form a decision; not to form a theory first, and then try to crush the facts into a theory.

Paul proceeded to summons 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.

After God had raised Christ from the dead, "He was seen of Cephas" or Simon Peter. You will recall that Peter was the first person to enter the empty tomb and see the orderly arrangement of the grave clothes (John 20:6-7). Later, on the day of the resurrection, Christ appeared to Peter alone (Luke 24:34). On the day of Pentecost, with tremendous courage, Peter preached the resurrection of Christ to the men of Israel who had crucified Him (Acts 2:23-24).

Next, Paul called upon the twelve, including the one whom they had elected as the successor to Judas Iscariot, 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.

The next witness whom Paul called upon for a testimony was James. He said, "After that, he was seen of James." James was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus. They had played together in their childhood, but James did not believe in Jesus as the Christ before His death, burial and resurrection (John 7:5). Nothing is more certain than the fact that James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus and the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, had seen Christ in the flesh after He had risen from the tomb.

In writing to these keen and quick-witted Greeks in Corinth, Paul referred them by name to reliable men who were still living, who had personally seen Christ after His death, burial and resurrection, and who could be questioned and cross-examined as to 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 far-away 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. Can we do less than Thomas, who, upon recognizing the fact of His resurrection, fell at the feet of Christ and said, "My Lord and my God!"? If you have not received Him as your Saviour, do so now while we sing.