

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." John 20:21.

In our Southern Baptist churches across the nation many groups are meeting at various hours during this week for a study of and prayer for home missions. The study on Monday was devoted to the theme of obedience to the Word of God. The study on Tuesday was given to the development of Christlike characteristics in the lives of Christian witnesses. The study for today centers around the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, reminding us of our responsibility to proclaim this gospel to all whom we can.

Christ began His public ministry in the little synagogue at Nazareth. Being in the Lord's House on the Sabbath, as was His custom, Christ was invited to read the lesson from the Scriptures. He accepted the invitation and read the following verses from Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called Trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified" (1-3). Then to the surprise of His listeners He remarked, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). As Isaiah had been authorized to proclaim liberty, so was Jesus Christ sent to proclaim a joyful salvation to those who were lost, and bring comfort to those who mourned, and all of this to the end that God might be glorified.

In this concise summary of the ministry of Christ He gave His authorization for the benefit of His hearers, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek ... to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, ... to comfort all that mourn." The words preach, proclaim, and comfort specify the activities in which He would engage, thereby glorifying God. He gave Himself wholeheartedly to these duties. He preached the good tidings in matchless simplicity and taught the way of victorious living. The meek were singled out to be the particular recipients of the good tidings. He taught that the meek, the gentle, the humble, the patient and the longsuffering people would inherit the earth.

He was also to bind up the broken-hearted. As a broken bone is set and bound in place to be healed, hearts broken by sin are bound by the gospel of love in Christ to ease pain and to restore to wholeness. He came to proclaim liberty. Jesus came to make payment for the debt of sin, which turned man over to the justice of God. The man who accepts that payment for his debt is liberated from the power of Satan. Jesus came to comfort. This He did by preaching, by His deliverance of captive sinners, and by physical healing. To mourners He gave rejoicing and praise, making them as trees of righteousness which the Lord had planted.

Christ glorified God. He could not give the Father any greater glory than obedience to His will, even to death on the cross. Throughout His life Christ glorified the Father who had planned man's redemption. When He died on the cross he fulfilled that loving plan and sacrifice. After His resurrection, Christ returned to His exalted position with God. There He intercedes for sinners, who, being saved, will glorify God yet more. Can you read from Isaiah the statement, "The Lord hath anointed me" with emphasis on the pronoun "me," and then add your own name? Christ once said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). We are obligated to do the things which He did -- preach, proclaim, and comfort. The Holy Spirit, Who indwells dedicated Christians will instruct them what to say and give them the resources of God with which to witness. As Christ did, we, too, must glorify God. He told us how the Father is glorified: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John 15:8). What is the fruit of a

Christian? Another Christian. The fruit-bearing Christian must be a witnessing disciple.

Never has there been such opportunity for proclaiming the gospel as today. There are more saved people and more lost people than ever before. We have more potential witnesses as the ranks of Christians increase. But the ranks of lost people are increasing even more rapidly. Opportunity is not lacking. We lack witnessing Christians who have a deep desire to follow Christ, making Him supreme Lord of life.

We need to come to a renewed appreciation of our own salvation, and then recognize our obligation to proclaim the gospel of Christ to others.

In the Jubilee Advance meetings in Atlantic City last year the Baptists of America celebrated the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of organized Baptist work in America. The theme of that meeting was "For Liberty and Light." Baptists have been a liberty-loving people who have shown an interest in those who have sought a haven within our country. In addition to the relief funds, and food and clothing provided for Latin American refugees in Miami, Florida, Southern Baptists, through the Home Mission Board, have resettled or relocated 1,263 refugees. Various others have been helped spiritually through departments in missions and churches where the gospel is proclaimed in Spanish.

In the Annie Armstrong Offering this year, \$50,000 is allocated to the Summer Student Program and to Evangelism. Last year 682 students participated in mission work in fifty states and in Panama.

The Home Mission Program of Evangelism is designed to assist churches and denominational agencies in winning and enlisting people in Christian service. Dr. Billy Graham has announced his intention of spending the next two or three years in evangelistic work in the United States because he thinks the conditions here warrant this action. An increased offering this year will provide the means for additional evangelistic efforts.

The gospel of Christ is propagated by a variety of methods in addition to preaching from the pulpits by the men whom the Lord has called to this task and to whom He has committed the responsibility. Every child of God is required and challenged to witness for the Lord wherever he is.