

THE ADEQUACY OF CHRIST

"I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ." Romans 15:29.

It was the dream of Paul's life to see Rome before he died. His desire to do so was not due to curiosity. Neither was it because of any personal advantage it would give him. He wanted to see Rome because of the great opportunities for the Gospel of Christ in that seething city. By contacting the surging world at its center Paul could ultimately send his Gospel of hope to every nation. In his Gospel there was light for the unenlightened, liberty for the prisoners, salvation for the lost, and hope for the hopeless.

Paul was determined not only to see Rome but to win it for Christ. The little Christian community in Rome was holding on grimly to its precarious, hard-won position, knowing that at any moment the full force of the legions of heathenism might be turned against it. Now Paul was resolved to fling himself into the attack. He had had enough of skirmishing with paganism at its outposts; he had fought the world, the flesh, and the devil in Syria, Macedonia, and Illyricum. Now the hour had come to assault the pagan principalities at their headquarters, to make the foundations of Caesar's empire tremble and to give Christ the throne.

Strange, fantastic hope! Judged by any rational standards, it was sheer absurdity. On the one side there was the metropolis of the world, the heart of the empire, magnificently proud and regal on her seven hills, ruling with a rod of iron and shaking the earth with the march of her invisible legions; and on the other side, this little Jew, with his scarred face and his frail-looking body, and nothing at all to offer--no credentials, no testimonials or references from important people, no imposing organization--nothing but what he called his Gospel. But then, to Paul, that was simply everything. He says, "I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ." See how he loads his language, how he piles the words up, one on top of the other, till the sentence becomes top-heavy and begins to stagger with its weight of truth--"The fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ."

These words are very strong. The abounding confidence which they breathe may cause some to hesitate to adopt them. But there are matters on which we ought to feel strongly and speak with assurance. Deep affection makes a man speak confidently, and so does earnest conviction. A man's religion should call out his strongest feeling and constrain his strongest purpose.

I. "I Shall Come With The Gospel Of Christ."

He was not coming with a philosophy of life, though Rome loved dabbling in philosophy. Not coming with a new political theory, though crowds would doubtless have flocked to such a message. Not coming with a new interpretation of religion, though the intelligentsia would have been intrigued by it. "I am coming to you with the Gospel of Christ," said Paul.

It was not even "I am coming to preach righteousness, temperance, and judgment"--the theme of the flaming sermon that made Felix tremble. It was not "I am coming to argue the cause of morality" though Rome was needing that desperately. It was simply this: "I am coming to you with Christ."

If ever there was a man of one subject, that man was Paul. He told the Corinthians quite frankly, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ." To me life means Christ. That was his one theme, given to him straight from God Himself; and if ever a time should come when that is no longer the theme of any church, then the day of that church will be finished. The one thing that can justify the existence of a church is a great passion for Christ.

There have been others who have burned with the same flame as the Apostle. There was Raymond Lull, valiant missionary to the Moslems, with his oft-repeated exclamation: "I have one passion-- it is He, it is He." There was Charles Wesley, singing and helping others to sing--

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon cried out the secret of his life, "I looked at Him, and He looked at me, and we were one for ever." Martin Luther was describing the message of the reformers when he said, "We preach always Him. This may seem a limited and monotonous subject, likely to be soon exhausted, but we are never at the end of it." At this moment, in multiplied thousands of the gatherings of His people, men are still thinking about Jesus, telling of His all-sufficient grace, exploring His eternal truth-- and still not anywhere near the end of it. Any other subject under heaven would have been exhausted long ago; this theme remains bewilderingly rich, everlastingly fresh and fertile. The early church had a strange name for Jesus. It called Him "the Alpha and the Omega;" which means, to put it in the language of today, that Jesus is simply everything in life from A to Z.

Why keep to this one note in the light of our modern situation? Critics of the Gospel of Christ say, "Leave that played-out message and let us come to grips with actualities, and do something. Why all this talk of Christ?" They tell us that Jesus is irrelevant today. But we dare to maintain that Christ is the one and only way of hope. Take our pressing problem of living together. What is the best way to deal with that? Is it to preach brotherhood? Is it to beg men to love one another and to be friends? That leads nowhere because it is tackling the problem from the wrong end. If you bring men face to face with God in Christ, and they feel the impact with Jesus and come under His spell, the brotherhood we long for comes in of its own accord. It comes as a by-product, and thus the problem solves itself.

So it is with all the other problems that vex the heart of this troubled world, our own moral problems included. The weary business of trying to eliminate evils and cultivate virtues is always futile. It is starting at the wrong end. David Brainerd explained the method of his work among the North American Indians by saying: "I never got away from Jesus and Him crucified; and I found that when my people were gripped by this, I had no need to give them instructions about morality. I found that one followed as the sure and inevitable fruit of the other." Jesus, when once known and loved, brings with Him into a man's life a different atmosphere, in which spontaneously the evil things begin to droop and the fine things burst into bloom.

Christianity, therefore, is absolutely right when it refuses, in spite of a barrage of criticism, to be deflected from the one object for which it exists, which is to hold up Jesus. It must be the most hopeless thing imaginable to have only arguments, advice, and moral points of view to offer to the world to help it in its troubles; but to have Christ to offer--a living, accessible, and all-sufficient Christ--how different that is, how redemptively effective, how gloriously charged with hope.

"I am coming to you with the Gospel of Christ." The Gospel means good news; not views, but news. The substitution of views for news is one of the most damaging and deadening things that can happen to religion. Tennyson asked a good woman, "What is the news?" She replied, "There is only one piece of news I know: Christ died for all men." Tennyson replied, "That is old news, and good news, and new news." Is that not your feeling, every time you open the New Testament?"

II. "I Shall Come With The Blessing Of The Gospel Of Christ."

Here the subject is the reaction of religion upon life, its practical effect on the concerns of every common day. It makes life blessed, says the Apostle. It lights up one's whole experience with joy and peace and courage and serenity. With one voice all the saints proclaim it, that there is no nook nor cranny of life which is not crowned with light and flooded with sunshine, no dull stretch of the road which does not grow romantic, no common task nor lonely way which is not marvelously transfigured, no human friendship which is not hallowed, no heavy cross which does not begin to shine with glory, when once Christ and His glad tidings have gripped and held the heart.

All the saints have proved it. Paul and Silas proved it, lying with torn backs and bleeding heads in the Philippian dungeon; for even that place could not quite smother the joy that broke into songs at the midnight hour. General Booth and the Salvation Army have proved it. The driving power of that great movement which has seen so many miracles of grace is its indwelling joy, the radiant overflowing happiness of ordinary folk, who have been caught by love's strong arms and lifted out of the toils of sin, and who really know that amazing difference Christ can make. Nor is there one of us who may not prove for himself that true blessedness and solid happiness are in our grasp since Christ is here.

III. "I Shall Come With The Fulness Of The Blessing Of The Gospel Of Christ."

Paul believed that the best blessing he could bring to any people was that of the Gospel. Here there opens up to us a boundless field, for in this are comprehended all that Christ can bestow and all that man can receive. This includes Christ's blessing of forgiveness, of eternal life, of peace, of assurance, of strength, of fellowship, of service, and of hope.

Happy is the person who enjoys the blessings of the Gospel in its fulness. If we would receive the full blessing of the Gospel we must let Christ enter our daily lives. Paul said, "I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ." For some of us the crux of everything lies here. We have the blessing

of the Gospel of Christ, and we thank God for that--nothing is going to be allowed to rob us of that; and yet, is there not a dim feeling that we have never quite entered into the fulness of the blessing? Something has come to us from our religion; much that we treasure dearly has come to us out of the bosom of our Christian faith. Yet there is something lacking, some final gift of God unappropriated, some last step untaken, some deep secret unprobed. Many have the blessing, but not the fulness of the blessing. And so the pilgrim soul on its march through life lacks that steadfastness and buoyancy and dignity which God intended it to have. The fulness of the blessing of the Gospel consists in a full Christ for empty sinners, a full salvation for lost sinners, a full assurance for doubting sinners, a full restoration for fallen sinners, a full comfort for sorrowing sinners, a fulness of food for hungry sinners, and fulness of love, peace, joy, and hope for all. It is a most encouraging and inspiring thought that whatever the heart may crave of blessing may be surely appropriated and enjoyed upon application to God through Jesus Christ. We should believe it, receive it, live it, enjoy it, impart it, and die with it in our hearts and on our lips.