

## The Gospel Message.

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When the humble shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem were astonished by the shining of the glory of the Lord round about them, as they watched their flocks by night, their fears were quieted by the voice of the angels of the Lord, who said, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10, 11.

The words, "good tidings," are from the one Greek word which elsewhere is rendered "Gospel;" so that we might properly read the message of the angel thus: "Behold, I bring you the Gospel of great joy, which shall be to all people." In that announcement to the shepherds, therefore, we learn several important things.

1. That the Gospel is a message that brings joy. "The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, and peace, and *joy in the Holy Ghost*." Christ is anointed "with the oil of gladness," and He gives "the oil of joy for mourning."

2. It is a message of salvation from sin. For before this time the same angel had foretold to Joseph the birth of this infant, and had said, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins." Matt. 1:21.

3. It is something which concerns everybody,—"which shall be to all people." "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

This is assurance enough for everybody; but as if to emphasize the fact that the poor have equal rights in the Gospel with the rich, the first announcement of the birth of Christ was to men in the humblest walks of life. It was not to the chief priests and scribes, nor to the nobles, but to shepherds, that the joyful news was first told. So the Gospel is not beyond the understanding of the uneducated. Christ Himself was born and brought up in deep poverty; He preached the Gospel to the poor, and "the common people heard Him gladly." Mark 12:37. Since it is thus presented to the common people, who form the bulk of the whole world, there is no doubt about its being a world message.

### "The Desire of All Nations."

But although the Gospel is first of all to the poor, it is not something mean and ignoble. Christ became poor that we might become rich. The great apostle who was chosen to give the message to kings, and to the great men of the earth, said in view of his hoped-for visit to the capital of the world, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Rom. 1:16. The one thing that all the world is seeking after is power. Some seek it by means of wealth, others through politics, others through learning, and still others in various other ways; but in whatever enterprise men engage, the object is the same,—power of some kind. There is in the heart of every man an unrest, an unsatisfied longing, placed there by God Himself. The mad ambition that drives some to trample on scores of their fellow-creatures,

the unceasing struggle for wealth, and the reckless round of pleasures into which many plunge, are all vain endeavors to satisfy this longing.

God has not placed in the human heart a longing for any of these things; but the quest for them is a perversion of that desire which He has implanted in the human breast. He desires that man should have His power; but none of the things which men ordinarily seek, give the power of God. Consequently none of these things satisfy man. Men set a limit to the amount of wealth which they will amass, because they think that when that limit is reached they will be satisfied; but when the fixed amount has been gained, they are as unsatisfied as ever; and so they go on seeking for satisfaction by piling up wealth, not realizing that the desire of the heart cannot be met in that manner.

He who implanted that desire is the only one who can satisfy it. God is manifested in Christ, and Christ is indeed "the desire of all nations" (Haggai 2:7), although there are so few who will believe that in Him alone is there perfect rest and satisfaction. To every unsatisfied mortal the invitation is given, "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. O fear the Lord, ye His saints; for there is no want to them that fear Him." Ps. 34:8, 9. "How precious is Thy loving-kindness, O God! and the children of men take refuge under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures." Ps. 36:7, 8, R.V.

Power is what men desire in this world, and power is what the Lord wants them to have. But the power which they are seeking would ruin them, and the power which He desires them to have is power that will save them. The Gospel brings to all men this power, and it is nothing less than the power of God. It is for everybody, if they will accept it. Let us for a while study the nature of this power, for when we have discovered it, we shall have before us the whole Gospel.

### **The Power of the Gospel.**

In the vision which the beloved disciple had of the time just preceding the coming of the Lord, the Gospel message which prepares men for that event is thus described:—

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come; and worship Him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Rev. 14:6, 7.

Here we have plainly set before us the fact that the preaching of the Gospel consists in preaching God as the Creator of all things, and calling on men to worship Him as such. This corresponds to what we have read in the Epistle to the Romans, that the Gospel "is the power of God unto salvation." What the power of God is we learn a little farther on, where the apostle, speaking of the heathen, says:—

"That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." Rom. 1:19, 20. That is to say, ever since the creation of the world, men have been able to see the power of God, if they would use their senses, for it is clearly to be discerned in the things which He has made. Creation shows the power of God. So the power of God is creative power. And since the Gospel is the power of God

unto salvation, it follows that the Gospel is the manifestation of creative power to save men from sin.

But we have learned that the Gospel is the good news of salvation through Christ. The Gospel consists in the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. The apostle says: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the preaching of the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." 1 Cor. 1:17, 18.

And still further: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." 1 Cor. 1:23, 24. And this is why the apostle said, "And I brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." 1 Cor. 2:1, 2.

The preaching of Christ and Him crucified is the preaching of the power of God, and therefore it is the preaching of the Gospel, for the Gospel is the power of God. And this is exactly in harmony with the thought that the preaching of the Gospel is the setting forth of God as the Creator; for the power of God is creative power, and Christ is the one by whom all things were created. No one can preach Christ without preaching Him as the Creator. All are to honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Whatever preaching fails to make prominent the fact that Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things, is not the preaching of the Gospel.

### **Creation and Redemption.**

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us full of grace and truth." John 1:1-14. "By Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." Col. 1:16, 17.

Let us give more careful attention to the last text, and see how creation and redemption meet in Christ. In verses thirteen and fourteen we read that God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." And then, after a parenthetical remark as to who Christ is, the apostle tells us how it is that we have redemption through His blood. This is the reason: "For by Him were all things created," etc. The Revised Version, and others also, give the more literal rendering, "For *in Him* were all things created, . . . and He is before all things, and *in Him* all things consist."

So the preaching of the everlasting Gospel is the preaching of Christ the creative power of God, through whom alone salvation can come. And the power by which Christ saves men from sin is the power by which He created the worlds. We have redemption through His blood; the preaching of the cross is the preaching of the power of God; and the power of God is the power that creates; therefore the cross of Christ has in it creative power. Surely that is power enough for

anybody. No wonder that the apostle exclaimed, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Gal. 6:14.

### **The Mystery of God.**

To some it may be a new thought that creation and redemption are the same power; to all it is and must ever be a mystery. The Gospel itself is a mystery. The Apostle Paul desired the prayers of the brethren, that utterance might be given him, "to make known the mystery of the Gospel." Eph. 6:19. Elsewhere he says that he was made a minister of the Gospel, according to the gift of the grace of God, given unto him by the effectual working of His power, that he "should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." Eph. 3:8, 9. Here again we see the mystery of the Gospel to be the mystery of creation.

This mystery was made known to the apostle by revelation. How the revelation was made known to him we learn in his Epistle to the Galatians, where he says, "But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." And then he makes the matter still more definite, by saying, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." Gal. 1:11, 12, 15, 16.

Let us sum up the last few points. 1. The Gospel is a mystery. 2. It is a mystery that is made known by revelation of Jesus Christ. 3. It was not merely that Jesus Christ revealed it to him, but that he was made to know the mystery by the revelation of Jesus Christ in him. Paul had to know the Gospel first, before he could preach it to others; and the only way in which he could be made to know it was to have Christ revealed in him. The conclusion therefore is that the Gospel is the revelation of Jesus Christ in men.

This conclusion is plainly stated by the apostle in another place, where he says that he was made a minister "according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints; to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." Col. 1:25-27.

So we are fully assured that the Gospel is the making known of Christ in men. Or rather, the Gospel is Christ in men, and the preaching of it is the making known to men of the possibility of Christ's dwelling in them. And this agrees with the statement of the angel, that they should call the name of Jesus Emmanuel, "which, being interpreted, is God with us" (Matt. 1:23); and also with the statement by the apostle that the mystery of God is God manifest in the flesh. When the angels made known to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, it was the announcement that God had come to man in the flesh; and when it was said that this good news should be to all people, it was revealed that the mystery of God dwelling in human flesh was to be declared to all men, and repeated in all who should believe Him.

And now let us briefly sum up all that we have thus far learned.

1. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Salvation is only by the power of God, and wherever the power of God is, there is salvation.

2. Christ is the power of God.

3. But Christ's salvation comes through the cross; therefore the cross of Christ is the power of God.

4. So the preaching of Christ and Him crucified is the preaching of the Gospel.

5. The power of God is the power that creates all things. Therefore the preaching of Christ and Him crucified, as the power of God, is the preaching of the creative power of God put forth for the salvation of men.

6. This is so, because Christ is the Creator of all things.

7. Not only so, but *in Him* all things were created. He is the first-born of all creation; when He was begotten, "in the days of eternity," all things were virtually created, because all creation is in Him. The substance of all creation, and the power by which all things should be made to appear, were in Christ. This is simply a statement of the mystery that only the mind of God can comprehend.

8. The mystery of the Gospel is God manifest in human flesh. Christ on earth is "God with us." So Christ dwelling in the hearts of men by faith is all the fullness of God in them.

9. And this means nothing less than the creative energy in God working in men through Jesus Christ, for their salvation. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." 2 Cor. 5:17. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Eph. 2:10.

All this is indicated by the apostle when he says that to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ is to make all see "what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who *created all things by Jesus Christ.*"

### A Summary.

In the following portion of Scripture we have the details of this mystery well summarized:—

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace; wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to the good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself; that in the dispensation<sup>1</sup> of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will; that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ; in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation; in whom also after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory. Wherefore I . . . cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory

<sup>1</sup> Some versions, as for instance the various Scandinavian versions, have, "To establish an household," or, "with regard to an household" in the fulness of times. This is warranted by the Greek, and is much clearer, when we consider the subsequent mention of the household of God.

of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." Eph. 1:3-20.

Now we will note the different points of this statement. 1. All blessings are given to us in Christ. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things." Rom. 8:32.

2. This gift of all things in Christ is in accordance with the fact that He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that in Him we might obtain holiness. "For God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thess. 5:9.

3. In that choice the destiny determined for us was that we should be sons.

4. Accordingly He accepted us in the Beloved.

5. In the Beloved we have redemption through His blood.

6. All this is the making known to us of the mystery, namely, that in the fullness of times He will gather together in one household all things in Jesus Christ, both things in the heaven and things on the earth.

7. This being the fixed purpose of God, it follows that in Christ we have already obtained an inheritance; for God makes all things work out the purpose of His own will.

8. All who believe in Christ are sealed with the Holy Spirit, which is called the Holy Spirit of promise, because it is the surety of the promised inheritance.

9. This seal of the Holy Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Eph. 4:30.

10. Those who have the Spirit as the seal, know what is the riches of the glory of the inheritance; that is, the glory of the future inheritance becomes theirs now, through the Spirit.

In this we see that the Gospel involves an inheritance; in fact, the mystery of the Gospel is really the possession of the inheritance, because in Him we have obtained an inheritance. Now let us see how the matter is stated in the eighth of Romans. We shall not quote the scripture entire, but simply summarize it.

Those who have the Holy Spirit of promise are sons of God; "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." But if we are children we are necessarily heirs; heirs of God because sons of God. And if heirs of God, we are joint heirs with Jesus Christ. The one thing above all others that Christ is desirous that we should know is that the Father has loved us even as He loved Him.

But of what are we heirs together with Christ?—Why, of all creation, because the Father has constituted Him "heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2), and has said that "He that overcometh shall inherit all things." Rev. 21:7. And this is shown by what follows in the eighth of Romans. We are now sons of God, but the glory of the sons of God doth not yet appear. Christ was the Son of God, yet He was not recognized as such by the world; "therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." 1 John 3:1. In possessing the Spirit we are in possession of "the riches of the glory of the inheritance;" and that glory will in due time be revealed in us, in a measure far exceeding all present sufferings.

"For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it in

hope that the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” Rom. 8:19-23.

Man by creation was a son of God; but through sin he became a child of wrath, even a child of Satan, to whom he rendered obedience, instead of to God. But through the grace of God in Christ those who believe are made sons of God, and receive the Holy Spirit. Thus they are sealed as heirs until the redemption of the purchased possession, that is, the whole creation, which is waiting for its redemption when the glory shall be revealed in the sons of God.

Next we shall continue the study of the Gospel, specially considering what is included in the “Purchased Possession.”

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