

THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL

The message which Christians are called upon to carry to the nations is indeed a unique one. While others may weary us with their fanciful philosophies and mysterious mythologies, the message of God's Gospel deals with known historical facts. It tells how Jesus of Nazareth died outside the city of Jerusalem, -was buried, -and then emerged from His grave on the third day, -thereby verifying His claim to be Saviour of the world. This "report" has the ring of solid and dependable truth, and countless souls, who have taken God at His word have experienced miraculous New Birth and blessed newness of Life. They have touched Almighty Truth, and God has set His Seal upon them.

The original word for "gospel" (Gk. EUENGELLO) means literally, "good message", or "glad tidings". The same word is found in Luke 2:10, where we read of God's angel appearing to those shepherds "keeping watch over their flock by night", -and said to them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you GOOD TIDINGS of great joy, which shall be to all people". "Good Tidings" indeed, - "Unto you...a Saviour which is Christ the Lord".

The Apostle Paul gives us a true summary of the Gospel in his first letter to the Corinthians. This is how he puts it: "...I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and ...By which also ye are saved,... Christ died for our sins ...he was buried...he rose again the third day ...and was SEEN of..." (1 Cor.15:1-8).

In a word, it was just the story of our Lord's death and resurrection, -historically accomplished, and abundantly attested and verified. And that is the message we are privileged to carry to the world today!

It is important to notice that the first carriers of the Gospel HAD TO BE those who had witnessed these events with their own eyes (Acts 1: 22,23). We, who follow on, have been given the same privilege because of what is perhaps a still greater qualification; -we have SEEN that Blessed One with an inward eye that has been mercifully 'opened by the Blessed Holy Spirit. Thus, we also can say, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen" (John 3: 11; -C/p. also 1 John 1: 1). How wonderful when we can say, "...it pleased God, ...To reveal his Son in me" (Gal.1: 15,16).

We need to say, here, that this message is something that is bitterly hated by the powers of darkness. We are told that "the prince of this world" (Satan), has "blinded the minds of those who believe not ...lest the gospel of the glory of Christ should shine unto them" (2 Cor.4: 4). This blinding work has gone on throughout the intervening centuries, and the sharpest minds of natural men still seem incapable of grasping the simple facts. What a mercy it is when we can go on to say with Paul, "FOR GOD who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (v.6)! We could say that the enlightening of a soul is actually a repetition of Genesis 1: 2! What wonderful grace! May it please the Lord to say again, "Let there be Light". And may He give us the privilege of passing on the "report" (Isa.53:1) -far and wide.

As you will see, we are sending out this series of messages under the title, "The Glorious Gospel of Christ". Paul uses the phrase in 1Timothy 1: 11, and speaks

of "the Glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which had been committed to our trust". He was awed at the message entrusted to him, and Satan was afraid of it! Truly, -it is a Glorious Gospel. We shall now discuss some of the reasons why it is a GLORIOUS Gospel. Doubtless there are countless other "reasons", -but the few that we shall mention will more than suffice to show the unparalleled splendor of these "glad tidings".

First of the reasons why it is "Glorious", must surely be that it is a message which sets before us A GLORIOUS PERSON, -the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The good news is a Person; -the glad tidings are tidings of a Person, -a real Person, -a Person Who is alive today! That Person Himself is the glory of the Gospel.

Paul tells us that grace had been given him to "preach... the un-searchable riches OF CHRIST" (Eph.3:8), and that he was determined to know nothing among men save JESUS CHRIST! (1 Cor.2:2). He was prepared to be "God's ignoramus" ! And it was just the same with Peter. His message on the Day of Pentecost really began with the words "Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 2:22). The few verses preceding verse 22 were just a preamble, explaining the strange happenings that were going on all around; -then came the message itself; -"Jesus of Nazareth...". The climax of the message was reached in verse 32; -"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are, witnesses". Then comes the statement, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, ...BOTH LORD AND CHRIST" (v.36). We could Summarize all those early days of the Church's history with the words of Acts 5:42; "They ceased not to teach and preach JESUS CHRIST".

We do not hesitate to say that the Church's task from the beginning has been to IMPRESS THAT CHRIST on the minds and consciences of men. The Holy Spirit is engaged in the same task (John 16:14), and, while our emphasis remains identical, we may be assured of His "fellowship" and His anointing.

When our Lord was here among us, He said, "I, if I be lifted up... will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). He was then referring to that approaching hour when He would be "lifted up" on the Cross, " 'twixt earth and heaven". He comforted His disciples by assuring them that even that dark spectacle would prove strangely magnetic to the sons of men, -and we know that has been so, - right up to our day. That dying thief, hanging beside Him on that day, was truly "drawn" to Christ, -and cried out, "LORD, remember me" (Luke 23:42), - and went straight to paradise! Thank God, we have the privilege now of "lifting up" a RISEN AND EXALTED SAVIOUR, -the same Great Lord of all. Whenever that is done, we may be sure He will be "drawing men" towards Himself- They will only need the grace to respond!

The whole glory of Christ, of course, is something beyond all comprehension, and certainly beyond all telling. No evangelist can ever tell all, but every evangelist should continually be passing on those basic facts that we have mentioned; - CHRIST, ALIVE, EXAL TED, and "mighty to save" (Isa.63: 1). More can follow as opportunity presents itself, -here a little and there a little (Isa.28: 10).

How sad it is when professing servants of the Lord are seen doing the exact opposite of this, -just impressing themselves on the minds of their hearers. If people go away from our meetings just thinking of us, we have failed miserably and shamefully in our trust. May God ever spare us! We sum up by saying that our Gospel is a GLORIOUS Gospel, because it always sets before us a GLORIOUS PERSON. May we truly see His Glory and ever speak of HIM (John 12:41).

In these studies, we are discussing what the Bible again and again, calls, "The glorious Gospel of Christ", and we are suggesting some reasons why it is, indeed, a glorious Gospel. The first and foremost is the fact, it sets before us the Glorious Person of Christ. Indeed, indeed, Christ Risen and glorified is the Gospel; -God's own "good news" for a lost world.

Moving on from that point, we now wish to show that that glorious Gospel relates to a glorious plan and purpose that has ever been in the heart of God. For that reason, also, it is a glorious Gospel.

It is interesting to notice that Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost emphasizes that the "strange things" happening in Jerusalem on that day, were events that had been prophesied centuries earlier. He quotes the words of Joel regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; -words written 800 years before that time. He also mentions the prophetic word of David, uttered centuries before Joel. Peter simply tells his audience, -"This is THAT"! God was working according to His foretold plan; -step by step fulfilling His foreknown purpose. The time had come for Messiah to be raised from the dead, and highly exalted, -and to pour forth His Blessed Spirit. All was transpiring "according to purpose". That; we now say, is a further reason why God's Gospel is "glorious"; -it accords with, and further unfolds, God's great eternal plan.

The fact that God has a plan, and is working to that plan, is stated many times in the Bible, -but there are also passages which indicate certain glorious aspects of that plan. Let us give some examples. Ephesians 1: 9 speaks of "God's good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself". The following verse tells us what that purpose is; - "That in...the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (Eph.1 :10). The original wording here is, we believe, most enlightening, -and carries with it very far -reaching significance. The phrase "gather together in one" means literally to "head up into one", or to "bring under HEADSHIP". The word used is the ordinary word for "head", -as in Matt.1 0:30, and, at the end of Ephesians one, -it is applied to Christ, "the Head of the Church which is His Body" (Eph.1: 22). One translator, (Jerusalem Bible), has rendered Eph.1: 9 -"He has let us know the mystery of His purpose, -the hidden plan He so kindly made in Christ from the beginning...that He would bring everything together under Christ as Head". We can only pause and say, "What a glorious purpose that is!". It visualizes both the positional and the VITAL Headship of Christ over everything that makes up God's new creation; -all gathered, all assembled, all placed, under the Living Headship of Christ! That will be the kind of government that will operate in the "fullness of times", -the final age towards which all other ages have always been moving. That, we say, is part of God's eternal plan and purpose. And our Christian Gospel is glorious because it is related to that GLORIOUS PURPOSE. Indeed, it is itself a part of that purpose, or should we say, that purpose is part of the Gospel. Glorious Gospel indeed!

Needless to say, there are countless aspects to that Great Divine purpose, and here we can only touch lightly on one or two of them. We would like, however, to make a comment on something that is stated in the third chapter of Ephesians. Verse ten of that chapter tells us that God planned to show forth His own "manifold wisdom" to principalities and powers in heavenly places, -and to do so through the instrumentality of the Church. To understand that verse, one needs to absorb what Paul has been saying in the earlier verses of the chapter. There, he has discussed the fact that both Jews and Gentiles had been brought together in God's Church, -in fact they no longer knew each other as "Jew" or "Gentile". They were all part of

God's NEW Man, and their NEW citizenship was in Heaven! All earlier considerations and distinctions had been crucified and buried in the death and burial of the Lord, and now Life was NEW under the Headship of Christ. "Irreconcilable" had been reconciled, and God's wisdom had accomplished it, -the Wisdom of the Cross. Principalities and powers, "looking on", saw ex-Jews and ex-Gen- tiles greeting each other as "Brother", and they could only marvel at this masterpiece of divine wisdom. All are now "bound together in ONE 'bundle of Life'!" (1 Sam.25:29). WHAT WISDOM! HALLELUJAH !

Putting it into very simple terms, we could say that, in ages past, God planned to "educate" countless unseen beings, on the subject of His own inscrutable wisdom, -and to use the Church as His chosen blackboard. It is in the Church that there lies the evidence of what God's wisdom can do. "Of the twain, He has made One NEW Man" (Eph.2:15), -and peace has followed. And He did it- "in Himself". What the wisest of this world have never been able to do, HE HAS DONE, -in the all-surpassing wisdom of the Cross. What an accomplishment, -what a great Eternal Plan, now gloriously realized !

It would be right to say that, since the fall of Adam, humanity has been a shattered vessel, with countless widely -scattered particles, -but now God has a NEW vessel, -renewed men under the Headship of His Son. All that was "old" has been crucified and buried in the (representative) death of Christ, and a NEW humanity has emerged in the reality of Christ's resurrection. In that New Man there is no Jew nor Greek; -all is HEAVENLY! There is seen the "manifold wisdom of God", and principalities and powers are amazed at such an accomplishment. "What hath GOD wrought!"(Num.23:23).

It is important to notice the word "now" in Eph.3:10. Paul expected the enlightening work ("education", we called it!) to go on in his day. It was not just something planned for the future. Wherever there are living expressions of God's Church, it is now impacting on those unseen powers, -they are seeing the evidence of the immensity of God's "manifold wisdom". THEY too, are learning the wisdom of the Cross.

Surely this should encourage those of us who are called to preach the Gospel. Unseen forces are looking on, and they are learning their lessons.

We would like to close off this section by quoting Gal.3:27,28:- "For as many of you as have been baptized (placed or plunged) into Christ have put on (been clothed with) Christ. THERE is neither Jew nor Greek, THERE is neither bond nor free; THERE is neither male nor female: FOR YE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS". Manifold wisdom indeed! What a plan, -what a purpose, -WHAT A GOSPEL!

We must now give consideration to another all- important aspect of the Christian message, making it a Glorious Message indeed. It is a message, which tells of the Glorious Provision God, has made for His redeemed people, as they make their pilgrimage through this alien world. He does not take us up immediately to our heavenly Home, - but leaves us here as His witnesses (Acts 1 :8), - His ambassadors (2 Cor.5:20). But He said He would not leave us here "UN helped", -but He would come to us (John 14:18). He was referring, evidently, to the Blessed Holy Spirit, - God's perfect provision for His pilgrim people, -the Very Spirit of their Exalted Master. And, all through this present church -age, our Ascended Lord has been keeping that promise, -the Superb Provision for every responsibility we carry.

The age in which we live has frequently been called the age of the Holy Spirit. That Heavenly Helper, of whose descent we read in Acts two, has not been withdrawn, but flows on like a mighty river. The Saviour said He, -the Holy Spirit, would abide with us for ever (John 14:16). We believe He is always "hovering" (Cp.Gen.1: 2) near us, and, once the government of Christ is accepted, HE flows in. As soon as we trust from our side, He enters our hearts, and "seals" us as God's own property, (See Eph.1: 13; RV, NIV! etc.), -and, from that moment, He is prepared to "keep on filling us and overflowing us (Eph.5: 18; John 7:37-39). With some of us that first entrance is "quiet as a whisper", -with others of us it is something quite dramatic, -but the Same Spirit .in, both cases. Probably very few of us actually understand what has happened until someone, -Bible in hand, explains it to us; -we are actually "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor.6: 19; 2 Cor.6: 16). All that however is our basic Christian heritage, and it will also be our blessed experience as we maintain right relationships with our Living Lord.

All of us must surely agree that this is, indeed, a GLORIOUS PROVISION. But it is all part of the Christian Gospel, -making the Gospel itself a Glorious Gospel. The world has never heard a message that can compare with it. All else is dull and lifeless, May God help us to preach the true Gospel, and to preach it in its fullness.

That provision of the Holy Spirit is a most important part of the Christian Gospel, and we have not fully preached that Gospel unless and until we tell our hearers of it.

As we said before, the initial experience of the Gift comes to us at the time of our conversion. We may not fully understand it at the time, but someone will explain to us later; -"This is THAT". That was certainly so in my own case. I knew that something deep had happened, -but thought it was some marvelous "feeling of joy", or "sense of peace", a kind of "unprecedented ecstasy", Then someone told me, "This is THAT"! My young body had become a temple of the Holy Ghost; -I had become a container of Deity; -God's Shekinah was shining within!

In these notes, I have been trying to be as concise as possible, but I find my heart "running away with me", Perhaps it may suffice if I now just comment on two aspects of the Great Provision, - and trusting the same Holy Spirit to "fill in" the SO-much -more that could be said.

First, -regarding the ABUNDANCE of the Provision. When Paul wrote to young Titus, and spoke of God's saving mercy, he said, "-. He saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; -which He shed on us ABUN-DANTLY through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit, 3:5,6). The wording there is very rich and one translator has rendered it, "The Holy Spirit, -which He has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our Saviour".

I was reminded of those words when I first stood and watched the Niagara Falls; -what a deluge; -what a torrent; - what a picture of the wonderful Day of Pentecost! when God Himself came down in power and glory, and taking fresh hold on His infant Church. Certainly our God knows nothing of stint, and the Lord Jesus Himself said, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure", -or "with reservations" (John 3:34). He also said that if we also would learn to give, we would receive "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38). The Provision we are now thinking of (The Holy Spirit), is always a full provision, and "without measure". If there is any lack, it can only be from our side. Someone has rightly said, "God is a Great Giver; -He only needs great receivers"!

Our second comment must be about the CONSTANCY of the Provision of the Holy Spirit, -the never- ending flow of God's River! When Paul wrote to the Philippians from his prison in Rome, he assured them that his difficulties would not spoil, or limit, his witness, because he was continually being helped by what he called, "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil.1: 19). The word he uses for "supply" is again the richer word (EPICHOREGIA). It reminds us of the promise made by Moses to Asher, "Let him dip his foot in oil, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33:24,25). That promise may be ours too, and it shall be ours, if we will but dip, not only our foot, but our whole being into the Oil of God's Spirit. How sad, indeed, it would be if we had to try to live the Christian life in our own strength, -as if God started us off in the Way, and then left us to fend for ourselves! Thank God the River of Supply flows on, and we may be freshly filled day-by-day, and even moment -by -moment. As an empty cup may be continually filled if held under running water, so may we be continually FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT IF WE WILL KEEP OUR PLACE UNDER THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST. In that way, God will not stop blessing us. In fact, He will daily LOAD us with His benefits (Psa.68: 19). The "SUPPLY" is both abundant and constant!

As we have been writing these lines our thoughts have gone to Joseph, -alive, and "highly exalted" to the very throne of Egypt. In Genesis 42, we see him sending off his brethren on their journey from Egypt to Canaan. In verse 25 we read, "Joseph commanded to FILL THEIR SACKS with corn...and to give them PROVISION FOR THE WAY". Thank God, our Greater Joseph has done the same for us, -He has made PROVISION for our journey; -He fills our sacks with the Blessed Holy Spirit, and sets us off for "Home".

There, then, we have our third reason why the Christian Gospel is a Glorious Gospel; -it tells us of a Glorious Provision, -"Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:3, 18; Luke 11: 13). What a Perfect Provision for the way; -the Very Spirit of Him Who is the Way! May God make us great receivers of His great mercies!

It remains to us, now, to say a little about THE GLORIOUS PROSPECT that lies ahead of God's people, -for that also is part of the Christian Gospel and makes it, indeed, a glorious Gospel.

Here, particularly, we are right out of our depth, and can only hope to "flash something" into the minds and spirits of those who read us.

When the Apostle Peter wrote his first letter to those "strangers scattered abroad", he cheered their hearts by telling them that they had been "called to God's eternal glory" (1 Pet.5: 10), -and that God Himself would "establish, strengthen, and settle them". He was "the God of all grace", and He would surely do it, "after they had suffered a little while". What a prospect for "scattered strangers", -they were "CALLED TO GOD'S ETERNAL GLORY"! That, surely, is one of the great "UN-fathomable" of the Bible!

More amazing still, -the word of Christ Himself, when praying to His Father for His people said, "The glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them" (John 17:22). We still feel we can only whisper such a word; -God's Christ SHARING WITH US the glory which the Father gave to Him!

Then again, the last picture we have of the Church in the Bible likens her to "a great city HA VING THE GLORY OF GOD" (Rev .21: 10, 11). It might be well; now, to read quietly the rest of that chapter, but the few verses we quoted will suffice to

show us the Glorious Future that lies ahead of God's people. And that, most surely, is part of our Christian Gospel. Glad tidings, indeed! A glorious Gospel! And it is for "all people" (Luke 2:10), - wondrous grace!

As Christians, we love to talk about our "Blessed Hope" (lit. "Happy expectation"). We generally have in mind our Lord's Second Coming, -that wonderful day when our Lord shall come, and we shall be caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thess.4: 16,17). That truly is a "blessed hope", '- but what of the glorious events that will follow that coming? -Enthronement with the Lord. - Marriage to the Lord. Seeing His face, and being forever with Him? All this is included in the believer's "glorious prospect", and all is part of God's Glorious Gospel. All must be told to all nations, as the Holy Spirit leads and under His powerful anointing.

No doubt, there are countless separate components, which together comprise The Glorious Prospect that lies ahead of us as Christian believers. It may be well for us now to mention just three of them, -all of them extra to that initial meeting with our Lord in the air (1 Thess.4).

First, there is the prospect of ENTHRONEMENT WITH CHRIST. Paul told young Timothy, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim.2: 12). Our Lord said to His disciples. "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12:32). He said the same in Luke 22:29, -"I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me". The following verse actually mentions "sitting on thrones", indicating a real partnership in the administration. Our Lord seems to come still closer when He says to the Laodiceans, "To him that overcometh will grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His Throne" (Rev.3: 21). Even taking some of these terms as symbolic, we are still left with an amazing picture; -saved sinners, sharing with their Saviour in the administration of His everlasting Kingdom! This glorious theme runs all through the Bible, but all can be gathered up in the statement of Daniel 7:27, "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him". We can only say again, "What a glorious prospect", -reigning with Christ forever!

One important point does need to be mentioned here. We must always realize what is the nature of "dominion" in the eyes of God; -what is its essential character. The Lord made this plain in Matt.20: 25-27, when He said to His disciples, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister (Gk. Servant); and whosoever will be CHIEF let him be your (lit.) SLAVE". This is a clear reversing of our own ideas; -the qualification for "reigning" is HUMILITY. We must take the towel before we can take the Throne (John 13:4,5; -also vs. 13, 14). This was the "way" for Christ, and it must be the "way" for us (see Phil.2: 8-11). May the Lord put that "mind" into us, and teach us to be overcomers. That new kind of ruling is part of our Glorious Prospect, -and part of the Glorious Gospel.

We move on now to our second thought. For the Christian believer, there is something still more wonderful, -and, even today, I feel I can only whisper it; -we are appointed to a marriage with Christ. Paul plainly told the Ephesian believers that "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (see Eph. 5:25- 27).

Here again is a theme that runs from the beginning of the Bible (see Gen.2: 21-23), to the end (see Rev.19: 9 and 21: 9-11). What stupendous thoughts are these; -the Marriage-supper of the LAMB; -the LAMB's wife; -and notice again the emphasis on humility! Again, I feel quite helpless, and totally unable to develop such a theme, or even to comment upon it. What a prospect! -what a Gospel! -"thy Maker is thine Husband" (Isa.54: 5) This, of course, was something planned and purposed before the foundation of the world. The Father will secure a worthy bride for His all - worthy Son, and sinners, - washed, justified, and glorified, will make up that bride! It was just like Abraham in Genesis twenty-four. He sent his servant, Eliezer, to find, and bring home, a bride for his son Isaac, -beautiful picture of the Holy Spirit working in our age to find, and "bring home" a Rebecca for "the Beloved Son".

To conclude our meditation on this marvelous matter, we suggest that our readers just turn to Psalm 45, and read it through with a prayerful and worshipping heart. The Psalmist's heart is overflowing (v.1), and he sets out to write some-thing about "the glorious King". He gives his beautiful picture, but unavoidably it flows on to an equally beautiful picture of the Queen, standing beside him in gold of Ophir. All of this is very significant, -specially, perhaps, the statement that her raiment was "raiment of needlework" (Cp.Gal.5: 24; 6:14). That, again, is part of our GLORIOUS PROSPECT, -all included in our Glorious Gospel.

We said earlier that we hoped to mention three aspects of the believer's "Glorious PROSPECT". We have now said a little about the prospect of reigning with Christ, and the prospect of marriage to Christ. Our last thought will be the simplest of them all, -but, I think, the dearest of them all.

We again have in mind the word of Paul to the Thessalonians regarding the Second Coming of Christ, and we note that he concludes by saying, "so shall we be ever WITH THE LORD". Is not that the most precious prospect of them all? -just "being with the Lord", -for ever! May God speed the day!

It is interesting to note that the very next chapter tells us that when Christ died, it was with that kind of fellowship in view. The passage reads, -Christ "died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we should LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM" (1 Thess.5: 10). Yes, -very simple words, but what a prospect, -living "with Christ" FOREVER! Hallelujah, Hallelujah; -May God speed the day!

The time has now come for us to close off our little series of meditations on God's Glorious Gospel. We have said that that Gospel is glorious because it tells of a Glorious Person, -a Glorious Plan, -a Glorious Provision, and a Glorious Prospect. ALL this is in the Gospel we are to carry to the nations. May God help us to see it, and to say it; -to see HIM and to speak of HIM... everywhere! Maranatha!