

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, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who 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 will 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. "For the kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and *joy in the Holy Spirit*." 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, "you shall call His name Jesus, for He will 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 *whoever believes* 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 to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 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" (Hag. 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, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him" (Ps. 34:8, 9). "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures" (Ps. 36:7, 8).

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:—

"Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people— saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (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 to salvation." What the power of God is we learn a little farther on, where the apostle, speaking of the heathen, says:—

“What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes 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 to 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 did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:17, 18).

And still further: “We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who 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, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except 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 through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1–14). “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in 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 “has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, 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 boast except 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 to 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 ages has been hidden in God who created all things through 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 make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through 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 through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer 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 stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are 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 to 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 anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for 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 ages has been hidden in God who *created all things through 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 has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation* of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. Therefore I also ... do not cease 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 to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His 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 who did not spare 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 did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through 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.

* Some versions, as for instance the various Scandinavian versions, have, “To establish an household,” or, “with regard to an household” in the fullness of times. This is warranted by the Greek, and is much clearer, when we consider the subsequent mention of the household of God.

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. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for 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, these 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 who overcomes 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 does not yet appear. Christ was the Son of God, yet He was not recognized as such by the world; "therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1). In possessing the Spirit we are in possession of "the riches of the glory His 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 eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the

Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, 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, especially considering what is included in the "Purchased Possession."

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