

## GETTING THE GOSPEL RIGHT

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As teachers and ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I'm sure you would agree that it is imperative that we get the gospel right. Toward that end, I'd like to briefly take you to three passages of Scripture that establish three dimensions of the gospel:

- ◆ The gospel of deliverance
- ◆ The gospel of resurrection
- ◆ The gospel of the kingdom

### THE GOSPEL OF DELIVERANCE

The gospel of deliverance is set forth for us in an extended passage of Scripture, Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13. Allow me to direct your attention to just one verse in this passage:

Hebrews 4:2: For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Let's set the context for this verse. In the extended passage the writer of Hebrews is referring back to an episode in the history of Israel that we designate the *Kadesh Barnea episode*. The nation of Israel was poised on the very threshold of the promised land of Canaan, which Yahweh had promised to give them on oath to their ancestor Abraham. They requested Moses to send spies into the land, and Moses agreed to do so. So twelve spies were sent, one from each tribe. Of the twelve, Caleb

represented the tribe of Judah and Joshua represented the tribe of Ephraim. The spies brought back a report of a land that was, indeed, a land flowing with milk and honey as Yahweh had promised – that is, a land that was agriculturally fruitful. However, they also had seen the great stature of some of the Canaanites, and they had observed their fortified cities. Ten of the spies refused to trust the promise of Yahweh to deliver the Canaanites into their hand, and they strongly recommended *against* entering the land. Only Caleb and Joshua believed Yahweh, and they insisted that the Canaanites would be defeated on account of the enablement of Yahweh, the God of Israel. However, the people embraced the majority report, and they refused to enter. Because of their unbelief, they were condemned to wander in the desert for thirty-eight years until that entire generation of fighting men had died off.

Against this historical background, let us now consider our focal passage. In it the writer of Hebrews is asserting that the gospel preached to Israel in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC is parallel to that preached to us. The gospel preached to them by Moses was a two-part gospel:

- ◆ Deliverance from bondage in Egypt
- ◆ Deliverance into rest in the land of Canaan after a period of conflict and conquest

The parallel gospel preached to us is also a two-part gospel:

- ◆ Deliverance from bondage to sin
- ◆ Deliverance into eternal rest after a period of conflict and conquest in this present life

As they were poised at Kadesh Barnea, Israel had already experienced the first part of their gospel; it was historical fact. However, they refused to embrace the second part of the gospel, which is what the writer means by saying that the gospel they heard was not united by faith in their hearts to the extent they were willing to act on the promise of Yahweh. As for us, we must not only believe that we have been delivered from the bondage of sin, but also that we have been delivered into eternal rest after a period of conflict and conquest.

Let us be those who *actually practice* the second part of the gospel of deliverance, placing our confidence firmly in the hope that is set before us, even eternal rest after a period of conflict and conquest.

#### THE GOSPEL OF RESURRECTION

In opening the great chapter on resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul quotes from a 1<sup>st</sup> century hymn:

1 Corinthians 15:1-8: Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but

some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

At Trinity you have been taught well that the historical, bodily resurrection of Christ is the foundation for the gospel. Therefore, we should not be surprised that critical scholars who are hostile to the gospel claim that the resurrection is actually an accretion to the ancient story of Jesus Christ that was added later by the church to deify Jesus. In opposition to this claim, Kirk MacGregor, in his June 2006 JETS article, argues convincingly that the actual, grave-emptying resurrection of Christ was taught by the original apostles, and the tradition expressed in the ancient hymn quoted by Paul goes back to the very beginning of the Christian era.

First, regarding the history of the ancient hymn, MacGregor traces it back to Peter and James, from whom Paul received it during his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. He argues convincingly that the date of the hymn is no later than 35 AD. Second, MacGregor directs our attention to the Greek verb *egeiro*, which is translated “raised.” This verb means to cause to stand upright from a prone position, and it clearly refers to a bodily, grave-emptying resurrection rather than a non-physical – that is, spiritual – resurrection.

So let us also practice the gospel of resurrection – because he rose, we too shall rise!

#### THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

The Book of Acts is Luke’s narrative of how the apostles went about fulfilling the Great Commission, which we find it its most expanded form in Matthew 28:18-20:

Matthew 28:18-20: And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Another thing that you have been taught well at Trinity is that the only command in this passage is that we are to make disciples. However, I would like to focus on Christ’s preamble to his command – namely, his announcement of sovereign authority over the entire universe. We can readily establish from Scripture that God the Father conferred this sovereign authority upon his Son in conjunction with the resurrection.

Thus, the Great Commission takes on a whole new dimension of significance. It is not simply a command to make disciples. Instead, it is a command to *expand Christ’s kingdom* through the making of disciples. Jesus had initiated the in-breaking of his kingdom through the calling forth of twelve followers. He was now commanding them to continue the in-breaking of the kingdom by making disciples – that is, by repeating the same process of life-on-life, relational, in-service mentoring that he had accomplished with them. And the Book of Acts is the story of how they went about implementing Christ’s command, beginning in Jerusalem, expanding through Judea and Samaria, and continuing the expansion throughout the Roman empire. As we can readily establish from six key passages in Acts, the gospel preached by the apostles to bring about the 1<sup>st</sup> century expansion of Christ’s kingdom

was, in fact, the gospel of the kingdom.

What is the significance of the gospel of the kingdom as compared with a gospel of forgiveness. It is true that the gospel is one of deliverance from bondage to sin, but it is also a gospel of our coming under Christ's authority as king. Our trusting Jesus Christ as Savior is *necessarily connected* with our embracing him as Lord. Because of the gospel of the kingdom, these two aspects are *inseparable*.

In conclusion, let me direct your attention to...

Romans 10:9-10: ... If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Our modern English translation insulates us from the force of this passage as it impacted the minds of the 1<sup>st</sup> century disciples. For them, the embodiment of the Hebrew Scriptures that they knew and loved was the Septuagint – that is, the Greek translation. Some 80% of the New Testament quotations from the Old Testament actually come from the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, the covenant name of God that we know as Yahweh was translated by the Greek *Kurios*, which, of course, is the word used by Paul in Romans 10:9. Let us substitute the Hebrew names for God that the early disciples would have understood:

*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Yahweh, and believe in your heart that Elohim raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

And so, as we go forth from this place tonight, let us be faithful to preach the entire gospel of deliverance, the gospel of resurrection, and the gospel of the kingdom.