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When a Man Hears the Gospel

Herald of Truth

TRANSCRIPT OF THE radio programs
When a Man Hears the Gospel

What does the word "gospel" mean to you? Don’t turn the dial on your radio yet! What I say about “the Gospel” in the next few minutes concerns your life and welfare, now and for a long time to come.

The word “gospel” sounds too “religious” or “churchy” for some of my friends. So many weird and unbelievable things have been advocated under the cloak of this innocent word, that many honest people refuse to listen when “the gospel” is mentioned. For others, “gospel” smacks of a message with too much certainty and authority in answering modern man’s complex problems. Things just never seem to be solved in the simple, quick way that some alleged “gospel” messages suggest. Then I am convinced that most of us just do not know what the word means. We have no frame of reference in which to place it, no experiences to relate to it, and no understanding of what it represents. These very reactions suggest why I want to talk with you today about what happens “when a man hears the gospel.”

First of all, when a man hears the gospel, he hears the best news of our time. “Gospel,” as used in both Old and New Testaments, suggests the announcement of a victory or the publication of “news” by a person or persons duly empowered and appointed for such a task. In the Old Testament these “good tidings,” as the word can be translated, may be the announcement of a new king (I Kings 1:42), or “the news” of a military victory (I Samuel 31:9). In the New Testament, “gospel” is used almost exclusively for the “good news” that, in Christ, God and man can be one again.

The Gospel, as Isaiah saw it hundreds of years before its full publication by Christ, was the “great news” of God’s peace, presence, and salvation in our lives. The prophet writes: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! The voice of the watchmen! They lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when Jehovah returneth to Zion” (Isaiah 52:7, 8).

Notice Isaiah’s vivid sense of expectancy, “when Jehovah returneth to Zion.” The Gospel here is called “the good tidings” and who can dispute it! Peace, good, salvation, God’s presence in our lives again — these are elements in God’s “good news” for us.

There is another important prophecy about this “best news” in Isaiah, at chapter sixty-one. We begin looking at this prophecy seven hundred years after it was given, during the lifetime of Jesus. At His hometown synagogue in Nazareth our Lord worshiped one day. According to custom, Jesus was given an opportunity to read from the Old Testament which the local group had on a scroll. This is what Jesus read that fateful day in His hometown and before His friends, Kinsmen and townspeople. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has annointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion — to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Healing for the broken-hearted, freedom for those imprisoned by self and sin, release from the captivity of immorality and guilt, the bestowal of God’s grace and the announcement of God’s judgment — this was the “gospel” or the “good news” for our day proclaimed in and by Jesus Christ. When Jesus finished reading this great prophecy from Isaiah, He looked up at His fellow
worshippers and quietly stated the most electrifying truth ever taught: “Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21).

John the Baptist, in preparation for the ministry of Jesus Christ, offered a pre-announcement of the great message we are discussing. Of John's preaching we read: “With many other parables...he preached good tidings unto the people” (Luke 3:18).

In the verses of Luke's Gospel that precede this statement we learn that John called for repentance on the part of those who heard him (Luke 3:8). He warned of the impending judgment of God, a judgment that would arise out of the very “news” of salvation, peace, and life (Luke 3:9). He offered specific directions to those who inquired about how they should respond to his “gospel” (Luke 3:10-14).

But, above all, John the Baptist signaled a time when “every valley” would be filled and “every mountain” leveled by the publication of “the way of the Lord.” “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God,” he concluded (Luke 3:4-6). That, in any sensitive man's judgment, was “great news,” the “best news” that John's world, or ours for that matter, had ever heard.

Second, when one hears the “Gospel,” he sees Jesus Christ as the central truth of God’s “good news.” He is the reason we have such “great news.” When His personal followers clamored for His attention, Jesus explained, “I must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also: for therefore was I sent” (Luke 4:43). When John the Baptist wavered about Jesus' identity, our Lord sent this word back to John in prison: “Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good tidings preached to them” (Matthew 11:4-5).

His virgin birth occasioned great joy in heaven and caused the angels to announce to the shepherds, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall 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). This was “good news.” It warranted a heavenly “newsboy” to herald the message!

So central was Christ to this startling “news” that in the face of physical punishment and threat of death, the apostles “every day, in the temple and at home, ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). They knew Him personally as the Son of God, the divine visitor in the flesh, and they couldn’t keep from telling others about Him and His impact on their lives.

Jesus is at the heart of this great message because He reveals God and God's nature to us. “All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father, neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). This Jesus Christ, Paul explains in I Corinthians 1, “was made unto us from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (I Corinthians 1:30). That's it! Jesus Christ is the key to God for today's man. He is the one through whom God's being, power, forgiveness, and love are manifested to us. And that, my friends, is “great news.”

But this greatest “news” man has ever heard also includes the death of Jesus Christ. Sounds strange, does it? That a man's death would be considered “good news”? But this was not just another man, He was Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Our Lord Jesus Christ “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present world, according to the will of God and Father” (Galatians 1:4). The Apostle Paul reminded Galatian Christians that Jesus Christ “was openly set forth crucified” before their very eyes, in his proclamation of the “Gospel” to them (Galatians 3:1).

The cross of Christ is at the heart of the “Gospel” Paul says, “For Christ sent me not to baptize (that is, not for the sole purpose of baptizing people as an isolated act), but to preach the gospel (or cry out the “good news”): not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void” (I Corinthians 1:17). Any word spoken, any deed performed, that took men's minds away from Christ's death on the cross was not a legitimate part of the gospel, this inspired preacher explained. This truth remained so vivid in Paul's thought and practice that he later summarized his preaching and teaching in Corinth with these words: “And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:1, 2). Although missions were scandalous, rejected as foolishness, and branded as insane, Christ's death to those who are saved “is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:8). Yes, but more than just “the power of God” this great news of Christ's death is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

Christ's resurrection from the dead also represents an important part of this “good news”. That decisive, historical demonstration of God's power over life and death says that none of us need fear death. Personal security and the continuation of meaningful existence is now an assured fact, guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Peter exclaims: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5). I call these assurances arising out of the actual resurrection of the real Jesus “great news.” Life evermore! Death's tyranny demolished! Life forever with God! That's the "Gospel," my friends.

Another truth important to this heavenly announcement or “news” is the Lordship or sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Such authority over our lives is the inevitable result of our acceptance of the results of His death and resurrection. He is God's message and messenger for our time. We either submit or resist His initial and continuing control of our lives. For to this end, Paul writes, "Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9). The word which we preach, the "good news" we proclaim, "the word of faith," Paul also says in Romans 10:9, is this: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:8, 9).

As certainly as Jesus is both Lord and Christ, and thus the very heart of our "good news" from God, He is coming again. To borrow General MacArthur's well-known phrase from World War II days, Jesus "will return." The publication of God's "good tidings" for our time includes this vital promise. The angels at the Ascension said, "This Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven; shall come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). When the "Gospel" or the "good news" was first preached to the city of Thessalonica, Paul says the Thessalonians "turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come" (Thessalonians 1:9, 10).

Christ's return will announce the immediate judgment of God on all men. "For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself; and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man" (John 5:26, 27). We will all "stand" before the "judgment seat of Christ," Paul instructs us in I Corin...
Corinthians 5:10. Out of His mercy and love, God gave man the most fantastic proof of this judgment that the world has ever witnessed. This is why, even though overlooking ignorance in past ages, God now "commands men that they should all everywhere repent: insomuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:30, 31).

We have attempted, for the last few minutes, an explanation of why Jesus is the central truth and basic reality of God's "great news" for today's man. When a veteran of any venture, an experienced individual, speaks, most of us listen. This is the way one of the "Gospel's" greatest preachers, a true veteran, summarized this profoundly imperative message: "Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; ..." (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

We have just read the "heart" of the "Gospel" of Jesus Christ — His death, burial, and resurrection. God's "good news" for modern man! The "best news" the world has ever heard and will ever hear! God's vital proclamation of life, truth and salvation in Jesus Christ, whose person and work constitute the central facts, the heart, of this greatest of all "good tidings."

What a magnificently moving story unfolds as the "Gospel" is proclaimed in our hearing. Yet, the truth of the "Gospel," Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, can be yours, appropriated to your own life, in a specific manner. You can die to sin, to your "old self," Paul explains in Romans, chapter six. Those of us "baptized into Christ Jesus," the Apostle states, are thereby also "baptized into Christ's death" (Romans 6:3). In baptism, we are also "buried with him," Paul says in the next verse (Romans 6:4). The reason being, "For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin" (Romans 6:5, 6).

The "great news" that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again is not a formal creed to be accepted solely on the intellectual level. Each obedient believer in Jesus Christ, who comes for baptism in willing penitence and open confession of this new faith, makes the Gospel - Christ's death, burial and resurrection a personal possession and a living hope.

John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program. He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13-week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.