

The Service of the Gospel

Romans 1: 1-17

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"Gospel" — glad tidings — is a word to which we are introduced in the New Testament; it does not appear in the Old. But the Old Testament is replete with the most precious references to the One who is the Theme and Centre of God's glad tidings. "*His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

In Psalm 4 we read of many who say "Who will shew us . . . good?" and the answer to the question is implicit in the following portion of the verse, "Lord (Jehovah) lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." Goodness is inherent in God ("There is none good but One, God," Luke 18: 19), and in the glad tidings — which are "of God" — the abundance of His mercy, the riches of His grace, and the eternal blessedness of His love shine in all their brilliance. His kindness has been manifested and in it all His righteousness has been established.

The word occurs a little over one hundred times in the New Testament, and some seventy of these references are from the pen of the apostle Paul. How fitting indeed that "the chief of sinners" should thus delight in speaking of God's glad tidings! How he loved the gospel! How many things he can speak of in relation to it! The majesty of these glad tidings impresses our spirits as we read Paul's words — "the gospel of God;" "the gospel of His Son;" "The radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ;" "the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God;" "the gospel of . . . salvation;" "the gospel of peace." The gospel affected his whole being — spirit, soul and body (Philippians 1: 27. New Trans.); he served in his spirit (Romans 1: 9), and many Scriptures show how much he suffered in his body for the gospel's sake. We do not wonder that he is able to say "*my gospel.*"

In the first few verses of Romans 1, Paul mentions the gospel four times. In verse 1 he says that he has been "*separated* unto the gospel of God." Tremendous dignity surrounds these glad tidings as being "*of God!*" As we read through this Epistle we are impressed with the way in which the majesty of the gospel had gripped the soul of the apostle. He had been steeped in the religion of his fathers, and armed with the authority of its leaders, he, as "an insolent overbearing man" sought to destroy all who owned the Name of Christ. Now all is changed! He has been arrested by a vision of the exalted Lord; and under the influence of "light out of heaven," and as hearing a voice calling his own name, he exclaims "Who are Thou, Lord?" The answer is "I am Jesus." He had heard these two words before, as the martyr Stephen cried "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Henceforth the *authority* and the *preciousness* enshrined in this exalted Man were the motives which activated the whole service of the apostle. Alongside the authority of his *apostleship* is found the *grace* needed to move in his service as expressing the very spirit of his Master. He "received grace and apostleship in behalf of His Name." The preaching of such "glad tidings" necessitates a real appreciation of divine grace.

The word "separated" in verse 1 carries the thought of being "ringed around" — to be "shut in" and "shut out." In the mind of God Paul had been thus "separated" from his birth. It was the pleasure of God to "*separate*" him; to "*call*" him "by His grace;" to "*reveal His Son*" in him, and thus equip him, without help from man, to preach Christ among the Gentiles (Galatians 1: 15-17). Christ, the theme of the gospel is now the all-absorbing Object in the apostle's life. Is the gospel concerning God's Son? — then Paul will not only preach Him as such (Acts 9: 20) but his *whole life* shall be lived in relation to that glorious Person — "the life which I now live . . . I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved

me, and gave Himself for me," (Galatians 2: 20). Is "Jesus Christ our Lord" the theme of these glad tidings? — Then Paul will preach not himself, but "Christ Jesus the Lord" (2 Corinthians 4: 5), and as he preached so he would desire that Christ might be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death (Philippians 1: 20). We see from Scripture how each Divine Person had His own distinctive part in the fitting of the apostle for his great service in the gospel. "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" (Galatians 1: 15-16); on the Damascus road he was arrested by the *Lord* in glory, and in Acts 13 he was singled out (with Barnabas) by the *Holy Spirit* for the work to which He had called them. Blessed indeed to see the interest of the whole Godhead in the preparation of a servant for the preaching of God's glad tidings! Surely this should enhance before *us* both the preaching itself and the precious theme of which it speaks.

"God is my witness, whom I serve in *my spirit* in the glad tidings of His Son" (verse 9). This *inward* feature of the service is of tremendous moment! Paul's service, so faithfully rendered before men, brought him into misunderstandings, reproach, insult, sufferings, persecution, evil report, and at the end all forsook him. Yet, as near to God in his spirit, he could rejoice even if men from impure motives announced the gospel in order to add to the apostle's tribulation (Philippians chapter 1). His bonds, thrust upon him by men, but "manifest as being in Christ," "turned out rather to the furtherance of the glad tidings." In this he rejoiced and thus approximated so nearly to his Master who at a moment when His testimony was refused "rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father." The consciousness of divine approval is one of the choicest possessions open to the servant of Christ. Hear the apostle's words at the end of his pathway of devoted service — "I have fought a (*the*) good fight . . . Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the *righteous Judge*, shall give me at that day."

Verse 15, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel." This word ready implies the thought of "alacrity" — even of "fierceness." Lethargy, lukewarmness, compromise were unknown in the preaching of the apostle. Barnabas in introducing Paul to the apostles (Acts 9: 27) told them "how he had preached *boldly* at Damascus in the name of Jesus." This he does also at Jerusalem (vv. 28, 29) even though some "went about to slay him." At Iconium, Ephesus, before Agrippa, and in many other places this frankness of speech and fearless attitude of the apostle accompanied his "readiness" to proclaim the precious gospel. He was "debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." His debt was a debt of love (cf. Romans 13: 8). The love of Christ constrained him, and made him an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians chapter 5). Ceasing to preach the gospel would have occasioned him grief of heart which is conveyed in his expression "woe is me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9: 16). His brethren after the flesh were ever in his affections. His touching references in Romans 10 shew the depths of his feelings for them — "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved," and the exquisite language of verses 9-17 of that chapter indicate his deep exercise that the "preaching" might reach to them. Then, too, he would move in his affections and labours to "the regions beyond" (2 Corinthians 10: 16). Thus with love motivating his every step, and in the power and leading of the Spirit of God he served his Lord in the glad tidings. Was it not in this way, love's response to the call of need for help, and the Holy Spirit's direct guidance, that the gospel of God's grace reached us in Europe? (Acts 16). How much could be said of the pathway of suffering in which Paul was involved through his faithful service.

Finally in verse 16 of our chapter we read "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power (*dunamis*) of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." As Paul pondered over the mighty dynamic power of the glad tidings and their far-reaching effects for the glory of God and the blessing

of men, he exclaims "I am proud of the gospel" (the original language carries this alternative rendering). Well may he be!

Beloved brethren — the "Son of God" who loved Paul is the One who has and does love *us* — *the* One who "gave Himself for us;" the glorified Christ who revealed Himself to Saul on the Damascus road is the One whom *we* see "crowned with glory and honour;" the Name of Jesus which sounded so sweetly in the ears of Saul, is the Name which charms *us* today. The gospel which Paul so devotedly, so faithfully preached in whatever circumstances he was found, is the glad tidings concerning his Saviour *and ours*. It is the *dynamite* of God, and there are still "many who say who shall show us . . . good?"

We are not all called to the "regions beyond," but we can all speak of the gospel in the place in which the Lord began to preach "*where He had been brought up*" (Luke 4). Love must be the motive; Christ the Object; the Holy Spirit the power; the Word of God the standard, and a readiness to say from the heart "For though I preach the gospel, *I* have nothing to glory of" (1 Corinthians 9: 16).

"How beautiful are the feet of *them* that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Romans 10: 15). "He that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11: 30).