

## The Gospel of the Glory

Acts 1: 8-11; Acts 2: 14, 22-24, 33-36; Acts 7: 55, 56; Acts 9: 20, 24-28.

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Psalm 19 has been referred to, and a fragment from it may serve to illustrate the line I wish to pursue, the Lord helping me. There we read of the sun, "as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it" The same sentiment may be used to illustrate the outgoing of what the apostle Paul in the end of Colossians 1 calls the gospel. Here, from the Acts, I desire to speak to you of what I shall call "The March of the Testimony — its development in character and sphere."

Acts 1 gives us a direct link with the gospel of Luke. There the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead and about to be taken up into heaven, commissioned His disciples to preach repentance and remission of sins. They were to be His witnesses, "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." But oh! the grace of His heart — they were to begin in the very place where He had been crucified. He had prayed at Calvary, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," and now, in answer to that prayer, the testimony of forgiveness was to be carried to them.

He commanded them to "tarry . . . in Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Then He was carried up into heaven. as they gazed after Him, the two men in white apparel instructed them that this same Jesus would so come again. They said, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

The gaze of the disciples was, as it were, directed earthwards. The time had not yet come, in the expansion of the testimony, for the unfolding of the true intent of the heart of God that, according to His eternal purpose, He had a place for men on earth in association with the Man of His counsel in heaven.

In Acts 2 a Divine Person, the Holy Spirit, has come down from that Man in heaven to bring here the report of His glory there. This report by the Spirit, through Peter, is made to the men of Judaea and Jerusalem. This is the carrying out of the first part of the commission from the risen Christ. The **sphere** of the testimony commences at the very place where the Lord Jesus was crucified. The **character** of the testimony at the outset was the presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ as great David's greater Son.

Immediately, in Peter's preaching, the Spirit, Whose function it is to bear witness of and to glorify Christ, delights to rehearse all that wondrous story of perfection and blessing which the Gospels record. He speaks of the life and ministry; the works of power, the going down into death, the triumphant resurrection, and the glorious exaltation of our Lord. All that had come out in the pathway of that blessed One down here has been treasured up of God. Through the goodness of God we have been brought into a position in which we can avail ourselves of the Spirit's ministry in connection with our Lord Jesus, from the cradle to the glory, including all that came out on the way.

Here, in Acts 2, all is presented that the conscience of the nation might be reached. God was prepared, had the nation repented (see Acts 3: 19-21), to send Jesus again.

Him, Whom they had crucified, God had raised from the dead, glorifying Him at His own right hand, making Him Lord and Christ. He was, when here, truly Lord and Christ in the glory of His Person. The cry had gone forth, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee," but they had replied, "We have no king but Caesar," and with wicked hands they perpetrated the foulest crime that ever was committed in the history of time. But God has exalted Him to the highest place. As Lord, supreme authority is

vested in Him; as Christ, supreme ability and wisdom are His for the effectuating of every thought of God for Israel's national blessing.

The Spirit has thus vindicated Him and Israel is called upon to repent. What then is their answer to this presentation of a glorified Christ? No different from their answer to a Christ once humbled here!

Stephen in Acts 7, before the Sanhedrim, has spoken of the ways of God. He has drawn attention to these nine key men in the history of God's ways with His earthly people. Now, in the power of the Spirit, his eye is directed upwards into heaven. A turning point is reached in the testimony of God. Heaven is opened. Not now that Christ may enter there, but in the expansion of the testimony it is opened that a man on earth may steadfastly gaze therein to take account of all that is there, to see "the glory of God, and Jesus."

Different rays of that glory had shone out in these outstanding men of God in Israel's history, but now all are eclipsed. The heavens are open now — there is a Man in the glory, and that Divine Person, the Holy Spirit, has come down to dwell in our souls, uniting us thus to Christ in glory. He reports to us that every ray of the glory of God has been gathered up and concentrated in the Man of His pleasure. It is ours now to look into heaven and see Christ there as the glorified Son of Man.

Our first introduction to Him as such, in the New Testament, is in Matthew 8, where He says, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

There it is His title in rejection and poverty; here in the Acts it is His title in universal supremacy. The epistles open out to us that, whilst as Son of David He has the authority and ability to give effect to the will of God for Israel, as Son of Man He has the authority and ability to hold the universe for the good pleasure of God. Now we see Him in the place of power and glory at God's right hand; the day is coming when every intelligence in the universe shall have its attention focused upon Him and all will own His worthiness in that day of His manifestation.

When Christ was thus presented to Israel their rage knew no bounds. Venting it upon Stephen, they stoned him to death, sending him to heaven as their answer, the refusal of the glorified Christ, reiterating in effect, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

Stephen, as the stones battered the life from his body, exhibited the moral beauty of his Lord. This indicates a further feature of the Spirit's ministry to-day. He is forming in the lives of believers a moral transcript of the glorified Man. God is saying, as it were, "You have rejected My Christ, but in the power of the Holy Spirit I am continuing His life here in My saints." Here is the moral triumph of God. In the world that has crucified the Lord Jesus, He is drawing men out of the ruin and attaching them to Christ, producing in them the moral beauty of that precious life in testimony in the very world that refused Him.

Passing now to Acts 9, we see Saul of Tarsus converted by the revelation of Christ in glory. We have been seeing that the character of the testimony has been developing in these presentations of the Lord Jesus; so also we see an expansion of the sphere of that testimony. Jerusalem and Judaea are left; Samaria has been visited and the gospel has won its triumphs there.

In Acts 8 a son of Ham is blessed; in Acts 9 the son of Shem is blessed and the son of Japheth is seen to be blessed in Acts 10. The whole human race is to be visited with the testimony of God. In the commission to Saul of Tarsus, converted on the Damascus road, the glorified Lord indicates that the uttermost parts of the earth are coming into view. Such is the expansion of the truth in relation to our Lord Jesus Christ that the sphere of its out-telling must correspondingly be enlarged. Israel is not large

enough to contain this testimony. God will see to it that the whole race hears that the Man Whom men despised and slighted is the Man Whom He delights to honour.

Saul, entering the synagogue, straightway preached Christ, that He is the Son of God. Here we reach the peak of the testimony. Finality is reached in the Son of God. God has been fully revealed, in nature and character, in the Son of God. In Him, as such, has been fully brought to light the divine and eternal relationships of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with the affections proper to them. A complete answer has also been given to all that has come out, in that the Son of God has entered into heaven in abiding Manhood.

Heaven is now opened to men on earth that they might enter intelligently, appreciatively and responsively, as in association with the Son of God, by the Spirit, into all that wealth of heavenly truth and blessing which has reached us in the Son of God.

Brethren, this is the Person you and I came to when we confessed in His presence, "Jesus, my Saviour, I come to Thee." Great would have been our blessing had the blessed God only forgiven our sins; but He has brought us, through forgiveness, to a mighty ocean of blessing and invites us to know its fulness as in communion with Christ, that by the Spirit there might be the moral continuation down here of the life of that blessed One up there. In the light of this we can understand what the servants of the Lord mean when they say that our lot is cast in the most favoured day. The wealth of God's treasures has been brought out now, in the power of the Spirit, in connection with our Lord Jesus Christ — Son of David, Son of Man, Son of God.

In Acts 20 the apostle indicates the outstanding features of his ministry; Repentance and Faith; the Gospel of the Grace of God; the Kingdom of God; all the Counsel of God; the Church of God. The apostle to the Gentiles — great in his office and service — is seen here in the power of the truth he ministered. Thus he speaks of **the manner** in which he was among the saints; he **served** the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations; he counted not his own life dear to himself. To him to live — Christ.

Brethren, you and I have had nothing to face such as he had. What effect has been produced in us by the revelation of the Man at God's right hand, in the power of the Holy Spirit come down from Him there? May we be led to emulate the spirit and character of the apostle Paul. So to live and to get the gain, morally and doctrinally, of the truth for the glory of Christ, the good pleasure of God, and for the blessing of the saints, is possible only as we know sustained communion with Christ in the power of the Spirit. May it be so with each one of us.