

# What Is the Evangel?

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WHEN St. Paul (1 Cor. i. 21) speaks of the foolishness of "The Preaching" which saves believers, he uses a Greek word (*κήρυγμα*) which signifies the content of a message rather than the persuasive eloquence of an orator. Professor C. H. Dodd of Cambridge (in his lectures on *The Apostolic Preaching*) holds that, in the New Testament, a clear distinction is drawn between Preaching on the one hand, and Teaching or Exhorting on the other. Preaching (as also the usual verbs, *καταγγέλλω* or *εὐαγγελίζω* show) is the proclamation or announcement of a town crier, or a herald, calling attention to some definite piece of news. The Gospel, therefore, (which means "good-tidings") may be said to be the special content of Preaching.

Thus, the Gospel is the word employed in the Septuagint to describe "good news from the battle-field," and is so used in II Samuel iv. 10, where David speaks of the messenger who came with the news of the death of Saul, as "thinking to have brought good tidings." Later, in the days of the Exile, the word Gospel acquired a technical meaning—namely, the announcement of deliverance from captivity. It is so used twice over in Isaiah. The one place is Isaiah lii. 7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth the Gospel, that publisheth peace, that bringeth the Gospel of good, that publisheth salvation"—a passage quoted by St. Paul (Romans x. 15) in mourning the refusal of his fellow-countrymen to hearken to the Gospel of the Messiah. The other place is in Isaiah lxi. 1, "The Lord hath anointed me to preach the Gospel"; the content of which is then defined as "to proclaim liberty to captives"—a passage claimed by our Lord, in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke iv. 18), as fulfilled by Himself. In both instances the Gospel is the good-tidings of something that has happened—namely a deliverance, which is proclaimed publicly by a messenger or herald.

Now St. Matthew in chap. iv. 23; and again in identical language in chap. ix. 35, describes our Lord's mission as three-fold in its scope—teaching, preaching the Gospel, and healing. It seems indeed as if the Evangelist is here quoting a familiar and early catechism for catechumens. St. Luke also (xx. 1), makes the same distinction between our Lord's *teaching* the people," and His "*preaching* the Gospel"; and so does St. Mark in the first chapter of his Gospel (vv. 14 and 21). When, therefore in St. Mark's Gospel (which describes itself as "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ") our Lord no less than four times (i. 15; viii. 35; x. 29; xiii. 10) refers to His revelation of God as "The Gospel," we are to understand by the term, the announcement of something that has happened which is good-news for the hearers. He means more than a teaching about God, or a sermon on the good life. *What then is the Gospel, which is the content of the preaching, first by Christ, and then of the*

*Apostles?* What is it that necessity lays upon the ministers of the Gospel to preach, or woe betide them? (1 Cor : ix. 16). Several answers have been given ; and the question "What is the Gospel?" is often taken as synonymous with the question "What is the *Summum Bonum* which Christ proclaimed?"

(1). *Some say it is the Kingdom of God.* "Jesus went about preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom"; thus St. Matthew, whose Gospel might be called "The Gospel of the Kingdom." The Kingdom of God is a conception that is popular with Christian Humanists. They hold that the proclamation of a New Order is equivalent to preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom ; and advertise Social Gospel Campaigns as "the new evangelistic technique."

But Scriptural evidence is against such a view.

1. First, the Kingdom of God is decreed in the New Testament as at once a present possession, and also a future event.

2. Combining these two conceptions, the Kingdom is declared by Christ to be God's righteousness ; and not a matter of food, and drink, and clothing (Matt. vi. 31, 33).

3. The Lord's Prayer, therefore, defines the coming of God's Kingdom as the doing of God's will. This definition is entirely in accord with the idea of the Kingdom in the Old Testament, where the Kingdom is equivalent to the Rule of God. Just as the Scribes of our Lord's day gave to the Kingdom of the Psalmists and Prophets a national and spatial interpretation, which expected the Messiah as an earthly king ; so, Christian Humanists to-day confuse a Christian Society where God rules, with bricks and mortar and political ideologies.

4. The conception of the Kingdom of God, both in the Old and New Testaments, is intensely personal. It is equivalent to God Himself as Ruler and His personal claim upon the wills of His creatures. The Rule of God must certainly affect not only the behaviour of God's children but also their outward environment. But if we examine the schemes of proposed New Orders we find they are concerned with housing, hygiene, and education ; with everything in fact, except with God. That can never be the Kingdom of God where God is not the be all and end all of the whole process, however admirable the social reconstruction may be in other ways.

5. But in any case there is an obvious difference between the conception of the Gospel as being itself the Kingdom, and (what the New Testament calls) the Gospel *of* (or about) the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the personal rule of God ; and our Lord *teaches* the truths of the Kingdom in the sermon on the Mount, and in His parables. But the Gospel of the Kingdom, means good-news that is preached about the Kingdom. Something has happened which is a matter of good tidings ; for it makes a difference to man's relationship to the Kingdom. What, then, is this Gospel? It is that Christ has "opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers."

(2). *Eternal life was the Christian goal* proclaimed by Evangelist to burdened Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress. "Life ! Life ! Eternal Life !" cried Christian as he fled the City of Destruction and ran toward the wicket-gate which opened on the way that led to the Celestial City. Eternal Life is the counter-part in St. John's Gospel to the Kingdom of God set forth in St. Matthew's Gospel ; but empha-

sising its essentially spiritual character. As with the Kingdom of God, it has both a present and a future aspect. The Apostles were bidden to gather, now, harvest fields of souls into Eternal life (John iv. 36). On the other hand our Lord tells us that if we hate our lives in this world we shall guard them unto Eternal Life, hereafter. (John xii. 25). Those who make their Gospel the Kingdom of God regard chiefly its present and earthly connotation. Those who think of the Gospel as Eternal Life are liable to fall in to the opposite error of making "other-worldliness" refer almost exclusively to the next world; instead of seeing that it means an "over-world" which includes *all* life, both here and hereafter, in its spiritual reality. Eternal Life is, simply, to share the Life of God, in contradistinction to possessing human life only. Man has latent within him the possibility of uniting himself with God Who is Life, and thus of acquiring, here on earth, that fulness of life which death cannot touch. With all his supremacy, man may be as mortal as the animals; or with all his frailty he may be as immortal as God. Such is the burden of St. John's Gospel and First Epistle. But the mere fact and possibility of Eternal Life is not the Gospel. In 2 Tim i. 10 St. Paul speaks of "the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, Who *abolished death*, and brought life and incorruption to light through the Gospel." That must mean more than that Christ, by preaching the good-tidings of Eternal Life, brought Eternal Life to light. The good-tidings was that a Saviour had abolished death, and so made Eternal Life the gift of God to believers (Rom. vi. 23). In well loved words, the Gospel is that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him, should not perish, but have Eternal Life." (John iii. 16).

(3). *The Scotch Catechism* sees the Vision of God as the chief end of man; and the Bishop of Oxford has expanded the theme in his Bampton Lectures of 1928. According to him the Vision of God as the *Summum Bonum* emerges from the Beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God (Matt. v. 8); and Worship becomes the supreme activity and purpose of life. Once more, the idea of the Vision of God as the Christian ideal regards the Beatific Vision both as of present attainment and also as a glorious prospect. God "shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6). The Vision is for us now. "We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is" (1 John iii. 2). The full reality of the Vision is the rapture of heaven itself. The truth is that the Presence of the Person of Christ among men is the Vision of God, and thus at once the coming of the Kingdom outwardly in the world, and the possession of Eternal Life inwardly in our hearts. And this was the Gospel or Good-tidings of great joy announced by the Angel at the Nativity (Luke ii. 10). But as Dr. Vincent Taylor has pointed out in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (p. 198 ff.), the conception of the Vision of God as the Christian ideal is incomplete: for it rules out Love as the supreme gift and manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the invariable expression of Love—namely, service for others, is lacking if worship is considered as the sole, or even the chief, end of man. The idea of the Church as the

Worshipping Community with the Vision of God as its *Summum Bonum*, leads to its becoming an esoteric cell in the world of men, with no concern for those outside its sanctuary. The Vision of God as mirrored in His Son is that of a Shepherd, with bleeding hands and feet, going after lost sheep, or that of a warrior fighting to the death against evil. And, though there is exaggeration, there is food for thought in Stevenson's picture of God's eye with careless look passing worshippers by, to rest with approval upon those who do the work of the world.

For those He loves that underprop  
 With daily virtues Heaven's top,  
 And bear the falling sky with ease  
 Unfrowning caryatides.  
 Those He approves that ply the trade  
 That rock the child, that wed the maid,  
 That with weak virtues, weaker hands,  
 Sow gladness on the peopled lands,  
 And still with laughter, song and shout,  
 Spin the great wheel of earth about.

Be that as it may, the Vision of God, though it is presented to us as the quest of faith both in the Bible and in the Life of the Eternal Word, cannot itself be the content of the Good-tidings Christ came to proclaim. That there is a God to be seen by the pure in heart is no news, but a recognised tenet of all religions. The Good-news consists in the amazing assurance that we *may* be pure in heart, and so see God. Like Isaiah, we all realise that there is a God to worship; but, like the prophet again, we are conscious of unclean lips that must be cleansed before they can join in the Trisagion of heaven. Similarly the Good-tidings of the Angel at the Nativity was not simply that the tabernacle of God was with men; but that a Saviour, Christ the Lord, had appeared on earth to give sinners the free right of entrance into the Holy of Holies itself. (cf. Matt. xxvii. 51; Hebrews x. 19 ff.)

I have spent some time in trying to show what the Gospel is not, in order that thereby it may become the more clear what the Gospel actually is. Christ certainly proclaimed the Kingdoms or the Rule of God; but His Gospel, as the 8th of Hebrews sets forth, is that Jeremiah's (xxxii. 31-34) hope was at length fulfilled and man's will can be inclined to keep God's Law.

Christ, too, had the words of Eternal Life, and roused as never before the longing in men's hearts to share the life of God. But His Gospel was that His Atoning Death had effected the union of mortal man with the Eternal Source of all life.

In the same way Christ came to reveal the Father, and in order that in His Face the light of the knowledge of the glory of God might shine in men's hearts. But His Gospel was that minds blinded by sin could be purified to see the Vision of God. In a word, Christ came to *teach* the *Summum Bonum*—call it what you will, the Kingdom of Heaven, Eternal Life, or the Vision of God. But the Gospel which He *preached* or proclaimed was the Good-news that man could now realise the *Summum Bonum* and rise to the Christian ideal—his will

liberated to enter the Kingdom, his heart quickened to receive Eternal Life, his mind purified to see God. Surely, then, the great tragedy of our Church witness in these tremendous times is that it teaches Christianity and exhorts to Christian living, but all too often without the Gospel that makes Christianity possible: a well-meant effort about as cruel as offering a drowning man good advice on how to swim, instead of throwing him a rope.

(4) *To the question, therefore, "What is the Gospel?" the right answer is that of the Church Catechism which it derives directly from the Bible—namely "I heartily thank our Heavenly Father, that He hath called me to this state of SALVATION, through Jesus Christ our Saviour."* The Good-tidings of great joy which Christ came to earth to effect and to proclaim, was the Gospel of Salvation.

We cannot be too thankful that recent years have witnessed a return to a Bible Theology. We had got into the way of first forming our own theological conclusions, and then of searching the Bible to find authority for them. Anything and everything can be proved from the Bible by quoting isolated passages. But now we begin by asking, "What saith the Scripture," and then we draw our conclusions from the Bible as a whole. Thus, the Kingdom of Heaven, Eternal Life, and the Vision of God, are all found in the Bible as important aspects of the Gospel message. But the Gospel itself, as preached in the Bible, is summed up in the one word "Salvation." Salvation is indeed the Gospel theme throughout the whole Bible. It begins with the Protevangelium of Genesis, iii., 15, which (in the words of the late Professor R. L. Ottley) "strikes at the outset of *redemptive* history the note of promise and hope." It ends with the Hallelujah Chorus of Revelation (vii. 10.), "Salvation unto our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb."

The idea of Salvation was born from Israel's experience of God and His dealings with them. Jehovah was first and foremost a Deliverer; and His Salvation was indelibly impressed upon the national mind by the great deliverance from Egypt. From the date of the Exodus, Israel was a saved People; and Salvation, as the Jew knew it, was originally a "Deliverance" in its simplest meaning, the same indeed that we pray for to-day, the deliverance of a nation by "a high hand." Later, this experience of national Salvation developed into an expectation of deliverance from the afflictions that afterwards overtook them. Thus, as we have seen, the word "Gospel," became a technical term for the Good-news of Deliverance from the Babylonian Captivity; and similarly, Salvation came to mean the looked for Messianic Age. Unfortunately, owing to the rise of fierce national feeling during the heroic revolt under the Maccabees, the concepts both of Salvation and of the Kingdom of God assumed an earthly and political interpretation; so that by our Lord's Day they signified a Jewish hope of universal sovereignty.

Then came Christ, bitterly antagonising Jewish national feeling by proclaiming Himself the Saviour of the world and by preaching the Good News of Deliverance from Sin. Thereafter, the burden of the Gospel of the first century was the story of a personal Saviour and what He had wrought. Indeed, the recognised name for Christianity was "the Way of Salvation," (Acts xvi. 17). Hear, for example, St.

Peter before the Sanhedrin, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree. Him did God exalt to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins" (Acts v. 30, 31.)

As with the Kingdom of God, or Eternal Life, or the Vision of God, Salvation is at once a present experience and a future prospect. It is a present experience. Salvation is deliverance from *spiritual* death; that is to say, we are saved from missing God in this life—a condition which Christ terms as "being lost," and to rescue from which He came to seek and to save and to give His life. Salvation is also a future prospect. It is also deliverance from *eternal* death. But it is never really possible to distinguish between the two. Eternal life is now to possess God, Who is life, and to enjoy Him for ever. To miss God is to lose Eternal Life, both here and hereafter. To save us from this fate (to which sin condemns by alienating us from God) was the supreme mission of God the Son by becoming Man and dying on the Cross. Thus, Christ had the words of Eternal Life; He came preaching the Kingdom of God; He was made flesh to reveal the Father. But in order that man might live with God, and obey God, and see God, He was above all else a Saviour. Therefore His name was to be called Jesus, because on the Cross He was to save His people from their sins. The Gospel is the Good News of His Atoning Work which makes the Christian Life possible. And to preach the Gospel is to declare to men and women their blood-bought right of possessing conscious assurance of restored relationship with God, through Christ.

The saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ can best be understood by recalling a story of Bishop Westcott. When asked by a Salvation Army lass whether he was saved, the great theologian replied in some bewilderment, "O, my dear young lady, what do you mean? Do you mean *σῶζομενος* (I am being saved), or *σέσωσμενος* (I have been saved), or *σωσῆσομενος* (I shall be saved)." Salvation is a combination of all three. By His death Christ has saved us from the guilt of sin. By His Risen Power with us, He is saving us from the power of sin. By His Ascension, He Who is preparing a place for us will save us from the presence of sin. It is all set forth by St. Paul in the Romans; where the key note of the Epistle is the "Gospel of Salvation", and has been paraphrased as "The power of God you see in people's lives when they trust Christ (Rom. i. 16, 17)."

St. Paul's doctrine of Justification is, simply, that if we trust the Gospel and act upon it, we thereby possess conscious assurance of a life united to God in Christ. His doctrine of Sanctification is, simply, the unailing result of thus living with God—namely, the peace and power of a life unified in itself because in Christ it is united to God. Then one word in conclusion. By far the most important feature of the Gospel of Salvation is that its entire emphasis is laid on God's part in man's redemption and upward progress. Salvation is the Good-news of how God has intervened, broken into human history, and Himself effected man's deliverance from the slavery of guilt, from the shame of moral defeat, and from the death of a dog. It is Good-news of victory from the battle-field, proclaiming what God Himself has done and what God is still doing. It is Good-news, in

the achieving of which man played, and plays, no part. It is Good-news of a Salvation man can never merit, but only accept. We are saved by faith—by just trusting ; not by works.

By trusting Christ we are saved from the blindness of sin, and so become pure in heart to behold the Vision of God. By trusting Christ we are saved from the frustration of sin, and so are empowered to co-operate with God in the building of His Kingdom.

By trusting Christ we are saved from the death of sin, and so possess Eternal Life.

Moreover, the gratitude that is all we can offer, makes us feel that we are “ saved to serve ” : an incentive that has proved all down the Christian ages the supreme urge to Evangelise, to proclaim the Good-news of Salvation to others. In short, Salvation is that redemption of our nature, through Christ, which puts us into a right personal relationship with God and our fellows. By Salvation we enter Eternal Life—that is the life of the children of God. Thereby, as regards God, the chief end of life becomes the Vision of God and His eternal worship.

As regards man, our purpose in life is to bring the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, both by bringing men and women to God, and by striving to produce an environment in which they can grow to full Christian stature. So it is that St. Paul calls the ministers of the Gospel the Ambassadors of Christ’s Reconciliation (2 Cor. : v. 18 ff.) ; and I would end by venturing to re-echo the Apostle’s exhortation. God has committed unto us the word of reconciliation. As though God were entreating by us, we beseech you on behalf of Christ, re-affirm to yourselves the Good-news of your own reconciliation with God, and so become the ambassadors to others of Christ’s Reconciliation.

## The Salvation of the Individual

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**I**T is only possible to discuss “ The Salvation of the Individual ” in this separate way because of the complementary paper being read on “ The Regeneration of Society.” For the whole teaching of the New Testament is that we are saved to serve : “ That we, being delivered . . . might serve.” Deliverance first ; then service. There can be no such thing as a solitary Christian. We belong to a fellowship, and part of the responsibility of that fellowship is the regeneration of society. Christians are “ the salt of the earth.” One function of salt is to preserve. Probably our Lord often watched the fish being sent from Capernaum to Jerusalem, packed in two hampers slung one on either side of a donkey. But first, the salt was thoroughly mixed with the fish. If the fish had been packed in one basket and the salt in the other, the salt would arrive in Jerusalem in perfect condition, but the fish——! And the salt wouldn’t have carried out its preserving function.

### LABORATORY EXPERIMENTS

I asked permission not to read a paper but instead to give you a bunch of concrete instances of the way the Salvation of the individual