

~Other Speakers G-L: Allan Halton:

Three times in his letters the apostle Paul refers to something he calls “my gospel” (Rom. 2.16, 16.25 and 2 Tim. 2.8). There is of course only one Gospel—the Good News of our salvation. But Paul was able to call this Gospel his own. How so? It’s because the gospel of God was not just hearsay to him; it was operative in his own life.

And what is the Gospel? I realize many of us are very familiar with this, but I think we do well to look into the nature of the Gospel of Paul, lest the Gospel we’re so familiar with turn out to be a Gospel other than—or maybe less than—the one that lived and burned like fire in Paul. So let’s look at this.

Paul, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, separated unto the gospel of God Which He had promised afore by His prophets in holy scriptures... (Rom. 1.1,2).

This gospel is laid out in great detail in Paul’s letter to the Romans, but we will go to his second letter to Timothy, where it is encapsulated. It is a very powerful gospel—very great glad tidings.

Paul is writing to Timothy from a Roman prison where Nero has cast him, intending shortly to execute him. As we read later in the letter, Paul himself anticipates his end is at hand. But he doesn’t call it an execution. He calls it an offering unto God. He is “ready to be offered,” he tells Timothy. He has “fought a good fight,” he has “finished his course,” he has “kept the faith.” He looks forward to the crown of righteousness which is laid up for him, “which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day, and not to me only but unto all them also that love His appearing” (2 Tim. 4.6-8).

Paul begins his last letter with these words:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus...

These words remind us of his letter to Titus.

Paul, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ according to (in accordance with) the faith of God’s elect, and the knowledge of the truth which is after (accords with) godliness;
In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the ages of time...

Paul told the Romans that God promised the Gospel “by His prophets in holy scriptures.” Here he says God promised it “before the ages of time.” So this Gospel is a very great thing in the eternal purposes of God. We highlight the words, “in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised...” They echo the introductory words to Timothy we quoted above: Paul says he is an apostle of Jesus Christ “according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.” And so what has God promised? Life. And what life has God promised? Eternal life. Before the ages of time God promised that out from a whole race bound under the law sin and death He would bring a new man into a new dimension of life—eternal life.

But what does this eternal life involve? Dying and going to Heaven and living forever? Let’s read Paul’s letter to Timothy a little further. We’ll discover the astonishing gospel unto which Paul had been separated.

First, he calls Timothy to boldness. He is not to be ashamed of what he is involved in.

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but suffer evil along with the gospel according to the power of God...

The testimony of our Lord is the witness to the truth to which Christ was faithful in His own life and walk, and which we too are equipped to give by His Spirit. We note in passing that Paul gives no credit whatsoever to the reprobate Roman ruler Nero for his imprisonment; he is a prisoner not of Nero but of Jesus Christ. For, Nero may purpose to shut the Gospel down, but Paul knows it is actually for the furtherance of the Gospel that he has been jailed. His sufferings and imprisonment will result in the Gospel not being shut down but actually growing. And so he seeks to encourage Timothy with the same realization. This Gospel is attended with much shame and suffering as far as this world is concerned; many there are who will not bear the shame and afflictions of the Gospel. But Paul assures Timothy that God has all the power necessary to equip him to bear up under it all, and suffer the evils the gospel suffers in its way of triumph.

Now Paul lays out for Timothy (and for all of us) the staggering dimensions of this awesome gospel of God. Let's read it carefully.

“...Suffer evil along with the gospel according to the power of God, Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, nor according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time, But is now made manifest by the appearing of Jesus Christ, who hath abolished (annulled) death, and hath brought life and immortality (incorruption) to light through the gospel; Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Tim. 1.8-11).

This is such a powerful passage of Scripture. Paul says that Jesus Christ has “abolished death.” That is, He has made death impotent, he has made it “of no effect.” He has made death so that it “doesn't work” anymore, as the word literally means. It has no power. This is what God accomplished in the cross of Jesus Christ.

But that is not all. In what Paul is saying here he has his opening words in mind, “the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.” He returns to them now, saying that the God who has made death of no effect has “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” We too easily miss the import of these powerful words. Paul is not talking about a gospel that merely informs us that God has brought life and incorruption to light; he is talking about the gospel that is an actual demonstration of the truth that Christ has annulled death.

This is what the Gospel is all about—and nothing less. The Gospel is a bringing to light, a manifestation, a shining forth... of a life that is dominion over death.

And what is death? Paul is not talking solely about the death that terminates our mortal existence. Yes, in due time that too is vanquished. But primarily Paul is talking about the death that reigns over the whole family of Adam all their days. Death is not merely an event that ends our life here on earth. It is a domain in which all men have been bound since the day Adam sinned in the Garden. All, that is, except those who have been liberated from that bondage by the Gospel. The Gospel of God is a gospel that brings men into the kind of Life over which sin and death has no dominion.

Paul wrote to the Romans, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8.2). He wrote, “For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5.17).

Christian, is this the gospel—the glad tidings—unto which you and I too are separated? Are we walking in a Life that reigns over all—over sin, over the domain of death? Over the flesh, over the world, over the Devil? And this not only in our own lives but in the lives of those around us?

This is why He saved us.

But it doesn't end with our own salvation: “He saved us, and called us with a holy calling...” What is the calling? It is the calling to walk in eternal life and make eternal life manifest in a world bound under the law of sin and death. What does Paul urge us to, then?

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life whereunto thou art called and hast confessed a good confession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6.12).

Let us lay hold on this eternal life, Christian. This is our calling. It is unto this that we, like Timothy, have been called on behalf of all men. It's the Gospel God, the Gospel of eternal life. Let us never settle for a gospel less than this! It is good news—very good news indeed!