

GREAT WORDS OF THE GOSPEL

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Chapter 7

RESURRECTION

"He preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection . . . And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:18, 30-31).

Apart from the great fact of the resurrection of our Lord JESUS CHRIST from the dead we would have no gospel to preach. By "resurrection" we do not mean that our Lord's spirit continued to live after His body died, but that He was actually raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and came forth from the tomb in the very same body that had been impaled on Calvary's cross. In that body, now glorified, He sits at GOD's right hand, and in that same body He is coming again as the JUDGE of both living and dead -- the saved and lost. This is what is emphasized for us in the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

The entire passage, beginning with verse 16, is of tremendous interest, but I have no thought of attempting to explain it all, though I hope you will read it carefully at your leisure, if you are not thoroughly familiar with it, for it is undoubtedly one of the finest examples of a preacher's eloquence that we have anywhere in the Bible.

Paul appears here at his best, from the human standpoint, but he also speaks as a divinely inspired servant of CHRIST. Of Apollos we read elsewhere that he was an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, and it is very evident from this sample sermon that Paul was a man of the same stamp; although on the other hand he did not particularly cultivate what was simply rhetorical, lest the Cross of CHRIST should be made of none effect.

But it was quite in keeping with his principle of being "**made all things to all men,**" that, when he stood on Mars' Hill, the very center of culture of the Greek world, he should meet those philosophers on their own ground.

PROUD, ATTIC PHILOSOPHERS

So far as culture was concerned, he was every whit their equal, combining a thorough acquaintance with their literature, history and customs, with a deep knowledge of the Word of GOD to which they were strangers. Thus he gave them that day a new and arresting message such as they had never heard before, and possibly many were destined never to hear again.

Notice some of the circumstances. Paul was waiting in Athens for several of his fellow servants,

who had returned to Thessalonica to find out how the newborn Christians there were getting along. As he wandered about the city, his spirit was deeply stirred, for he saw everywhere the evidences of idolatry. They worshipped everything in Athens, in fact an ancient philosopher once said, "In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man." There were images on every street corner, over every doorway, in every courtyard, found in every store, and every dwelling house. Turn where you would, you were confronted by them.

SIGNS OF PAGAN DARKNESS

Paul, as he walked those streets, knew that the things the Gentiles sacrificed were sacrificed to demons and not to GOD; he knew that he was probably the only man in that city who had a knowledge of the true and living GOD and of His Son, the Lord JESUS CHRIST; and yet for the time being he saw no opportunity to give his message in a public way.

A Jewish synagogue, however, attracted his attention, and entering it, he claimed his right as a recognized teacher to speak, and there he presented the Gospel, disputing with the adherents of Judaism, and with proselytes who were doubtless weary of the unsatisfactory character of idolatrous rites and ceremonies, and had sought out this place of instruction in the law of Moses.

In the market place also he addressed himself to individuals, and sometimes little groups would gather about him to whom he proclaimed the wondrous story of GOD's grace in CHRIST JESUS to a lost world. Little by little he drew the attention of the people, who were always interested in that which seemed new and strange. So we need not be surprised that at last certain philosophers of the Epicureans and the Stoics became interested in him and his teaching.

THE EPICUREANS AND THE STOICS

These believed that man's supreme good is found in trying to please himself, that there is no use denying one's self; make the best of life by getting all the pleasure out of it you can, for you are going to be dead for a long time. We can hear the echo of this in the philosophy of so-called self-expression of our day.

The Stoics took the opposite view of life. They said: we are in the hands of a remorseless fate; we had nothing to say about coming into the world, and there is no telling what will happen when we leave it. Just grit your teeth, don't show the white feather, make up your mind that "what cannot be cured must be endured." Stoicism has come down through the ages as the synonym for patient endurance.

Some of these philosophers asked, "**What will this babler say?**" To them he seemed to be setting forth new gods. New gods in Athens! They had searched the world to find all of them. They had shrines for the gods of Babylon, Phoenicia, Greece, Egypt, and Rome. They worshipped them all, and yet this man seemed to know something about some new ones, because Paul preached "**Jesus and the resurrection.**" They thought that Anastasis (resurrection) was yet another god! They had the god of peace, the god of victory, the god of justice, the god of love -- all these different deified human attributes; and now they thought, "**This man seems to have two new gods, one called Jesus and the other, Resurrection. We would like to hear more about them.**" And they took him up to Mars' Hill, or the Areopagus. This overlooked Athens,

and was where the philosophers met for discussion. So they invited Paul to come up there and expound his new doctrines. Led by them, he wended his way to the meeting-place above, and at once began to proclaim the message that he had been yearning to give them for so long.

He took his text from an inscription he had seen on one of their altars, and said, as it were, "I see you are a very religious people. You seem to worship every god known to the Greeks and all other nations, and as I walked about I noticed an altar with an unusual inscription."

"TO THE UNKNOWN GOD!"

(During the writing of this book, Dr. Ironside reports that an altar bearing just such an inscription had been recently unearthed)

It was evident that these Athenians feared lest they might be neglecting some god whose name had not been communicated to them, and so they set up the altar that had attracted Paul's attention.

What a splendid text it made! And so Paul said, "**Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.**" In other words, "I am here to tell you who the unknown GOD is." How can anyone make known the unknown? GOD has made Himself known in the person of His blessed Son, the Lord JESUS CHRIST. Paul was there, indeed, to present JESUS and the resurrection, and let me say that no man preaches the gospel unless he does preach JESUS and the resurrection.

There is no gospel for guilty sinners apart from CHRIST, for the Gospel is GOD's message about His blessed Son. The Gospel is not good advice to be obeyed; it is good news to be believed. And that good news concerns the Lord JESUS CHRIST who came from the glory that He had with the Father from all eternity down to the sorrow and anguish of the cross of Calvary where He bared His breast that the sword of divine justice might be sheathed in His heart. He took our place and endured what we deserved. But that alone would not be the gospel; there is something more needed. Paul preached:

JESUS, AND --

And what? "**And the resurrection.**" Every sermon that he ever preached was an Easter sermon; every sermon that the early apostles preached was an Easter sermon, for wherever they went they preached that CHRIST died for our sins according to the Scriptures: and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. The essence of their message was that He "**was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification**" (Romans 4:25).

So Paul preached JESUS and the resurrection, and we today proclaim the same, and we tell you in His Name, "**That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation**" (Romans 10:9-10).

THE CREATOR AND THE CREATED

Notice how Paul prepared the ground for his message. First of all, they were reminded that the CREATOR must be greater than that which is created, and Paul directed their attention to the visible universe. It was very evident that the GOD who made all things could not be confined in one of their temples. He says, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing he is Lord of Heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." He is not the GOD of one nation, but of all nations, and we are really one people, for He "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and bounds of their habitation." He has put upon men the responsibility to know Him, for He is not far from any one of us.

There is no man anywhere who will dare say in the day of judgment, "I wanted to find GOD and could not," for

"Closer is He than breathing,
Nearer than hands and feet."

He is so close that if men will feel after Him, will stretch up empty hands towards Him, they will find His great strong hands reaching down to lay hold of them. GOD will never permit it to be said that any man honestly sought the way of life and failed to find it, that any man really wanted to be saved, and cried to GOD unheard.

This answers a question that troubles a good many people. I am often asked:

WHAT ABOUT THE HEATHEN?

They have never heard the Gospel. What of them? Are they going to be damned because they have never heard? No matter where a heathen man may be today, if he wants to know GOD and honestly reaches out after Him, GOD will make Himself responsible to give that man light enough to be saved, for He is not far from any one of us. GOD has commanded men "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him."

This is the only place in the New Testament where we get the word "feel." I have often urged people to trust the Lord JESUS, and have told them how He died for them, bore their sins on the cross, and that if they will believe on Him, He has given His own Word that "**whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**" And then they say, "Well, I do believe, but I don't feel any different." That has nothing to do with it. The word feel is not a Christian word at all. The only place it occurs in the New Testament is here where Paul is speaking of the heathen. But you have an open Bible; you do not need to feel after GOD. What you need to do is to believe the testimony that He has given, and then you will be saved. "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house**" (Acts 16:31). This is the word of the living GOD given through His servants of old.

"FEEL" AND "FEELING"

I said that the word feel is found only once in the New Testament, but the word feeling is found twice: once in Ephesians 4:19, where it speaks of certain Gentiles, and says, "**Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness**"; and again in Hebrews 4:15, "**For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.**" Apart from these three instances we do not find the words feeling or feel used in the New Testament. The moment you believe in the Lord JESUS, the moment you trust in Him you pass out of death into life, out of condemnation into justification before the throne of GOD.

In John 5:24, JESUS says, "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.**"

THE FIVE DIVISIONS OF JOHN 5:24

1. "HE THAT HEARETH MY WORD." Face this: be honest with your own heart. Have you heard the Word of the Son of GOD? Have you heard Him speaking to you through this blessed Book?

2. "AND BELIEVETH HIM THAT SENT ME." Do you in your heart believe that GOD sent the Lord JESUS CHRIST to be the sinner's Saviour, to die for you on the cross, to rise from the dead for your justification?

3. "HATH EVERLASTING LIFE." When do you get it? When you die? No, you get it now, from the moment you believe, from the moment you hear the Word of the Son of GOD, and receive and confess Him as the One whom the Father sent into the world to be the sinner's Saviour. The trouble today is that people are stumbling over its very simplicity.

I heard of a man who wanted to be saved, and he was told to do penance for sin by putting hard dried peas in his shoes and walking on them so many hours a day. This poor man did this and limped around the streets, trying to make atonement. It would have done him just as much good if he had boiled the peas first.

But people are willing to do all kinds of hard things. They are like Naaman who, when the prophet commanded, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times," said, "That is too easy a way." But he had a wise old servant who suggest, "**If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?**" Why, of course he would. "**How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?**" If you had to give a great deal of money, say a great many prayers, make long pilgrimages, do vast numbers of charitable deeds in order to get life eternal, how many of you would be willing to do these things? How much more when He saith to thee, "**Believe and live!**"

4. "SHALL NOT COME INTO CONDEMNATION." Think of it! Is that not good news? Not a word about purgatory, not a word about confession to a priest, not a word about sacramental observances, not a word about penance; but here and now, the moment you put your trust in the Lord JESUS CHRIST, your sins are gone and you will never come into judgment, but you have everlasting life. It is all for you. That is the gospel which Paul preached. And notice the

next point:

5. "IS PASSED FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE." It is a settled, complete salvation, giving a new standing before GOD to the believing sinner. Observe the threefold link with resurrection:

a. Resurrection and Repentance

But what if men do not accept it? Then there is the judgment. He says that GOD has been very gracious with the heathen: "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Repent means to change your mind completely, to have a new attitude. You had an idea that you could save yourself by your good works, but you change your mind and now admit that you cannot do a thing to save yourself, but that CHRIST must do it all. That is repentance -- a change of attitude toward GOD. Instead of trying to do anything to save yourself, let the Lord JESUS do it all.

GOD "commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." GOD is going to judge the world in righteousness, but your case can be settled out of court, and settled today, so that you need never think of coming into judgment. But if you reject CHRIST, some day you must give account before His judgment throne.

b. Resurrection and Assurance

"Whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." The resurrection of the body of our Lord JESUS CHRIST is the ground of our assurance that we shall live again in our resurrected bodies. He says, "**Because I live, ye shall live also.**" We are told that "**As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.**" This does not mean that all men will be saved, but that the bodies of all men will be raised from the dead. Thus GOD has given assurance to all men of a life after death in that He raised the body of CHRIST from the grave. In the second place He has given assurance unto all men that the sin question is settled in the death of CHRIST, by raising His body from the dead.

Here is an innocent man who has gone to prison for the crime of another. He knew the other man was guilty, but he knew, too, that in order to prove his own innocence he would have to expose his friend; and so he hears the sentence of the judge, sending him to prison for one year. What must be the feeling of the other man outside? He says, "I have sent that man there; I deserved to go, but he is there in my place." Perhaps he goes to see him and the man says, "I took your place voluntarily, and I am quite content; you let me endure it." The other roams the streets and says, "I wonder how long he will be content to remain there; I wonder how long before he tells the whole story." But by and by a year has passed, and walking down the street one day, he sees the one who went to prison for him. He rushes up and says, "What does this mean?"

"It means," is the reply, "that you have nothing to fear now. The sentence has been endured."

So our blessed Lord bore on the Tree the sentence for us, and now we who were once guilty sinners are free. "**Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more.**" The resurrection is the proof that the sin question has been settled, that GOD is satisfied. "**He hath given assurance**

unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

c. Resurrection and Reckoning

In the third place we have assurance in the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST that some day all men are going to give account to Him. This will be when He sits upon the great white throne. Think of giving account of your sins to Him after all He has done to save you from them!

Notice the threefold response from Paul's message had that day. "**When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. . . . Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed.**" I wonder if there are not people manifesting these three different attitudes toward the message today!

THREE RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL

Some mock, some ridicule, some say, "Oh, we cannot believe this message about JESUS and the resurrection; we cannot accept it. We do not see how He could die for sinners and rise again, and how men can be saved through believing on Him." GOD pity you if you are turning this message down. Some day He will turn you down, for He says in His Word, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (Proverbs 1:24-26). GOD grant that you may not at last be exposed to such a doom. Do not turn it down, do not go away with a cold, careless sneer and say, "It is nothing to me."

The second class said, "**We will hear thee again of this matter.**" They are the procrastinators. You may not be mocking; possibly you would not sneer at the Gospel message; you fully intend to be saved some day, but you are saying, "I will hear you again; I am not ready to close with CHRIST today. There is so much to occupy my heart and mind these days; some other time. Let me alone for the present. Sometime I will give attention to these things." Remember the old saying, "Procrastination is the thief of time." There is a Spanish proverb which says, "The road of by and by leads to the town of never." How many have taken that road, have said, "By and by, some other day," and have gone on and on, until at last they have reached the other world, hopelessly lost, and that forever!

The third class, "**Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed.**" What a blessed testimony! GOD has recorded the names of two of them, one man and one woman, Dionysius and Damaris, who accepted the message proclaimed that day.

Men have an idea that what sinners need is more culture, more refinement; but if polite culture could have saved the world, Greece would have been saved long ago. But Greece went all to pieces in spite of its culture. It was the gospel of the grace of GOD that saved the ancient world from ruin. And it is the Gospel of the Lord JESUS CHRIST that saves men today. I bring before you these two examples, Dionysius and Damaris, and I beg you to follow them as they followed CHRIST; believe the message, and go on rejoicing in Him, who was raised from the dead, never to die again. Hear what He says in Revelation 1:18 -- "**I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.**" ~ end of chapter 7 ~