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WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

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The Protestant Faith

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What is the Gospel? This is an important question which we should ask ourselves from time to time in order to see that we are still aiming at the right target.

Gospel means news, and "the Gospel of God" means the news that God brings to us. It is news about Himself; something we would not have known had it not been told us. The Old Testament contains the gospel; for example, Moses brought the Israelites news from God. They were slaves in Egypt, in a hopeless situation, quite unable to release themselves from the thralldom and hard labour which the Egyptians, with their dominant military force, were imposing on them. Moses brought them the news that God would save them, as indeed He did, leading them out to the promised land. Some centuries later, the children of Israel were in a similar position, this time slaves in Babylon. They could not hope to help themselves; and what was very galling, they knew that they were there as a result of their own sins; they had turned against God and God had given them up to their own choice and there was no hope. Yet Isaiah was sent as God's prophet with the news that God would save them; He had given a ransom for them. They were to cheer up and put their faith in the Word which the prophet was bringing them.

The news that Moses brought and the news that Isaiah brought was simply a foretaste of the news which we have to bring to men and women living in the hopelessness and sorrows of life and the hopelessness and judgment of the next life that follows death. It is the news of God. What He has done and will do, and it comes to us and to our contemporaries hopelessly enslaved, not to the Egyptians or the Babylonians, but to our own sin and to Satan; there is no future except judgment. Both you and I are involved in this situation; of ourselves we cannot get out of our predicament. But to us comes the news from God that He Himself has provided salvation, He has paid the ransom; we are to repent and believe this news. In the opening words of the letter to the Romans Paul writes that he has been commissioned to bring this news of God to those who will hear it; and that for those who hear and repent it is the power of God to salvation, no matter whether they are Jew or Greek.

What is the content of this news of God? In a word, Paul says it is about God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth (Rom. 1:2). He is the message which the preacher has to bring, He is the one to whom the hearer has to respond; Jesus Himself, nothing more or less. He is the ransom. He is the ransom which God has provided to rescue us from our predicament and hopeless future. Jesus is the news. He is the message. The gospel (to quote St. Paul) is the new concerning the Son of God.

It goes without saying that Jesus was a true man, born and growing up like any of us. He experienced what we experience; for example, physical tiredness and hunger, physical pain sorrow at the death of His friend, sadness at the rejection of His message at Jerusalem, He showed concern for the welfare of His mother, compassion in the presence of sickness, and He exercised faith in the valley of the shadow of death. In all respects He was a true man, but He was more. He was what we are not in that He was a man who never yielded to what He knew to be wrong; a man who never broke fellowship with God through self-will. Not that He wasn't tested. He was tested and tried to the uttermost, yet He overcame every temptation, and was completely victorious over every sin and self-centredness, even in the extreme test of painful and unjust death. We give in, but He stuck it out, never yielding to do any injustice or unkindness for His own benefit, and so He became our sin-bearer, accepting the consequences of our sin on the cross. He was the ransom which secures our release, and so He has been crowned as head of humanity by God our creator. He has been highly exalted and all authority in heaven and earth has been given Him. He will be the judge in the future, and after he has put down everything that opposes itself to God, He will reign over God's creation for ever, as its Lord, and we will reign with Him. God's purposes will be complete in Jesus. In pictorial language, He is seated at God's right hand and we who are His, we who have recognised Him as Lord, are seated there in God's presence with Him and nothing will separate us from this relationship, neither life, nor death, nor principalities, nor any created thing, can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Those who believe in Christ have already begun to experience this love and fellowship and it will last for ever.

Jesus is a true man and a perfect man, and supreme man; but there is more to be said than this. In Him, God entered into into a new relationship with mankind, a relationship of a very intimate fellowship. In Jesus, God took our nature; for Jesus was Emmanuel, that is, 'God with us'. In His essential personality Jesus is our divine Lord who for our sakes became man that we might share His eternal life through faith in Him. No wonder then that Jesus is the message that we have to bring. Jesus Himself, our Divine Saviour, who dwells in our hearts by His Spirit, is the news which we bring our fellow men and women, enslaved in selfishness and sin, with no possibility in themselves of avoiding the awful future that this involves. It is good news, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself; and He has given to us this message of reconciliation which is that the one who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become acceptable to God, in Him.

Jesus is the content of the news we bring and He must be the centre of our world-view. Any other view of the world which does not make Jesus, Who is Emmanuel, God with us, the very centre of the purposes of God in Creation and in world history, is obviously wrong. Jesus is Lord. This He claimed to be, and this he demonstrated through the resurrection. This is what Christians believe. Jesus is Lord, the centre of history. This is the news. We are invited to put our faith in God who saves us through His son. As St. Paul says, He who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us, how shall He not also with him freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:32). There is nothing we need that we cannot trust God to provide. For he has provided for our salvation in such a wonderful way by Himself taking our nature, and on the cross paying our ransom, and through the resurrection ensuring our victory over sin and death.

What is the Gospel? It is the news about Jesus.

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