

A REDISCOVERED GOSPEL

Scripture lesson: Rom. 5:1-11

Text: Rom. 5:1 "Being therefore justified by faith..."
Rom. 5:9 "Being now justified by his blood..."

On Reformation Day we remind ourselves of history-making events more than 400 years ago. Those events centered around one great fact: Men discovered anew the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This discovery made the Reformation necessary. It gave power to the Reformation movement. It is what makes men today reform their lives, their homes, their churches, their society. What was this "re-discovered Gospel?" We find it summed up in two phrases from the fifth chapter of Romans: Rom. 5:1 "Being therefore justified by faith..." and Rom 5:9: "Being now justified by his blood..." In these two phrases we find the heart of the Re-discovered Gospel which caused the Reformation. Let us consider then these questions: (1) How was this Gospel rediscovered? (2) Where was it discovered? (3) What was this Gospel?

I. How was this Gospel rediscovered? Imagine yourselves as living 450 years ago in the year 1500. Civilization centers in Europe, particularly in the South. There is only one Church, the Roman Catholic. Everyone belongs to this church, from birth. The Pope at Rome exercises both political and military control over most of Europe. He can make kings or break them. His armies carry out his will. He exacts tribute and taxes where he pleases. Looking upon himself as the divinely appointed head of the church on earth, he takes no backtalk from anyone. His word is law. People shut their eyes to his private wickedness. He is the Pope!

But new events are transpiring. It is an age of reaching out for new things. Columbus has just made his amazing discovery of a wild and rich continent called America, far to the West. Other explorers are finding areas of the world which had been there all along but were hitherto unknown to civilized Europe. It is a new era of appreciation of beauty. Art and literature flourish. Fortunes are being invested in fine paintings and statues, and in the erection of magnificent cathedrals. The world is mad after beauty. Scientists are beginning to discover the laws of God's universe. Here and there scholars are applying this enthusiasm for art, for beauty, for scientific accuracy, to the study of the Bible. One of these scholars, the Bishop of Irenia in a closing speech at a great Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1517 spoke: "The Gospel is the source of all wisdom, of all virtue, of all that is divine and wonderful; the Gospel, I say, the Gospel." This man was more right than he himself knew. Even now there was arising a young man sent from God to proclaim everywhere the long-forgotten, the true and perfect Gospel (Sohm: Outlines of Church History, p. 152.)

This young man was Martin Luther--a young German priest who had tried every method the Roman Catholic Church had to offer but still was dissatisfied with the state of his own soul. Through hours of anguish and inner struggle, coupled with diligent searching of the Scriptures, he had rediscovered for himself from the writings of the Apostle Paul the old long-forgotten truth of the Gospel: "The just shall live by faith." He had no idea of starting a new church. He merely wanted to reform--to make over--the old church. That's why the movement he started is called the Reformation. He did not mean to split the old church--but to protest against the errors and abuses he saw in it--that's why his followers to this day are called Protestants. It was the Pope who spurred Luther on, finally driving him out of the Catholic Church and causing the break-up of the old church. In 1517, Pope Leo X, started a campaign to raise money to

complete the great church of St. Peter's in Rome. The money was to be raised by the sale of indulgences. By payment of money a person could buy an indulgence--a slip of paper which would forgive his sins in this life and in the after life cut down his punishment. The Arch-bishop over him was agent for selling these indulgences in the part of Germany where Luther lived. Half the money was to go to the Pope; half to the Arch-bishop who was to use it to pay back the rich banking house of Fugger money they loaned him to buy his high church office from the Pope. Thus the agents of a banking firm and of this Arch-bishop travelled around selling indulgences. It became a notorious racket. Such abuses were too much for Martin Luther. In the fire of his zeal he nailed his famous 95 theses on indulgences to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. Their central assertion was that no man can buy his salvation, neither has any man--not even the Pope-- the right to forgive sins. Salvation is by faith in the saving blood of Jesus Christ. With one stroke young Luther set Germany and all Europe on fire. The Reformation had begun. The Gospel was rediscovered.

Other leaders took up the challenge. The battle was on. Councils and wars, bloodshed and violence marked the next decades as men found new life and peace and joy in their hearts as they followed Luther and Melancthan, Zwinglin and Calvin, in their rediscovery of the old Gospel. Gradually they saw how the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church was rotten and wicked in its worship of Mary and the saints, in its outrageous doctrines of salvation by works, in the evil practices of the priests and monks. Luther's followers started the great Lutheran Church, Calvin's followers the Presbyterian. A century or two later people within these two great branches of the Protestant movement saw need of more reformation and founded the Baptist, the Methodist, the Brethren, the Moravian the Congregational and other groups. Each time it was because men got tired of listening to what church leaders and church doctrines taught and rediscovered for themselves the true Gospel. *who actually had their origins long before Martin Luther but who were expanded rapidly,*

II. Where was this Gospel discovered? The great discovery of the Reformation was the Word of God, the Bible. Centuries of Roman Catholic domination had pushed the Bible out of the reach of ~~common~~ common man. ~~It~~ Never translated out of Latin, they never could understand it. Luther and the other Reformers were quick to translate the Bible into German and French and English so that all could read and discover the old Gospel for themselves. So popular was the Bible that it had to be chained to the church pulpits so that no one would steal it. When men came to the Bible they saw nothing about Popes, nothing about buying indulgences, nothing about confessing sins to a priest and receiving pardon through them. They saw only the great forgiving power of the love of God in Christ Jesus. They read: "But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved ~~by~~ from the wrath of God through him." Though all the form and superstition and mass of unimportant detail and organization of the old Church, people saw in the Bible that "God so loved the world that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The Reformation of Martin Luther was not the only Reformation. When John Wesley saw that the Church of England had grown cold in doctrine and form he turned to the Bible again and the Methodist Church was born. Such too was the case of the Baptists who objected to the loose living of the members of the Church of England as well as to its departure from the Bible. Whenever men have turned to the Bible and sought to find the Gospel for themselves, it has led to pure thinking, godly living, Christ-like service. This has meant either a revival within the churches to which they belong or a new start by setting up a new organization. We sometimes wonder why we have so many Church demoninations. While this is often regrettable, yet the simple fact remains that they are the product of those who sought to live and believe as they felt the Bible taught

them. Hence this Reformation is still going on today. Sometimes it means a real revival within a church. Sometimes it causes new denominations to start--and there are many such groups in process of formation today. Let us not be too critical of them.. They may have rediscovered the Gospel in the Bible, while we let dust gather on ours and allow the light of the Gospel to grow dim and cold and flicker out in our lives, and in our churches.

III. What is this Gospel? which stirred the church and gave birth to the Reformation which we celebrate today? Look at this passage in Paul's letter to the Romans, from which we have selected two key phrases. Look at the last one first:

A. "Being now justified by his blood." This is what God has done to save us. Here is the heart of the good news. Christ has come and has given his life for our sins. "But God commended"--that is, gave full evidence--"his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Here is the greatest text the preacher or thematic sinner can find. Christ died for us. Sinful, undeserving--or as he puts it in vs. 10, "enemies" of God and opposed to His will--still God loved us in that awful condition and sent his Son to die for us. It is difficult for us to love those who have been hateful and mean to us, or even be kind to them. But God did more than to love us hateful and sinful people. He gave His son to die for us. "Much more then, being now justified by his blood shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him." Yes, this is necessary--God is not just love and kindness--he is also just and righteous. He abhors sin, and sin deserves his wrath, and His wrath means that sin shall be cut off from His presence and eternally damned. That's the position every one of us would be in, did not God also love. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, took upon himself the wrath and punishment due for our sin. So we are saved from that wrath--"being justified by his blood"--that is, God looks not upon the guilt of our sin but accepts the sacrifice of Christ in its place. Hence the sin which separates us from God is removed and we "rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

B. Yet there is another aspect of this Glorious Gospel which the Reformation brought to light again. That is contained in the opening phrase of this chapter. "Being therefore justified by faith" This is all that we are or can do to receive salvation. All the sacrifice of the Son of God is in ~~the~~ vain if we have not the faith to accept it. There is no way to buy salvation, as Luther saw the people of his day trying to do. There is no way to do so many good deeds that we store up merit making us deserve the saving benefits of the death of Christ--Luther as a monk and priest had found the utter uselessness of such an approach. Only by faith--from the heart accepting the free gift of God's saving power in Jesus Christ--and by direct confession to God of our own sins through prayer--only thus may we receive pardon and salvation.

In this paragraph Paul tells us the results of such a faith. There are certain immediate blessings--such as peace with God and the hope which gives us courage to live even under persecution. There are also remote consequences--we have the assurance derived from the proof of God's love in the death of His Son that we will have final salvation and joy and glory in heaven.

Conclusion. Every man must discover this Gospel for himself. Until we do we cannot say we have been justified by faith, and by the blood of Christ. May this be the day for any who know him not to accept Him in faith. May it be the occasion for all of us to rediscover the old Gospel in God's Word. May ours *be all the peace and joy and hope promised to those who are justified by faith in the Son of God.*