

The Gospel

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For one who is acquainted with Scripture the importance of the subject of this pamphlet, the Gospel, will be self-evident. The subject is of the greatest import in itself, and not merely in the light of the consideration that there always was and still is a good deal of misunderstanding with regard to the question what is the gospel and how it ought to be preached. Just a few references from the Bible will prove this statement. Very frequently Scripture speaks of the gospel, either directly or indirectly. It defines it as "the gospel of God" ([Rom. 1:1](#); [II Cor. 11:7](#); [I Thess. 2:8, 9](#); [I Pet. 4:17](#)). It is God's gospel, not ours. He conceived of it; He realized it; He proclaims it. Consequently, if we would preach the gospel it may be regarded as of prime importance that we learn from Him what it is, what are its contents, and how it ought to be proclaimed.

As to its contents, it is called the gospel concerning the Son of God ([Rom. 1:3, 9](#); [Mark 1:1](#)). In the gospel, therefore, God declares something about His only begotten Son, and we must be anxious that by our presentation we do not distort the image of the Son presented by it. It is, accordingly, also called the gospel of Christ, or of Jesus Christ, the anointed Savior ([Rom. 15:19](#); [I Cor. 9:12](#); [II Cor. 2:12, 9:13, 10:14](#); [Gal. 1:17](#)). It is further defined as the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, and our presentation of it may not tend to mar or bedim that glory ([I Tim. 1:1](#)); and the glory of Christ shines forth from it and must be declared by it ([II Cor. 4:4](#)). It is also the gospel of the Kingdom ([Matt. 4:23, 9:35, 24:14](#)), and this Kingdom, as to its idea, origin, realization, and future, must be correctly set forth, whenever the gospel is preached. And such further definitions as: the gospel of the grace of God, the gospel of your salvation, the gospel of peace ([Acts 20:24](#); [Eph. 1:13, 6:15](#)), further serve to impress on our minds the fact, that he who deals with the gospel has to do with something divine, very precious, exalted in origin and contents, which may easily be marred and corrupted by the handling. And, considering that it is incumbent upon the church of Jesus Christ to preach the gospel, this gospel of God, of His Son, of Christ, of the Kingdom, of grace, of salvation, of peace, of the glory of God and of Christ, to all creatures, according to the command left her by her Lord; considering that at all times and especially in our own, there are many would-be preachers of the gospel, that present it as if it were the cheapest article on the public market, you will readily admit, that our subject is an important one.

Hence, I propose to set forth before you:

The Gospel

I. In Its Idea

II. In Its Contents

III. In Its Historical Fulfillment

IV. In Its Proper Proclamation

In Its Idea

Scripture frequently employs two terms that are as closely related in their significance as they are, in the original Greek, similar in sound. They are the words *espangelia*, and *euangelion*, the first meaning "promise," the second being the word we translate by our "gospel." That they are closely related in our thought is evident from the rather common expression that is frequently used and is employed, too, by our confessions, viz., "the promise of the gospel." It emphasizes that the gospel contains a promise.

But this close relation between promise and gospel will become still more evident and will be seen in a somewhat different light if we turn to Scripture and discover that according to it the gospel is essentially the gospel of the promise. Directly this is expressed in [Galatians 3:8](#) and [Acts 13:32](#). In the former text we read: "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen by faith, preached the gospel before unto Abraham, saying: In thee shall all nations be blessed." Notice, that in the last expression you have the promise.

Now, according to the text, when this promise was given to Abraham the gospel was preached unto him. The gospel and the promise are, therefore, identified in such a way, that the giving of the promise by God through Scripture to Abraham is the preaching of the gospel. And in [Acts 13:32](#) we read: "And we declare unto you glad tidings, or preach the gospel unto you (*euangelidzometha*), how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled unto us, their children, in that he raised up Jesus again." It will be evident that the promise made unto the fathers and realized unto us their children is the same as that mentioned in [Galatians 3](#). And it is also evident that here, as in the former passage, the apostle speaks of declaring that promise as being the preaching of the gospel or proclaiming glad tidings. The gospel, then, is essentially, according to its idea, the gospel of the promise, and to this promise we shall have to call your attention in order to explain the gospel according to the very presentation of Scripture.

Very frequently the Bible speaks of the promise. Sometimes it refers to it in the plural to express the riches of its implications; more often in the singular to denote its unity and identity, but

always it is the same promise. It is the promise that is given to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For, having mentioned these saints of the old dispensation and having spoken of their life and death or translation by faith, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews tells us: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (vs. 13). And having reviewed the life and battle by faith of many more of the great cloud of witnesses, and including them all in his view, the author of the Hebrews finally states: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise" (vs. 39).

It is evident from these passages that all through the old dispensation there was a promise, given unto the saints, which they embraced and believed, by which they lived and died, for the which they were willing to be strangers and pilgrims in the earth, suffer hunger and exile and imprisonment, and endure cruelty and mockeries and scourgings. They were slain with the sword and sawn asunder, wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, afflicted, destitute, and tormented. And in the greatness of their faith and endurance and the severity of their sufferings we may see reflected the beauty and riches of the promise they possessed and saw afar off. [Galatians 3](#) is a classic chapter on this subject of the promise. It emphasizes that the promises were made to Abraham and his seed, and that this seed of Abraham is centrally and essentially Christ (vs. 16). It is plain that Christ, the Seed, who is the fulfillment of the promise, is at the same time also the chief recipient of the promise. It states that the law which came four hundred and thirty years later than the promise to Abraham could not possibly make the latter of none effect (vs. 17); and that God gave the inheritance to Abraham by promise (vs. 18). It reaches the conclusion that if we are Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (vs. 29).

As to the contents of this promise, Scripture speaks of it as the promise of the Holy Spirit, who is given to Christ ([Acts 2:23](#)) and to them that are of Him by faith ([Gal. 3:14](#)); the promise of life ([I Tim. 4:8](#); [II Tim. 1:1](#)); the promise of eternal life ([I John 2:25](#)); the promise of Christ's coming ([II Pet. 3:4](#)); the promise of entering into His rest ([Heb. 4:1](#)); the promise of becoming heir of the world ([Rom. 4:13](#)); the promise of raising up a Savior from the seed of David ([Acts 13:23](#)). Hence, it also speaks of the Spirit as the Spirit of promise ([Eph. 1:13](#)); of children of the promise, that is, of children that are born in the line of the promise, by the power of the promise and according to the promise and upon whom the promise rests ([Rom. 9:8](#)). It points out the heirs of the promise, and the co-heirs of the promise, for not all men have received the promise ([Heb. 6:17, 11:9](#), etc.). And at the beginning of the new dispensation it announces: "For, unto you is the promise and to your children and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call" ([Acts. 2:39](#)).

Now, it is important, that we clearly understand the nature of a promise. It is by no means the same as an offer. Also in the latter the person that makes the offer declares his willingness to do something for or bestow something upon the person to whom the offer is made, but for its realization the offer is contingent upon the willingness of the second party, upon his consent to the offer. But a promise is different. It is a declaration, written or verbal, which binds the person that makes it to do or forbear to do the very thing promised. It is an engagement regardless of

any corresponding duty or obligation on the part of the person to whom the thing is promised. A promise, therefore, implies the declaration of a certain good, together with the positive assurance that this good shall be bestowed upon or performed in behalf of the person to whom the promise is made.

This certainty of the promise is, as regards the promise in Scripture, emphasized by the fact, that it is God who makes the promise. God conceived of the promise; He it is who realizes the thing promised; He declares the promise. All of this implies, in the first place, that the promise cannot be contingent, for God is God, and His work certainly cannot be contingent upon the will of the creature. And, secondly, this signifies that the promise is as faithful and true as God is unchangeable. He will surely realize the promise. When He binds Himself to do or to bestow anything, He is bound by Himself and all His divine attributes to realize the promise unto them to whom it is made, for He cannot deny Himself.

And this idea of the promise necessarily implies that it is made to a definite party. An offer that is contingent upon the acceptance and consent of the second party may be general; a promise that binds the promising party and that is certain of realization requires a definite second party. And thus it is in Scripture. For, the promise is centrally made to Christ, and through Him to the seed of Abraham, to the children of the promise, to those who are called heirs and co-heirs of the promise. That this is certainly the idea of the promise is clearly expressed in Scripture. For, we read in [Hebrews 6:13, 14, 17](#): "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying: Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.... Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath!" To the heirs of the promise the promise is certain, because it is rooted in the immutable counsel of the Most High!

Now, the idea of the gospel is that it is glad news about this promise of God. Glad news of glad tidings is the meaning of the word *euangelion*. Glad news it is for two reasons. In the first place, because of the present misery of the heirs of the promise. They are in the world, and in that world they are subject to sin and corruption, to suffering and death. Their present experience is one of sorrow and grief, of affliction and torment, of misery and groaning. And the promise holds before them the deliverance from their present state of misery and destitution. And secondly the gospel is glad news because of the unspeakably great riches of the inheritance that is promised. For, the promise holds before the heirs not such a deliverance from sin and death as will restore them to a former state and condition, but fills their hearts with a hope of glory such as never was conceived in the heart of man.

It stands to reason that this glad news concerning the promise could only be imparted by Him that conceived of the promise, that is God. God proclaims the promise. He preaches the gospel. The gospel that speaks of things which eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard and which have never been conceived in the heart of man can only come through revelation. But this revelation of God, this divine proclamation of the gospel, always took place through the agency of men. Hence, he who preaches the gospel can with authority declare, in the name of God, glad news about the promise, about its certainty of fulfillment, about its riches of blessings, about its progress in the realization of it in history. All through the history of the world there are

in the world the heirs of the promise. They know the promise. They are anxious about it and long for its realization. They inquire about its contents and the nearness of its fulfillment. And he that could answer this anxious inquiry and bring some glad news about the promise was preaching the gospel.

In Its Contents

This must also determine, as will be self-evident, the contents of the gospel of God. If the gospel is glad news about the promise, that is, about a positive assurance of God to the seed of Abraham, the heirs of the promise, that He will bestow a great good upon them and realize for them a glorious inheritance, it follows that the contents of the gospel must always be such with respect to the contents of the promise; and he that declares anything else than the riches of the promise is not preaching the gospel but vain philosophy of men. It must be such with respect to the certainty of the promise; and he that changes the sure promise into an uncertain and contingent offer is corrupting the promise of God and the gospel of the promise. And it must be such, finally, with respect to the promise; and he that presents the matter as if the promise of God were made to all men, or to an uncertain number of men, is not preaching the gospel, and he makes God a liar. For, God does not realize the promise except unto those to whom He promised, that is, the seed of Abraham, the heirs according to the election of grace.

Now, the contents of the promise, according to Scripture, is Christ and all His riches of salvation and blessing. For, it is the promise that God will raise up a Savior out of the seed of David; that this Seed of David shall bear the sins of His people; and that God shall raise Him from the death and give Him glory, exalt Him on the throne of His father David, and give Him the ends of the earth for His possession. He is the promised Seed. The promise, therefore, according to Scripture, implies the assurance of righteousness and peace, of forgiveness and sonship, of deliverance and sanctification, of eternal life and glory, of the incorruptible, undefilable inheritance that fadeth not away. It implies for Christ, and all that are in Him, that they shall be heirs of the world, inherit the new and heavenly kingdom, and dwell in God's heavenly tabernacle forever.

And, therefore, the promise also implies the gift of the Holy Spirit, first to Christ, then also to them that are of Him, that by this Spirit all the blessings of Christ may be realized upon the church. For, it is a mistake to present the matter as if God merely promised the objective blessings of salvation to the seed of Abraham, or even to men in general, so that it depends upon their consent whether or not the promise shall be realized unto them. Very definitely the gift of the Holy Spirit is included in the promise. It is God's promise, it is *the* promise that God will pour His Spirit upon all flesh. And through this Spirit He effectually works the salvation in Christ in the hearts of all His people, in the way of regeneration, calling, faith, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Through that Spirit they are translated from darkness into light, and are kept in the power of God unto the salvation that is to be revealed in the last time. All this is included in the promise, that is, in the positive declaration on the part of God that He will surely bestow these blessings and benefits of salvation upon all His people.

This promise is, at the same time, the contents of the gospel. It is the gospel of God, that is, the gospel of which He alone is the Author and which He proclaims. He alone is able to declare it, even though it is revealed and preached through the agency of men. And as to its contents it is the gospel concerning His Son, the gospel of Christ, so that Christ alone may be preached in the proclamation of the gospel. For that reason it is also the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, for in and through Christ the glory of that blessedness is revealed; and the gospel of the glory of Christ, for God gave Christ and all that are His, His own glory.

That glory of the blessed God, through the glory of Christ and through the glory of the church of which He is the head, must be realized in the gospel. It is the gospel of the Kingdom, for the Kingdom of heaven in its spiritual and final realization is the end of the promise that must be proclaimed in the gospel. It is the gospel of the grace of God, for all the work of God in behalf of the realization of the promise is a manifestation of His sovereign grace, sovereign in its conception, sovereign in its objective realization in Christ, sovereign in its application to His people. It is the gospel of peace, for in it the Lord of heaven publishes peace and bringeth good tidings. And so, finally, it is the gospel of your salvation, for it declares the fullness of your salvation from sin and death into the glorious liberty of the children of God!

We come, therefore, to the conclusion, on the basis of the Word of God, which alone can be our light, that the gospel is glad news about the promise of our salvation, about the sure promise of God, that He will surely deliver us from all sin and guilt, corruption and death, and translate us into the highest conceivable, or rather humanly inconceivable bliss of His heavenly Kingdom and covenant. And the gospel declares: (1) that God objectively realized all the fullness of His salvation in and through Christ Jesus, His humiliation and exaltation; (2) that God subjectively realizes and applies all the blessings of salvation through the Spirit of promise; (3) that He realizes this work of salvation in whomsoever He wills, that is, His people, the elect, they that believe in Christ, the humble and brokenhearted, the weary and heavy laden, all they that mourn in Zion.

In Its Historical Fulfillment

As to the historical realization of this gospel of the promise, we must first of all notice that two factors are concomitant. In the first place, God realizes the contents of the promise, the promised inheritance, historically, step by step. And, secondly, as the realization of the promise advances and approximates its consummation, He also declares the promise, proclaims the gospel, reveals to His people the work of His salvation. That is, He explains to His people the work of salvation step by step; and at the same time He points them forward, in ever clearer terms of revelation to the final inheritance that is to be realized in the day when the promise shall be fulfilled.

Bearing this in mind, we call your attention first of all to the gospel in the old dispensation. In the first Paradise there was undoubtedly an image of the promise, an earthly picture of the heavenly things God would prepare for His people in Christ Jesus. For, there the tabernacle of God was

with men. The first man is of the earth earthy, but is nevertheless an image of the second; Paradise is an image of the heavenly tabernacle of God, and the tree of life is a picture of the eternal tree of life in the new creation. The sun shone brightly, but with earthly splendor in that early morn of creation. But the sun went down, the first things passed away, and the night of sin and death settled upon the world. The first man Adam did not remain faithful to the covenant of God; he fell into the dark abyss of sin and guilt from which he could nevermore save himself.

And in his loins were the elect. These elect, the church of Christ, he dragged with him in his fall. But God had provided some better thing for His people, a better thing that could not otherwise be realized than through this night of sin and death. For, He put enmity between man and the seed of the serpent. He realized His everlasting Covenant. And as He realized it, He also immediately proclaimed it to His people in that mother of all promises: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise its heel!"

Henceforth, the children of the promise would have to walk in the night. But in that night they walked in the light of the promise, and, walking in that light, they lived in hope and stretched themselves to the realization of that promise. In the light of the promise and in that hope they brought forth children, always looking forward to the promised Seed. In the light of that promise and in the strength of that hope which is the substance of all their life, they struggled and fought the battle, they condemned the world, they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth and were looking for the city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

Frequently it looked dark, very dark for the realization of the promise and for the heirs of the kingdom in the world. Dark it was in that predeluvian world, where the church was persecuted till but a few, that is eight souls, were left. But they held on to the promise and received the victory, and in Noah the church became heir of the world in righteousness. Henceforth the earth would no more be cursed. Grace pierced with its blessed light through the darkness of God's wrath and drew the beautiful rainbow across the firmament, the promise of final victory for Noah and his seed.

Dark it appeared when the world united around the contemplated tower of Babel, and later when God separated Abraham His friend to go to a land which He would shew him. But Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Though he and Isaac and Jacob never possessed a foot of ground in the promised land, yet they lived in hope and died in the faith that the land of Canaan they would possess. And they shall possess it. We must not say that Abraham and his seed shall not possess the land of Canaan, for God's promises are yea and amen in Christ. Only, the Jews are not the seed of Abraham, but Christ is and His people are; and that earthly land on the Mediterranean is not the Promised Land, for they all looked for a better, that is, a heavenly country.

Dark it looked when the heirs of the promise were threatened with extinction in the land of Egypt. But they had the promise, and God revealed that He would advance toward the realization of it. And He did realize the gospel as He preached it unto them. He delivered them with a mighty hand, received them into His covenant, gave them the land of promise, and in the land of promise He showed them the promise everywhere in a figure. In prophet and priest

and king, in the land and its bounties, in altar and sacrifice and the service of the sanctuary in general, in all they saw and did and received, they had the glorious gospel of the promise preached unto them.

In that promise they lived in hope, when gradually the shadows disappeared, the holy city was destroyed, the temple was burnt and the heirs of the promise groaned and lamented in a strange land. Dark was the period of the Babylonian captivity, for it seemed as if God had forgotten the promise. But the light of the gospel shone more brightly as the night grew darker. In hope against hope they looked forward. They would ask: Watchman, what of the night? Do you have any news of the promise? When shall the morning come? When shall the dawn of the promise break through our sad night? And all through the dark night, growing darker even after the return from Babylon, they were saved by hope.

It is undoubtedly, upon that dark background that we must picture to ourselves the joy of the shepherds in the field of Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flock by night. Dark it was in respect to the promise. And these shepherds lived in hope of the promise. Perhaps, in that very hour they were bemoaning Israel's misery and wondering about the time of the realization of the promise. What a joy, then, when no human prophet, but an angel was the agent of God to preach the gospel unto them. God had spoken to Zion: "Up! Be enlightened!" Immanuel, the promised and long expected Seed, had been born of a virgin, from the seed of David, according to the promise. And His people must know! Therefore, God preaches unto them, through His angel, and brings them glad tidings of great joy concerning the promise, namely, that it was now fulfilled! Unto you He is born!

And once more it grows dark, amazingly dark, when He, of whom they had hoped that He would deliver Israel, yet did not understand the nature and the way of His deliverance, passed away, under the wrath of His enemies in the darkness of the bloody tree! But God realized the promise. He raised Jesus from the dead for our justification, exalted Him in the highest heavens, and gave Him a place at His right hand. And He gave Him the Spirit of promise, and this Spirit of promise He poured out into the church. And by this Spirit of promise He realizes all the blessings of the promise unto all the elect! Always God explains to His people the work of His grace, declaring unto them the blessed gospel, glad news about the promise, that now it is fulfilled and that the Kingdom of heaven is come indeed!

Even now the promise has not reached its final con-summation. Still the heirs of the promise are in the world. Still they are walking as pilgrims of the night. Still they are strangers in the world and they seek the things that are above. Still they are killed all the day long, and God might indeed be ashamed to be called their God, were it not for the fact that He has prepared them a city. And the coming, the final realization of that city and the beauty of its glory He declares unto the heirs of the promise while they are in the midst of the darkness of this present night, in order that even now they might walk in hope and lift up their head in the expectation of the fullness of glory promised unto them with an oath of the God of their salvation! The gospel is glad news about the promise and reaches into the heavenly city that shall descend out of heaven from God!

In Its Proper Proclamation

Even from the foregoing it will be perfectly evident that, as far as the proclamation of the gospel is concerned, it can never be an offer of salvation. The gospel is the glad news God gives us of His promise. It must therefore be preached, proclaimed. It can never be offered. But thus it is also constantly presented in the Scriptures. Jesus *preaches* the gospel of the kingdom ([Matt. 4:23](#), [9:35](#), [24:14](#)). Paul *preached* the gospel among the Gentiles, ([Gal. 2:2](#)); he *preached* the gospel of God among the Thessalonians ([I Thess. 2:8, 9](#)). Or, he spake unto them the gospel of God with much contention ([I Thess. 2:2](#)). Or, again, he testified of the gospel of the grace of God ([Acts 20:24](#)). And frequently also the word "evangelize" or "to declare glad tidings," is used to denote the preaching of the gospel of God in Christ ([I Cor. 15:1](#); [II Cor. 11:7](#); [Gal. 1:11](#); [Rev. 14:6](#)). But never do we find in all the Word of God that the gospel is offered, or that it presents the promise of God as a well-meaning offer of salvation to all that hear the preaching of the gospel. This surely is an invention of men.

And as we remarked before, this stands to reason. A promise cannot be offered. An offer is a conditional proposition. It depends and is contingent on its consent by man. But a promise is binding on Him that promised. And this is especially and emphatically true of the promise of the gospel. In the first place this is so because it is God that promised and He cannot lie. He is faithful and true and will surely realize His every word. Secondly, this is so because the things promised cannot possibly be realized, or even partly realized, by men. If the gospel were the preaching of a conditional offer there is nothing in the condition man can possibly fulfill. He cannot of himself believe the promise; he cannot even will of himself to believe in Christ. He cannot repent and turn unless God first realizes the promise unto him. In other words, the promise of God is either unconditional, or it is impossible of realization. And in the third place, the promise is given, not to all, but to a certain party, to the seed of Abraham, to those that are of Christ, to them that are in sovereign grace elected unto salvation from before the foundation of the world.

And this leads me to my final remark, namely, that the preaching of the gospel must needs be such, that it points very definitely to those for whom the promise is intended. A gospel for all is a gospel for none. It may soothe the conscience of the wicked and send him to hell with an imagined hope, but it will not comfort the elect, for the simple reason that such preaching does not mention them as heirs of the promise. The gospel must be so preached that it very definitely declares to the heirs of the promise that it is for them.

Indeed, do not misunderstand me, the particular gospel must be proclaimed within the hearing of all. Partly, because we do not know the elect; partly because it is the will of God that even the reprobate shall hear the gospel of salvation by way of faith and repentance, that sin may appear to be sin indeed, the gospel in its preaching must be general. But in this general preaching of the gospel the heirs of the promise must be called by name, in order that they may know that the sure mercies of David are for them. Not as if they can be mentioned by their natural name. But under and through the preaching of the gospel God gives them a new name, a spiritual name, by which they may know that He intends the promise for them. Objectively they are the

elect. But according to their spiritual name, wrought by the Holy Spirit of promise in their hearts, they are the weary and heavy-laden, those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the contrite and broken-hearted, they that have learned to place all their hope and expectation only in the blood of Jesus Christ their Lord, who loved them and died for them and was raised for their justification! To them the promise of God is yea and amen. They shall never be ashamed. They shall be kept in the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

The preaching of the gospel must surely comfort them that mourn, in order that they may have light in darkness and the joy of hope in the midst of the suffering of this present weary night!