

The Power In The Gospel

Ephesians 3:7

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. (Ephesians 3:7)

The gospel has a very special power that resides within it. In Romans 1 we read that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

And that is what we will talk about here today, because this day, in this week, in the life of the Lord Jesus was Him going about the gospel in its purest form.

With that in mind, may I say that it has been my earnest desire over these past few days, to ponder the events of each of the days of this very special week in His life!

To say that "His week" began much earlier than last Sunday, would be the ultimate understatement, because we know from many of the other scriptures that the things which took place during this week really were worked out long before Jesus came to us as a little baby in a manger.

All these events were part of a "master plan" carefully orchestrated within the Trinity by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, all three agreeing to every wretched misery, and to every wonderful accomplishment that would take place.

It was that masterful thing that only God is able to do, that of Him making all of the plans and guiding men's steps, while at the same time allowing men their wretched "free will" entanglements, men thinking that they were in charge of their actions, and to some extent that being so, but only with the "Hand of God" deciding the final steps.

I have spoken on other occasions about a Christian song that we sang often some years ago. The song pictures God as being the "Great Director" in the "master symphony" of mankind that is being played out daily on the earth. And I like that allegory. It helps me to better understand each of our roles, His, mine and other people's.

And if we look carefully at the cast of players, we can see that He chose each one very well. And each did exactly as they were supposed to do, the disciples, especially Judas, the chief priests, Pilate, the soldiers and on and on.

We'll begin our thoughts today with Saturday a week ago. Jesus spent that evening with His disciples and with friends in Bethany where He ate a meal and where Mary

gave one of the most precious examples of worship ever given as she anointed Jesus' feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair.

The next day, the first day of the week, Jesus and His disciples came into Jerusalem, Jesus riding on the donkey's colt, with people spreading their garments and palm branches before Him, crying "Hosanna in the highest, blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord". On that day, the people received Jesus with such great excitement.

On the second day, Jesus returned to Jerusalem. And entering the temple, He drove out the money changers and profiteers, declaring "you have made my Father's house into a den of thieves".

On the third day, Jesus came again to the temple, but this time He taught those who would listen, using parables and precious words of wisdom. And some received His word eagerly, but others, the Scribes and Pharisees did not.

On that day, Jesus gave the parable of the "Wicked Vine-growers who killed the Master's Son", a parable that foretold His own death.

He also gave the parable of the "Talents", reminding us that we will be held accountable for all that we do and don't do with the gifts and the talents that we receive during this life.

Jesus also gave the parable of the "Widow's mite", reminding us to be willing to surrender all that we are and all that we have to God.

He also gave the parable of the "Ten Virgins", warning us to always be ready for His return.

And He also gave the parable of the "Great wedding feast of the Son", the one that tells about how the first guests who were invited would not come, and then how the Master of the Feast sent out to the highways and byways and invited any and all to come", a significant invitation, one that the Apostle Paul would later issue to all gentiles everywhere, to you and me.

On this same day, Jesus would also give the people the "greatest commandment", saying,

37 . . . "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

And it was sometime during this day that Jesus spoke at length about the coming “end times” during which men will suffer an awful tribulation.

And He also gave warning about the great “judgment day” that will take place when men breathe their last here on the earth and we stand before Him, a very frightening day for many, but a glorious day for others, those who have received the Son as Savior and Lord.

And it was on this day that the religious leaders began to conspire in earnest about how they might kill the Lord Jesus.

On the next day, Wednesday, Jesus began His plans for His “Last Supper” with His disciples, sending some of them on ahead to arrange for the “upper room” accommodations.

It was also on that day that Judas began his betrayal of the Lord Jesus, talking to the religious leaders about how they might take Jesus captive.

Many have questioned Judas’ motives and intents, “Did he realize that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus? Would he have done what he did had he known their real intentions, because in the next few days He would grieve and then go out and kill himself?”

All these are questions from the “human side” of the equation and they are to some degree valid. But when taken in the context of God’s design for the redemption of men’s souls, we can also see God’s hand “over-arching” over all that took place, with Judas, with the religious leaders, and later with the soldiers and Pilate and the screaming crowds.

But for the time being, Jesus went about His plans, beginning with the next day’s events in the upper room. On that last day before He was betrayed and taken before the Chief Priests, Jesus went about giving final teaching and instructions to His chosen few.

He told them much about how they should conduct their daily lives, with great love for one another. And He told them again about who He really was, the “Son of God”, He in the Father and the Father in Him, that He was the Vine and those who would receive Him were the branches, and that God the Father was the Vine-dresser, carefully pruning each branch.

He told them, and us, that He is the Way, the only Way to eternal life, and that He was “Truth” the only real “Truth” that exists among men, and that in Him is “Life itself”, and there is no other life outside of Him.

They ate what would be His last supper with them, and it was during the meal that Jesus arose and showed true humility and purpose as He knelt and washed each of His disciple's feet.

In washing their feet, He demonstrated the words He had given earlier when He said

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

These words "gentle and lowly of heart" are words of true humility, not just the kind of humility that esteems others better than yourself, but also a depth of humility that is willing to suffer humiliation so that others might be blessed.

"Praise be to God!"

It was also during this meal that Judas began the final steps of his wretched betrayal. Satan entered into his soul and he went out and set into motion his deadly conspiracy with the Jewish leaders.

And here at this meal we see also that satan really knows how to work a crowd to do his bidding. Here, satan had Peter trying to talk Jesus out of being crucified. And he also had some of the other disciples arguing among themselves.

And here we see how easily Jesus dispatched satan with a simple "flick of His tongue" saying, "get thee behind me satan". Satan truly is very "crafty", but none of his wiles would be able to deter God's plans.

After the meal, Jesus gave his "High-Priestly prayer" for the disciples, and us, and then He went out to the Garden of Gethsemane to commune with God the Father before He was crucified.

There, He agonized for long hours, crying out to His Father to let this cup pass from Him.

Folks, this was no small matter. It was not so much His physical suffering and death that Jesus agonized about, but rather it was that "He who knew no sin was about to become sin for you and me". The Pure and Holy God of all creation was about to become the most wretched of sinfulness in order that you and I might be redeemed.

His agony was so great that His earthly body was not able to withstand the suffering, so much so that He sweated great drops of blood.

But, as we are told in Hebrews 12,

2 . . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Jesus knew that He would need to stand up to the suffering that would take place. The prize, our redemption, was far too important. And we are so thankful that He did. His final words on the matter were, “Not My will Father, but thine be done”.

It was then shortly thereafter that Judas and the soldiers came for Jesus, and His misery began.

Over the next several hours, of late Thursday and on into Friday morning, He would be dragged before the courts of men, humiliated and slapped in the face. He would be accused before Pilate, brutally beaten by the Roman soldiers, and then sentenced to death on the cross.

As all these things were taking place, many men and women would be given the opportunity to make their “free will” choices. As we said a moment ago, satan really does know how to work a crowd. We are able to see the vilest of mistreatment being put upon Jesus, from the religious leader, from Pilate, from the soldiers and from the great crowds who were gathered.

Jesus’ own disciples ran away in fear, Peter denying that he even knew Jesus.

Pilate sensing in his own soul that crucifying Jesus was not right, and even being warned by his wife not to do it, he still ultimately took the easy way out as he passed the sentence the Jewish leader demanded.

And so then we arrive at the final moments of His life. As He hung there on the cross with the two thieves on either side of Him, ever-ministering and ever-interceding, He said His last words and then He died.

What took place over the remainder of that day and over the next three days, we know a little bit about, but for the most part of it, we can only imagine, because the scriptures are mostly silent about those events.

We know that He was taken down from the cross by two men, Joseph of Arimathea, and a recent convert, Nicodemus. And from there, He was placed in a tomb that had a stone rolled in front of it and guarded by a troop of soldiers.

Again, as to exactly what took place while He was buried, we can't know much. But we can know for sure that He was going about whatever it would take to redeem the souls of men.

It was probably then that He suffered the punishment that I myself deserved to suffer in hell, the penalty that I should have paid, because it was me who did all those wrong and sinful things, my lying, my stealing, my immorality, my corruption. It was me, not Him. But it was Him who chose to suffer that I might have life.

Thankfully, His journey did not end in the grave. He had one more step to take, one last eternal accomplishment before everything He came to do was truly completed. He needed to be resurrected from the death He had suffered. And that was what took place on this last day of His week.

Praise be to God, Jesus was eternally resurrected to new life. Death was defeated and eternal life was won for all who would receive Him as Savior and Lord.

And that brings us back to our scripture text for today,

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. (Ephesians 3:7)

Within all these scriptures that I have been recalling for us this morning, we have restated what the words of 1 Corinthians 15 call the "gospel". Listen to these words!

1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless (else) you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

This, dear friends, is the gospel in its simplest form. Jesus died for our sins. He was buried. And on the third day, He was raised from the dead.

But how was all of this accomplished, especially the raising of Jesus back from death unto life. It was, once again, by the amazing, miraculous, mighty working power of God's Spirit.

The salvation that was brought to you and me by the resurrection of Christ was all made possible by the mighty working power of God's Holy Spirit.

Listen to how this truth of our salvation is expressed in Romans 8:9-11.

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (Romans 8:9-10)

And listen carefully . . . verse 11

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11)

This folks is the mighty working power of the Holy Spirit as He ministers this gospel to those who receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

My question for you today is, “Has this gospel, this death, this burial and this resurrection taken place in your personal life”? Has it truly taken place? Because it must, else you will never see the kingdom of God, not on this earth and not in heaven to come.

This is the mighty working power of God’s Spirit and He wants to do His work in you. Those words from Romans 8, verse 11 again . . .

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11)

This is the last step that Jesus took on this day in the last week of His earthly life, to provide a resurrection power for you and for me. And He invites you and me to join with Him in His resurrection.

I’ll close with the greatest invitation ever given, the invitation given by the Lord Jesus Himself in Matthew 11:28-30.

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)