

The Gospel of Christ

by James Blaine Chapman

The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation and has the power to transform lives.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:8, Acts 9:1, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Philippians 1:21, Colossians 2:2, 1 Timothy 1:15, 2 Timothy 4:6, Hebrews 6:19

Topics: "Gospel Message", "Christian Salvation"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches about the unashamed proclamation of the gospel of Christ, emphasizing its power to bring salvation to all who believe, regardless of background or status. He highlights the personal testimony of Paul, who willingly paid the price to follow Christ and boldly shared his faith despite persecution. Chapman discusses how the gospel transforms lives, challenges intellectual skepticism, surpasses social standards, and meets practical needs, providing inner assurance, power for holy living, and eternal hope.

Transcript

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16).

The term "gospel" includes within its scope all the essentials of that revelation that are given to us in the Bible and in Christ. It includes the facts of the life and death of Jesus, and of His resurrection from the dead and ascent into heaven. It includes the doctrines of grace as related to the salvation and destiny of men. It involves the power of God extended by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in conviction for sin, regeneration of the heart and sanctification of the nature. In substance our text says, "I am not ashamed of Christianity for it does for men what they need to have done in the interest of their present well-being and their future destiny."

First, the text is just the personal testimony of Paul. Here is a man who, according to the calculations of men, paid a great price to become a Christian. He was of proud pedigree, of high social and religious reputation, and of honorable occupation. He had about all one could have in the way of advantage and honor, and was, withal, blessed with a good conscience, feeling that his zeal for the religion of his fathers was fully justified. But on his way to Damascus he met Jesus Christ, and immediately all the things which he might have counted gain, he immediately transferred to the other side of the ledger and counted them loss that he might win Christ. He was not reluctant to pay the price, but made his decision immediately and set forth on his new course with the zeal of his former life purified and increased.

As a young convert, Paul set about telling others of his great find. He brooked the persecution which his course stirred up, and found grace and courage to face all opposition without faltering. His testimony was direct and unequivocal. He told when and where he met Christ, what the Master said and did, what his own response was, and what his considered purpose relating to the future was.

Being a man of intellectual honesty, he found it necessary to get aside to think things through. He was wise in that he took Christ immediately by faith and received Him into his heart, and then in the joy and assurance of his new-found love, set about to make his intellectual adjustments. Some, with less wisdom, have waited to receive Christ until they could work out their problems, and in so waiting they have become hard faster than they became wise, and so have lived and died without knowing the joys of sins forgiven, and possessing the bliss the blood-washed know. In the isolation of the deserts of Arabia, Paul the Christian Jew spent three years working out the faith of his fathers in relation to his new-found knowledge of Christ. At the end he came out to confer with the apostles at Jerusalem, and to discover to his immense joy that what he had received "by revelation" was in exact agreement with what the apostles, who had been with Jesus from the days of the preaching of John, had learned and taught.

Being a man of practical sincerity, Paul could not join the legalists in requiring circumcision of Gentile Christians or in making any sacrament of the Jews or of the Christians a saving ordinance. He would circumcise Timothy that he might not offend the unconverted Jews of that part, and he would baptize a few converts when there was no helper to attend to this sacrament, but he would count only the circumcision of the heart as essential, and the baptism with the Holy Ghost as the full symbol of the new dispensation of grace. He utterly refused to be brought into bondage to holy days and new moons or to allow menus or shibboleths to substitute a holy heart and a truly righteous life.

Equipped with this panoply, Paul set forth as an apostle of Christ to put his doctrines and his life to every form of test. This he did of both choice and necessity. Feeling it was woe if he did not preach, he determined to do what would otherwise become a duty before it had time to become such, and while it yet remained in the sphere of privilege. In going forth thus willingly, he was unable to avoid the tests incidental to such a course. He had to compare what he had with what others held, and in all sincerity, he had to face the results, be they encouraging or otherwise.

When Paul set forth to preach, and until the end of his earthly day, Judaism was in bloom. The temple at Jerusalem was still standing, and here the Levites sang and the priests -- robed sons of Aaron -- ministered at the altar. Every morning and every evening the people knelt on their housetops to pray while the black smoke of the rekindled fire of the burnt offering and the white smoke of the incense offering ascended toward heaven. There were beauty and splendor in the ritual, and there was pity in the hearts of the worshipers there for all who could not class themselves as sons of Abraham. Paul knew what this pride of race and religion meant, and he had to come with his simple gospel of Christ and make comparisons. Christians had no edifices. The ritual was short and unimpressive. On the point of form and appearance, the Jews were ahead, but Paul looked on into the inner power, and found that the gospel would do for men a more fundamental thing than the finest ritual in the world. The religion of the Jews could give appearance and polish, but the gospel of Christ would make bad men good, transform sinners into saints, and make the chief of sinners an apostle of Christ. The religion of the Jews affected but the outside, the gospel of Christ made "all things new" by making the heart new, so being enamored of reality, Paul could stand there within the confines of the sacred temple and say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" in comparison with the religion of the Jews; for the religion of the Jews deals with the outside and is confined to the Jew, while the gospel of Christ reaches the depths of the heart and is applicable to

the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

In the course of time Paul went with the gospel message to Ephesus, where stood the temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The huge and beautiful edifice housed a little black image of Diana which was said to have fallen down from Jupiter. Silversmiths made fortunes molding and selling facsimiles of that original image; a thousand priestesses ministered at the altar, and all the world knew that Ephesus worshipped Diana. Shut up within their narrow provincialism, the dwellers at Ephesus felt themselves superior to others, and developed an arrogant pride with reference to all other religions. To the shadow of that marvelous temple came Paul the Christian to preach the incarnation, matching the story of Diana with the message of Bethlehem's manger, and placing over against the fanatical idol worship of the Ephesians the fact of the indwelling Christ. He saw men lose their equilibrium over the prospect of a loss of trade, and spend hours in an uproar by which they hoped to drown out all objections and explanations. Paul stood aside and compared with all this the fact that God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. He stood there and made the comparison, and he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," for it has a living Christ in the place of the dead images of Ephesus, and it has transforming power where they have only pointless frenzy. Right under the shadow of that great temple Paul had a revival, set in order a Christian church, and remained for months to preach and testify to all the visitors from Asia, as well as to the inhabitants of Ephesus itself, that Christ is peerless, and His gospel without an equal.

From Ephesus Paul passed to Macedonia, in obedience to the direction which came to him in a vision of the night. In Macedonia he came to Philippi, the chief city, which was the center of commercialism, where many were so taken with making money that they had no time for prayer meetings, and turned such matters over to the few women whose hearts stirred them to meet by the water course to seek the favor of God. In Philippi money was mammon, and mammon takes the place which rightly belongs to God. In Philippi a man's importance was judged by his hoard of gold, and his wisdom by his ability to get earthly gain. Paul and Silas walked about the city in search of opportunities. They stopped at the woman's prayer meeting, and by their testimony led the "worker in purple" to the Lord, and thereafter found lodging at her house while they continued their search for souls. At the end of a week their faith reached up for the conversion of the little show girl who amused the crowds by making fun of the Christians. Her conversion led to the scourging and imprisonment of the apostles, but in the jail God gave them grace to sing praises at midnight, and by supernatural means they were loosed from their bands and their prison gates swung wide. At that late hour the jailer and his family were converted, and the Church was founded in money-mad Philippi. Paul, the Christian, stood aside and compared what he had with what Philippi offered, and he affirmed, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" in comparison with the money of Philippi; for this is but the gold which perishes, but Christ gives the true riches that fire cannot destroy, and which we will have later when we need it more and can keep it longer. Christ is better than money, for although money may buy some things we need and want, Christ is all we need and want immediately. The rich are poor if they have not Christ, and the poor are rich when they possess Him in His fullness. The true Christian may boldly say, "Give me Jesus, and you may have all this world."

Paul went to Athens, the intellectual capital of the world. He ascended to the top of Mars' Hill where gathered the disciples of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others of the Greek masters, for the purpose of either hearing or telling something new. These men deified the intellect and accounted speculation the highest occupation of man. Within their group was represented the best the mind of man had ever produced. When they asked Paul, "What is new?" he began at once to preach Christ unto them. He

started where the Greeks left off. After lifting an altar to the honor of every known god, conscious that their pantheon was not complete, they lifted yet another and inscribed it to "The Unknown God." This One whom they acknowledged they did not know, Paul declared unto them. Standing there in a city world-famed for intelligence, Paul preached Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Surveying the array of brains before him, Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" for in Him is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and the greatest wisdom in the world is that which one exercises when he takes into his life the power to live forever. Socrates, in his dying hour, looked toward the West and said to his disciples, "I think I see the golden isles. But, oh, that we had a stouter ship and a stronger hope!" And here Paul stood among the disciples of that great teacher to set before them that stouter ship and stronger hope for which their master prayed. The gospel passed this test also, and from the top of Mars' Hill there came some who found in Christ what philosophy could not give them -assurance of salvation from sin and a home in heaven.

From Athens Paul went on to Corinth, the pleasure capital of the ancient world. Situated on a narrow peninsula, with beaches near on two sides, Corinth was adapted to the role which she took. Her best known citizens adopted pleasure as their goal. Their motto was, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." They despised conventionalities, and substituted license for liberty. Men let their hair grow long, women cut their hair short, and in both cases the unseemly fashion was a badge of abandonment. It testified to all that they bowed only at the altar of fun. Decency did not count with the Corinthians. To them the bodily senses were all. Into this human slime pit came Paul the Christian to preach Christ. Against their assumed license he set up that liberty which Christ gives wherein a man can do as he chooses and still do right, because his heart has been chastened and changed until he now loves the things that God loves and hates the things that God hates. Against their sensual pleasures he set up the unmixed joy and peace that comes to one whose heart is right. He stood there and compared what he had to offer with what the Corinthians had, and he exclaimed, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" for His joys are lasting and His pleasures are forevermore. And from Corinth came trophies for Christ who were washed and justified and sanctified and devoted to Christ without measure. Christ won in Corinth, and Paul won too, and came away more fully confirmed that there is no situation that Christ cannot master, and no need He cannot fulfill.

And now Paul thinks of going to Rome, the political capital and military center of the world. Here was the golden palace of Caesar, the senate chamber of the Romans, and the home base for the legions before whom all the world quailed and bowed low. To that city where power was the watchword, Paul the Christian was about to come. He was no revolutionist set for the overthrow of the government; but he must match power with power. Rome had power to make and enforce laws. It had power to restrict the wicked actions of bad men. It had power to conquer on the fields of battle. It had power to humble proud cities to the dust. It had power to exalt little men to high places. But here comes Paul with the challenge of a power that will save men from the guilt and power and pollution of sin. He sets this power up in comparison with all the powers that Rome claimed and said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Such power Rome neither had nor claimed to have, so Paul was ahead again, and now he speaks, not as a novice newly harnessed for future battle, but as a warrior who has tried his armor on a thousand battlefields and found no dart sharp enough to pierce it. As "Paul the aged," he speaks as a veteran, and he speaks with the assurance of experience. He speaks as a challenging giant conscious of his strength. He speaks with the authority of one who knows his resources and knows they are ample. The gospel he had preached for thirty years never failed him once. The Christ he declared never let him down. From the eminence of a long and devoted life, now within sight

of its final goal post, he shouts, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

But Paul speaks not alone as an individual, but also as a representative Christian. The experience he had on the Damascus road should have its parallel in our lives. And our gospel must meet its tests, even as his met its tests. There is no way to spare either ourselves or the gospel we preach. We are in a very real world. We are in a trial world -- a world of test and probation. Can we pass the tests? Will the gospel we preach make good in the modern world?

First of all, our gospel must stand the personal test. That old motto, "Do as I say, and not as I do," is invalid. We must practice what we preach. We must be partakers of the gospel we preach to others. The true form is, "Jesus can save you, for He has saved me." We must be able to say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," because when it found me a sinner, it transformed me and made me new. It gave to me new life and new power. It brought pardon and peace to my troubled heart. It brought purity and power to my needy soul. It has proved sufficient in trial and test. It has brought to my inner life the strength that answers to the outer demands which come upon me. Philosophy and theory are not enough. There must be witness and testimony. I cannot myself be satisfied with dim hopes. My soul demands assurance. And I thank God that the gospel of Christ has met these inner needs of my unworthy heart, and I can say as I look back upon what I was and the road over which I have come, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" for it is the power of God unto my salvation, having lifted me from the pit of sin and established my feet upon the unmovable rock, and having sustained me until this good hour.

Then the gospel must stand the intellectual test. Reason does not go far enough; though the gospel goes parallel with reason as far as reason is able to go. The world has always been quick to claim the brains of men, but its claim is often as false as it is quick. At the close of the French Revolution the members of the French Academy listed eighty scientific facts which contradicted the Bible, and upon the basis of this array of reasons the scholars rejected the Bible as being untrue. But now in a little over a hundred years, not one of the eighty theses listed is held by any authentic scholar, but more people read and believe the Bible than ever before in the history of the world. Voltaire, the skeptic, prophesied that within a hundred years from the time he was speaking the Bible would be found only as a curiosity in museums and other such places. But before the hundred years were up the very house in which Voltaire uttered his prophecy was used as a depository for Bibles, and the Bible has been translated into more than a thousand languages and dialects and continues to be the "best seller" in every land where it has been introduced.

The persistent inconsistency of unbelievers is difficult to overestimate. Time and again the spade of the archaeologist has driven the skeptic from his place of refuge, and in every instance the claims of the Bible have been substantiated by the findings of those who dig in the ruins of ancient civilizations. The skeptic who will not believe upon the basis of sufficient evidence is fully as unscientific as the credulous Christian who accepts without examining the evidence. Sober thought and established facts are both on the side of the Bible and the Christian's faith. No effort of any skeptic shall ever be sufficient to dislodge the Rock of Ages.

In the old days, Paul said, "The world by wisdom knew not God," and in such words he set forth a timeless truth. It has ever been so. It is true today as in the past. The old Greek teacher, so they say, sat in the midst of his class of boys, and to awaken their interest, suddenly asked, "Would you not like to know upon what foundation the earth rests?" The boys were instantly clamorous to know this, and the old teacher stated simply, "The earth rests upon the back of a huge turtle." A few days later the keen-minded boys had

finished with this bit of knowledge and came to ask, "Upon what does the turtle stand?" Without elaboration, the teacher answered, "The turtle stands upon a rock." Then when the class demanded to know what sustained the rock, the teacher replied, "The rock is in the water." Once more came the question, "What holds up the water?" To this the teacher replied, "We do not know what sustains the water. We cannot know everything. We should be glad to know as much as we do." This story sounds silly now, but yesterday the successor to that old Greek teacher told a class of intelligent boys and girls that man came from the higher animal species, the higher species from the lower, the lower from the insect, the insects from the orders beneath, and all from "the original fire mist." And there he left them suspended. Such wild guessing is as intellectually insufficient as it is spiritually hurtful. In comparison the Genesis account is as day to night; for the Genesis account posits an adequate cause for all we see and know, and that is a thesis which is intellectually sound. Among the intellectuals there is no occasion to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It can pass this test now as in the past. The Bible and the Christian faith are scientifically sound and intellectually dependable.

The gospel must stand the social test. Who are the people who hold to this faith? What are they like in comparison with others? Where can the world find a man of faith to match Abraham? Where can it turn for a man of prayer like Samuel or Daniel? Where can it find patience like that of Job? Where can it find a logician and theologian like Paul? Where can it find saints like Knox, Fox, Calvin, Luther, and Wesley? Where can it show homes to match Christian homes, civilizations to compare with Christian civilization, and lives to compare on the average with the lives of Christians? There is no occasion to be ashamed here. God's people are the best people in the world, and when allowance is made for all their shortcomings, it is still a fact that nobody lives so well as God's people and nobody dies so content. Even Balaam, the greedy prophet, had to say, "Let me live the life of the righteous and let my last end be like his." The Christian life is the good life, and the Christian death is triumphant.

The gospel must stand the practical test. After all, a machine must do what it is made to do before it can be dubbed a success. It may be beautiful in design. It may be shiny in appearance. It may be costly in construction, but if it will not do what it was made to do it is a failure. And it is like that with the gospel. It was designed to bring salvation to sinners, holiness to believers, victory to troubled saints, triumph in the dying hour, and a home in heaven when all is over. Salvation in its unlimited sense involves all this. Pardon is initial salvation; purity is full salvation; paradise is final salvation. Can the gospel be trusted to bring all these? Yes, thank God, it can, and there is no occasion to be ashamed here.

A noted Hindu in India was brought to Christ. In the church on Sunday morning he gave his testimony, which was in effect as follows: "I found many good things in the religion of my fathers, but I found in Christ something that I never could find there, and that was inner assurance of acceptance with God and power to live the life I knew I should live. It is this positive life and inner power that differentiates the Christian religion from all other religions in the world."

The gospel must meet the demands of experience. It must bring one to know he is right with God and that the Holy Spirit abides within him. It must bring peace and contentment and assurance beyond a doubt. It must satisfy the soul to the point where one can be independent of environment. One cannot always be well or wealthy or popular simply by choosing to be so. These things come partly as rewards of certain modes of living, and partly by the providence of God without much respect to volition, but the gospel must enable us to be content in whatsoever state we are. It must make our beds in sickness; it must reward us with something more valuable than money; it must console us when friends leave us; it must make us complete when everything besides is lacking; it must bring us to where we can say, "To me to live is

Christ, and to die is gain." It must be so complete as to require no supplement. It must be so full as to make useless all measures. It must be timeless like eternity. Its peace must be deep like the ocean. Its joy must be active and exhaustless like a river. Its righteousness must be adapted to everyday life. Its assurance must be a staunch bridge across the river of death to land us in the city of God. Is the gospel this? all of this? Yes, thank God, all of this, and more. By it more than one has come to the end of the way to shout back to those who follow on, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time for me to lift anchor and go across to the harbor on the other side of the sea has come. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." I want my last testimony to be like that. I am living every day with that hope set before me. I plan deliberately to lift the anchor pretty soon and cross the sea to the haven on the other side. In life I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it has led me to the source of power which has transformed me and sustained me. In death I shall not look back -- my treasures are in the sky. In heaven I shall still rejoice that I have not believed in vain, neither labored in vain. In this faith and in this assurance I stand fast today, and I join Paul in declaring that I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Thank God for the honor of being a Christian. In this I have been the gainer from the beginning. Today, after years in His service, I disavow any claim upon Him for reward. He has abundantly rewarded all along the way. The end of each day finds me still deeper in debt to Him. His bounty overmatches my devotion. May God give me grace and wisdom to love Him more and serve Him better until the perfect day shall dawn!

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