

In His Letters to Timothy

by T. Austin-Sparks

The gospel of the glory of the blessed God is the good news of God's perfect satisfaction, rest, and tranquillity in His Son Jesus Christ, made available to us through faith in Christ.

Topics: "The Glory of God", "Assurance in Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound nature of the gospel as the 'gospel of the glory of the blessed God', highlighting that it reveals God's glory through Jesus Christ. He explains that this glory is not merely about the content of the gospel but about the manifestation of God's unique and tranquil nature, which is fully expressed in Christ. Sparks reassures believers, especially young Timothy, that despite life's challenges and personal struggles, Jesus is the answer and source of satisfaction for God and humanity. The sermon underscores the importance of being 'in Christ' and how this position brings peace and joy, as God sees us through the lens of His Son. Ultimately, the message is one of hope and assurance that God's happiness and satisfaction are available to all who abide in Christ.

Transcript

"...the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (1 Tim. 1:11).

"Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God..." (2 Tim. 1:8).

"...our Saviour Jesus Christ... abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel, whereunto I was appointed a herald, and an apostle, and a teacher" (2 Tim. 1:10, R.V. mg.).

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David, according to my gospel..." (2 Tim. 2:8).

We come now to our closing thoughts on what Paul called "the gospel which I preach". "The gospel of the glory of the blessed God". We need, in the first place, just to note the correct translation of these words, because the different versions render them in different ways. The Authorised Version has: "the glorious gospel of the blessed God". You will note how different this is from the Revised Version from which I have quoted above. The latter - the Revised - is the correct rendering of the statement, and the point in getting it right is this. Paul is not speaking of what the gospel is about - the content of the gospel. He is speaking of the gospel which has to do with the manifestation of the glory of God. That may sound a little technical, but

it is very important. Let me repeat: what Paul has in mind here is the gospel, or the good tidings, which is concerned with the manifestation of the glory of God. The glory of God in manifestation - that is the gospel.

Note another thing: "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God". There is a translation which changes that word, and uses the word 'happy' in the place of 'blessed': "the gospel of the glory of the happy God". But that does not sound quite right, does it, in our ears? And yet, if we understood the real meaning, we should realise that that is not an altogether inappropriate word.

There are two Greek words translated 'blessed' in the New Testament. One, which is much the more common, literally just means 'well spoken of'. That is its literal meaning, but in the New Testament it is almost exclusively used in the sense of 'blessed', and is so translated. That, however, is not the word that is used here. The word used here - the second of the two words to which I have referred - is one that occurs far less frequently. It is a word which expresses that which properly speaking is true of God alone: that is, the uniqueness of God as to what He is in Himself, altogether apart from what men think of Him or say about Him. It is just what He is in Himself. You may think what you like, and say what you like, but God is this. This is the word here translated 'blessed'. The word really means that solemn, calm, restful, perpetual gladness that fills the heart of God. If you can get the feeling of that definition, you have got somewhere near understanding the meaning of the word here translated 'blessed'. It is the gospel of the glory of the calm, restful, confident gladness of the heart of God; the good news, the good tidings, of that.

The Good Tidings of the Glory of God

What is this glory of God which becomes that gospel, that good news? It is the glory of God in the revelation of Himself in His Son Jesus Christ. The revelation of Himself. In the Old Testament the glory of God has symbolic form, as we know. For instance, in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, between the cherubim on the mercy seat, the glory was found. The glory covered the mercy seat. It was a light streaming down upon the mercy seat, upon the ark of the covenant; streaming down and focusing there. It was heavenly radiance. It was but a symbol. That which it symbolized is here - the light of God streaming down upon, and through, His Son Jesus Christ. That is the glory of God. Paul in writing to the Corinthians puts it in this way: "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). It is that which is in the Lord Jesus of God's perfectly restful, calm, tranquil, abiding satisfaction.

The Glory of God in a Man

Now, here is a very remarkable thing. You hear about the glory of God. Much is said about it, and you are told that that is what you will find in the Bible; that, if you go to the Bible, there you will find much about the glory of God. When you take up the Bible looking for the glory of God, what do you find? A Man! You find that you are confronted with a Man. You cannot get away from that Man: the Old Testament is always pointing, by numerous means and methods and ways, to a Man; the New Testament, from beginning to end, has one Man in view, a Man always in view. So that you have to say: 'This is the answer to my quest. I am in quest of the knowledge of the glory of God, and God's answer to the quest is a Man.' That is but an exposition of this little phrase, "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God", which is the revelation of God in His Son, Jesus Christ.

God is here represented as being in a state of perfect tranquillity, restfulness, calm, abiding assurance and satisfaction and joy, and everything that can be summed up in the word 'blessedness'. God is represented as being, God is stated to be, in that condition. What is the basis of that state of God? It is just

that God has found a perfect, a complete, expression of Himself in a Man. Yes, we know who that Man was. I am not overlooking or setting aside His Deity, His own Godhead, but I am not thinking about that just now. You see, God created man with very, very high purposes. Indeed, man was created in order to answer to and satisfy the heart of God: and when we say that, we are saying tremendous things. To satisfy the heart of God! There are some people who take a lot of satisfying. Indeed, they never do seem satisfied. Things are always falling short of their standard and their ideal. But you can go a long way, you can go as far as it is possible to go with any human conception of satisfaction, and you still fall far, far short, infinitely short, of God's idea. God is so much greater, so much more wonderful.

We have in the fallen creation but a faint reflection of how wonderful and great God is. Yet even when we view this very creation as it is, with all its faults and weaknesses and variations and so on, we have to stand in awe and worship. We can see just a faint indication of what a wonderful God He is, and of how much it must take to satisfy Him. Yet here He is in a state of absolute satisfaction, calm, tranquil, restful, happy, because all those thoughts of His, all those desires of His, all those intentions of His, and all those first undertakings of His, have now been consummated and perfected - not in the creation generally, but in a Man. That Man answers to God to the very last requirement of that infinite Mind. How great Christ is! God finds, therefore, His happiness, His blessedness, His satisfaction, His tranquillity, in that.

A Representative Man

Perhaps you may think, 'That is a beautiful thing to say, those are very wonderful thoughts to express, but where is the practical value of it?' Ah, that is just the gospel, you see. Do you think that the Lord Jesus, God's Son, came through and took the position of man, and was made perfect to God's utter and final satisfaction, just in order that God should have that in one Man? No, the gospel is this, that the Lord Jesus is representative of all the men that God is going to have. He is representative and He is inclusive. The old and beautiful beginning of the gospel, which you and I, after long familiarity with it, still often need, for our own tranquillity, to grasp more perfectly, is just this: that Jesus Christ, God's Son, is a sphere into which we are called, bidden, invited to enter by faith, so that we are hidden in Him as to what we are ourselves; God sees only Him and not us. A wonderful thing! You have got to put aside all your arguments and all your questions, and accept God's fact. That this phrase, "in Christ", occurs two hundred times and more in the New Testament must surely mean something.

God Sees Us in Christ

The first, and perhaps the all-inclusive, thing that it means, is that, if you are in Christ, God sees Christ instead of seeing you. I have a little piece of paper here. Let that represent you or me in ourselves, what we are. I put it into a book, and that book represents Christ. You do not see the paper any more you only see the book. That is our position "in Christ". That is what Christ means. All His satisfaction to God is put to our account. That is the gospel: when you and I are in Christ, God is satisfied with us - tranquil, happy, blessed. Oh, wonderful gospel! You cannot grasp it, or explain it, but there is the fact stated. This is the gospel of the glory of the satisfied God.

Putting again the test that we were applying in other connections in an earlier chapter, it is just this: that, when you and I really come into Christ and find our place in Christ, one of the first things of which we are conscious is that all the strain has gone out; we have come to rest. A marvellous tranquillity, that is not natural, has come into us. We feel the battle is all over between us and God. It is wonderful; a blessed, happy condition. Now, that is our experience, but what is the significance of it? It is the Spirit of the happy

God bearing witness to God's happiness in our hearts. "The gospel of the glory of the blessed God". The first stage of that is a position. We are in Christ.

Christ In Us

The second stage or the second aspect of that is that Christ is in us. But we must not pursue that to the same conclusion as in the last point. That does not mean that we are seen and Christ is hidden. No, Christ is in us and we are in Christ: an impossible thing to explain, unless perhaps we can put it like this. Dr. Campbell Morgan was asked on one occasion whether baptism was sprinkling or immersion. He said: 'My dear friend, come with me to the Niagara Falls, and stand underneath. Are you sprinkled or are you immersed?' Well, I leave you to answer. But it is like that. Christ is in us. Why is He in us? He is in us as that very satisfaction to the heart of God, in order that the Spirit of God may work in us to conform us to Christ.

And that introduces another aspect of the Christian life: that, if you and I go on continually on the basis of Christ within, our joy increases. That can be put to the test. Stop going on with the Lord, and see what happens to our joy. Get away from the Lord, and see what happens to our blessedness. We shall begin to lament then -

'Where is the blessedness I knew

When first I saw the Lord?

Where is the soul-refreshing view

Of Jesus and His Word?'

Ah, but God forbid that it should be necessary for any of us to sing that hymn. It is not necessary. Go on with the Lord Jesus on the basis of God's satisfaction with Him, and the blessedness increases. God's happiness enlarges in our heart. Christ is installed within as the pattern, standard, and basis upon which God works.

Now, here is something fundamental. Oh, how long we take to learn this! It is simple, I know, but it is fundamental and it is a thing on which we are always tripping up. If we begin to try to go on on the ground of what we are, God stops. If we get on to our own ground, what we are in ourselves - our miserable, wretched self, that God regards as a corpse and a stinking corpse - forgive me for me for saying that - because it has been dead for two thousand years (that may sound amusing, but really it is exceedingly serious): if you get off the ground of "Christ in you" on to what you are in yourself, God says, 'I am going no farther'. All Divine operations cease. We can only continue as we began. We began in faith that Jesus Christ was our substitute, took our place with God and answered to God for us. That was our faith that brought us into Christ. We have to go right on to the end with the same faith in the Lord Jesus, and no faith in ourselves, and God will go on if we go on on His ground. The good news is that God is ready to go right on with increasing blessedness if we will only keep on His ground. His glory is in His Son, and He has no glory in man apart from His Son.

So Christ is out sphere, Christ is our centre, and Christ is our model, and we are being conformed, says the Apostle, until Christ is fully formed in us. Simple, basic: God's glory in Christ being manifested in believers, in the Church, because believers are resting upon God's satisfaction with His Son. That and that only is the way of the glory of God and the expression of God's blessedness, God's happiness. That is the

gospel.

You see, it all comes at last to focus upon this. What is the gospel? When you have said all that you can about it, it is included in, and compassed by, this - God's perfect satisfaction, rest, tranquillity, concerning His Son, made available to us. Oh, that you and I might live without conflict with God, because we abide in Christ! Brother, sister, when you begin to feel miserable about yourself, repudiate it. 'Yes, I know all about that. If I do not know all about that now, it is time that I did. I know all about what I am; I know where that will lead me if I begin to take that into account. I set that aside. It is a fact - God has done it - that, so long ago, in Christ I was crucified, in Christ I died, in Christ I was buried, in Christ I have been raised. It is all in Christ. That is where I stand.' Maintain that position; abide in Christ. Get out of that on to any other ground, and the glory departs, the blessedness, the happiness, is arrested.

Good News for Young People

Paul was speaking to Timothy about the gospel, and Timothy needed good news, good tidings. To begin with, Timothy was a young man. A young man who is a Christian has his own personal problems - he has many difficulties and problems in himself. A young man represents the sum of a life at its beginnings: all the problems of life are resident there. Timothy was a young man. To such a young man, the Apostle says: 'It is all right, Timothy: you may be beset by all these problems and these difficulties, you may be having all this trouble spiritually in these different ways, but Jesus Christ is equal to the whole situation!' Do remember, young man, young woman, that the Lord Jesus is God's answer to all the problems of youth. That is good tidings, is it not?

Timothy was not only a young man, but he was a young man in difficulties of a specific kind by reason of his position in Christian work. Difficulties were coming at him from three directions. Firstly, there was the pagan world. What a challenge that must have meant for a young man in those days! It was a world that had no place for God, no place for the Lord, no place for the things of God, and all the opposing force of that world must have seemed concentrated upon this young man. Secondly, there were all the difficulties of the Jewish world. Paul hints at them here. These Judaizers were pursuing Paul over the whole world, with the determination: 'This man shall be brought to an end - this man's work shall be utterly wiped out!' By every means these Judaizers were set upon destroying Paul and his work and his converts, and Timothy was associated with Paul. Paul says: "Be not ashamed... of me". Association created a good many difficulties for Timothy. The answer is: 'All right, Timothy ; there is good news for you! The Lord Jesus is equal to that - He will see you through it all'.

And then Timothy was a young man in great responsibility in the work of God - in the Church of God. If you know anything about that, you know that you need a fairly sure ground of confidence. He came up against some very difficult Christians. But Paul said: "Let no man despise thy youth." There were certain wiseacres - people who thought themselves to be something - who were inclined to say, 'Oh, Timothy is only a young fellow, you know - you must not take too much notice of him.' They were despising his youth. That is rather a difficult thing to endure. It takes the heart out of you if you happen to be in that position. I remember so well, when I commenced ministry and became responsible for a church, where most of the church officers were old men, one of them was heard to say, one day, 'He is so young, you know!' But I had a champion among them, and he said, 'Don't worry about that - he is getting over that every day!' Well, that is very kind and nice: but that sort of attitude among fellowworkers may well take the heart out of you, when you have to carry the responsibility. Timothy was in that position, but this is the gospel for Timothy: 'It is all right: the Lord Jesus is equal to that situation - He can see you through that too'.

After all, it is really just this. It is what the Lord Jesus is "made unto us... from God": God's satisfaction. Oh, thank God that the Lord Jesus covers our faults and weaknesses and defectiveness. I once read a story - I think it was true - of a certain hotel on the Continent, where people used to go and stay for rest and quiet and detachment. One day a mother arrived with her little girl, and that little girl was just beginning to learn the piano. Every morning, first thing, she went to the piano and strummed and strummed, and all day long she strummed. Morning, noon and night she strummed, until those people became almost distracted, and they were counselling together as to what they should do, when a famous pianist arrived to stay at the hotel. He at once sensed the atmosphere, took in the situation, and when the little girl went to the piano, he went up alongside and sat down, and put his hands over hers and guided them, and there began to come forth the most beautiful music. The people came down from their rooms into the room where the piano was, and sat down and listened. When the recital was over, the pianist said to the little girl, 'Thank you so much, dear; we have enjoyed it so much today' - and all the trouble was over.

Yes, the Lord Jesus just puts His hands over ours. We might make a mess of things; we do, if we are left to ourselves. We upset a lot, do a lot of harm; we are so imperfect, so faulty: and then the Lord Jesus comes, in this blessed way, and corrects our defectiveness, answers to the Father for us, makes good our deficiencies - how? - with Himself, just Himself.

That is the answer; that is the good news - "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God".

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