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## "The Gospel Which We Preach"

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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### **"The Power of His Resurrection"**

*"I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which ye also received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved... The word which I preached unto you." (1 Corinthians 15:1,2).*

*"I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which was preached by me." (Galatians 1:11).*

As it was in Paul's case, from time to time, it becomes necessary to restate in precise and definite terms what the New Testament Gospel really is. What it was that the Apostles preached; what it was that the first believers received; what it was wherein they stood; and what it was by which they were saved. As then - so soon - so since, the Gospel may lose its distinctiveness; may be whittled down; may be confused by additions; may be subverted by distortions; may be sterilized by tradition; may be killed by misrepresentation.

We shall therefore embark upon a consideration of the original gospel; the gospel as it was in the beginning. One thing that we shall discover, or rediscover, in this consideration is that the gospel of the Apostles was an infinitely greater thing than is associated with the word or term today. That immense word needs redeeming from the limitation which common usage so much conveys. When such a phrase as 'to preach the gospel' is used, the idea limits the preaching to certain basic elements or features by which unsaved people can be brought to put their trust in Christ as their Saviour. It is sometimes called 'the simple gospel'. The very use of such a phrase carries with it a fear and a precaution. Perhaps herein lies one of the surest explanations of the poor type of Christian that much evangelism produces, and why so many go no further than a first step, and then go back.

If we examine the preaching, the gospel preaching, of the Apostles, we shall see that it presented the most immense and humanly inexplicable and ununderstandable realities; and such presentation was based upon two essential factors: one, the preacher being endued and endowed with the mighty Spirit of God; and, two, complete dependence and faith that that same Spirit would give to the hearers ability to receive the truth. Apart from these two things the preaching was indeed 'foolishness'. We shall come on this again as we proceed.

Of the many humanly inexplicable and ununderstandable factors, the all-inclusive one - in Apostolic preaching - was the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As an example (and do note that this is what Paul specifically called his gospel) take 1 Corinthians 15. Having made the statement that this is what he preached as his gospel, he proceeded to this long, long discourse on resurrection. Read it carefully in detail and say to yourself: 'This is the *gospel*.' It is not some extra, detached, advanced teaching. It is not an 'ology'; that is 'Christ-ology', 'Church-ology', 'Theology', etc.; it is the *gospel!* It is all gathered into and based upon resurrection, beginning with Christ and expanding and advancing until *all* believers are in a state of immortal glory for all eternity.

In the New Testament the resurrection of Christ is shown to proceed along many lines, touch many issues, and affect all situations, conditions, and needs of the individual believer's life; the Church universal; the churches local, and so on. We are going to pursue some of these lines and issues.

In all the varied and many aspects and effects of Christ's resurrection it will and must be recognized that, while it was an historic fact, it was more than that: it was, and is, a permanent and many-sided power and experience. Were this not the case there would be absent the essential of verification. It would be but a statement in history books, and something remotely in the past. The truth is that Christianity - the individual Christian, the local company of believers, the Church universal - has as the justification of their existence this alone: that they were intended by the Risen Lord to be the *abiding, positive, effective* vessels of "the *power* of his resurrection". Not the doctrine alone, and not alone the historic (past) fact as a tenet of the creed. This is exactly as it was after Pentecost, and it is the only adequate explanation of Pentecost. So we begin there.

### **Pentecost and the Resurrection**

Pentecost was *the* baptism of the Holy Spirit, prophesied and promised in the Old Testament and by Christ Himself. But that baptism has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. Its accompaniments have been made *it*, in part or in whole. The result is that we have statements and teaching - often categorical - that this or that particular accompaniment of Pentecost is *the* essential and indispensable proof and sign of the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit. In this, what may be incidental, related to a time, a situation, a phase in growth, a pointer to something which, when reached, will mean that the pointer fades away - these incidentals, we repeat, are made the whole and are detached from the *inclusive* meaning. While we do not brush aside the accompaniments as of small meaning, we do say very definitely that not any one of them is *the* evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the absence of which particular feature is to constitute a verdict that the baptism itself is absent. "Whether there be tongues, they shall (sooner or later) cease." The same with other *sign* gifts. So says the Scripture. But there is one thing which is basic to all, inclusive of all, everywhere, at all times, and beyond time, which is *the* seal, sign, and evidence of the advent and presence and work of the Holy Spirit, and that is "the *power* of his resurrection". This may be independent of tongues, healings, etc. But *nothing* can be a substitute for, or alternative to, the power of His resurrection, and all other things depend upon it. This surely is the summing up of the Day of Pentecost. Peter's address out of the baptism definitely affirmed that the accompaniments, the signs, pointed to one inclusive explanation - God had raised Jesus from the dead. Other things

came out of that and would have no meaning apart from that. That power was going to work in *many* more and other ways in days ahead, as we shall see. We should never put the mighty power of resurrection into the limited box of particular and partial manifestations, however valuable and necessary they may be for the time and circumstance. In doing so, we limit the Holy Spirit.

That is a comprehensive view and statement as to resurrection in Christ. Let us pursue it along some specific lines of outworking. Firstly:

### **The Power of Resurrection in Morale and Character**

In this connection let us place in parallel columns some relevant passages of Scripture.

*"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended in me this night... Peter answered, If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter saith unto him, Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples"* (Matthew 26:31-35).

*"Jesus answered them... Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone"* (John 16:31-32).

*"Then all the disciples left him and fled."*

*"But Peter followed him afar off." "...a maid came unto him (Peter) saying, Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilaean. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest... another saw him and saith... This man also was with Jesus the Nazarene. And again he denied with an oath, I know not the man. After a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter, Of a truth thou also art one of them... Then began he to curse and to swear, I know not the man. And straightway the cock crew."* (Matthew 26:56,58,69-74).

*"And they all forsook him, and fled"* (Mark 14:50).

Now for the other side of the dark story:

*"Peter, standing up with the eleven, ...spake forth... saying... Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know... ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised... Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified"* (Acts 2:14,22,24,36).

*"And... Peter... answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel... The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob... hath glorified his Servant Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied before the face of Pilate... Ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of life; whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses"* (Acts 3:12...).

*"...their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest... and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest... Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them... be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in him doth this man stand here before you whole. He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation... Now when they beheld the boldness of*

*Peter and John... they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus... Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard... And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:5...).*

That is enough, although much more could be added. It has been said that, of all the miracles of Pentecost, Peter himself was the greatest. It is impossible to read the passages above without being deeply impressed with the immense change in morale which the resurrection, sealed and attested by the Holy Spirit, effected in these men.

We have to allow that the forces against them were very great and terrible. There is, of course, a great difference between physical and moral courage. Peter was a man who had battled with many a storm on the lake, and come through many a perilous tempest. Physically he would not have been without courage. But, however much there was of that, both physical and moral courage failed at the time of the trial of Jesus, and he, with the rest, was reduced to cowardice, fear, timidity and escapism. If we follow this Judaistic antagonism through the Gospels, the life, trial and crucifixion of Jesus, into the Acts, and right through the life of Paul, and note how murderous and venomous it was and what it could do, we are left with two impressions: how inhuman and diabolical were the forces against these men, and how devastating those forces could be to the best natural morale; and then, correspondingly, how great was the change in the same men later. Those forces were reduced to sheer impotence and weakness by what had happened in the erstwhile terror-stricken people.

You will have noticed in the records how they related everything to resurrection. For Peter, the resurrection meant deliverance from the torment of shame, self-reproach, and remorse over the weakness and failure which marked his former life. It meant deliverance from Satan's power. Jesus had said to him: "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat" - more accurately: "Satan has obtained you by asking" (Luke 22:31). (We are back in the Book of Job here.) So, Simon's fall, though based upon pride and self-confidence, was a shaking and sifting by Satan. Christ's assured intercession secured Simon's salvation in and by the resurrection. No wonder Peter, and the others, made everything of the resurrection. To them it was not *only* an historic event, but an abiding and continuous power and personal experience. As such, it went on throughout the Book of Acts, and that Book was never completed. The testimony has gone on in numerous lives since. That word 'testimony' in the original language means more than verbal statements and declarations. It is the same as our word 'Martyr', which carries with it a life, and a life committed. The testimony of Jesus is the fact and the power of His resurrection. This testimony is first seen in the changed morale of those who took the first fierce onslaught of all evil powers, and Satanically-energised men and systems against that testimony. That will be *the* comprehensive evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and it will be called for more than all other features as the end of the age develops.

We shall pursue this testimony along other lines in subsequent chapters.

*[No subsequent chapters were published]*