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"Watchman, what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

GOOD NEWS

The Gospel - the Good News - to be understood in its simplest dimensions cannot be separated from the conflict of the ages. This is the setting in which it is presented in the book of Revelation. The drama of the Cross is symbolically described as a "war" between Michael, and the great red Dragon.¹ Resultant from the victory of Michael, "a loud voice" was heard proclaiming from heaven, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ."² Salvation reduced to simplest terms is two-fold. God's kingdom is re-established; its authority is restored; and its credibility is verified. Strength is provided through Christ so that men, aliens and captives, might be restored to citizenship in the commonwealth of Israel - a nation of overcomers, who overcome even as He overcame.³

In the beginning of the conflict, God was called into question. His law was challenged. His very goodness doubted. His word ridiculed. Angels in heaven accepted the slander of Lucifer, and joined in the rebellion that resulted in their expulsion from the courts of glory. God then created man in His own image so that through man God could reveal His character, His goodness, and His word; and thus re-establish His kingdom and credibility. But man chose to reject His authority; mistrust His goodness, and disbelieve His word.⁴ This betrayal on the part of man only served to darken further the credibility of God, and weaken further the authority of His kingdom.

What was God to do? In the councils of heaven, it was determined that the

One who shared from eternity the nature and glory of God would become a man, and vindicate the character of God in fallen humanity. Sin would be condemned in the flesh.⁵ He would show that by believing the Word of God, trusting His goodness, and accepting His authority, man in his fallen nature need not sin, but could also demonstrate a character of holiness. This the Man, Christ Jesus did. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh.⁵ He accepted a fallen human nature "degraded and defiled by sin."⁶ But in that nature He declared:

I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting; whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak.⁷

His avowed purpose in coming to this earth was not to do His will, but the will of God who sent Him.⁸ Restricted to the limitations of humanity, and unable to see as God in heaven could see, He trusted God's goodness instead of His human judgment. He could pray - "Even so, Father: *for so it seemed good in Thy sight.*"⁹ Little wonder then - when Jesus enshrouded in the darkness of Calvary, unable to see through the portals of the tomb declared His faith in God's goodness, by praying - "Father into Thy hands, I commend my spirit", - the loud voice from heaven proclaimed - "Now is come salvation!" In triumph, the Eternal could send forth an angel clothed in the panoply of divine authority to break the seal of death, and declare, "Son of God, come forth, Thy Father calls Thee."¹⁰

This Paul declares to be the good news of God. He wrote to the church at Rome that he had been separated -

unto the gospel of God, . . . concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.¹¹

In the humanity of Christ, God has been vindicated; His credibility restored; His goodness trusted and revealed; and His word verified. He could point to the sinless life, lived under the conditions and liabilities of fallen man - both environmental

and hereditary - and declare that His law as stated in heaven, revealed in Eden, and proclaimed from Sinai could be kept.

But this is only one half of the good news. Christ has something to say. He told His disciples - "All power [authority] is given unto Me in heaven and earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations. . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."¹² The work assigned by Christ was not merely to make men lip-servants to a way of life, but to permit men to experience a way of life - even His way,- a life of strict obedience to the will of God. This is righteousness by faith in the power of God to keep one from falling to the artful insinuations of the defeated enemy. This Paul declares to be the good news of Christ. He wrote:

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth;. . . for therein [in him who believes] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.¹³

Reducing the acceptance of the gospel to its simplest terms, it is saying by word and life - "Yes, I believe that God is right in the conflict. I choose to accept His side of the question, [We stop our fence straddling] and will join forces with Him against a common enemy." God then provides from His arsenal "the whole armour"¹⁴ that will enable one to stand, resist, and attack the forces of evil. This is the revelation of God's righteousness in Jesus, in other words, Righteousness by Faith. Even the "gates of hell" cannot withstand such an attack.¹⁵

Abraham revealed this simple righteousness. God told him - "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."¹⁶ He questioned what this meant, and how God was his reward seeing he had no heir. God told him to look into the heavens and count the stars if he could number them. Then God said - "So shall thy seed be." The Scripture states - "He believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness."¹⁷ The word in the Hebrew for "believed" is "Amin", which we transliterate

as "Amen". In other words, Abraham *amened* God, and this was counted to him for righteousness. We today hear very few "amens" in response to preaching. It may be that we do not hear much truth anymore, and so therefore, keep silent. But in reality we are not keeping silent. By our means, our time, and our talents, we are either saying "Amen" to God, or we are saying "Amen" to the enemy. By what we support, we are either saying "Amen" to truth, or "Amen" to apostasy. And in so doing we are either being accounted righteous or unrighteous.

When we place man, be he a religious leader, a member of the hierarchy, or just a friend and confidant, where God is supposed to be, we are joining in the work of the enemy to discredit God. How many of us desire approval of men to such an extent that we are willing to compromise God and His cause? Because of this, we cannot see the real issues, and think that those who call sin by its right name are nit-picking. Jesus said - "How can ye believe [Greek - "have faith"] which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?"¹⁸ This is why the message of righteousness by faith remains only a theory, and has not been translated into a living reality.

Jesus revealed a righteousness - a faith and confidence in God - which did not permit Him to bow to the wishes and whims of the religious hierarchy of His day. This proved a source of embarrassment to His own relatives. They "were not only alarmed at His bold statements, but indignant at His denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees."¹⁹ But Jesus knew that "through. . . reverence for tradition and . . . blind faith in a corrupt priesthood, the people were enslaved. These chains Christ must break. The character of the priests, rulers, and Pharisees must be fully exposed."²⁰ The righteousness of Jesus was not only the passive virtues of meekness, kindness, and long suffering; but also the active virtues of truth, and courage to resist evil and apostasy. "While [we] are to give the soft answer that turns away wrath, [we] must possess the courage of a hero to resist evil. . . There is in

