



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3/21/1905

BUT, WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

by Jim Buller

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people— saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” Revelation 14:6-7

These verses echoes the ideas in Matthew 24:14. “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” It also brings to mind the ‘great gospel commission’ in Matthew 28:19-20.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

But, what exactly is the ‘*gospel?*’ As I have asked this questions from different groups in different areas over the years, I have realized that there are several words that we as Christians commonly use, assuming that everybody knows what we are talking about. However in reality, few of us have good working definitions for these terms, or the concepts behind them. Some of these words/terms are: the gospel, grace, righteousness, repentance, salvation, and sin.

For example, some typical answers to the question, ‘What is the gospel?’ have been: simply, “The ‘good news’” —but ... what *is* the ‘good news?’ Or, “The story about Jesus” —but ... what *is* the story? And more importantly, what is the *message* of the story? A somewhat better answer has been, “That Jesus came and died for our sins.” However if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that this last answer is frequently just stated as factual information. So, we must keep in mind that, as true as the facts might be, there isn’t any saving value in facts alone, for even the demons

believe the facts about God, (see James 2:19). These relatively shallow, nondescript responses bring to mind a quotation from Christ's Object Lessons, page 411.

The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit's working. They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up. This class are represented also by the stony-ground hearers. They receive the word with readiness, but they fail of assimilating its principles. Its influence is not abiding. The Spirit works upon man's heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form. "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Eze. 33:31. The apostle Paul points out that this will be the special characteristic of those who live just before Christ's second coming. He says, "In the last days perilous times shall come: for men shall be lovers of their own selves; . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. 3:1-5.

Brothers and sisters, *we dare not be content with shallow, superficial definitions.* May we "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear," instead. (1 Peter 3:15.) So, let's dig deeper as we consider what the gospel *is*.

A good scriptural definition can be found in Romans 1:16-17.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

In the same way that we say 'two plus two *is* four,' this verse tells us that the gospel is, or equals, "the power of God to salvation." Why is this significant? Because our own human power is completely, and totally, inadequate to do what needs to be done. As Jesus said, "Without Me *you can do nothing.*" (John 15:5 emphasis supplied.) Therefore, we must fully rely on the God's power.

Unfortunately, there are those of us who don't sense a need for the "power of God" in our lives. The message to the Laodicean church describes those who say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." (Revelation 3:17.) Maybe this is one reason why some of us are content with the shallowness described earlier. However, for those of us who *do* recognize our need, who believe in what God wants to

do with us, and who consent for Him to work in our lives, the “power of God” will accomplish our salvation.

Maybe we also need to take a look at what is meant by “salvation” here. Before Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the human race didn’t need salvation. But Satan deceived her by saying, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5.) In other words, if you eat this fruit you won’t need God to tell you what is right or wrong, you will be able to decide for yourself what is best, and do what you want to do.

The great deception is that we can separate ourselves from the Source of life to pursue our own agenda, and still live! And ever since Adam and Eve ate the fruit, the human race has been both infected, and infatuated, with the idea of doing what *we* want to do. But this deception is a lie, which should be plainly evidenced by the misery, death, and destruction which we see all around us as a result of following this course of action.

To be saved from inevitable death we need to re-connect with the Source of life. As Jesus said in John 15:4, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” But to re-connect, and “abide” or remain in Jesus, also means that we must give up the pursuit of our own selfish agendas, submit to God’s wisdom and directions, and start bearing “fruit.” Which is why we need the “power of God” to work in our lives. We cannot re-connect ourselves to Him, neither can we root out our selfishness. We can only surrender and consent for Him to accomplish this work in us.

The result of His work in us was pointed out back in Romans 1:17, which says, “For in it,” that is, in the gospel, “the righteousness of God is revealed.” Before we go on though, maybe we also need a working definition for ‘righteousness.’ *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 312 says, “Righteousness is right doing.” So ‘righteousness is simply doing the right thing. For example, God is righteous because He always does the right thing. He always does what is best for all concerned. On the other hand, humans are not ‘righteous’ because when we pursue our own agendas we don’t do what is right and best. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” (Proverbs 14:12.) So when Romans 1:17 states that as a result of the “power of God,” —the gospel— working in our lives, “the righteousness of God is revealed,” it means that when we allow God to work in us and through us, He will have us do what is right. God’s righteousness will be “revealed” in us!

Notice that all this happens by “faith,” as the verse goes on to quote Habakkuk 2:4 which says, “The just shall live by faith.” This type of “faith” goes way beyond just believing the facts about God. As it says in Hebrews 11:6, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is,” that is, to recognize the facts about God, “and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Which brings to mind another familiar verse in Matthew 6:33, which says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Thus, faith believes that it is *worth it* to seek God’s kingdom and His righteousness rather than to pursue our own agendas. Faith places ourselves in God’s hands, trusting that He can, and will, do a better job directing our lives than we can, or would, be able to do ourselves.

So to summarize, the gospel is: God's power working in our lives to re-connect us with Himself, the Source of life, and cause us to do the right thing as we believe in, and surrender to, His wisdom and leading. This is the message that needs to go to all the world before Jesus comes, so that all may have a chance to escape the ultimate destruction of sin and it's results, and to have a part in heaven and the new earth.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Ezekiel 36:26-27

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

POTTERY

If you are in an area that has natural clay, you may be able to make a pottery cook pot that would be easier to cook with than by using hot rocks in a wooden bowl you have burned out of a section of log. So it is worth having at least an idea about how to make pottery. Of course whole books have been written on this subject, and I'm sure there are those who will find the instructions here overly simplistic. But I am only presenting some basics to get you started, not attempting to offer a comprehensive treatment of the topic. And, as with many of the other primitive crafts, it is certainly best to gain some experience making and firing pots using primitive techniques before you actually need to make a cook pot to eat out of in a survival situation.

To make a useable pot, you will need: (1) to find, and possibly mix, some workable clay; (2) to be able to form the clay into a useful shape; and (3) to fire the 'green' pottery successfully.

Testing the Clay

Some areas have good clay, others don't. If you find some dirt that you think might work, test it to see if it can be shaped without breaking or crumbling apart. Moisten it if necessary, and work it with your hands. Some people refine the clay by drying it, crushing it, and winnowing it, before they moisten it. But it is probably best to test it first, before you go through all that trouble. Sometimes it is also necessary to add up to 25% fine sand to the clay to get it to work —more about this later. You will just have to experiment to see what works best for the particular clay you are working with.

As you work the clay with your hands, does it feel like clay should? (If you are not sure what pottery clay should 'feel' like, get some commercial clay, such as the 'laguna' red or grey clays from a ceramic shop and experiment.) Does it stick together, or does it just crumble and fall apart? If it tends to stick together, pick out any rocks or roots as you work it into an even consistency. Then, try to roll it between your hands to make a long 'worm' or 'coil.' If it still stays together this is a good sign. If it doesn't stay together enough to be rolled into a coil, it probably can not be used to make a pot. If it makes a coil, try to tie it in a loose overhand knot. Again, if it breaks apart it probably won't work. But if it stays together, it's worth continuing to experimenting with. The next thing to do would be to try shaping it into a pot.



Shaping a Pot

One easy way to shape the clay into a pot, is to make what is called a 'pinch pot.' Start by forming the clay into a round ball, then poke your thumb down into the center of the ball. Don't try to poke it all the way in one push. Poke it in a short ways, then rotate the ball of clay a little, and poke it in some more from a different angle. Continue poking, and turning, until the hole is almost all the way through the ball of clay.



Next, starting at the bottom of ball, 'pinch' the clay a bit between your thumb on the inside of the hole, and your fingers on the outside of the ball. After pinching the clay, rotate the ball around your thumb a little ways, and pinch it again. Pinch and turn, and pinch and turn, working around and around to shape the sides of the pot. Be sure to start from the bottom of the pot and then work up the sides, saving the rim for last, or you may end up with a plate instead of a pot. If small cracks form around the rim, you may be able to mend them with some 'runny' clay mud, known as 'slip.' Gently work the slip into the cracks. If the slip shrinks while drying, you can add more.

After the pot has been shaped, let it dry, preferably in the shade as the sun will cause the outside of the pot to dry more quickly than the inside, which will increase the chances for cracks. When the pot is 'leather dry,' 'pebble polish' it by rubbing a very smooth pebble all over the pot, especially on the inside. Pebble polishing not only makes a nice smooth finish, it also helps to seal up the pores in the clay so it will hold water better. After pebble polishing, let the pot dry *thoroughly*. It must be completely dry before it can be fired. This generally takes a few days. However, some people speed up the drying process by placing the pots just near enough to a fire so they will be warmed by it, and turning them regularly. As the pots dry, they are moved closer to the fire, but this will still take most of the day, and requires a watchful eye.

Firing the Pottery

Without being fired, 'green' pottery is just dried mud. If it were to get wet, it could lose its shape. But firing makes that dried mud into a solid object, which can then be used to hold water and cook with, without turning back into mud. What happens during the firing process is called 'vitrification.' To put it in really simple language, when a pot is

adequately fired, the small pieces of sand in the clay melt, acting like 'glue' to hold everything together. This is why it is sometimes necessary to add fine sand to the clay.

Be sure the pots are thoroughly dry before firing. Otherwise, as the pot is fired, the moisture in the clay will turn to steam, causing large flakes to break off, or even exploding the pot. Gradually heating the pots at the beginning of the firing process will help to drive off any last bits of moisture.

One of the main secrets to successfully firing pottery is to heat the pots slowly and evenly, and then after firing, to let them cool slowly and evenly. Wind can be a big problem here, as it tends to cool one side of the pot more quickly than the other, so it is best to fire pots on a calm day. Pots can be fired on level ground. However, for these reasons it may be helpful to fire them in a pit, or some other enclosure that will block the wind. If using a pit, first make a fire in the pit to drive off any moisture in the dirt before adding the pots. While this fire is burning, the pots can be placed around the edge of the pit to warm. Turn them regularly so all sides of the pot are heated evenly. After a bit, let the fire die down to a bed of coals. Then, carefully place the pots among the coals, it is best if they don't touch each other. Let the pots heat up a few minutes, then carefully add more wood on top of the coals and pots to build the fire back up. Keep the fire burning vigorously for a while. Then let the fire die down, and wait until morning to take the pots out. Because you are going to wait until morning to take the pots out anyway, it may be a good idea to plan on firing the pots in the late afternoon or evening.

This same basic process can be done on level ground. Or, the pots can be carefully placed inside a stack of wood, and the fire lit at the top of the pile. In theory, the pots will gradually be heated as the fire burns down through the stack of wood. Just remember that whichever way you fire the pots, the important thing is to gradually heat the pots, bring them to an adequate heat for a sufficient length of time, and then let them gradually cool down.

When the pots have cooled, take them out of the ashes. Be careful, as they still might be a bit hot. Brush them off, and admire your work. Check for cracks by lightly thumping the rim of the pot with your finger to see if it 'rings' —which would mean that there aren't any cracks! A pot with a crack might still be able to be used, though. Its life will probably just be shortened.

Cooking with Pottery

Make sure the pot is adequately supported while cooking. And as with firing, one of the main secrets to cooking with pottery is to heat it up slowly and evenly, and when finished, let it cool slowly. So it is best to cook over a bed of coals, rather than with flickering flames. Don't add cold liquid to a hot pot either, and no sudden splashes with cold wash water.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

Yet, O Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; and we are all the work of Your hand. Isaiah 65:8 (NIV)