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DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

OF THE

R. I. QUARTERLY MEETING OF FREE-WILL BAPTISTS,

AT APPONAUG, JANUARY, 1851,

ON THE QUESTIONS,

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

AND

WHAT IS IT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL?

BY MARTIN CHENEY,

PASTOR OF THE F. W. BAPTIST CHURCH,

OLNEYVILLE, R. I.

Published by request of the R. I. Q. M. Minister's Conference.

PROVIDENCE:
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S E R M O N .

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN:—

Jesus said, at the closing of forty days' instruction, after his resurrection, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Every word here is emphatic. "Go ye,"—my disciples—Where? Into "*all the world.*" To do what? *Preach*—Preach what? *The gospel.* To whom? *Every creature.* We repeat it, every word in this great commission is emphatic, full of meaning. The questions before us come into the very heart of this text and ask, what is the gospel? and what is it to preach it? or in other words, *what* is the thing to be done? and *how* is it to be done?

First then, we call your attention to the question, What is the Gospel? To this question I reply. First, that the word Gospel signifies in its most simple meaning, "good news or glad tidings," and is applied to the great fact of Christ's birth, one item, (and a deeply interesting one), in the great mission of love and mercy to man. On this great event an angel, it seems, paused in song, to quiet the trembling shepherds, with a "fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." This is Gospel. The glad tidings of the advent of Jesus. Webster derives the word from the Saxon word Godspell, *God*—good, and *Spell*—history, and defines it thus. 1. The history of the birth, life, actions, death, resurrection, ascension and doctrines of Jesus Christ; or a revelation of the grace of God to fallen man through a mediator. 2. God's word. 3. Divinity, theology. 4. Any general doctrine. The

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word is applied to the history of Christ, Mark 1. 1, and is there called the "Gospel of *Jesus Christ*, the *Son of God*." It is applied to the promise made to Abraham, Galatians, 3—8, "And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the *Gospel* unto Abraham," *saying* in thee shall all nations be blessed. This great message of love and mercy is called the "Gospel of God," Rom. 1, 1. The Gospel of God's Son, Rom. 1, 9. Paul calls it "*my Gospel*" in Rom. 2, 16; and when writing to the Corinthians, "the glorious Gospel of Christ," 2 Cor. 4, 4, and to the Ephesians he denominates it the "Gospel of Salvation," Ep. 1, 13, and of peace, Ep. 6, 15.

We have also in the New Testament, the phrases "the *truth* of the Gospel," "the *faith* of the Gospel," the *hope* of the Gospel," and what Paul calls "another Gospel," which was "not another," that is, was spurious. On that memorable day, when in Nazareth's Synagogue, the carpenter's son stood up to read, there fell from his lips these startling words; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the *Gospel to the poor*, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

And still more. In the more advanced stage of the Ministry of Jesus, we have these words,—“And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations.” The meaning of this mighty word can be embodied in a single verse. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And in another, “It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Each of these texts embodies the Gospel, and the man who makes known the great truths contained in them, has preached the Gospel; that is he has uttered that which involves and implies all that is contained in the Gospel. And yet if he go no



farther than the mere utterance of the words of these texts, he will leave his hearers in utter darkness. For when it is said, "God so loved the world," it will be asked, *Who* was it that "so loved the world?" was it the Hindoo "Lord of the world?" Was it the being the Chinese call God? Was it Mars, or Jupiter or Juggernaut? and unless we have HIM, the true and living God "declared unto us" in our ignorance we worship an unknown God. And so of the phrase, "only begotten Son," and of every word in the text, they need to be explained, expounded, and applied. We proceed then to call your attention, First, to *what* is involved, included or implied in the Gospel, and without a knowledge of which the Gospel is no Gospel to us; is not the power of God unto salvation, or in other words, to give an answer to the first question proposed.

And First. The Gospel involves the idea that mankind are sinners, and in danger of perishing. Leave this great truth out of the Gospel, and it has no meaning. Surely if there were none lost, none in danger of perishing, Christ could not have come to seek and save. But the sad truth, (on which the mission of Jesus is predicated), meets us every where in the world's history, and on the pages of revelation, "All have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God." The saying of Paul is a melancholy truth, "If one died for *all*, then were all dead."

2. And this involves another great truth, viz: *That there is a Law*, and a law supreme, which men are bound to obey. "For where no law is, there is no transgression," and where there is no transgression, there is no guilt, and where there is no guilt, there is no need of a Saviour, no need of a Gospel. The Gospel speaks of a law which is "a schoolmaster," and of a law, royal, unchangeable, unrepealable, which lays its claims on the heart, which demands *all the heart*. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. And thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

3. And this involves still another truth of the highest importance. And that is, *there is a law giver*. That law giver is God; the Maker and Ruler, and Sovereign of the Universe. If there be no God, then there is no law—if there be no law, then there is no transgression—if there be no transgression, then there is no guilt—and if no guilt, then no need of a Saviour—and if no Saviour, then no Gospel.

4. The Gospel involves the idea that sin or transgression has been committed, or in other words, that the great law of love has been violated. This has been already intimated—and we only add, that observation, experience, and God's word, give their concurrent testimony to the sad truth.

5. The Gospel implies that man is a moral and accountable being, having powers and faculties capable of knowing, loving, and serving God; capable of knowing and obeying God's law; capable of knowing what sin is, and capable, after having sinned, of exercising repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that man was made in the image of God, "a little less than God," having God's image and superscription stamped upon him by his Maker, "crowned with glory and honor;" and the sceptre of dominion over all things on earth, (save his brother man), put into his hands—capable of becoming "an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away"—lofty privilege this—and such the Gospel implies was man original.

6. The Gospel includes the idea that men are under obligations *to obey God's law*, and that obedience to it will be followed by God's favor, or a reward; and disobedience to it with his displeasure or punishment. The commands, precepts, persuasions, entreaties, invitations, promises, admonitions, yea all the teachings of the Gospel imply this.

7. And finally, the Gospel implies that man sustains such relations to God, and to his fellow-man, and to the earth on which he dwells, as involves certain duties and obligations in each of those relations.

Such is the message of God to men, and the witnesses are,

1. *God*, the author of this Gospel.
2. Jesus, the bearer of this heavenly message to men, the manifested life.
3. The *Angelic songsters* with their sweet music, the wise men of the east with their guiding star.
4. The *whole college of Apostles*, as their teachings and doings are given us by the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and by their own epistles.

II. We proceed to answer the second question, viz: What is it to preach the Gospel? The term *preach* signifies to publish, to proclaim, and to preach the Gospel is to publish or proclaim the Gospel to the children of men; or more definitely it is—

First. To publish, to proclaim, to make known the being, the character and government of God. Or to make known what God is, and what he does, that man may be able to know the true and living God, in opposition to all false or unknown Gods. The minister of Jesus should be able, with all confidence, to say, “whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, *Him* declare I unto you. It is to make known his natural and moral attributes, power inconceivable, *wisdom* that can never be baffled, and *love* unutterable.

Second. It is to proclaim in all its length and breadth, and height and depth, *the law of God*. To announce it, to proclaim it. To declare its origin, its character, its claims, and its penalties. To explain it, and to apply it to the human family in all their varied relations, circumstances, and conditions. To announce what it commands, and what it forbids.

Third. It is to make known to men their origin, condition, character, duty, responsibility, and conditional destiny. To announce *what man was, what he is, and what he may be*, and conditionally what he *must be and will be*. Especially should his condition, as a sinner, be clearly and faithfully pointed out, and his ability to repent, believe and be saved, be fully made known.

Fourth. It is to make known, the *being*, the *character* and the *Mission of Jesus* to the world. To announce the "Son of God" the "Son of Man," "the root and offspring of David," "the Christ," "the Christ of God," "the true light," "the lamb of God," the "manifested life." To declare Him who came to seek and to save. Who came to die, to rise, to ascend, to mediate, to intercede, to atone. Who came to teach, to preach, to redeem, to save. The Redeemer, Saviour and Judge of the world.

Fifth. To preach the Gospel, is to declare clearly, fully, plainly, and fearlessly what *sin is*, and what are its consequences; and to boldly announce *when* and *where*, and *to whom* guilt attaches individually and collectively, whether it be in individuals, families, churches, states or nations.

Sixth. It is to clearly set forth before the people the *nature* and *results* of true repentance—the *nature* and results of true faith—the nature and results of true obedience. In other words, to make known what repentance, faith and obedience really are.

Seventh. We only add to what has been said; That to preach the Gospel, is to make known to men what it is "to be born again," to be regenerated, to be converted, "to pass from death unto life," to be a child of God, an heir of glory, to point to the mansion, the robe, the sceptre, the crown; to that "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," to those pure, unutterable, unspeakable joys that are reserved for the pure in heart; and to announce to all the world, in the name of God, *how*, and on *what conditions*, the guilty sons of men may obtain this rich inheritance, and "read their title clear to mansions in the skies."

III. To conclude, we offer a few thoughts by way of application or improvement.

First. From what has been said we may behold the *Moral grandeur* and *sublimity* of the plan of salvation.

The plan of mercy is grand in its conception—in its developments—in its completion. The mission of Jesus is full of

sublimity, from the time when the sacred oracles gave intimations of his coming, to the time when he ascended in a cloud of glory "to the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Full of grandeur and sublimity are the annunciations of the prophets, on this topic. Listen! "For unto us a child is born—unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called wonderful, counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace." The scene at the manger, wise men kneeling, and pouring out their gold, frankincense, myrrh, the star shining brightly above them which guided them there, is full of grandeur. The scenes on Jordan's banks, in the wilderness, on the mountain, in the garden, (his brow dropping the bloody sweat,) are full of sublimity; and as he goes from the garden to Pilate's bar, and from Pilate's bar to the cross, his actions rise in sublimity, till on the topmost height of the morally sublime, he cries, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." So deep was the condescension of Jesus, so high his elevation, and so wide the sweep of his benevolence, that they combine the elements of the sublime in its highest forms. In the language of Watts, we may say,

" God in the person of his Son,
Has all his mightiest works outdone."

From the cradle to the cross, from the cross to the throne, the mission of Jesus is full of sublimity; the *sublimity of suffering*, of *patience*, of *love*.

II. From what has been said, we may learn that the *office* and *work* of a *Minister of Jesus*, is one of *high dignity* and of *vast importance*. No ministry of God may exceed it. There may seem to be higher ministers of power and of wrath, but none that can in reality compare with the *dignity* and *high authority* of the Ministry of Jesus. "Laborers together with God," co-workers with Christ, "Ambassadors of Christ," "as though God did beseech you *by us*, we pray you in *Christ's stead*," is language which marks the dignity of their station, and the vast importance of their work. Clothed with

the authority of the *Son of God*, and authorised to act in the name of the Almighty Father, and having the promise "Lo, I am with you always," it transcends all other Ministries! Are there any who doubt? Turn your attention to one of earth's mightiest rulers, the Royal King of God's chosen people, with all his royal emblems of authority, the robe, the sceptre, and the crown, shrinking, quailing and trembling, at the simple annunciation of the Prophet, "Thou art the man," and doubt no more. The monarch of Israel recognised a "higher law," and the higher authority of the Prophet of God. Mark once more. See one of the Roman rulers, trembling before the utterance of one of Christ's chosen ones, although in bonds, and we shall, at once, recognize the high authority of the Minister of Christ. From the time that Moses stood before Pharaoh and said, in the name of God, "let my people go;" or the day when Daniel and his companions vindicated the right to worship the true God, despite the lion's den and the fiery furnace, to the time when "Felix trembled" before an Apostle in bonds, "the powers that be" have been taught that there was a higher law than their own, and a higher authority than that which they possessed. That higher authority is vested in the Ministry of Jesus.

"'Tis not a cause of small import the Pastor's care demands,
But what might fill an Angel's heart,"
And filled a Saviour's hands.

O that the Ministers of Jesus might feel that *one* is their master, even Christ, and when called to obey the statute of blood, boldly declare—we ought to obey God rather than man," and God helping us *we will*.

III. We may learn from this subject how to answer the objection "that it is wrong to introduce the subject of temperance, anti-slavery, and other kindred reforms into the ministrations from the Pulpit." If the Gospel be, what we have described it to be—if it involves what we have said it involves; then the objection is not sound. For it will at once be seen that there is *no sin* which the gospel should not describe, point

out, and warn against ; no sinner, in high or low places, which the Gospel does not address in persuasion and entreaty, or in warning and rebuke ; and that no conceivable circumstances can place a sinner out of the reach of its wide sweeping claims, and that no combinations of men can evade or escape its righteous requirements, or just retributions. " Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished." It is seen that the Gospel has to do with *man*, his *thoughts*, *words*, *actions*, *laws* : and that it demands that, whether he eat or drink, or whatsoever he do, he do all to the glory of God.— And so it will be seen that an anti-slavery lecture is, when rightfully spoken, the Gospel applied to the sin and evils of slavery ; and a temperance lecture the Gospel applied to the *sin* and evils of intemperance, and so of all evils and wrongs. And we see likewise, that the Gospel has to do with *all the laws* of men, either to approve or condemn. And when we are charged with preaching on other topics than the Gospel, we reply with all confidence in its truth, that there is *no topic* that tends to the good or ill of man, but what legitimately belongs to the Gospel. There may, indeed, be wisdom or the want of it, in the topic chosen, as there may be in the *mode* of treating it, but it cannot be charged as not Gospel.

IV. We discover that the mere utterance of words, however true or important, is not preaching the Gospel. A parrot may be taught to do this. The Gospel, to have power in it, must not only be truth spoken, but truth *adapted* to the occasion. It is *adaptation* that gives to the sword of the spirit its keenest edge. It is this which sends the arrow between the joints of the harness, although the bow be drawn at a venture.

A discourse about the river Jordan or the Dead sea, however beautiful in itself, becomes a *dead Gospel*—aye, worse than a dead Gospel to me, when the man-thief " the man-stealer," aided by iniquity, framed into a law, is about to lay his unhallowed hands on me, or my brother, to bear me or him into all the horrors of slavery. I want a Gospel that comes from a heart and lips touched with a live coal from God's al-

tar like Isaiah's. A Gospel that says, "Shew my people their transgressions," that cries aloud, "undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free," that "proclaims deliverance to the captives." I want a Gospel that shall give to him who would bear me or my brother into slavery, his New Testament name, *Man-stealer*; and rank him with murderers. And let him who would call this too severe, suspend his censure still he has well pondered these words of the New Testament. Remember those in bonds as *bound with them*," until he himself or his wife, or his child, has been torn from all they hold as dear and sold into interminable slavery.

V. Finally. We may learn what the Minister of Jesus *ought to be*. He should be one that can clearly discern between things *moral* and *ceremonial*, the *sign* and the *thing signified*, the *shadow* and the substance, between a mistake of the head and obliquity of the heart—between the true and the false. They should be full of light, and full of love, like the allegorical beasts of the Apocalypse before the throne, "full of eyes," like the angel which John saw "standing in the sun," standing in the sun of righteousness, like the knowing, loving, living ones, that worship before God's throne—burning, blazing, brightening ever. "Wise as serpents, harmless as doves;" bold, truthful, uncompromising, sons of thunder," "sons of consolation," "sons of God."

Much like this, very much like this should the Minister of Jesus be. His work requires it. God demands it—the world needs it. May such a Ministry be multiplied, and this nation and the world feel its life-giving energies—its regenerating power, until all that darkens this fair earth shall give place to pure light—until the shout shall be heard, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." Amen.