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AZUSA STREET SERIES

The  
Pentecostal Blessing

*Sermons That Prepared Los Angeles  
for the Azusa Street Revival*



JOSEPH SMALE

SPIRIT  
EMPOWERED  
CLASSICS

INTRODUCTION BY TIM WELCH

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## CHAPTER 1



# Some Misconceptions of the Gospel

We confine the discussion to those misconceptions within the evangelical fold, and of such, the ones of major significance, which seriously affect a true embodiment and illustration of Christian life, experience and service. We summarize the subject under four divisions: First, the popular error that all the cardinal characteristics of the gospel for our life in this world are realized at conversion. Where emphasis is laid upon soul-winning work conversion is made chiefly the goal of labour. That which follows consist of such things as church membership and joining societies within the church, and doing some service either in teaching or occupying a place in the official life, and only exceptionally is the convert seeking the salvation of souls. The greatest things to be attended to by a new-born soul are rarely mentioned in the average church. If the ordinary Christian is plied for a definition of the gospel, what is he likely to say? Perhaps he will make note of the incarnation of the Eternal Son of God; the sacrificial work on the Cross; justification by faith; the new birth; the sonship of believers; and with an observation or two upon prayer, the Bible; the church

and heaven, this is the reach in his conception of the gospel. We think we are rather overstating his definition, for with the notorious omissions, of the things of the Word of God in much modern preaching, scarce any evangelical test in many quarters exists for church membership, and the people's connection with the house of God is becoming largely a matter of mere sentiment, and morals, and custom instead of spiritual life. We hope the reader has assured himself of saving truth and knows that the impregnable rock of a "thus saith the Lord" is the only foundation of a truly Christian hope. We are taking this for granted, for our subject matter deals with truth that can only be known after conversion, and is intended to help *believers* on the Lord Jesus Christ. Where the historical doctrines of the faith are preached, and congregations understand the things fundamental to the experience of eternal life, there is not usually taught the splendid truths which in the purpose of God in His gospel immediately follow the penitent's trust in Christ. We cannot be too thankful in our times that any company of people are being blessed from the pulpit with expositions of the saving truth of the imputed righteousness of Christ. But to get even this, sinners for the most part have to seek the mission hall rather than the church. Christ crucified is truth but little found in the sermons of our day. In the few churches comparatively that love the substitutionary work of Christ we greatly wish that a whole gospel were preached. The serious lack, in the ministry of most of the really evangelical churches is that the pulpit has little or nothing to say, about the deep truths of the Christian life. After we are saved, we need keeping and establishing, and manifold inspirations for Christian duty and privilege. But where are the preachers who instruct their hearers on the true method and means. Having had set before us the glories of the work of

Christ *for us*, and having appropriated that work by faith, we need a tremendous work of Christ *within us*, a work unknown in regeneration. What is the gospel? Tell me not it is a life of struggle, frequent defeat, intermittent peace, occasional joy. Tell me not Jesus Christ wrought in strength on the Cross for me, but he can only do so in weakness within me. Tell me not there is no such thing as a permanent unbroken supremacy of the soul over the world, the flesh, and the devil. If your experience, though a child of God, is one of captivity and servitude to evil, there are thousands rejoicing in liberty and having power over all the power of the enemy. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Say not we have to endure it and make the best of a bad situation. No, no, deliverance is here and now. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." *A thorough work in the life of the believer, bringing him now absolutely from under the dominion of sin is possible, and is taught in the Scriptures.* What is the glorious Word? "The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The gospel is not only the grace of justification but the glory of sanctification, not only the blessing of the new birth but the riches of the Spirit-filled life. These double experiences are indeed for us while we are in this evil world. The gospel is not as an old time insurance policy only payable at death, but like—only better—those policies that mature in the policy-holder's lifetime. Let a man take up with the gospel, let him put his faith therein, and he will draw out ultimately the life of heaven, but he may draw out today if he will a supernatural life. In the gospel we have:

"A religion which supplies  
Solid comfort when man dies."

Also:

“A religion that will give  
Sweetest pleasures while man lives.”

What, then, Christian reader, is the gospel to you. This is the will of God even your sanctification. I bow my knees unto the Father . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man; that Christ might dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to apprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. This can be the Christian's *present experience*. Glory to God.

A second misconception is that the gospel is mainly beliefs for the head and not experiences for the heart. The gospel is *revealed* truth, and such as the “natural” man cannot receive, yet many a “natural” man thinks he can receive it; and thinks he has received it. When we meet him in reference to it we find his mind mirrors chiefly the truths of religion as nature makes them known. As for his understanding of revealed truths, we find they are so reduced to the terms of finite reason as to be made for all practical purposes null and void. His knowledge of the gospel in reality is only the knowledge of the facts of Christian history. Of the profound truths associated with those facts he is a stranger. His religion is not a matter of the heart. To him consecration, sanctification, separation from the world, a life of piety, world-wide missionary sympathies, and the hallelujah gladness of the saint of God, are not the essentials of religion but the spirit of fanaticism. Yet Scripture says: “The kingdom

of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” The “natural” man never rises to either one of these. *One-third part of religion, according to the Bible is emotion.* It is joy, the pure, delightful joy of a renewed heart. *One-third is undisturbed serenity.* It is peace, which is a near neighbor of joy. But of this he knows nothing. The calm in which he may boast is a false peace, for the ground of true peace is the shed blood of Christ. *One-third is purest character.* It is the beautiful righteousness of the gospel. A beggarly thing when he describes it. In his mind it is no more than the moralist’s life of right doing, from which Paul shrank so much, that he hoped he might not be found in it at the judgment day. Gospel righteousness is an immaculate thing. Our righteousness by the side of it is as filthy rags, hence the apostle’s cry, “That I may be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness, but the righteousness of God, which is by faith.” Well might we desire the same, for then:

“Bold shall we stand in that great day,  
For who aught to our charge shall lay;  
While through Christ’s blood absolved we are  
From sin’s tremendous curse and shame.”

“Jesus Thy blood and righteousness  
Our beauty are our glorious dress  
’Midst these, in flaming worlds, arrayed,  
With joy shall we lift up our head.”

From all this we cannot escape the conclusion that while religion is a system of beliefs, the articles of our faith result in experiences that affect the very center of our being, our affectional nature, not only producing an ethical change but of



necessity firing the entire life with the pure emotion of delight in God. The subjects of grace find *that grace to be glory*, and such glory that the heart bursts with praises to God. It is impossible to accompany Christ from the throne to the manger, and from Bethlehem to Gethsemane, and from the garden to Golgotha, and from Olivet to the seventh heaven and to feel the mystery of His indwelling the believer, without the strong emotion of gratitude and love. Divine praises *will* well up within, and brook no effort of repression, and the house of God will be of all places the seemliest for their expression. Unnatural is that sanctuary service, and those conditions, and that conception of religion which preclude a child of God glorying in his Redeemer. To frown upon emotional religion is clearly not to have the Spirit of Christ, but the spirit of the Pharisees. The Word tells us of an occasion when the whole multitude of disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen, saying: "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." The Pharisees desired to have the disciples rebuked, but Christ answered and said: "I tell you that if these should hold their peace the stones would immediately cry out." When shall we understand that *praise is never out of order*, that we should bless the Lord at all times, that His praise should continually be in our mouth. "Whoso offereth praise," saith God, "glorifieth Me." "O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good . . . let the *redeemed* of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy." Such is the Spirit-filled life that it would sooner cease to breathe than cease to praise.

Perpetually does it say: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life

from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies. . . . Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His that do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, all His works in all places of His dominion.”

“Oh for such grace let rocks and hills  
Their lasting silence break;  
And all harmonious creature tongues  
The Saviour’s praises speak.”

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

A third misconception is that the gospel can be realized without spirituality. We have heard various grievously heretical doctrines and pseudo-religious philosophies, each in their own day, described as the masterpiece of Satan, but *we know of nothing that is comparable to the device of worldliness for the damnation of souls*, because it admits of a man being mentally orthodox, while he is morally corrupt and spiritually a cipher. The worldly religious are the hardest people to reach. They believe in the church, support it, are ready to assent to its theological propositions, and they subscribe to the accepted cardinal doctrines of Christianity; but withal, there dwells within them an idolatrous heart. Their devotion is not devotion to God, but to forms and ceremonies connected with His Name, and when through with these, with the zest of any non-professor, will yield themselves to the service of self and Satan. Consequently these souls are lost when they have not the remotest suspicion of any such desperate personal condition. Like Herod, who did many things

and heard John gladly they nevertheless fail to do *the* thing, the one thing absolutely needful. All their doing in the house of God is profitless, and worse, a snare destroying the possibility of the knowledge of the redemptive work of Christ; for it is written: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Scripture, you note, sweeps clean from the soul the false notion of knowing the love of God, if in the heart be found the love of the world. *The truth of the gospel is after godliness* according to the first verse of Titus I. And according to Titus 2:II, I2, the grace of God that bringeth salvation, is a grace teaching the denial of ungodlines and worldly lusts, and enjoining the life of sobriety, righteousness and godliness. To mix religion and the world is sacrilegious. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? It is presumption and not faith to claim salvation when the heart refuses and hath no desire to go forth unto Jesus without the camp bearing His reproach. Remember the solemn words in James 4:4: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God. Whosoever will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God." Verily then, "to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

A fourth misconception is the notion that the gospel requires supplemental methods for its prosperity at home and abroad. This may not seem to be a vital error in the church of God, but we shall hope to show in the after pages of this book that it is, and the people of God ought to retrace immediately the false steps they have taken in this direction. Very insidiously has this notion worked in the church of God. Did not we all find it prevailing when we were brought into connection with the church, and not being enlightened from the Word and by our

teachers, we accepted the system of work in vogue without a question, and formed easily the habit of doing things according to custom. We took for granted that the traditional was the true way. How often we have said it over and over again to ourselves and to one another, "Do not our denominational leaders think so? They ought to know. They are men of piety and wisdom." So we contented ourselves in thinking that all was well; but in this compliance with tradition we have unwittingly yielded to man the headship of the church *which belongs to Christ alone*. It is our solemn conviction for which we can give reasons that a great mistake has been made in the modern church in associating with the office of bishop and elder, functions legislative. The mistake has also been extended to the church itself. She in representing the only true faith in the earth, and receiving the responsibility of a world-wide message, has interpreted that she must devise ways and means to strengthen herself and her influence, and to carry the Word to the ends of the earth, whereas, she has nothing whatever to do with devising ways and means to promote the Lord's glory among men. With the open Bible before us, of apostolic life covering a period of fully half a century, we cannot sympathize with the modern denominational methods of promoting the gospel of Christ. We venture to assert that if churches had not become apostate and worldly there would never have been societies and missionary boards. We find not so much as a hint of these things in New Testament days. The plea cannot be reasonably entered that the church of those days was not fully developed, and that methods were left for after generations to formulate. The church being peculiarly the Lord's own organization He has a care, not only touching the things to be believed but touching the ways of His people's service. *We contend that whatever is essential to the spread*

*and growth of the gospel both in doctrine and in method was made known by the great Head of the church through His apostles.* Let us be careful about being wiser than the Word in anything. The ways and means for spiritual life and missionary activity have not been left to the wisdom of man, not even to his sanctified common sense that we hear so much about whatever that may mean. If ladies' guilds and young people's societies and men's clubs and boys' brigades and entertainment sociables, and missionary boards are essential to the maintenance and increase of the gospel, why were not these things introduced by the apostles? They are singularly absent from the early church, and what is very noteworthy, more, proportionately, was accomplished for Christ in apostolic time without these appendages than in our day with them. We do not regard as a justification of modern methods the good that has been accomplished by them, because in adopting them we are denying to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Head of the Church, the all-sufficiency of His ways and means in the accomplishment of His own will. In this we have done a serious wrong to our Lord Jesus Christ. Let the wrong be righted by the faithful of our day. But it may be urged that if the present auxiliaries be overthrown there would be no missionary church. Let it be understood that we grant the necessity of these modern methods in an apostate and worldly church, but suppose we were to dispense with these arms of flesh and each organization become a spiritual body squaring its life and practice by the Word, the result would be that overthrowing the societies within the church and the missionary boards on the outside of the church, the church of Christ would quickly be seen to be all-sufficient without any auxiliaries to carry out the entire revealed will of God in spiritual matters in the earth. This is proven by instances here and there, of which

the First New Testament Church of Los Angeles is an illustration. Organized with only about a membership of two hundred and twenty-five, on the principle that the Lord founded but one body of people, and that the church, of which He only is the Head; and distrusting absolutely the wisdom of man for work divine; it exists and flourishes, increasing weekly in numbers, and spiritual strength and influence, without any sub-organizations or the help of missionary boards to fan its missionary life; and ere four months of its life it had laid on God's altar without any personal solicitation, at one service, over three thousand dollars for Christian missions; and before it was six months old had set apart two choice young men of its own membership for independent missionary work in China. Oh! mightily would grow the Word of God and prevail if only the wisdom of man were renounced and the wisdom of God exalted.

## Biographies of Azusa Street Book Series Editors



Cecil M. Robeck Jr., PhD, is an ordained Assemblies of God minister who has served on the administration and faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary for over forty years. He is currently senior professor of Church History and Ecumenics and special assistant to the president for Ecumenical Relations. He has two academic passions. The first is the Azusa Street Mission and the revival that exploded there in April 1906. The second is working with Christian leaders all over the world on issues related to the unity of Christ's Church.

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Joseph Smale (1867–1926), a British Baptist pastor trained at Spurgeon's College in London, was an important catalyst behind the Azusa Street Revival. Smale visited the Welsh Revival in 1905 and was instrumental in sparking a similar spiritual outpouring in California. In the fall of that year, Smale preached a series of sermons, titled "The Pentecostal Blessing," in which he encouraged believers to rediscover the deep spirituality of the Early Church. In 1906, Smale and people influenced by his ministry were among the earliest participants at the interracial Azusa Street Revival, which became a focal point of the emerging Pentecostal Movement.

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