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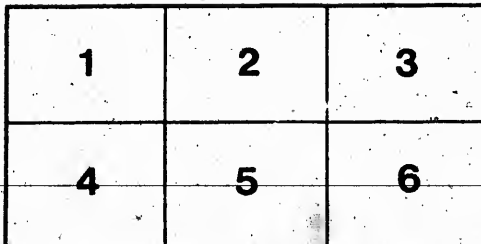
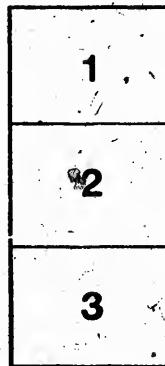
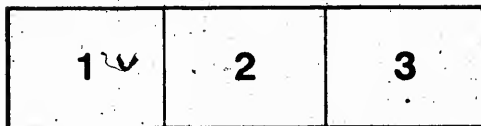
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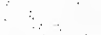
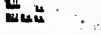
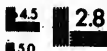
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# The Glorious Gospel:

## A SERMON

PREACHED AT NEW LOWELL ON 14th MARCH, 1886.

BY

WILLIAM MACLAREN, D.D.,

*Professor of Systematic Theology in Knox College,*

Toronto.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SESSION.

TORONTO:

PRESBYTERIAN PRINTING AND PUBLISHING COMPANY  
(C. BLACKETT ROBINSON).

1886.

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# THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL:

## A SERMON.

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1 Tim. I. 11: "The glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."

THE gospel must be something very important. When Christ was leaving our world the commission which He gave to His followers was to preach the gospel unto every creature. In the Apocalypse, we read of an angel flying in the midst of Heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth. The Apostle Paul made it his boast that from Jerusalem round about unto Illyrium, he had fully preached the gospel. And when John the Baptist sent from his prison two of his disciples unto Christ to ask, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" the answer returned is memorable: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up;" and, last and most wonderful of all, "the poor have the gospel preached to them."

What, then, is the gospel? The word, as you are aware, means good news or glad tidings. And the gospel here is the good news of salvation to the perishing through Jesus Christ.

This subject suggests three points for consideration, viz: What the gospel presupposes, the gospel message itself, and the manner in which it is here characterized.

I. *What the gospel presupposes.* It presupposes man's state of sin and ruin. What is good news to us depends largely on our state and circumstances. The tidings which

fill one man with joy, excite no emotion in the breast of another. The disease is what gives value to the remedy. They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. It is man's condition as a sinner which makes the announcement of salvation through Christ, good news to him. The elements in our natural condition of sin and ruin may be summed up in three words—depravity, guilt, and unrighteousness.

By *depravity* we mean that all men have naturally a bias towards wrong-doing which leads them to run into sin, so that there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not. We speak of this corrupt bias as total depravity, not in the sense that men are so bad that they cannot become worse, but that they are so bad that, if left to themselves, they will never become better. To discover that we are thus depraved and have a corrupt bias towards sin, we do not need the teachings of revelation: we have only to open our eyes and ponder facts which are patent to observation. Our own experience shows that it is easier to do wrong than to do right. We need not go beyond the testimony of our own consciousness. We all find it easier to fall below than to come up to our own moral standard. We know what is right, and we do what is wrong. None of us can deny that we have run into sin.

And how is it with your neighbours? Does not observation show that they too suffer from the same moral disease as reigns in your own heart? In the entire circle of your acquaintance you cannot find one who has escaped the ravages of sin. They all suffer from this terrible blight.

Interrogate history, and what witness does it give to the condition of the race in bygone ages? All down the centuries, the same sad testimony comes to us. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. History makes known no period since man tasted of the forbidden fruit, in which men have not been estranged from God and defiled by sin. A survey of the condition of mankind in our day in other regions of the earth, reveals with equal clear-

ness the depravity of the human race. We are now practically acquainted with almost every variety of the human family. Travellers have visited the most remote and inaccessible regions, and have made us familiar with races previously unknown. They have made us acquainted with peoples of strange manners and customs, speaking unknown languages and dialects, but no traveller has ever come back and reported the discovery of any race or community which does not sin. There is but one explanation of this terrible uniformity in wrongdoing. When we discover sin in ourselves, sin in our neighbours, and sin in the whole human race in all ages and lands, it makes known to us as surely as ever a cause was revealed in its effects, that there is in the heart of man a corrupt sinful bias. Observation unites with inspiration in declaring that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

But if men are alienated in heart from God, and prone to evil, it is surely self-evident that they are all *guilty* before God. They who love sin must be obnoxious to the divine displeasure, which is what we mean, when we affirm they are guilty. For, if God is holy and just, and men are intelligent and responsible beings, who love sin, and are averse to what is good, they must be objects of the divine displeasure. There is antagonism between their hearts and the rectitude of God. To question this antagonism is in reality to deny the moral perfection of God.

But, if all men are depraved by nature, and are constantly exposed to God's displeasure on account of what they are and what they do, it is surely foolish for any of our race to imagine he can ever work out a righteousness by which he can recommend himself to God's favour. The taint of our corrupt nature, attaches to our purest services. And were absolute rectitude possible for the future, it could not make up for the shortcomings of the past. For the righteousness which the law of God demands is without flaw, covering our entire career from the cradle to the grave.

This depravity, guilt and utter lack of anything on the

ground of which we can claim the divine favour, characterizes the race. They are the elements of our state of sin and ruin, which make the gospel good news to us. These are terrible and undeniable facts, which, by their native force, expose us all to endless death. They are not things which you can put away from you with a lordly wave of the hand. They are facts with which you will all one day have to deal. Man's exposure by reason of these to eternal ruin, is the dark background on which mercy paints the great salvation; and every attempt to tone down these dark colours, takes away from the significance and value of the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

II. *The gospel message.* It makes known a remedy adequate to the disease. The gospel message is based on certain great historical facts, which for the most part, admit of being verified like other facts of history. The facts to which we specially allude, are the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the phenomena which accompanied what we call the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. If these facts occurred substantially as they are narrated in the New Testament, the gospel message rests on a basis of history which cannot be successfully assailed. Indeed, the issue may be narrowed down to two points. If Jesus died and rose again, as the Evangelists assert, no one who reflects upon what these facts involve, can seriously question the truth of the gospel message. Upon what evidence then do we accept these central facts of the gospel system? We accept them on evidence such as can be adduced for almost no other facts of ancient history. They are witnessed to by four Evangelists, two of whom were personal companions of our Lord during the whole course of his public ministry, and the other two, although not personal attendants upon our Lord, were intimately associated with those who were, and they made it their business to inquire into the facts. All four were cotemporary writers of the highest character. We have also the testimony of the Apostle Paul, who claims to have seen the risen Christ, and who, by the force of the evidence brought to bear upon

him, was transformed from a bitter persecutor into the most powerful preacher of the gospel of Christ. Indeed, we have the witness of all the writers of the New Testament; for there is not one of them that does not, in some form, testify to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is no room for mistake in reference to the facts. These writers narrate minutely the circumstances connected with His crucifixion which took place in the presence of thousands who thronged to witness the spectacle. The Roman soldier's spear plunged into Christ's side and the water and blood which gushed forth from the wound left no ground for questioning the reality of His death. And when He had given up the ghost, they tell us, His body was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb of Joseph, a stone was rolled to the mouth of the tomb, and carefully sealed and guarded by soldiers so as to render the removal of the body impossible.

They declare that on the third day He was seen alive by His followers. As many as ten or twelve distinct occasions are recorded on which He was seen alive by His disciples during the forty days which succeeded His crucifixion. Sometimes he was seen by one or two, sometimes by many of his followers; and upon one occasion he was seen by above five hundred brethren at once, the greater part of whom were alive when the first epistle to the Corinthians was written.

They tell us that He ate and drank in their presence, conversed familiarly with them, and gave them careful instructions how they should conduct themselves when He was taken from them. Then at the close of the forty days He assembled the disciples which were in Jerusalem, and led them across the brow of the Mount of Olives, to the slopes leading down to His loved Bethany, and there He lifted up His hands and blessed them, and while the words of blessing fell upon their ears, He was parted from them and taken up visibly into heaven.

These are facts in reference to which Christ's apostles, provided they were in their right mind, could not be mistaken. These are matters in reference to which their

senses enabled them to speak. We are shut up to the conclusion that these events occurred, and that our Lord is risen indeed. In what other way can we account for the testimony of these witnesses?

Shall we suppose that these men were so overwhelmed with the terrible death of their trusted leader and beloved Lord, that they fell an easy prey to some sort of hysterical excitement which led them, honestly enough, to substitute mere imaginations for sober matters of fact? Are we to believe that the disciples were in a condition so nearly bordering on insanity that they were carried away with a hallucination, and truly believed that they had seen their Lord alive after His death, and had conversed with Him, while there was no foundation for such a belief? And this insane notion seems to have adhered to them to the very end of their life; for it is certain that to the end of their course they preached the death and the resurrection of Christ. But how does this theory harmonize with the facts? Look at the writings which these men have left us. All persons competent to judge will admit that the entire range of literature supplies no writings more remarkable for sobriety of language and strong common sense. The man who ascribes such writings to persons carried away with an insane delusion, writes himself down as unable to distinguish sober-minded narratives from the outpourings of a distempered imagination. But if these men are acknowledged to have been honestly carried away with a delusion, how did those who must have been fit candidates for an asylum impose their hallucinations on others? This they must have done with remarkable rapidity. Within a few weeks, their converts in Jerusalem were numbered by thousands. Many of the priestly order, whose pride and worldly interests tended to array them against the gospel, yielded to the evidence of Christ's resurrection, and we soon find that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." In a short time Christianity worked its way into every part of the civilized world; and in three centuries it mounted the throne of the Cæsars. And at the present moment there is no nation

exerting any appreciable influence in the affairs of the world which has not accepted the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. What we are required to believe is that the honest delusions of a few unlettered men have, by the simple power of moral suasion, apart from worldly influence, been imposed as realities upon all the most intelligent nations of the world. We make bold to affirm that to represent the triumphs of Christianity as resting on no more solid foundation, is a libel on the human race.

Shall we then accept the alternative supposition? Must we hold that the founders of the Christian Church deliberately banded themselves together to impose on the world what they knew to be falsehoods? They could not have been mistaken when they affirmed that they had seen Christ alive after His crucifixion. They were intimately acquainted with him, and in every way qualified to testify to His identity. Are we to suppose that these men lent themselves to a great fraud, and that they endeavoured to palm off on the world a resurrection which they knew had not occurred?

Again, we say, study the writings they have left us. Mark their denunciations of untruthfulness, lying and deceit, their assertion that no liar shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, and ask, Is this the probable language of men whose entire teaching is based on wilful fabrication? But, if you will have it, that this is only the garb of hypocrisy assumed to cover the very thing denounced, then note the high morality in every department which pervades their writings. Nothing higher than the morality of the New Testament has ever been enunciated. It is not too much to affirm that the world's morality has touched its highest watermark in its pages. Skeptics borrow from it, unacknowledged, the morality which they substitute for the gospel system. And we are asked in the name of reason to believe that this matchless moral system is the product of men whose whole life was a lie, and whose entire preaching rested on a wilful falsehood! "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" We venture to affirm that of all the miracles recorded in the Bible, there is none so

difficult for a thoughtful mind to accept, as it is to believe that such morality could have come from such a source.

And it must not be forgotten that the early heralds of Christianity endured bitter and relentless persecution, because they taught the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is believed that only one of the apostles escaped the crown of martyrdom, and he was banished to "the isle called Patmos for the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." As their offence in the eyes of their enemies was that they preached Jesus and the resurrection, they could at any moment have arrested the hand of persecution by admitting that the resurrection of Jesus Christ had never taken place. But no such admission ever fell from their lips. They went everywhere, proclaiming the fact, and took joyfully reproach, persecution and death itself, rather than deny that Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification.

But it may be said that it is eighteen centuries since Christ is alleged to have died and risen again, and how do we know that the testimony given to these facts has come down to us correctly? We answer that the books in which they are recorded have been handed down to us as other ancient writings have been transmitted, and whatever would cast doubt on their purity and authenticity can be alleged with greater force against nearly all the literary remains of the early ages. This, indeed, is greatly understating the truth. For these books were esteemed sacred writings by the early Church, and were preserved with special care. As early as the second and third centuries they were translated into various languages, and they have thus come down to us through many distinct channels. They have also been alluded to, quoted and commented upon to such an extent by early Christian authors, that some have gone so far as to say that were all the Bibles in the world lost, the Scriptures could be restored from the quotations which have found their way into literature. They have also been quoted and referred to frequently by the ancient opponents of Christianity. There are certainly no ancient writings which have come down to us for whose



authenticity and purity we can adduce evidence, which, in fulness and strength, even approximates that upon which we accept the books of the New Testament.

We have, moreover, monumental evidence which assures us that the death and resurrection of Christ have been accepted by the whole Christian Church from the beginning as fundamental facts. We may assert, indeed, that the Christian Church is so dependent on these facts that its existence is inconceivable apart from a belief in them; and the Church itself becomes a monument that the Christian community from the first accepted the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." In full harmony with this statement, we find that the death of Christ has been celebrated in the Lord's Supper in all the centuries from the Apostolic age until our own day. At the dawn of the Christian dispensation, the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread, and probably scarcely a week has passed since that time in which companies of believers have not met to show forth the Lord's death in this monumental observance.

And what means the Christian Sabbath? We do not observe our weekly rest, like the Jews, on the seventh day. Immediately after the resurrection of Christ, the disciples began to assemble for religious services on the first day of the week, in memory of their Lord's victory over death; and before the close of the New Testament Canon, the first day of the week had become familiarly known as "the Lord's day;" and without the break of a single week, that day has been observed by the Christian Church, all down the ages.

The Lord's Supper and the Christian Sabbath are monumental evidence that a belief in the death and resurrection of Christ was not thrust upon the Church in later ages, but has distinguished it from the first. Wherever

they have been observed, they proclaim the faith of the community observing them. They speak with the same voice in the first, in the second, in the third, in the fifteenth and in the nineteenth century. Wherever they are observed, they declare the belief of the Christian Church that Jesus died and rose again. We do not here deal with musty records, or obscure historical problems, but with monumental observances which have confessedly come down unchanged from the days of those who proclaimed themselves witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are carried back and placed by them among the original disciples of Christ, and mark the conviction which events left on the minds of the earliest Christian generation. But, if Jesus died and rose again; if we accept as true, facts for which such overwhelming evidence is adduced, what follows? God has visibly set His seal upon Jesus Christ, and has sanctioned all the claims which He put forth for Himself, or which He warranted others to put forth on His behalf. What view do we thus reach of Christ's person and work? Who is He, and what has He done? He was truly a man; He called Himself the Son of Man. He was linked to us by the possession of our nature. He also claimed to be the Son of God, making Himself equal with God. He could say, "I and my father are one." He is therefore as He was named by the prophet, Immanuel, God with us. He unites in Himself the infinite, and the finite, and He bridges in His own person the gulf between the Creator and the creature. Such a person we needed for our salvation, and such a person He claimed to be when on earth, and such a person God declared Him to be, when He raised Him from the dead.

He also intimated that He gave Himself as a sacrifice for sinners. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, to give His life a ransom for many. He was pointed out by His forerunner as the Lamb of God that beareth away the sin of the world. He declared that His blood was shed for many for the remission of sins.

He claims that He came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law. He came to fulfil all righteousness. And His accre-

dated messengers affirmed that He was "the end of the law for righteousness for every one that believed." They taught that He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. It is evident, therefore, that His sufferings were penal, and His obedience vicarious.

Our Lord also intimated that His departure from earth, by the path of suffering and death, which He had marked out for Himself, was linked with the mission of the Holy Spirit, whose special work it is to quicken the dead and sanctify the living. We live now under a dispensation which is characterized as "the ministration of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is now shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Observe now where we are. Mark the fulness of the provision God has made to meet man's state of sin and ruin. Set over against man's depravity the power and grace of the Holy Spirit; set over against human guilt the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, which cleanseth from all sin, and set over against our entire lack of righteousness, the perfect righteousness of our divine substitute, and ask what element is wanting to complete salvation? Is it not evident that when God interposed on our behalf, He sounded the depths of our ruin and searched out every element of our misery, and met each fully in the salvation proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

In view of these facts, we are warranted in accepting for ourselves, and in offering to others, three blessings, or rather three categories or classes of blessing: pardon, acceptance with God, and renovation of heart and life.

Pardon may be called one great act of grace. For as soon as any man accepts Christ by faith, God casts over all his sins the mantle of forgiveness. It covers his entire career from the cradle to the grave, so that "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." But while pardon is one, it is, as a matter of conscious experience, also manifold as our sins. How numberless are they! Sins of thought, of word, and of action. Every thought of our hearts and every forthgoing of our activity is tainted

with defilement. But no sooner do our sins arise than they are met by the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ and blotted out, and so we come not into condemnation.

I call acceptance into the divine favour, one act of grace which changes for ever our relations to God. When we believe in Christ we are made the righteousness of God in Him, and permanently instated in the divine favour, and the full tide of the love of God is turned towards us. And as the rising tide, flowing in on the sea-coast, insinuates itself around every rock, crevice and indentation of the shore, so doth the love of God, turned upon us in Christ Jesus, insinuate itself around every want and misery of human nature, and it does not leave one element of our ruin which it does not in the end reach and take away.

Renewal of heart and life is at once one and manifold. We must be either dead or alive. There is nothing intermediate. A man must either be dead in trespasses and sin, or alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. But while the transition from death unto life is necessarily instantaneous, there may be many steps by which the divine Spirit prepares the way for it; and when the great change is wrought, the good work is so imperfect that there are required constant inflows of the divine life into the soul to sustain and develop it. All these daily communications of grace by which the Christian is fitted for the presence of God, and the service of a better world are due to the same Spirit who quickened us when we were dead in sins.

To all mankind God offers in the gospel this heritage of blessing, and whosoever will may accept it freely. He proffers to the chief of sinners pardon, full, free and everlasting. He invites all, through the righteousness of Christ, to a permanent reinstatement in His love, and all that His love can do for them. And through His Spirit He offers to renovate our hearts and transform us into His own glorious image. This is surely glad tidings of great joy to all people.

III. *The manner in which the gospel is here characterized. It is "the glorious gospel of," etc.*

(1) It is the gospel of God.

It is His message. Every statement and fact in it is vouched for by Him. Its offers, His offers. Its invitations are His invitations. It is not something which we have to reason out for ourselves from certain premises. It is not as if we had been taught the deity and the humanity of Christ, and had then been left to reason for ourselves that as Christ was Himself the lawgiver, His humanity, which subsisted in the person of the Son, did not owe any natural subjection either to the precept or the penalty of the divine law, and that, therefore, His obedience and sufferings may be available for others. This reasoning might seem to us satisfactory, or the opposite, but we could not feel perfectly sure that in dealing with a matter so much above us as the question, how can man be just before God? we could not be sure that we had not left out of account some element which required to be considered. But God has saved us from these perplexities. He has taken the reasoning on these lofty themes into His own hands. He gives the conclusion, and glimpses of the steps by which it has been reached. And the gospel hearer does not need to rest his soul either on his own reasoning, or the preacher's logic, but on the Word of God. The sinner is called to rest directly on the invitations and promises of the God of truth.

We are persuaded that ministers should preach, feeling that they are delivering God's message, and hearers should listen as to God's message. When this is done, the Word will be preached with the demonstration of the Spirit and with power. It will need no artificial aids to fix attention. If those called to preach dig into the mine of God's Word and bring forth its hidden treasures, their message will never lack interest. They will need neither doubtful speculations nor sensational topics to drive drowsiness from the pews. Let men feel that they are listening to the gospel of God, and they will not sleep.

(2) It is the gospel of the *blessed* God. This epithet is not here chosen at random. You have observed, in the case of men, that when mind and body are in their happiest and best moods, the inward blessedness enjoyed some-

how expresses itself in their every word and look and action. And so it seems to be hinted that in the gospel, the very blessedness of God overflows and expresses itself in blessing men. In Christ's memorable words, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," He seems to make transfer of the very peace which dwelt in His own bosom, to His disciples, so here we are led to view the gospel as the very channel through which the blessedness of God flows into our hearts.

(3) It is the *gospel of the glory of God*. This is the literal force of the original, which is correctly enough rendered for popular purposes, *the glorious gospel*. The gospel is so characterized, specially because it unveils God's glory in redemption. It presents all His attributes in harmonious exercise. Mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. Men often glory in what has almost no connection with character, in a wreath, a ribbon, a title or an empty decoration. But God's glory is always the manifestation of His real character. We do not glorify God when we heap up great turgid words of praise, to which we attach almost no meaning, but we do glorify Him, when, by our constant example, our loving deeds, or by words spoken with stammering tongue, we are able to give men a glimpse of His real character. And it is because all the perfections of God shine illustriously in Christ's redeeming work, that the gospel, which makes known the way of salvation to man, is also the gospel of the glory of God.

(4) It is a trust committed to the gospel ministry. It is committed, indeed, to the whole Church; to ministers and to people. "For how can they preach except they are sent?" No one is saved for his own sake alone. We are our brother's keeper. When the gospel salvation reaches us in power, and rolls away the load of guilt, breaks the dominion of sin in the soul, and fills us with joy and peace in believing, it is a priceless blessing, in which we do well to rejoice. But what blesses us is also a trust committed to us for our fellow-men. We owe something to our Redeemer, who has bought us with His own blood, and

something to our fellowmen who may yet shine with His image. It is a sacred trust which is committed to living Christians, and especially to those who are called to the gospel ministry! God has put into our heart and then into our hands His one remedy for man's ruin. Under Him, it depends on us whether this remedy shall be faithfully applied to the salvation of men, or those around us shall be left to perish in their sins. Our position is like that of Aaron when the plague had broken out among the children of Israel. You will remember that Moses commanded Aaron to take his censer, and put fire therein from off the altar and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation and make atonement for them. And we are told that Aaron did as he was commanded, and made atonement for the people. "And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed." Numb. xvi., 46-48. Brethren, ye who know the gospel have God's one remedy in your hands, and this day you stand between the dead and the living, that the plague may be stayed. Sometimes we get a glimpse of the preciousness of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and at such seasons we are profoundly humbled that we have done so little to make it known to men. At such times I can sympathize with the feelings of a venerable father eighty years of age, who, many years ago, was preaching before the Synod of Western New York. He was referring to the trials and privations of the gospel ministry, especially in new and frontier districts, and he told his brethren that, although he probably knew by experience more of these trials and privations than any of them, and although by God's grace he was not afraid to die, yet such was the joy of proclaiming the gospel and seeing souls led to Christ that "he would be willing to take a commission to preach the gospel clear up to the Day of Judgment." At such seasons, I think I can sympathize with this venerable father, and I can understand somewhat the emotions with which young Gardiner Spring, about the beginning of this century, listened to a sermon from Dr. John M. Mason, of New York. Gardiner Spring was then studying law at

Yale. He led the college choir and sat opposite to the preacher. Dr. Mason preached to an immense audience on the words, "To the poor the gospel is preached." And as that great preacher unfolded the preciousness of the gospel, the whole of that audience was moved as a man. Aged professors and venerable senators were like little children. When Gardiner Spring left the chapel, he could think of nothing but the gospel. He went home across the college green to his young wife, exclaiming, "The gospel! The gospel!" And from that hour he could get no rest until he had consecrated his fine gifts to preaching the glorious gospel of the blessed God. And would to God, that there may be some young man here to-night whose lips have been touched with fire from the altar, who, at the call of God, will also respond, "Here am I, send me."





