

WOE IS UNTO ME IF I PREACH NOT THE GOSPEL

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16, KJV)

The Unmerited Grace of Salvation

The Apostle Paul's proclamation concerning the urgency and necessity of preaching the Gospel reflects a profound understanding of unmerited grace. His transformation from a persecutor of Christians to a dedicated apostle serves as a powerful testimony of God's ability to redeem the most unlikely individuals. In Acts 9:3-6, Paul, then known as Saul, encounters the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, leading to his radical conversion. He writes about this transformative experience in Galatians 1:15-16: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." Paul's acknowledgment of God's grace underscores that salvation is not about human merit or works but is exclusively a gift from God.

Paul's life serves as a reminder that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. As articulated in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." We are encouraged to remember that, like Paul, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Therefore, woe unto us if we neglect to share this unmerited grace with others!

The Call to Share Our Blessing

In addition to recognizing the unmerited nature of grace, we must understand our calling to share the blessings we have received with others. The account of Esau selling his birthright serves as a poignant cautionary tale. Hebrews 12:16-17 states, "Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected." Esau's disregard for his birthright illustrates the dangers inherent in taking spiritual inheritance lightly.

As believers, we must not allow the allurements of this world to distract us from the eternal significance of our calling. Matthew 6:19-21 warns us, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But

lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The blessings of salvation and the Gospel must be shared and cherished so that they do not become a mere afterthought in our lives.

Furthermore, 1 Peter 2:9 proclaims, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." This verse illustrates that we are chosen not only for salvation but also to communicate the light of Christ to a world shrouded in darkness. Woe unto us if we fail to recognize the role we play in sharing the message of hope and salvation with those around us.

The Necessity of Action

Paul's missionary journeys exemplify the commitment required to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. In Acts 20:20-21, he enthusiastically declares, "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." His determination serves as an exemplary model for us concerning the need to actively engage in preaching the Gospel, regardless of the risks involved.

In a land fraught with dangers, Paul exemplified the necessity of movement in sharing the Gospel. He often faced hostility, imprisonment, and persecution, yet he remained undeterred. 2 Corinthians 6:4-5 illustrates his resolve: "But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses." For Paul, the urgency of preaching the Gospel outweighed any personal safety concerns, and so must it be for us today as we fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), which commands us to go and make disciples of all nations.

Moreover, the Gospel is not confined to geographic boundaries. Romans 10:15 asks, "And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" This sentiment underscores the importance of being sent, of actively seeking opportunities to spread the message of God's love and grace to all nations. Every believer is called to be an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), which entails taking action and engaging with those who have yet to hear the message of hope. Woe unto us if we remain stationary, confined within our walls, failing to reach out to others with the life-changing truth of the Gospel.

The Witness Expected from Us

The account of the rich man and Lazarus found in Luke 16:27-28 reinforces the weight of our responsibility as witnesses. The rich man's plea from hell serves as a haunting reminder:

"Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." This scripture calls attention to the urgency of our mission; many souls desperately seek the truth that we possess, yet remain oblivious to it.

The rich man's concern for his family illustrates that even those who face eternal consequences are aware of their need for the truth. Abraham's response, as recorded in verse 29, is equally revealing: "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." This response highlights the significance of the Scriptures and the necessity of those who recognize God's truth to share it with others. Let us not forget that we have an obligation to fulfill—to be those who proclaim the recommendations of Scripture to our family, friends, and communities, guiding them towards salvation.

Ephesians 6:19-20 reminds us to seek boldness in our proclamation: "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." The anticipation that souls could be eternally lost because we remained silent is a heavy burden; we must resolve to share the Gospel openly and fearlessly.

Love as the Core Motivation

At the heart of our mission to share the Gospel is the love of God, manifest in Christ. John 3:16 powerfully encapsulates this divine love: "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." This profound truth signals the foundation of our faith: God's love compels Him to seek and save the lost.

Jesus' ministry exemplifies this love in action. His compassionate encounters with individuals like Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, and Mary Magdalene showcase His heart for the marginalized and the broken. In Luke 19:10, Jesus proclaims, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." His mission was one of outreach and reconciliation, creating a model for how we are to interact with a lost world.

Moreover, in John 4:7-9, we find the story of Jesus speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well. This encounter was groundbreaking and transformative. Jesus crossed cultural barriers and societal norms to engage with her, offering her "living water" (John 4:10). He saw her not for her past or her status but for her potential to become a vessel of His love and grace. As a result of their conversation, many in her town believed in Him (John 4:39). This act of love underscores that we, too, must look beyond the surface and reach out to those who may feel unworthy or unlovable.

Paul deeply understood this kind of love. In Romans 5:8, he writes, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In recognizing that Christ willingly sacrificed Himself for us while we were still in our sin, we gain both perspective and motivation to love others similarly. Woe unto us if we close our hearts to the very people Jesus came to save! True love ignites a desire within us to reach out and share the story of redemption with others.

The Reward of Faithfulness

As we consider the urgency of preaching the Gospel, we must also contemplate the impact our faithfulness can have on others. Galatians 6:9 encourages us not to grow weary in well-doing: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." This promise motivates us to persist in sharing the Gospel, despite challenges or discouragements we may face.

1 Corinthians 3:6-9 reveals the collaborative nature of spreading the Gospel: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." It is the work of the Holy Spirit that enables hearts to respond to the truth of the Gospel. Our role is to be faithful in planting the seeds and nurturing them, trusting that God will bring forth the harvest. Woe unto us if we withhold the seeds of truth from those who desperately need them.

Furthermore, the joy of fellow believers coming to faith provides a glimpse of the joy that awaits us in eternity. 2 Timothy 4:7-8 reminds us of the ultimate reward for our faithfulness: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." Sharing the Gospel is a labor of love and an investment in the eternal lives of others. It is a compelling call to live with purpose, intent on declaring the great truths of faith.

Conclusion: Answering the Call

In conclusion, the urgency of proclaiming the Gospel is underscored throughout Scripture, and we are faced with the weighty responsibility to participate in this divine mission. As believers, we should take to heart Paul's declaration, "woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). Let us embrace this mandate, recognizing that every day, individuals are lost without the message of salvation.

Each of us carries the light of Christ within us, called to shine it brightly in a world in desperate need. Let us engage in this vital work, moving beyond our comfort zones, sharing the grace we have received, and embodying the love of God to those we encounter. Woe unto us if we allow fear, complacency, or apathy to hinder our mission. May we rise to fulfill our calling, proclaiming the Gospel boldly and passionately, so that none may perish but all may come to know the saving grace of our Lord. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) Let us heed this command as we live out our faith, fulfilling the Great Commission and bringing glory to God.