

## STUDY 11

# An Eternal Gospel to Proclaim

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### INTRODUCTION

- Revelation 14:6—‘an eternal gospel to proclaim’; eternity strikes a deep chord in contemporary culture.
- Why is it an *eternal* gospel?—this is a vital question for us, as it has to do with:
  - 1) life that is eternal not only in quantity, but also in *quality*—i.e. ‘abundant life’ (John 10:10); the only true life that there is for men and women (which is *why* it is also eternal in *quantity*—i.e. everlasting); and
  - 2) it is *the* eternal gospel (as identical with Jesus Christ Himself, *the* Light—John 8:12); and so it is *the only* eternal gospel (among the many, many other ‘gospels’ within our world—Gal. 1:6–9; 2 Cor. 11:4), and so the only source of true life for men and women (John 6:68).
- This gospel then incisively (i.e. in its judgements) calls and commands all the earth to obedience to it—Revelation 14:7 (whether or not they hear and obey).
- Firstly: the Church (‘judgement starts with the household of God’—1 Pet. 4:7; Amos 3:2); through and by whom, all the earth is called and commanded.
- This end, obedience to the eternal gospel, is identical with ‘worshipping’ the true God (Rev. 14:7); full, holy communion; *bliss!*

### THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

- What defines *eternal* in ‘eternal gospel’?
- This gospel is nothing other than ‘the gospel of the kingdom as pronounced by John the Baptist and Jesus, and later pronounced by the Church’.<sup>1</sup>
- Yet the dynamic substance of this *kerygma* is the divine revelation itself—‘the *light*’ (John 1:1–9); which is identical with Jesus Christ Himself (John 8:12), actively revealing Himself, and the truth summed up in Himself (John 1:5–13, 18), in the *kerygma*, and in accordance with the Scriptures.

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<sup>1</sup> G. C. Bingham, *Revelation of St John the Divine*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1993, p. 133.

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- ‘The light’ (revelation/gospel) is identical with ‘*the life*’—John 14:6 (the man, the person, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, in the fullness of His saving action toward the world).<sup>2</sup>
- Whatever the ‘eternal gospel’ is, it must be defined strictly by the person of Jesus Christ Himself; nothing more, nothing other, *nothing less*.
- The reason that it is the *eternal* gospel, is because Jesus Christ, with whom that gospel is identical, is the *Eternal One*.
- In the gospel we are not dealing with any abstract notion of ‘eternal truth’, we are dealing with a person; in the matter of eternity, we do not philosophise, we relate to our Lord, Redeemer and brother—truly, or falsely!

### **THE ETERNAL ONE (*THE LIFE*)**

- The light of Jesus Christ is the light of His life—*so what is His life?*
- The life in which He is true Son of God, and as such also true Son of Man; and lived out His life within our human history and nature (John 1:14; Heb. 2:10–18).
- The life in which God, in omnipotent grace, has fulfilled His covenant relationship with humanity—both on His side, and ours (Rom. 5:6–21; 2 Cor. 5:14–21; Heb. 4:14–5:10).
- It is the life in which we have therefore been crucified (Gal. 2:19; 2 Cor. 5:14).
- Therefore the life in which we, as creatures, and from the abyss of our sin, guilt, remorse, unworthiness and longing, nonetheless look to God the Holy Father seeking to cling to Him and find our lost fellowship with Him restored (Heb. 4:14–16; Rom. 8:26–27, 34; Heb. 6:13–20; 7:23–25).
- The life in which we, as fallen, broken, lost human beings, are nonetheless fully included, and participate in, the life of the dearly beloved Son of the Father (Rom. 8:14–17; Col. 3:3; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:1; Matt. 6:9).
- The life in which we have therefore been raised from the dead and seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1).
- The life in which God wholly humbles Himself, and in which humanity—we—are wholly exalted by God in His humbling (the great, beautiful, atoning exchange!).
- The locus of the pronouncement of the eternal gospel—i.e. ‘midheaven’—is precisely that of the pronouncement of the woes of coming judgement! (Rev. 14:7; 8:13).
- It is the life which is the world’s—and our—established reconciliation with God.
- How truly immense is *this life!* . . . could it be contained within time and space?! . . . That which descends as such, in great, great love, must ascend ‘*above all the heavens, that it may fill all things*’ (Eph. 4:10).
- *How great a gospel, a light, is this life?!*

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<sup>2</sup> See K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.3.1 (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1961), pp. 105f.

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### **THE GOSPEL (THE LIGHT)**

- Now Jesus Christ Himself, the life, *is also the light* (John 14:6; 8:12; 1:4, 5); as the life, He is also Word, revelation and *kerygma*.
- So Jesus Christ is *Priest* (ministering the things of God to humanity; and the things of humanity to God); He is *King* (exalting humanity in Himself); and as such *He is also Prophet* (Word and revelation of the Gospel, which is identical with Himself).
- This is part and parcel of the inner necessity of the being of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the Triune God of other-person-centred love; their truth, as the truth of their love, ever spills over, flowing outward and outward in creation and redemption; pressing to be known, received, responded to and enjoyed by all.
- So, it is to be proclaimed ‘to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people’ (Rev. 14:6).
- This light, this gospel, tells us that ‘our new eternal life has begun . . . even glorification [is] accomplished . . . we are already dead and risen again, that we are already citizens of the future world (the new and true world to be revealed as the dominion of God in His Christ) . . . We are those who are eternally loved and elected by God in Jesus Christ, and called to the grateful realisation of their election in time’.<sup>3</sup> Jesus Christ Himself, this life (and our life and the world’s in His), *is the eternal gospel*.
- Eternal life is a relationship (John 17:3).
- This life is *true life for men and women*; and so life that is good, rich, complete, full and overflowing—*welling up to eternal life!* (John 7:38; 4:14).
- To be brought by the gospel into this place is to come into abundant salvation, ‘abundant life’ (John 10:10); a life of other-person-centred love, that is self-giving, renewing, energising, joyous; life that is full-on, over-the-top, busting-out-everywhere; life that is *eternal in quality—eternal life starts now! . . . and overflows as eternal in quantity!*
- We don’t preach small fragments of truth—we ‘*preach the eternities!*’!<sup>4</sup>
- Humanity won’t settle for less!
- ‘It’s not that we don’t preach enough of the times, but that we neglect eternity; if we are truly preaching to eternity, we are truly preaching to the times’.<sup>5</sup>

### **THE ETERNAL GOSPEL**

- While it is said to be ‘*an eternal gospel*’ (Rev. 14:6), we have seen that, being identical with Jesus Christ Himself—‘*the Light*’ (John 8:12)—it is in fact *the eternal gospel*.

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<sup>3</sup> K. Barth, *loc.cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> H. C. McKenzie, *Preaching The Eternities*, St Andrew’s Press, Edinburgh, 1963.

<sup>5</sup> C. Macartney, ‘Suggestions to Students of Homiletics’, *The Ministry*, July, 1968, p. 9.

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- Is the gospel of Jesus Christ *alone the eternal gospel*?
- Yes—we have heard *what the content of His gospel is*—i.e. the *light of His life; we will not hear this from any other lips, from anywhere else in the universe!*
- God alone is to be worshiped above all others because *He alone delivered His children from the house of slavery* (Deut. 5:6f.).
- Jesus alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68); He alone can deliver true, abundant life, life that is eternal in quality and quantity.
- Eternal life will not come from the ‘gospels’ of Islam (in spite of expensive TV campaigns!), of instantly sated desire, of capitalism, of infinite individual ‘rights’, of ethical corruption—even in ‘christian dress’, of ‘christianised’ growth-gospels, of self-righteous ‘christian religion’, of infinite individual ‘gods’ of our own spirituality, etc., etc., etc., etc.
- Elements of truth—and so eternal truth—in the vast array of human (even human religious) wisdom? Yes, but utterly dependent upon the eternal gospel itself, and must repent and bow to it.
- All other ‘gospels’, human wisdoms/systems that claim our allegiance, are empty and deadly idolatries.

### **THE ETERNAL GOSPEL’S CLAIM**

- The gospel: God Himself in sovereign grace has fulfilled His covenant with the whole creation in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.
- Such absolute grace (its greatness/holiness) lays absolute claim upon us and all people for allegiance, true response, the obedience of faith, ‘worship’ (Rev. 14:7).
- The gospel makes this claim incisively in its ‘judgements’—i.e. the revelation of evil and sin, and of their consequences in death, its condemnation of them, and its call to repent of them.
- Judgement is of a piece and inseparable from the gospel; not in isolation from, much less in contradiction to it; *the gospel itself actually necessitates judgement*.
- The loci of the declaration of judgement and the declaration of the gospel *are the same* (Rev. 8:17; 14:6).
- True ‘fear’ of God (reverence; awe), is the beginning of, and coinheres in, wisdom that leads to the gospel and eternal life (Prov. 9:10; 14:27).
- ‘Give Him glory’—i.e. simple, due, full acknowledgement of His greatness/holiness revealed in the gospel (cf. Rom. 1:21).
- ‘He said in a *loud voice*’—the voice goes out to every atom of the universe, to command hearing (Ps. 19:1, 2, 4); yet they do not all hear (Ps. 19:3).
- The Word of the gospel’s judgement addresses the rebellious, and only those who will hear do hear.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> G. C. Bingham, *Revelation*, p. 133.

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- ‘The hour of his judgement has come’: the hour for those who have rejected the Lamb in the ‘great day’ (Rev. 6:16), or the dynamic revelation of the judgement of the gospel that comes continually to the rebellious throughout history?

### **THE ETERNAL GOSPEL’S CLAIM— ON THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD**

- As the gospel is for and toward all the earth and its inhabitants, it lays claim upon them to its goal (Rev. 14:7).
- God ‘made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water’, and covenanted all creation to His purposes (Gen. 1:1–5, 28–31).
- He claims the ground beneath our feet; He claims us (He ‘pulls all ground from under our feet’); *the gospel’s claim is universal*—there is no such thing as ‘private truth’.
- The Church must bear witness to this against all ‘other gospels’.
- Yet, ‘judgement starts with the household of God’! (1 Pet. 4:7; Amos 3:2); to invert Forsyth!—‘that which goes widest to the world, [first] *goes deepest to the heart!*’
- Where in the Church, in us, does the incisive judgement of the gospel fall?
- This Word of the judgement of the gospel comes to *the rebellious*; are we, the Church, ever completely *out of that camp?*
- Only as the Church, and we, live *in this judgement* of the gospel—and so *in the gospel*—are we a true, effectual ‘light to the nations’ (Isa. 49:6).
- Jesus is the Eternal Gospel, to and for the whole creation, in His person and work as Incarnate Lord and Saviour. Have we received Him? i.e. are we of eternity?

### **WORSHIPPING THE ETERNAL ONE**

- *All is for ‘worship’!*
- True, full, holy, adoring communion—i.e. *loving the Father*.
- This is true human *bliss*.