

GCM called this "the  
first wonder & glory of the  
cross."

FORGIVENESS  
Acts 26:13-23 (for unbelievers)

Intro: In Acts 26 we have Paul's defence before Agrippa.  
In the course of his defence he gives a simple,  
direct, and yet complete statement of his ministry  
as an Apostle. It involved three things:

- (1) What God wanted to do with him (v. 16). (Read.)
- (2) What God wanted to do for him (v. 17). (Read.)
- (3) What God wanted to do through him (v. 18). (Read.)

Then he shows how this had all come to pass. Note:

- (1) What God had done through him (vv. 19, 20). This corresponds with v. 18 above.
- (2) What God had done for him (vv. 21, 22a). This corresponds with v. 17 above.
- (3) What God had done with him (vv. 22b, 23). This corresponds with v. 16 above.

Summing it all up, Paul wanted men to receive two things  
which they did not have:

- (1) "Forgiveness of sins."
- (2) An "inheritance" which only those who lit. had been sanctified could claim, i.e., the heavenly fulfillment of all that was included in the word salvation--a final, complete, and eternal separation for God from all that would defile them.

Now here we have the great issues of salvation.

Paul did not ask men to come to Christ so they would be happier. Nor did he ask them to come to Christ so that they would get their problems solved. Nor did he ask them to come to Christ just to accept a better way of life.

He brought men face to face with their SIN, its consequences, and what God had done about it all. This is why he preached Christ!

He did not argue with men about what sins they had committed; he preached the death and resurrection of Christ, and sought to show men why He had to die!

He wanted men to know that ahead of every person is an eternal destiny: either heaven, or hell. There are only two alternatives--no others. But more than this he wanted men to know that the reason they were bound for hell and could never reach heaven was SIN--not just sin against man, but SIN AGAINST GOD!

It was too late to tell men not to sin because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). He came to tell them what God was prepared to do about their sin.

This is where we come to our word, forgiveness. Let us learn what we can about this word.

I. THE WORD FORGIVENESS TELLS US TWO THINGS ABOUT MAN, as it is used in the Scriptures.

- A. It teaches us that man is a prisoner who needs to be released. This release, or letting go, is forgiveness.

Luke, who speaks of forgiveness more than all of the other NT writers combined, gives us our illustration. Cf. Luke 4:18, where our Lord is reading from Isa. 61:1, 2:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me . . . to preach deliverance (Gk. forgiveness) to the captives."

What point is our Lord making?

He is saying that sin not only puts man hopelessly<sup>-ly</sup> at odds with God, but it makes him a slave, a prisoner. As such he is unable to do anything about his condition.

Cf. John 8:34,

"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."

Human experience proves this. Sin makes men prisoners and keeps them in bondage. It is not the kind of thing where you can take it or leave it as you like. You and I as sinners are in prison, hopelessly in bondage to our sin. We are not free.

- B. It also teaches us that man is a debtor and needs to be pardoned.

The year of jubilee in Israel gives us our illustration here. This is the year when slaves were set free, debts were cancelled. And it is in connection with these problems as discussed in Lev. 25 ff. that the word "redeemed" enters in. It was a year of forgiveness, of pardon, yes, and of liberation.

The problem confronting the Apostle Paul everywhere he went was that of getting men to believe that these things were true of them--that they had sins which needed to be let go, forgiven.

But, if I have a debt which I owe to God which I cannot pay, and if I am in such bondage to my sin that I cannot set myself free, what can my knowledge of such things do but lead me to despair?

This is where the Gospel enters in.

## II. DIVINE FORGIVENESS OF MAN'S SIN IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

Cf. Eph. 1:7,

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Cf. Col. 1:14,

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

In both of these passages redemption and forgiveness are used as synonyms. You cannot be redeemed without being forgiven, and you cannot be forgiven without being redeemed.

Vine defines this word redemption as "a releasing, for (i.e., on payment of) a ransom" (III, 264).

Through the work of Christ on the cross man can be released, forgiven, set free, introduced into a new life of fellowship with God, and heaven now becomes his destiny.

Cf. Peter's statement in Acts 5:30, 31:

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

Cf. Heb. 9:22:

". . . and without shedding of blood is no remission" (forgiveness).

According to our text (Acts 26:18) man is confronted with a double problem with respect to forgiveness. First, he is blinded. Secondly, he is not looking at the light.

How can they, then, be reached? By preaching Christ.  
Cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-5a.

### III. HOW COMPLETE IS THIS FORGIVENESS?

A. First, note this: Paul's words in Acts 13:38, 39:

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Note: not, from some things, but "from all things."

In Hebrews 10:17 we read,

"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Cf. Psa. 103:12,

"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

No wonder that David begins Psa. 103 as he does,

"Bless the Lord . . . Who forgiveth all thine iniquities" (vv. 1-3).

What does it mean to be justified? It means that we are not only forgiven, but declare to be righteous in God's sight--and this is what matters most!

But there is another thing to show how complete this is.

B. A moment ago we read from Heb. 10:17,

"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Will you note the following verse:

"Now where remission (forgiveness) of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Heb. 10:18).

Earlier in the verse the writer says,

"For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

BY ONE SACRIFICE JESUS CHRIST HAS MADE POSSIBLE  
DIVINE FORGIVENESS FOR EVERY PERSON FOR EVERY SIN--  
for ever!

But, does this automatically include everyone? No. And this leads to my final point.

#### IV. THE ONE CONDITION FOR FORGIVENESS.

Our text says,

" . . . that they may receive forgiveness of sins"  
(Acts 26:18).

When Peter had been called down to the house of Cornelius to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, he said this,

"To Him (i.e., to Christ) give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

What does it mean to believe? It simply means to trust. You have heard of your condition, and you have heard what Christ has done to meet your need. Now receive Him as your Saviour, believe in Him as the only One who can forgive your sins.

But you say, "This is too easy. There must be something else for me to do."

Let me ask you, What would you do? Do you want to do something because you feel that He has not done enough?

No, it is just by believing. And "whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Just by believing!

Concl: Now this is where the joy comes in. I don't seek forgiveness to be happy, but forgiveness produces happiness when once the load of sin is lifted and we know that we are forgiven.

David said,

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity" (Psa. 32:1, 2a).

# For "Come Every Soul"

THE DEBT IS PAID  
THE PRISONER RE-  
LEASED  
FORGIVEN!