

Christ Crucified

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Many years ago, there used to be a television show called "Queen for a Day." Four women told their life story and then the audience applauded for each one of them. The one that got the most applause became queen for a day. Suppose you had the chance, not to be queen or king for a day, but to be preacher for a day. Suppose this was the only opportunity you would ever have to preach. What would you preach about?

The first thing you might think about if you were made preacher for a day is that you are not a good enough speaker or that you are not very good in the powers of persuasion. But that is not what is important in preaching. It's not about the preacher, whether he is a fine orator or a persuasive and likeable person. No. What is important in preaching is what is preached. So, the real question is, what would you speak about? Well, in just two short verses, the apostle Paul, speaking of himself, answers both your fears and the question of what you should say. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Paul, by his own estimation, was apparently not an excellent speaker. He didn't use worldly wisdom to persuade people. In 2 Corinthians 10:10, Paul admitted that others were saying that "his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." But he preached anyway. And what did he preach? "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." And, if you are ever given the chance to preach to the unsaved, that is what you should preach. In fact, if you are given the chance to preach a thousand times, that is what you should preach. You can preach on a thousand different topics, but you should always point people to Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

I worked in ministry for many years before I knew this. I did not realize that, whether in sermons or Christian articles or books, the objective is to point people to Jesus. In my ignorance, I pointed sinners to their sins, I pointed them to the law, I pointed them to the Sabbath, I pointed them to Moses, I pointed them to all kinds of dos and don'ts that have never and will never save anyone. Sure,

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I said that Jesus is our Savior. But then I turned right around and, in essence, said He isn't totally our Savior because you have to do these things, too. You have to obey the commandments in the Bible. After all, Jesus did say, in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." What I didn't realize is that He didn't mean for you to keep His commandments in order to earn or even partly earn your salvation. And I always connected the word commandments with Moses. I was thinking of the Ten Commandments. But I was wrong! The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Jesus wasn't pointing us to the Ten Commandments. He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." And John tells us what Jesus' commandments are: "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." That's in 1 John 3:23. And these things we do because we are responding to our salvation by keeping Jesus' commandments. We keep His commandments because we love Him, not in order to earn our salvation.

And then God showed me. He showed me that, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life," as Paul explains in Titus 3:5-7. The Christian's salvation does not depend on his attempts at law-keeping. Salvation is all of Christ by grace alone, given freely to the elect foreordained from the foundation of the world. All the praise goes to Jesus Christ our Savior. We are merely the humble recipients of salvation by grace alone.

I have, at times, preached on biblical separation. It's important. But separation only shows outwardly what God has already done for us inwardly. God has sanctified us, set us apart as holy. How has He done that? Hebrews 10:10 tells us, "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." We are sanctified by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. You can separate all you want, but if you are not first sanctified by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, you are a dead separatist.

Paul tells us in Philippians 2:12-13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." We are to work outwardly what God is working in us through Jesus Christ.

But what is preaching "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," and what is it not? Of themselves, the preaching of worldly philosophy, or a social gospel, or the keeping of the law, or trying to prove Creation from scientific evidence, or even preaching morality or virtues are not preaching "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Preaching miracles, and healing, and prosperity are not preaching "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Preaching justification by faith plus works or justification by faith plus the works of faith, preaching sanctification by human works, and preaching that the sinner must by free will decide to choose Jesus as Savior is not preaching "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." That is preaching man and his works. These are false gospels.

Preaching "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" is preaching Jesus Christ, what He did. It is preaching what He did as a Savior. It is preaching that there is nothing good that we can bring to God that will cause Him to save us. It is preaching Jesus' sinless, righteous life that is imputed to believing sinners. It is preaching His substitutionary death on the cross to pay the sin penalty for all who believe on Him alone as their Savior. It is preaching the irresistibility of God's grace by which He saves us through faith in Jesus Christ alone. It is preaching the power of the blood of Jesus Christ to save us from first to last and prevent us from ever finally falling away.

Any message that allows man to add one tiny bit to the salvation already purchased by Jesus Christ on the cross is not preaching "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." It is not the Gospel because it is not good news, and that is what Gospel means. It is not good news because it tries to give man, sinful man, some part in his own salvation. And that is impossible. Man can do absolutely nothing to save himself. The praise goes to Jesus Christ and none goes to man. Jesus Christ is responsible for the salvation of His people. He accomplished that salvation on the cross. Not one of us can ever boast in ourselves.

The Gospel of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" is not a popular message, and it never has been. Notice 1 Corinthians 1:23-24: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Both Jews and Greeks rejected this Gospel. They rejected "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Why?

In short, it is because the message of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" excludes all human merit for salvation. It humbles man down to the dust and exalts God to the heavens. And that goes against the grain of

human nature. Oh, how it is a part of our very nature to want to earn our salvation! We had much rather depend on ourselves than depend on anyone else, including God. The carnal mind wants to be in control and depend on itself. After all, we are very familiar with earning because we earn a living. We see earning as fair. It is very concrete. We work, and we earn. We know how much we earn by how much and how long we work. We want to see salvation that same way. The carnal mind will not rest in a salvation that is from beginning to end of God. Only the spiritual mind, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, can rest in God's grace.

Paul gives us specifics. Christ crucified is "unto the Jews a stumblingblock." The law said, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." So, to the Jews, Jesus' crucifixion made Him cursed. How could they trust in Him? They would rather continue to trust in their ancestry and their law keeping to save them. They could not put their trust in a despised, rejected, obscure, unlearned, crucified man of doubtful parentage, as they thought.

Now, this might seem pretty remote to you. But is it? Examine yourself. What is your hope of salvation? Is it "Jesus Christ, and him crucified"? Or is it that your parents are Christians, and you were brought up in a Christian home, or that you go to church every Sunday and do many good works? Or perhaps it is that you love the law and you are meticulous not to break it. Here is the problem. These things are not "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." They are not the Gospel; they will never save you. If this describes you, Christ crucified is to you a stumblingblock, and you are not resting in Him for salvation. You are trusting in yourself, not in Christ. You must come before God in prayer like the publican. He did "not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." In 1 Timothy 1:1, Paul calls Jesus Christ our hope. We must totally rest in Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Next, Paul says that Christ crucified is to "the Greeks foolishness." Christ crucified made no sense to the Greek philosophical and scientific mind. How could a man executed on a cross save anyone? Today, the Greek-like philosophical and scientific mindset is what drives our educational system. The world, in general, considers religion foolish. Tell the average college professor about Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, and he will almost certainly label you a religious fanatic and consider everything you say as irrational.

Today's modern Greek, of whatever nationality—the thinking has now pervaded all western thought—trusts his measuring instruments and his mind more than he trusts God. Modern man wants to measure, analyze, hypothesize, theorize, and philosophize. He is quite impressed with himself, with his knowledge (so-called), and with the great body of scientific research upon which he stands. He bases his thoughts and very existence on the shifting theories of a long line of God-haters. In doing all that, he says nothing has purpose and that life is meaningless. And, puffed up in his pride and so-called broad-mindedness, he is perfectly happy with that conclusion.

He is like the man flying with his friend in a small airplane. The engine cuts out and the plane starts heading for the earth. His pilot friend screams to him that there is a parachute under the seat. He tells him to read the instructions, put the parachute on, and bail out. So the man looks at the instructions. He wonders who wrote them. Did the manufacturer write them, did he dictate them to someone else, or was the writer of the instructions free to write them any way he wanted? Are the instructions in his hand the original instructions, or merely copies? If they are copies, do they contain errors? Are these the complete instructions, is something missing, or maybe something has been added? He wonders why he should believe the instructions, why he should think of them as infallible. How does he know the parachute manufacturer knows what he's talking about? Maybe parachutes should just be put on anyway that feels good. Or maybe certain parts should be discarded. How does he know the parachute manufacturer even exists? Perhaps the parachute was not manufactured but is merely the result of the evolutionary development of silkworms! How can he trust that parachutes really work? What is the theory behind them? How does he know this parachute will work? How can he know that he is really holding a parachute? How...BOOM! Just then, plane and earth met and it was too late to do any more wondering.

The Cross of Christ is foolishness to fools. Have you ever known people like that? The Bible is foolishness to them because they can't measure and dissect God. Or even if they do show some interest in the Bible, they get caught up wondering about its inerrancy and infallibility or asking picky questions. They do this because they lack faith, and they cannot have faith unless God gives it to them. They do this because they do not want to submit to God; they want to keep living in their sins.

So, Christ crucified is a stumblingblock to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. But notice what Paul says of a third group of people: "Unto

us who are called, both Jews and Greeks, it is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

To the Jew, the legalist, Christ crucified is a stumblingblock. Compared to their law-keeping and righteousness, they consider it powerless. They are so focused on law-keeping, they are so focused on themselves, that self is the all-consuming thought. The self becomes the object of worship. Are you worshipping God or yourself? To God’s called and chosen people, whatever their nationality, the Gospel is the power of God. As Paul says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

And, what to the scientific and philosophical mind is foolishness, Paul says is the “wisdom of God.” And what is the wisdom of God? Beginning in 1 Corinthians 1:27, Paul answers, “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” What is the wisdom of God? Christ Jesus!

Jesus Christ and Him crucified is the central message of the entire Bible, Old and New Testament. We read in Luke 4 that Jesus went into the synagogue and read from Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” And then Jesus said, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.” Jesus was saying that this Scripture was about His ministry; it was about Him.

Notice just a few places where the Bible tells us that the apostolic church’s message was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. In Acts 5:41-42, right after being beaten by the council for preaching Jesus, the apostles “departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

In Acts 17, we read about Paul, who in Thessalonica, "as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ."

In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul says, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." In 1 Corinthians 9:16, Paul explains, "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!" And in 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul states, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

In Ephesians 3:8, Paul writes, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Why is Jesus Christ and Him crucified the central message of the Bible? Because, as I have said, it is the power of God unto salvation. No other message has that power. The law does not have that power. The law kills, but the Gospel saves. No other message saves. When someone whom the Holy Spirit has regenerated hears the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, he recognizes its power. He knows that in this old, old story of Jesus Christ and the Cross, he is hearing of his salvation.

Too many preachers, instead of focusing on Jesus Christ and Him crucified, focus on other people. They tell us of the experiences of athletes and movie stars. Or, instead of pointing to the Cross of Christ, they point to us. They talk about our felt needs and our emotions. They tell us how to have purpose-driven lives and purpose-driven churches. They tell us how to not be co-dependent. They tell us how to have a godly self-image. They tell us how to fight approval addiction. They tell us how to celebrate discipline and how to have the life we've always wanted. But they don't tell us how to have eternal life with God. They concentrate on tweaking and adjusting us where we stand, rather than transforming us at the foot of the cross. They draw our attention to the sinner, and away from the Savior. All this is wrong! It's not the Gospel. It's not the Bread of Life.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified is not something that takes place in us anyway. It is about an historical event that took

place wholly outside of us. Paul summarizes it in 1 Corinthians 15: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 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."

Christian friend, let me be very frank with you. Is Jesus Christ crucified the focus of your life? Or is your mind cluttered with a mixture of false gospels? Are you confused or are you resting in Christ alone for your salvation? Preachers, are you preaching Christ crucified? Are you and all those present worshipping the God of your salvation, or the god of self, the god of ego, the god of emotional well-being and self-image and self-empowerment?

Preachers, I want you to hear this quote from J.C. Ryle (from a sermon called "Christ Crucified"):

The doctrine of Christ crucified is the strength of a minister. I for one would not be without it for all the world. I should feel like a soldier without arms, like an artist without his pencil, like a pilot without his compass, like a labourer without his tools. Let others, if they will, preach the law and morality; let others hold forth the terrors of hell, and the joys of heaven; let others dwell on the sacraments and the Church: give me the cross of Christ. This is the only lever which has ever turned the world upside down hitherto, and made men forsake their sins: and if this will not, nothing will. A man may begin preaching with a perfect knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; but he will do little or no good among his hearers unless he knows something of the cross. Never was there a minister who did much for the conversion of souls who did not dwell much on Christ crucified. Luther, Rutherford, Whitfield, M'Cheyne, were all most eminently preachers of the cross. This is the preaching that the Holy Ghost delights to bless: He loves to honour those who honour the cross.

As Ryle later says, nothing whatever can make up for want of the Cross, and churches that drift from it may amuse some, but they will feed none. I would also like to read some excerpts from a sermon by

the 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon. It's called *Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats?* Spurgeon said,

An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross in its impudence, that the most shortsighted can hardly fail to notice it during the past few years. It has developed at an abnormal rate, even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them.

Had Christ introduced more of the bright and pleasant elements into his mission, he would have been more popular when they went back, because of the searching nature of His teaching [e.g. John 6:66]. I do not hear him say, "Run after these people Peter and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow, something short and attractive with little preaching. We will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it. Be quick Peter, we must get the people somehow." Jesus pitied sinners, sighed and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them.

In vain will the Epistles be searched to find any trace of this gospel of amusement! Their message is, "Come out, keep out, clean out!" Anything approaching fooling is conspicuous by its absence. They had boundless confidence in the gospel and employed no other weapon. After Peter and John were locked up for preaching, the church had a prayer meeting but they did not pray, "Lord grant unto thy servants that by a wise and discriminating use of innocent recreation we may show these people how happy we are." If they ceased not from preaching Christ, they had not time for arranging entertainments. Scattered by persecution, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. They turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). ...Lord, clear the church of all the rot and rubbish the devil has imposed on her, and bring us back to apostolic methods.

Lastly, the mission of amusement fails to effect the end desired. It works havoc among young converts.... The need of the hour for today's ministry is believing scholarship

joined with earnest spirituality, the one springing from the other as fruit from the root. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt, that it sets men on fire.

So wrote Charles Spurgeon over one hundred years ago. Are you honoring the Cross? I sincerely ask all who are listening to examine yourselves as Paul admonished: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" The simple Good News—stripped of legalism, stripped of psychology and science and philosophy—the simple Good News message, the Gospel, is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Is that what you are truly resting in and believing for your salvation? I pray it is.