

PREACHING CHRIST CRUCIFIED

I Corinthians 1:18-25

We are living in a nervous, restless, troubled and changing world. With all of the rapid changes, however, there are some things which do not change. Fundamentally man changes but little. His elemental needs--physical, mental and spiritual--remain the same regardless of the changing times in which he may find himself. Man's inherent sin, or proneness to go away from God, the consciousness of his own spiritual need, and his longing for fellowship and communion with the Infinite are prevalent in all generations. Do we, then, have a sure message for the people of such a generation as this? In all humility, but with deep conviction and boldness unafraid, we take our stand beside the great preacher and apostle, and declare, "We preach Christ crucified."

The crucifixion of Christ on the cross was central in the preaching of Paul. When he presented the message of the cross, he was very careful not to obscure it by beautiful words or human eloquence. He refused to dilute or weaken it in any way by charming rhetoric. He did not want anybody to listen to him preach and go away exclaiming, "What a brilliant preacher, what a splendid orator!" Instead, he was anxious for them to go away saying, "What guilty sinners we are, and how amazing is the love of God that sent His Son to die and bear the shame of the cross for our redemption!"

Some years ago a gentleman living in a country town in England went to London, and while there listened to some of the great preachers of that day. Writing home to his wife he said, "Last Sunday I went in the morning to hear Dr. So-and-So, naming one of the most eloquent men occupying a London pulpit at that time, and in the evening I went to the Metropolitan Tabernacle to listen to Charles H. Spurgeon. I was greatly impressed by both of them. Dr. So-and-So is certainly a great preacher, but Mr. Spurgeon has a great Saviour." Do you see the difference?

Knowing that men without Christ were lost, and that there was no hope for them except through the cross, Paul said, "I do not want anything to hide the cross. I do not want to decorate the cross and cause the people to lose sight of what it really is, the declaration of man's utter depravity and the manifestation of God's infinite love." He preached the word of the cross instead of words of wisdom from men.

If you want to know how wicked you are by nature, if you want to get an understanding of the awfulness of the sins of which your heart is capable, stand in faith before that cross and contemplate again God's holy, spotless Son hanging on that tree suffering unspeakable anguish.

I wonder if we have any conception of what the cross meant when Paul wrote our text. Cicero said, "The cross, it speaks of that which is so shameful, so horrible, it should never be mentioned in polite society," and yet you find Paul exclaiming, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The cross meant far worse than the gallows or the electric chair means today, because it declared that the one who was hanging there was guilty of the vilest and most awful crimes, and was utterly unfit to live, that he was rejected of man and accursed of God. Men looked upon the cross as a thing on which only the worst of criminals were put to death.

I. Reasons For Preaching Christ Crucified.

1. Obedience to His command.

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Paul and the New Testament Christians knew no other message. They went from place to place preaching and testifying to the things they had seen and heard. Christ crucified and risen again was their shibboleth.

2. An expression of appreciation.

Gratitude for what Christ's death has made possible in our lives should cause us to

"Tell to others all around,
What a Saviour you have found."

We delight to sing the praises of loved ones and friends because of our appreciation for what they mean to us and what they have done for us. We never cease telling of the early teacher who influenced our life's choices, of the earnest preacher who won us to Christ and baptized us, and of the faithful physician who ministered to us or to our loved ones in times of sickness. If our gratitude thus leads us to tell others about these earthly friends, how much more ought we to tell them about the Great Physician of our souls! Christ said, "Go home to thy friends and tell how great things the Lord hath done for thee." Every redeemed person can join heartily in singing:

"All my life was wrecked by sin and strife,
Discord filled my heart with pain.
Jesus swept across the broken strings,
Stirred the slumbering chords again."

"Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
Sweetest name I know,
Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go."

3. An answer to the world's needs.

Christ crucified is the:

- (1) Highest revelation of righteousness and mercy.
- (2) Most convincing testimony of the world's sinfulness and guilt.
- (3) Divine provision for the pardon of transgressors.
- (4) Best motive for Christian service.
- (5) Only hope of the regeneration of humanity.

There is no other way of salvation. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." It is the only message that will save men from sin, deliver them from the powers of darkness unto light, and deliver them from Satan unto God.

II. Trends In Modern Thought Which Lead Away From The Cross.

1. A belief in man's own sufficiency.

Many believe in the possibility of salvation by works, by self-righteousness, by education or by culture. The fundamental fallacy of this belief lies in the slight conception which men have concerning sin. They fail to reckon with the depravity of man's nature; the heinousness of man's sin in God's sight, and God's demands for righteousness. To a generation ignorant or unmindful of the awfulness of sin, its universal prevalence, its devastating blight, its dreadful consequences, the death of Jesus upon the cross is the needless sacrifice of a good man; the shameless martyrdom of a great teacher; the plain perversion of human justice; and a glaring contradiction of God's love. But the truth of the matter is a child cannot grow up into a Christian. There must be the experience of regeneration.

"I've tried in vain a thousand ways,
My fears to quell, my hopes to raise,
But what I need, the Bible says
Forevermore in Jesus."

"My soul is night, my heart is steel,
I cannot see, I cannot feel,
For light, for life, I must appeal
In simple faith to Jesus.

"He died, He lives, He reigns, He pleads,
There's love in all His words and deeds.
There's all a guilty sinner needs,
Forevermore in Jesus.

"Though some may sneer, and some may blame
I'll go with all my guilt and shame,
I'll go to Him because His name,
Above all names, is Jesus."

2. The disposition to accredit other religions, if sincerely believed and devoutly lived, with having efficacy in them to save the lost. The moment one grants the possibility of salvation through any other name than that of Jesus Christ and through any merit save the merit of His shed blood, that moment his interest in the evangelization of a lost world begins to die. If one can be saved without a personal faith in the shed blood of the Son of God so may all be saved. But, it is as true today as it was when Jesus declared it. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

"I know of lands that are sunk in shame,
Of hearts that faint and tire.
I know of a name, a name, a name,
That can set those lands on fire.

"I know of lives that are steeped in sin,
That no man's art can cure.
I know of a name, a name, a name,
That can make those lives all pure.

"I know of souls that are lost to God,
Bound down by things of earth,
I know of a name, a name, a name,
That can give those souls new birth.

"Oh, listen, my soul, the Saviour speaks
To save the world from dross,
Christ Jesus is the name,
He saves by way of the cross."

3. The disposition to recognize the historic Christ and to give Him a large place among men; perhaps the chief place among all the world's teachers, reformers and religionists, but to deny or belittle His death as a vicarious atonement for sin. Some there are who prattle much about the Golden Rule, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Christian principle as a way of life. Their difficulty is that they do not begin at the beginning. They extol the fruits of Christianity without accepting the source of Christian living. Before one can live the Christian life, he must have more than a principle or an ideal held up before him. He must have spiritual life begotten within him. "The fatherhood of God" and "the brotherhood of man" are but empty phrases and idle dreams until men become brothers in Jesus Christ. Society can only be saved as individuals are saved.

I call you Christians back to a new crusade of witnessing to the glorious gospel of the Son of God. Let us say with a new emphasis, "I determined not to know

anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," and "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world."

This is the one and only message that will bring pardon and peace to troubled hearts; that will transform crooked lives; that could change an impulsive and unstable Simon into Cephas a Rock; that could change Saul, the persecutor of the early church, into its chief defender and mightiest messenger; that could make the selfish, grasping Zaccheus willing to make restitution to all he had wronged and ready to give half of his goods to feed the poor. This is the only message that could have sustained the Christian martyrs of the first century as they burned at the stake or were devoured by wild beasts in the arenas of the wicked, sensuous, pleasure-mad, rotting Rome. This is the only message which could change the dissolute Augustine into the self-sacrificing monk and saint; Spurgeon, the uncouth country lad, into the mighty metropolitan preacher; John Wesley, the cultured Oxford student, into the fiery evangelist; William Booth, the unknown, itinerant preacher, into the head of the Salvation Army; Moody, the shoe clerk, and Billy Sunday, the care-free young baseball player, into the mightiest evangelist of the past century. "We preach Christ crucified."