

The Preaching of the Cross

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 1:17-18

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I especially want you to listen carefully as I preach to you today and I pray that God will give you ears to hear.

You know, the Scripture says, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Our Lord said of the religious people to whom he preached in the days of his flesh, “They have ears, but they don’t hear. They have eyes, but they don’t see.” And he turned to his disciples and he said, “Blessed are your eyes, they see; and your ears, they hear.”

I pray that God will give you ears to hear what I am dealing with in the message today and eyes to see and understand, enter in to, by faith, the promises of God in Christ Jesus. What an inheritance, what a treasure.

The title of the message is “The Preaching of the Cross” and I am going to read a most familiar passage of Scripture in 1 Corinthians chapter one, verse 17. You are all familiar with this, but let’s read it again. 1 Corinthians 1, verse 17, Paul says, “For Christ sent me not to baptize.” That is, “Christ didn’t send me to organize and baptize and promote. He sent me with this mission and this errand: to preach the gospel, not to talk about preaching it, but to preach it; not to plan to preach it or intend to preach it, or prepare to preach it, but to preach it. God sent me to preach the gospel.”

He sent every one of his preachers to preach the gospel. In fact, Paul said, “Woe is unto me if I don’t preach the gospel.” And he says, “He didn’t send me to preach it with wisdom of words, intellectualism, clever words, oratory,” you know, to amuse and amaze men, “Lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching,” now watch this. “For the preaching of the cross of Christ is to them that are perishing foolishness, sheer nonsense. The preaching of the cross of Christ and all that it implies and all that is included therein is to them who are perishing whether in the pulpit or the pew that they are perishing, nonsense, foolishness. But unto us who are being saved, the preaching of the cross and all that is included therein is the power and the wisdom of God.”

Now, my friends, it is evident to me—and you hold on there and listen to me, stay with me—it is evident to me that the Lord of glory holds the wisdom of this world in contempt. I believe that. The so called wisdom of this world God holds in utter

contempt, all of our smartness and intellectualism, our vain philosophies and our so-called wisdom.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:19. “It is written, it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. I will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”

And Paul said in Romans 1:22, “Professing themselves to be wise,” and don’t we? “Professing themselves to be wise they became fools.”

And in Matthew 11:25 one day our Lord lifted his eyes to heaven and he said, “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth because thou hast hid these things, these things, spiritual truth, knowledge of God, understanding of the mysteries of the gospel, thou hast hid these things from the wise and from the prudent and thou hast revealed them unto babes.”

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26. He keeps talking about “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world. God hath chosen the base things of the world. God hath chosen the despised things of the world. God hath chosen the things that are not to bring to naught the things that are that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

It is evident to me that the so-called wisdom of this world, intellectualism of this world and all the so called smartness we profess is foolishness to God, foolishness. And then, secondly, it is evident to me that the Lord God of heaven and earth—now listen—that he holds the so called outwards morality of this world in utter contempt just like he does their so called wisdom, their so called goodness. Their goodness is just so called like their wisdom is so called.

Listen to Luke 16:15. Now listen to this. “He said unto them.” Now, he said this to the most religious people of that day, the most religious...the scribes and Pharisees and the Sadducees. He said this to them, “You are they who justify yourselves before me. You have a religious veneer and an outward holiness and an outward profession and an outward righteousness and religion that you use to deceive men and justify yourselves before others, but God knows your heart. Men do not know your heart. They can’t see your thoughts. They can’t see your pride and arrogance and hatred and lust. And they can’t see your envy and jealousy and bigotry and prejudice. They can’t see your covetousness. And you look good to them. All that you profess to be you fool folks. You justify yourselves before men because they can’t see inside of you, but God can. God can.” And he said, “But God knows your heart, fellow. And that which is highly esteemed among men, all this outward veneer and all this so called morality and all this outward religion is an abomination to God almighty.”

He holds our so called goodness and morality in utter contempt. In fact, our Lord said to one of these so called good men one time he said, “There is none good but God.” People aren’t good. You are not good. There is not a good man on the face of this earth. There is none that doeth good and sinneth not, not a good woman on this earth. That’s what the

Bible says. It says, “There is none righteousness, no not one. There is none that understandeth, no not one. There is none that seeketh after God, no not one. There is none good, no not one.”

Scripture says, “Let every mouth be stopped, ever alibi cease and all the world become guilty, guilty, guilty before God.”

And our Lord said, “Except your righteousness, your holiness,” and people run around talking about their holiness of which they have none, but our Lord said this, “Except your holiness and righteousness exceed that of the best religious person you won’t enter the kingdom of God. You won’t enter the kingdom of God. None good.”

Oh how my soul...God holds our so called morality and righteousness and holiness in utter contempt because he looks on the heart. And let me tell you something. God can only be satisfied with perfection. He cannot be satisfied with anything less than perfection. That is what Scripture says. We have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The glory of God is his holiness, his holiness. It says...Isaiah said he saw the Lord and his glory filled the temple and the cherubims and seraphims cried what? “Holy, holy, holy.” That is God’s glory is his holiness and we have come short of his glory. And you can’t by...man at his best state is altogether vanity. That’s what the Word...that is this day is vanity.

God holds the wisdom of this world in utter contempt. God holds the so called morality and goodness of this world in utter contempt, religious and otherwise. And then, thirdly, it is evident to me that the Lord God of heaven—I’m talking about the living God, not the god of your imagination—that the living God holds the wealth and honor and fame of men and women in utter contempt. All of your fame and all of your influence and your so called power, the pride of your power, the pride of your honor, they named a street for you, they named a building for you, you got your name in the paper, you wear more diamonds than somebody else, you live in a bigger house, you know the governor, you call him by his first name, you know the mayor, you’ve done this that and the other, all of your honor, wealth...God said this in John 5:44. Listen. “How can you believe? How can you believe? How is it possible for any of you to believe which seek honor one of another?”

That’s just one worm bragging on another worm. That’s all in the worm. “How can you believe, how can you be saved that seek honor one of another and you seek not the honor that comes from God?”

There is a wisdom that is not the world’s wisdom. There is an honor that is not found here. And there are riches, but they are not the silly corruptible riches you have got stored away in your safety deposit box. I guarantee you that.

He said, “How hardly shall they that are rich enter the kingdom of God? How hardly shall they that trust in riches?”

Our Lord was born in a stable. He shows his utter contempt for all of this sham. He wasn't born in a mansion. His parents were unknown peasants, not rulers, not well known people. He was raised in a carpenter shop not in a university. His disciples were fishermen, not famous men. He lived in the fields, in the mountains, not in luxury. He died between two thieves and lay in a borrowed tomb showing all the way through. And he had not one possession except the robe he wore on his back.

You know they tell me today that the smart way to get a hearing, the smart way to spread the gospel, the smart way to have a revival or a crowd is to enlist the aid of men and women of fame and talent and worldly honor. If you want to get a big crowd, get you a politician to kick off your meeting or get you a movie star, some famous football player or basketball player to come and sit on the platform with you and people will come by the thousands. They will come to hear you preach if you get some beauty queen, Miss Kentucky or Miss West Virginia or some football star or somebody like that.

What a farce. What a joke. And what a joke preachers are that take part in stuff like that.

Our Lord didn't enlist the arm of the flesh to promote the glory of God almighty. Our Lord didn't enlist the help of Caesar. He declared, "It's not by might, nor by power, but by Spirit saith the Lord." And any time that people use methods like that, they show they don't know God almighty.

What does God need with a flea, with a worm, with a wretch just because he can run up and down the football field to promote God almighty? That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of in my life.

Jeremiah nine said, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. If anybody has got anything to glory in, let him glory in this: that he knows me." That's the thing to be rejoicing about, that you know the Lord, not that you know all the presidents by name, not that you know the mayor, not that you know mathematics. You know Christ.

"I am the Lord."

And listen to what he delights in. He said, "You delight in your wealth and your riches and your strength. I am the Lord that executeth loving kindness and judgment and righteousness in the earth. And in these things I delight," God says. "I delight in loving kindness. I delight in judgment."

Christ satisfied the judgment. There is no judgment for those who are in Christ. "And I delight in true righteousness," God says.

The honor of this world is nothing and the power and influence and riches of this world is nothing. It will be like an albatross around your neck some day. And God said, When you stand before him in the judgment the rust and canker of your gold stored away that

you left for folks to fight over instead of giving it to people in need will stand in the judgment as a witness against your eternity bound soul. You write that down.

And I'll tell you something else. It looks like brother Mahan is getting on everything this morning. It's time somebody spoke out. It's time somebody took a stand. We've got the most compromising bunch of preachers in this generation that ever lived and they care more for their fine homes and automobiles and jobs and salaries than they do the souls of men and nothing for the glory of God almighty. They are not prophets. The prophet went out of style a long time ago. But God holds the wisdom of this world in contempt and the morality of this world in contempt and the wealth and honor and fame of this world in contempt. And God holds the religious systems and religious denominations and religious organizations and religious powers in utter, total contempt. That's right. Everything going under the name of religion today, just about 99% of it God holds in utter, absolute contempt.

In Isaiah 1:11-15—you read that sometime—God said, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices? Your sacrifices to me, saith the Lord, your new moons, your feast days your sabbaths, the calling of your assemblies. My soul hates it.”

You read Isaiah chapter one. “When you spread your hands and make long prayers I won't hear you. Your hands are full of blood.”

When our Lord came down here to this earth in the flesh, he came to one of the most religious generations that ever lived, just like America today, synagogues and temples all over the place. And he shunned their temples and their synagogues and preached on the streets. And he called their greatest religious leaders hypocrites. That's what he called them, hypocrites. And he ate with publicans and sinners. And he drove the money changers and the promoters and the salesmen out of the temple. He didn't recruit them. He drove them out of the temple, all the fellows making merchandise of the temple and the house of God. That is what we're doing today, selling their gimmicks and their lapel pins and everything under the sun. Even one fellow was selling dirt out of the tomb of Christ that he brought back here in little vials on television not long ago. He drove these money changers and these promoters out of his temple and he said, “My house will be called a house not of merchandise and promotion and entertainment, but a house of prayer.”

And then he picked corn and healed people on their sabbath day. That irritated them. And then he refused their traditions and ate with unwashed hands. And he did every bit of this to show his contempt for organized religion and traditions and great mighty buildings and fanfare and extravaganzas and foolish customs. Yes sir, you know what they do today? Today in order to have a religious atmosphere men burn...men and women burn candles. That's supposed to be real religious to burn candles. And they burn candles in the presence of him who is the light of the world.

Can you imagine burning a candle in the presence of the light of the universe? It's a lightning bug before the noon day sun. And then they take holy water and baptism and

try to wash sins away. Sin is a heart disease. Sin is a heart stain. Sin is on the book of God. And they are going to put it away with sprinkling water on folks, you know, on little old babies and they sprinkle their water in people's faces, making peculiar signs over them like this, you know. And only the blood of God can put away sin. Don't you know that?

Sin is deep, it's a stain, it is an indelible stain, it is an everlasting stain. It is against God and it takes God to forgive sin. Man can't do that, absolve you of your sins, sell you indulgences.

They erect dead, cold statues to represent the living God who is a spirit. God is spirit. God is not worshipped with the things made by men's hands. God doesn't dwell in temples made with hands. The heaven of heavens won't contain the living God. And we've got a statue over there of Jesus and a picture.

Can you imagine a picture of Jesus hanging on somebody's wall? You've got him framed and the heaven won't contain him.

Men and women are herded to the front of the church and they call that salvation. They are just herded to the front of the church under all kinds of psychology and all kind of mass psychology and sweet singing of hymns and heads bowed and eyes closed and all of this sort of thing. They are herded down to the front and they call that coming to Christ.

And all of our outward rules and regulations...we're going to do...we're going to use those to make men holy.

How can you make men holy with rules and laws and regulation? The law has never been able to make anybody holy. People who understood the law ran from it. They did when God gave it at Sinai. Isn't that right? They turned and ran.

Oh, I tell you, our church programs and socials today are called serving God. What kind of God do we have? I cry out with Elijah of old, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Where is the living God? Where is the almighty awesome, fearful God? Where is the God who lives, who reigns, who dwells everywhere? Where is the God in the thunder and the lightning and the snow and the whirlwind that Job saw? Where is God?"

Or, like Isaiah: "Who hath believed our report and to whom is the arm, the power of God revealed."

Who knows God? Does anybody know God? Have you met anybody lately you thought knew God? Have you heard any preacher lately that you thought really was in contact with the living God?

I sat and listened to some compromising famous preacher not too many nights ago on nationwide television and he was carrying on about all kind of things, you know, foolishness and insignificant nothings. And I sat there and listened to him a little while

and I thought: “Is this God’s prophet of today? Is this the Paul of 1987? Is this the John the Baptist? This guy? This compromiser? Is this man representing God almighty? This man’s God is a peanut god. And his message is less than nothing.”

Oh, I tell you: It’s not the wisdom of this world I’m seeking. It is they wisdom of God I want, the wisdom of the almighty, awesome God. “Great is the mystery of godliness.”

Mystery God calls it, not so simple a little child can understand it, a mystery. But I’ll tell you this. I’ll tell you where the wisdom of God is. It is in Christ. He is the wisdom of God. He said, “I am the truth. I am the truth.”

The truth is not in your church catechism. The truth is in a person, Christ Jesus. “I am the truth of God. He of God is made unto us wisdom.”

I want to know Christ. Oh, I don’t want to miss Christ. I want to win Christ and be found in him. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.” Don’t you? Don’t you really? Are you satisfied? All of this showmanship and entertainment? Are you really satisfied with what you are listening to, what you are hearing, what you are reading?

“God wants to and can’t. God would like to and you won’t let him. Poor God.”

I’ll tell you it’s not an outward form of morality that I am seeking. I can get along. I can please you. I don’t need to go to this show or shoot dice or drink liquor. I can quit all these things and please you, you know, and appear holy to me and then justify myself before men. But that is not the morality I am seeking. I believe every believer ought to avoid every appearance of evil and live holy before God in every outward way he can to show forth the glory of Christ. But, my friends, I am seeking an inward righteousness. I am seeking the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

I tell you, he is able to present you holy, unblamable, unprovable in God’s sight and that’s what you better have. The very fact that you don’t paint your nails or you don’t have a television or you don’t chew tobacco or something like that doesn’t mean that you don’t have a wicked, black, dirty, hell deserving heart. And that’s where you need holiness before God, before God. Have you been pawning yourself off with someone too long? God knows you are a nobody and you need Christ. He is the righteousness of God. That old outward form of holiness—I see all these holiness churches—they are no more holy than a pig. Holiness is in Christ not in the flesh.

I’ll tell you it is not acceptance or approval of men I am seeking. I need to be accepted in the beloved. I need the approval of God. And that is found nowhere but in Christ. He hath made us accepted in the beloved. I may hurt your feelings, but I’m telling you the truth just like Peter stood on Pentecost and talked to those religious Jews and he said, “You better save yourself from this perverse generation, religious perverse generation.” That’s what it is. They have twisted the Word of God. They have got a form of godliness in denying the power thereof. I want to be accepted in the beloved. I want, like Paul of

old, to labor whether present or absent to be accepted of the Lord. Do you? It's not religion I seek. It's life, life in Christ.

"Lay hold," Paul said twice. "Lay hold of eternal life."

And I'll tell you, my friend, eternal life is not in the form. I don't care if you are a Baptist or a Catholic or a Methodist or Presbyterian. You can be just as lost in one as in the other. Eternal life is not in a form. It's not in a tradition. It's not in a custom. It's not in a ritual of religion. Eternal life is in Christ Jesus the Lord. That's what the Bible says. This is the record. God hath given us eternal life and this life is in his Son, not in his Church, in his Son, not in his law, in his Son, not in a borners bench, in his Son, not in a profession of faith, in his Son. And "He that hath the Son hath life and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

Thank God. The Son of God hath come and given us an understanding that in him, through him, by him, because of him, for him we may know him that is true and we are in him that is true, even in his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God. This is eternal life.

By his death on the cross we have life. By his obedience we have righteousness.

Is that foolishness to you? Or is it the power of God?

"The preaching of the cross, the cross, substitution, reconciliation, blood atonement is to them that are perishing, foolishness. But to those who are being saved—thank God, I'm a sinner saved by grace through the blood of Christ—it is the power of God."

All right. I have this message on cassette tape if you would like to share it with someone else or hear it again. Write for it. Send two dollars and we'll mail you this message "Preaching the Cross." And on the back of it, "Look unto me and be ye saved."

Until next week, God bless you every one.