

Preaching Christ

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I want to, if the Lord will give me some liberty tonight, I want to preach a message to you that I have entitled, "Preaching Christ." That is as simple as I know to put it.

Paul writes to those at 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.¹

Now I tell you what. If there is one thing that is certain—and I see it more and more every day that I live—if there is one thing that is certain in our generation there is absolutely no shortage when we look around of men and even now in our generation more and more men and women who claim to be preaching the gospel to this generation. All over this world people gather in their various churches and their various denominations and they sing many of the same songs that we sing, even the songs that we sang tonight. And they will give money to their church just like you and I give money to our church. And they pray just like we do and in their churches as they go through their services. And then finally somebody gets up in their church building and preaches just like I am going to preach to you tonight. And they will have an invitation, which we don't have an invitation. Our invitation is the gospel coming to Christ. But they will have an invitation at the end of their message or their sermon that they preach and when they are finished they invite sinners to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior and many will respond. And when they are finished they will all leave that place feeling with a felling of fulfillment because they have done their duty to serve God.

And my question to you tonight is this. What is the difference between what they are doing and what we are doing? Is there a difference? Is there something different between what we are doing here tonight at Eager Avenue Grace Church in Albany, Georgia and what they might be doing in other Bible conferences all across this world, because they are everywhere in every place.

Well, in this text that I just read to you a moment ago the apostle Paul he gives us the

¹ 1 Corinthians 2:1-2.

content and purpose of true gospel preaching, what we are supposed to do. And in his words Paul shows us the difference between truly preaching the gospel, telling men and women about who Christ is and what he did and what he actually came here to accomplish by his obedience unto death at Calvary when he actually put away all the sins of all God's elect. When he cried, "It is finished,"² he meant it. It was done. Salvation was complete. Justification was obtained for all those whom he represented.

And when we think about that Paul shows us the difference between truly preaching that gospel and to finding that gospel before men or simply going through the motions of falsely yet sincerely thinking that you are serving God.

Some people say, "Well, what is the big deal? Why make such a big issue of it?"

Maybe you are sitting there tonight and you are thinking, well, you know, God is not really concerned with the content and purpose of a person's preaching. All that matters is that you are trying as hard as you can. You are trying sincerely to do something for God.

Listen. Notice how the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul tells us this. He says, "For I determined."³ The word literally means he was resolved. In other words, he was dogmatically convinced in his heart and mind. He said, "I am determined not to know anything among you, save [what?] Jesus Christ, and him crucified."⁴

Now I know there is a lot of different things that we need to talk about in God's Word. There is a lot of things that we need to learn from God's Word, but none of them need to be learned out of the context of this: Christ's righteousness established that guaranteed the salvation of every person whom he represented. We talk about giving, but we don't talk about giving as a way to save you, keep you saved or recommending yourselves to God. We talk about coming to church, but we don't talk about church as a means to make yourself more holy or more qualified or more fit for eternal life. You come to church. You come here to gather to hear God's gospel preached so that you can be comforted and strengthened and encouraged in what you have already obtained by virtue of your oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And with all that said I want to talk to you tonight if I can about what it is to preach Christ.

And so the first thing I would have you to notice is look at verse one and then verse three and four. Notice the manner of Paul's preaching.

Paul is writes this.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you..."⁵

² John 19:30

³ 1 Corinthians 2:2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:1.

And I like this because being from Redneckville, USA in Louisiana I can say I came not to you in excellency of speech now or of wisdom declaring unto you...

And listen. This is what he is doing, declaring unto them the testimony of God. That is what we are to do. It is not what I think. It is what thus saith the Lord.

And notice what he says in verse three.

And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.⁶

And I'll tell you. If you go back, we don't have time to look at all of it, but I would encourage you to read the first chapter. If you go back and you compare Paul's words in the first chapter, particularly verse 17 of chapter one, he is saying basically the same thing. Man's wisdom—now think about this—man's wisdom and man's reasoning and man's eloquence of speech refers to man's attempts to remove the offensive nature of the preaching of the cross. They want to take away. They want to be able to preach it in such a way to where nobody ever gets offended. We want everybody to be in. We are all going to heaven. We are just trying to get there in a little different way.

And that is what Paul is trying to say to us. He is showing us that those eloquent attempts and those reasonings and wisdom that men come up with, they want to take away the offensiveness of the gospel.

What is it that makes the gospel so offensive? What is so offensive about it?

I have often wondered that. We tell sinners Christ did everything. He established a righteousness that demands your eternal justification. He, by the Holy Spirit, will present you holy, unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight. We tell sinners good news that Christ came and that he lived and that he died and that he rose again not to make salvation possible. He actually obtained the salvation of every person whom he represented.

And you think, why in the world would that be offensive to a sinner? Why? What makes it so offensive?

You know, the offensiveness of the cross, do you know what it lies in? It lies in the fact that we, God's children, are absolutely dogmatic concerning this thing that no sinner, no sinner, no matter how moral or sincere or dedicated or committed they might be, no sinner is saved who is either ignorant of or not submitted to Christ's righteousness alone as their only ground, hope or cause of eternal salvation. We insist on it. God's Word insists on that. That is not just me. It is not Ken. It is not Bill. And it is not David. That is God's Word and God insists on it. Salvation is in Christ.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:3-4.

And I am telling you. The gospel addresses all sinners. I don't care who they are or what state they are in life. It addresses all sinners who don't possess this righteousness is condemned and under the wrath of God and walking after and minding the things of the flesh. And it exposes their deeds as evil and fruit unto death. And that is why it is so offensive. It won't let man take any credit. It won't let you rest on the fact, well, I have preached 40 years or I have been a deacon or I have been a song director or I have been a Sunday school teacher, I have been a good momma or a good daddy or good grandma or good grandpa. It all come backs to Christ did everything and he won't share any of it with any of us at any point. And that is what offends man. Every man by nature wants to be able to take some of the credit, wants to be able to like that rich young ruler to approach our Lord Jesus Christ and said, "What good thing can I do that I might gain eternal life?"

We want to do something.

I said it years ago and I still believe it. Most of what is done in the name of God today is simply do-do religion is what it is. It is do this and do that and don't do this and don't do that. And this book doesn't teach that. It does not.

You can't... I challenge anybody find me any place in God's Word where it says if you will do this, God will do that. It is just not so. That is not salvation by grace. That is salvation by works, by merit based on what you do.

Now look over at Romans chapter one. Hold your place there. In Romans chapter one verse one Paul shows us... you know, there where we read in Corinthians he declared unto them the testimony of God. Well, here is the testimony of God.

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto [what?] the gospel of God."⁷

His message was from God as it was the gospel of God.

Now immediately... now notice what he says in verse three. Immediately upon mentioning the gospel, Paul begins with God specifically, God the Father. Notice what he says.

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.⁸

The gospel concerns one thing. It concerns the Son. It concerns the Son.

But listen. It is God the Father who is the source and originator of salvation. God the

⁷ Romans 1:1.

⁸ Romans 1:3-4.

Father before the foundation of the world chose or elected a multitude of guilty, defiled, hell deserving sinners in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And God the Father then sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ into this world as a representative of all those whom he had chosen and Christ Jesus came here in our name and in our nature and did everything that was required of us by way of obedience to the law and justice and then he suffered and bled and died under the guilt, penalty and condemnation of God's law in my place, in my stead, in the stead of every single solitary one of God's elect when he suffered and bled and died at Calvary, establishing that righteousness that demands that God bring all those whom Christ represented into glory.

Now turn back over to our text and notice what Paul says next. He says he declared the testimony unto God, but notice how he delivered it.

“And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”⁹

Paul was with them in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. Well, that could be a reference to natural infirmities along with a deep sense of the importance of the ministry of the gospel.

I tell you what. I have been doing this for a while. I don't even try to keep track of time anymore. But I tell you. I can't ever remember a time that I have ever stood behind the pulpit, whether it is here or in Ruston that when I stand behind it I am not in fear and trembling as I stand to declare the gospel of God's grace. It is an unbelievable responsibility to tell men and women the truth about God.

And that is what Paul is saying here as he declared this... We know the faults and frailties of human flesh. I know. And tragically I know. I do not love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength. I just don't. I wish I could say I did. And I could honestly say that I have never ever loved my neighbor as myself.

Now I don't say it to pat... I am definitely not patting myself on the back about that. But I know God still requires it and he demands it. He demands perfection. God doesn't say, “Try, give it your best shot.” God demands, “Be ye therefore holy even as my Father which is in heaven. Be ye therefore perfect even as my Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

And we get to stand up here and tell sinners about this holy God who will not overlook the least of sin in the best of men and yet we ourselves are sinners. And that is why we are so dependent upon the grace of God. Absolutely dependant upon the grace of God. We know but for his grace we would be lost and undone. If God hadn't chose me and hadn't a purpose to redeem me through his Son, if Christ hadn't of came and suffered, bled and died on my behalf, there is no way I could tell you this gospel.

We speak that which we know. We are telling men and women about something. It is not... I was just like you. You know, I was raised in religion and I thought that if it didn't

⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:3.

make the hairs which I can't experience anymore, if it didn't make the hair stand up on the back of your neck, it wasn't really something to it.

You know, I was baptized three times in three different Baptist churches and every time I cried and I wept and everybody else cried and wept right along with me. And I got that real tingly good feeling all over. And it didn't mean a thing, never meant a thing.

And then God taught me his gospel and revealed Christ in me, the hope of glory and everything else changed. Everything became different and I saw that God was merciful to me a sinner, that God through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, did everything required to bring me to glory.

And, see, Paul exhibits here, when he talks about this fear and trembling, he is exhibiting a reverential awe and respect that he had for God's character. So much so that he was careful. Listen. He was careful how he preached and what he preached. He had the... he was precise. We need to be precise in what we say. And we do. We don't need to be vague. You definitely don't need to let sinners make their own decisions and choices because do you know what? They will make... if you leave it up to their interpretation just like you and I apart from the interpretation of God the Holy Spirit do you know what we are going to do? We are going to make the wrong choice. We are going to make the wrong interpretation. And Paul's speech wasn't intended to make this message more desirable. That is what he is saying when he says that he came to them in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of men's wisdom. He says, "I am not trying to convince you to believe something by compromising the gospel and by speaking peace to those who are ignorant of the only ground of salvation."

He didn't seek to put his words together so artfully as to hide the offensive nature of the cross and not tell sinners plainly of their lost estate and that they needed to repent of dead works and evil deeds. His speech was in demonstration of the Spirit of God and the power of God. And that doesn't mean it is something mystical and mysterious and not easily understood.

Nor is he referring to those miracles he had been empowered to do by the Holy Spirit which it is true that he was able to do miracles. But it is true that Paul's preaching as all the other apostles was accompanied by those signs and miracles which were meant to demonstrate the authority and truth of their message. But here it is speaking of the message itself, of what he was saying.

And notice the subject of his preaching. Notice verse two.

He said, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."¹⁰

As the gospel begins with God the Father, it concerns Christ the Son incarnate.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:2.

Paul put it like this in Romans chapter one verse three: “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.”¹¹

Paul describes here in this verse the Lord Jesus Christ who is the central figure of the gospel, Christ crucified. This refers both to his person and the merit of his work in redemption in fulfilling his offices as mediator of the covenant of grace.

You think about this. God has graciously and wonderfully revealed his infinite wisdom in the makeup of that person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who he was. He was not just simply man. He was God man.

The gospel of God, who does it concern? It concerns his Son Christ Jesus our Lord. And it identifies and distinguishes him from all those counterfeits beginning with the make up of his person, who he was, that he was God in human flesh and then the nature of his offices in the work of redemption. God’s gospel is his promise of salvation conditioned on Christ’ love.

And the apostle Paul’s whole point here is to show how great and marvelous Christ the mediator and Savior is.

“Without controversy,” Paul says, “great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.”¹²

Now I don’t know about you, but I cannot begin in my finite mind to comprehend the height nor the depth nor that great glorious ministry that in that person, that babe who that was born in that manger, it was God in human flesh. I can’t comprehend that. I just can’t, but I know it to be so.

You know, when I think about that a lot of times, that babe in that manger, that person who was nailed to that cross, he kept the hearts beating in those who drove the nails.

We preach and we trust a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. And all the privileges and benefits and advantages of his offices in the mediation of Christ it will avail us nothing unless we reduce it to faith in his person, who he was, what he actually accomplished, all that he has done.

Think about this. All that Christ has done, all that Christ is doing and all that he shall do is inconceivably great because of the excellency and the glory of his person. A man couldn’t do it by himself. He would have to be God man. It had to be God in human flesh.

And, see, Christ’s person and his work are vitally connected. We don’t trust a person absolutely considered. We trust the crucified Christ, the one sent of the Father to meet

¹¹ Romans 1:3.

¹² 1 Timothy 3:16.

every condition of salvation by his obedience unto death. It is not just simply, you know, we have said this a lot of times. I have heard Bill say it one of the first times, but it is so true.

People say, “Yes,” most people. What is the gospel? They say, “It is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.”

Well, it is true the death, burial and resurrection of Christ are historical facts, but those historical facts in and of themselves alone won’t save you. It is how Christ came according to the Scriptures. How? As a substitute and representative.

Everybody out there believes in Christ, but they don’t believe in him as the one who came here and represented him by his obedience unto death.

Oh, they say Christ came and he lived and he died. But still it revolves and rests upon what they do with it. Their faith that makes it effectual. It is not that Christ simply came and that he lived and that he died. It is that he came here as strict obedience to God’s law and justice to satisfy God’s law and justice for the sins of his people. It is showing exactly who he is and what he accomplished on behalf of his sheep. We have got to tell people who that person is, that Christ came, that he lived, that he died, that he rose again.

I think one of my favorite verses in the Scripture is 2 Corinthians chapter 5:21.

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made, “not just simply righteous, that we were made in Christ, “the righteousness of God in him.”¹³

It is preaching that constitutes the ministry of reconciliation. We are telling. We don’t say, “Be ye reconciled to God just on your own.” We tell them, “Be reconciled to God based on this truth. God made Christ to be sin for you. Christ who knew no sin, that you might be made not just simply righteous, but the righteousness of God in him. That is what we tell sinners.

Imputed sin demanded Christ’s death. Christ had never thought an evil thought or did an evil deed. Sin charged to him demanded his death. And righteousness established, do you know what? It demanded his resurrection. Imputed sin demanded his condemnation under God’s law and justice. Righteousness established demanded his justification and therefore his resurrection. These truths establish the good news that we can tell sinners, that Christ Jesus did everything for you.

And notice verse five. Notice the goal of gospel preaching.

“That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”¹⁴

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:5.

You know, it is kind of amazing. That power of God thing keeps coming up all the time. Romans chapter one verses 16 and 17 Paul said, “ 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.”¹⁵

And my question is this. Why is it so powerful?

“For therein [in the gospel preached] is the righteousness of God revealed.”¹⁶

That same righteousness that we are made the righteousness of God in him.

Paul’s whole point here when he says that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, his whole point here is that the preached gospel, that he preached the gospel the way he did in order that sinners might be saved, that they might come to true, justifying, saving faith.

See, faith that stands in the wisdom of man, you know what? It is not saving faith. You know Christ came. Multitudes know that he came. There is multitudes that admit that he was born of a virgin and that he lived a perfect obedient life and that he died and went into the ground and came forth out of the tomb and he sits in the...

They will all admit those things. But it is not just faith in that wisdom of men. The wisdom of men teaches sinners that salvation in some way to some degree, who does it ultimately depend on? The sinner.

I heard that all my life in false religion. What will you do with Jesus? You can sing it all the time.

It can’t receive those things that are freely given based on the imputed righteousness of Christ. But faith that stands in the power of God is justifying faith and it... do you know what it does? It rests in Christ’s righteousness alone as on the ground of salvation. This promise is to everybody that believes.

And no one is excluded except those who exclude themselves by unbelief. God will save no sinner apart from faith. But now listen to me. All of God’s elect were justified not by their faith, but by the faith fullness of Christ, by what he did. Christ was the only one that has ever been faithful to the covenant. Christ loved God with all his heart, mind and soul as God made. And Christ loved his neighbor as himself. Not to improve on his person, but what did he do it? He did it as a representative, as a substitute, as a surety. He did it for those whom he represented. And when Christ cried on the cross, “It is finished,”¹⁷ he meant exactly what he said. Righteousness was established. All of the elect were safe and secure. It just left in time, what? They had to come under the sound of the gospel and have revealed to them what Christ Jesus did by way of his obedience unto death.

¹⁵ Romans 1:16.

¹⁶ Romans 1:17.

¹⁷ John 19:30.

Believers, they live by faith, they stand by faith, they walk by faith and, thank God, they die in faith. Faith is not the source. It is not the cause and it is not the ground of salvation. Faith is God's appointed means of resting and relying upon what Christ Jesus did by way of his obedience unto death. And faith is the foundation of grace and it is the mother of all other graces. Faith believes God's promise because it knows the God who made the promise. And faith rests in Christ as the only ground, hope and cause of salvation and rests and relies upon the imputed righteousness of Christ because it loves the Christ who established that ground of salvation. Faith is no part of our righteousness.

And that is where so many people run aground in our generation.

There is a very subtle movement today even among what is called sovereign grace churches. They want to drag faith in and make it a cause or a ground or the way that men are saved.

We are not saved by our faith. Never. Faith isn't... faith doesn't make up... Listen. What... my faith is most of the time wavering at best. Huh? What about... what about if you had a car accident and you fell into a coma. Where is your faith then? What are you to rely upon at that point?

It can't be by our faith. It is by Christ's obedience. Faith is no part of that righteousness which is the only ground of salvation.

Here in Paul's words we see righteousness as the ground of salvation and faith is the means of salvation distinguished. And this is so important. You think about this. The very moment faith truly rests in that promise and rests in Christ's righteousness—and I thank God for this—the believing sinner is made to see all that they have always possessed. It was always mine. When Christ cried, “It is finished,”¹⁸ everything that was Christ's was mine.

And it just got revealed to me. That is what the new birth is, it is a revelation of what God did for you in the person of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I will tell you. You think about the revelation. For the first time we saw that God's wrath was removed and that I was made accepted in the beloved at Christ's death at Calvary. Boy, that is a glorious truth. And do you know what that results in? That results in godly repentance. And I am not talking about the time I took all them preachers by the hand and boo hood and cried. I am talking about a genuine broken heartedness over sin and I am not just talking about the things that men call sin.

I told somebody this week, you know, there is a lot of things... As a matter of fact, I think I wrote it in one of the articles that I put in the paper. There is a lot of things in this life I am ashamed of before and after justifying saving faith. A lot of evil and mean left in this man. I thank you for all of the ironing [?] makes me...

¹⁸ John 19:30.

I used to want to hit people. Now I want to hit people sometimes. They make me mad. I don't take it real well.

But, you know, in spite of all the problems and difficulties that we have got in this life and as ashamed as I am of the fact that I don't love God like I should and I don't love my neighbor as myself, and those are two places where we fail continually. In spite of that knowledge, the thing that I am most ashamed of is all those things I did by way of religion thinking that they made the difference between saved and lost. And all the people that I influenced, I mean, I had a string of them. When God taught me the five points... Or nothing, when I learned, figured out on my own with my rational mind the five points of Calvinism and I read that book by Steele and Thompson, Thomas, the five points of Calvinism defined, defended and documented and I took my little read Bible and I went through and I circled every verse that was total depravity and put a little TD by them and it had a little limited atonement, you know, unconditional election. I had them all. And I went around and me and a buddy of mine at work, I taught him and influenced him and made him a five point Calvinist.

Now, you can influence people to believe those doctrines. And we would go around and we would slam dunk everybody with the five points of Calvinism. We would make them mad. They would want to fight.

Now you could make people just absolutely... especially Arminians. You could just really get after those.

But those are the things that I am most ashamed of. Those people that I left over in Shreveport. There is people over there that I influenced and turned them into Calvinists and made them two fold more the child of hell, the children of hell than I myself was. That is why I am ashamed. I am ashamed of the fact that I would have ever allowed anything to rival the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God help us to be men and women that are careful to preach Christ and him crucified. Tell men and women the simple truth. Christ came. He lived. He died. He rose again and he established a perfect righteousness that demands your eternal salvation. Will you rest in him?

And I will tell you what. God's children will. God's sheep will hear his voice. They might not hear today. They might not hear tomorrow. But if they are his sheep, one day they will hear it and they will rest in it and they will rely upon it as the only ground, hope and cause of salvation.