

“We Preach Christ Crucified”

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The believers in the church at Corinth had gotten bogged down in the life and culture of their city and their time, much like we do today. They had grown content and complacent in their spiritual condition and had lost sight of the most important purpose of the existence of the church in the first place – the message of the cross. If it weren't for the cross there would be no payment for sin, and if no payment for sin then we have no hope for eternity. They lost sight of that truth in their desire for acceptance and relevance among their peers in the city. We are doing the same thing today – for the sake of relevance and acceptance we, as churches in America, have lost sight of the Divine purpose of our existence in society – to “preach Christ crucified” – nothing less and nothing more.

The last phrase of verse 17 sets the stage for what is about to be said in the text under review in this message – “not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” We need, as we will see in our message, to make the message of the cross as simple and direct as we can, for what point is there in presenting the message of the cross to the lost if they cannot understand it?

Spurgeon said: “I take my text and make a bee-line to the cross” (Christian History, no. 29). That's what we always need to keep in mind when we are sharing a message concerning our faith – always make a bee-line to the cross.

There are two things involved in preaching Christ as found in this text: the message and the method.

I. THE MESSAGE – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CROSS – vs. 18-21

Within the doctrine of the cross lies all other Bible doctrines. All others stand, or fall based on the foundation of the doctrine of the cross.

NOTE: Both the Jew and the Greek are in view in this text – the wisdom and superiority of the Jewish religion (as they considered it to be), as well as the sheer worldly wisdom and knowledge of the Greek system of learning.

A. The power of the cross – vs. 18

1. To the lost, to those that are perishing in their sin, it is foolishness – without power
2. To the saved, to those that are justified by the blood of Christ, the doctrine of the cross is the power of God that saves from sin
3. “For the preaching of the cross”

a) The word for “preaching” here is the Greek word “logos” (literally defined as something said) and it’s the only time in the New Testament it’s translated by that word

(1) Of the 325 times the Greek word is found in the Bible, about 300 of them are translated by the word “word,” in its various forms (word, words, saying, sayings, utterances, etc.)

(2) What the translators were demonstrating with this translation (as well as several other translations of the Bible in English do) is that the primary topic of our message is to be the words regarding the cross and the work of atonement accomplished there – this is seen in the literal translation of the phrase – “the word of the cross”

b) "Is to them that perish foolishness"

(1) "*Perish*" – *are perishing* – in the process of perishing – this demonstrates that there is still time for them to be saved

(2) "*Foolishness*"

(a) Where we get our word "moron" from – this word is only used in First Corinthians, and is one that means folly, absurdity

(b) The Corinthians prided themselves on their knowledge and intelligence, and rightfully so, in a way, but it was that worldly wisdom that kept them from salvation – the message of the cross was, to them, absolutely absurd and anyone that believed it was simply uneducated

(3) "*But unto us which are saved*"

Same verb order here as with "perish" – those that "are being saved" – points to the truth of sanctification – we aren't in heaven yet so God is keeping us in His hand until we are

John 10:27-29

(27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

(28) And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.

(29) My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

(4) "*It is the power of God*"

(a) "It" – the message, the doctrine, the word, of the cross

(b) "Power of God" – "dunamos" – dynamite of God

Romans 1:16

(16) 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.

B. The product of the cross – vs. 19

1. For the lost, the doctrine of the cross produces destruction of their wisdom, the wisdom that the world brings
2. To the saved, the doctrine of the cross produces salvation
3. This verse is referencing Isaiah 29:14 where the prophet is warning Judah of impending discipline for their sin

Isaiah 29:13-14

(13) Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

(14) Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, *even* a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid.

4. This is a truth seen throughout the ages – God has always, and will always, bring to nothing the wisdom of this world as it tries to explain away God, and especially as they deny the work of redemption on the cross

C. The purpose of the cross – vs. 20-21

1. Vs. 20 – For the lost, the purpose of the doctrine of the cross is to demonstrate how foolish their wisdom is
2. Vs. 21 – For the saved, the purpose of the doctrine of the cross is to show that no matter who someone is, salvation is through the cross
 - a) “For after that” – this points back to the previous verse and uses it as the basis for the argument put forth in this verse – seeing that, or since, God made foolish (made of none effect, useless) the wisdom of the world – the point here is to show that there is no way that the wisdom of this world can bring a person to a saving knowledge of Christ – God had to provide another way
 - b) “In the wisdom of God” – as opposed to the wisdom of the world
 - c) “The world by wisdom knew not God” – the wisdom of God is demonstrated here in that, with all the wisdom and science and knowledge in the world (then and now, for that matter), they could not reach a righteous standing with Him
“For when, by the wise arrangement or government of God; after a full and fair trial of the native, unaided powers of man, it was ascertained that the true knowledge of God would not be arrived at by man, it pleased him,” etc. (Barnes)
 - d) “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believed”

(1) “Pleased God” – God chose this method to accomplish His redemptive plan – the

method of a seemingly unintelligent world proclaiming the message of the cross

(2) *"By the foolishness of preaching"*

- (a) "Foolishness" here is a different Greek word than in verse 18 – this one is dealing with proclaiming
- (b) The structure of this phrase, and the use of this word for "preaching" is pointing to the message preached, not just the preaching
- (c) This emphasizes the fact that it's the message of the cross, the words themselves, that saves – not our presentation of those words necessarily. They need proclaimed, but it's the message being proclaimed that matters most.

II. THE METHOD – PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED – VS. 22-25

NOTE: It's not simply the truth about a crucifixion that is foolishness to the lost, it is the truth of sin and the need of a Saviour that is.

Bonhoeffer studied for a year in New York City. He was uniformly disappointed with the preaching he heard there: "One may hear sermons in New York upon almost any subject; one only is never handled, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ, of the cross, of sin and forgiveness."

-- "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *Christian History*, no. 32.

A. It's simple – vs. 22-23

1. For the religious, the simplicity becomes a stumblingblock

2. For the worldly, for the educated, for those that rely on their intellect, the simplicity becomes foolishness
3. Vs. 23 answers for vs. 22 – the Jews want a sign that the Messiah has (had) come to reestablish His kingdom – a sign they are still waiting for – and the Greeks (non-Jews) seek only wisdom, knowledge, science
 - a) For the Jews seeking a sign of the Messiah, we are to preach (literally, to herald as a public crier would in that day) Christ crucified – we are to preach to the religious world that the Saviour has come and the payment has been made and the Kingdom of God has, in fact and in truth, already come and there is only one way to be a part of it – that message for the religious world is a stumblingblock, a means to cause them to falter in their acceptance of the true gospel
 - b) For the Greeks, that message of a Redeemer, that message of the cross and all the doctrines it brings, is simply moronic (in its literal sense) – absolute nonsense to them – of no value at all

B. It sanctifies – vs. 24

1. No matter who we are – “Jews and Greeks” – no two groups could be more opposed to each other than these – the message of the cross makes them holy
 - a) “Unto them which are called” – this is pointing to the believer – the use of the word “called” in this context, as in all other passages of the New Testament that use this term, is referring to those that have accepted the call to salvation – all are given

the opportunity to receive the gospel but only those that actually do are referred to as the “called”

- b) “We preach...Christ the power of God” – here we see this truth again – the message of the cross, the message of the gospel is where the power of God rests, and for the Jews that believed, it became the power to overcome the stumblingblock of the Suffering Servant rather than the Conquering Messiah
 - c) “We preach Christ...the wisdom of God” - to the Greeks that believed, the foolishness of the message of the cross had become the wisdom to know God that they had been searching for
2. It is through the preaching of Christ as “the power of God, and the wisdom of God” that we are sanctified – initially, progressively, and finally in heaven

C. It's sufficient – vs. 25

- 1. “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than man”
 - a) What the world considers foolishness is far better than anything they have – it is all sufficient in everything

2 Corinthians 3:5

(5) Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God;
 - b) “Is wiser than men” – even in our inability, with our finite minds, the little that has been revealed to man concerning God is far wiser than anything man can know
- 2. “And the weakness of God is stronger than

man” – what the world considers to be weakness on the part of the believer is stronger than anything the world can offer. They may consider us weak-minded but we know better – faith may be foolishness to them, but it is mighty for us.

1 John 4:4

(4) Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

1 John 5:4

(4) For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

Conclusion: The message of the cross is the only hope mankind has of being right with God – the doctrines of the cross have the only power to stand with Him. The method for the world to hear that message is given to us in this text – “preach Christ crucified” – proclaim the message often and loudly so they can hear and believe.

In the late 1800s, Charles Berry, an English preacher, became the pastor of the great Plymouth Church in Brooklyn. One day Berry described how earlier he had come to Jesus Christ.

There had been a time in Berry's early ministry when he preached a very thin gospel--really no gospel at all. As did the Corinthians, he looked upon Jesus as merely a noble teacher but not as a divine redeemer.

Late one night during his first pastorate, as he sat in his cozy study, there came a knock. He opened the door and found a

typical Lancashire girl with a shawl over her head and clogs on her feet.

"Are you a minister?" she asked. Getting an affirmative answer, she went on breathlessly. "You must come with me quickly. I want you to get my mother in."

Thinking it was a case of some drunken mother out in the streets, Berry said, "You must go and get a policeman."

"No," said the girl, "My mother is dying, and you must come and get her into heaven."

Berry got dressed and followed her for a mile and a half through lonely streets in the night. He knelt at the woman's side, and he began telling her how good and kind Jesus was and how he'd come to show us how to live.

Then the desperate woman cut him off. "Mister," she cried, "that's no use for the likes of me. I'm a sinner. I've lived my life. Can't you tell me of someone who can have mercy upon me and save my poor soul?"

"I stood there in the presence of a dying woman," said Berry, "and I realized I had nothing to tell her. In the midst of sin and death, I had no message. In order to bring something to that dying woman, I leaped back to my mother's knee, to my cradle faith, and I told her the story of the Cross and of a Christ who is able to save to the uttermost." The tears began to run down the woman's cheeks.

"Now you're getting it," she said. "Now you're helping me."

Berry concluded the story by saying, "I got her in, and blessed be God, I got in myself."

-- Gordon MacDonald, "The Centerpiece of the Gospel,"

Preaching Today, Tape No. 137.