

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.”

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

www.lightfordarktimes.com (blog)

Christ Reformation Church – YouTube Channel (Light for Dark Times)

Preaching Christ Risen in Athens Today

March 31 2024 (Easter Sunday)

Sermon Text: Acts 17:22-34

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians
1:18-31

One of our distance members sent me this article from an online publication called “Relevant” about a “church” in North Carolina:

“Elevation Church and pastor Steven Furtick are facing controversy after a recent interview with a senior staff member revealed the church doesn’t use words like “resurrection,”

“Calvary” or the “blood of Jesus” in their Easter invitations.

Nicki Shearer, Elevation Church’s digital content director, recently spoke with Pro Church Tools about the way that the church uses social media to draw and engage with new and familiar audiences. During part of the interview, Shearer explained that the church avoids using language that “immediately makes someone feel like an outsider,” particularly for an event like Easter Sunday.

“When I think about how I’m going to talk about Easter, I’m thinking about how I’m going to talk to people far from God because that’s the thing that matters most to us,” Shearer said. “For us, the most important thing on Easter is inviting people to church. This means reaching people far from God. So we’re not going to use the words ‘calvary,’

'resurrection' or the phrase 'the blood of Jesus.' We won't use language that will immediately make someone feel like an outsider."

How do we talk to people "who are far from God?" In other words, how do we present Christ to the lost, especially in what is being called a "post" Christian era. In a time when Christianity is no longer the core of culture? That is the question being asked. Elevation "church" answers the question with – *change our language. Change our vocabulary. Don't use the words of the Bible because those words are archaic to the modern man.*

Yesterday I was listening to a sermon by Martyn Lloyd-Jones based upon this Scripture:

1Th 1:4-5 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, (5) **because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.** You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

In that sermon Lloyd-Jones noted that the question of the day swirling within the professing church (this was I believe back in the 1960's) concerned this matter of *communication*. The debate is still with us today. How are we to communicate the gospel to a secular world? To a world ignorant of the Christian religion? To a world in which the wisdom of God is regarded as foolishness?

So often the answer that is being given by "churches" is – *we must change the words*. We must not use words like *resurrection*, or *Calvary*, or *the blood of Jesus*." We must not, as their spokesman said, use language that "immediately makes someone feel like an outsider." Otherwise we will not be *relevant*. *We must change the words of the gospel* – and I submit to you that this is just an equivocating way of saying "we must change the gospel so that it is acceptable to man."

What is our answer? What is the Bible's answer to all of this? It is simply this:

- The sinner, no matter what culture, what century, what language or social class he or she lives in, *is in fact an outsider*. Outside of God! And in fact, the *gospel emphasizes this truth to the sinner. It doesn't try to make men and women outside of Christ, comfortable* . Paul reminded the Christians at Ephesus of the terrible condition they had been in:

Eph 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

- The gospel, which is the power of God to salvation, just as it came to these Thessalonians *in power*, is *the word of the cross*. I wonder,

what does Elevation “church” do with this word – *the cross*? Because surely that word is as foreign to modern culture, and even more so, than “resurrection.”

1Co 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

We as Christ's people are commissioned by Him to preach a message that is foolishness to the natural man. Folly. Ridiculous. A message only held by fools. That is how the world sees it. Yet it is the wisdom and power of God who works through the foolishness of the word preached.

The moment anyone, tweaks the words, schemes to make God's Word more acceptable to the sinner, the gospel ceases to be the gospel and is emptied of its saving power.

In fact, this business of dressing up the gospel in the world's clothing is exactly what the Apostle Paul

rejects:

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

A "church" with another gospel is no church at all and is, in fact, under God's condemnation (see Galatians 1).

The Gospel at Athens

How *did* the Apostle Paul preach the gospel at Athens? To a crowd of pagan philosophers to whom the Word of the Cross was totally foreign and foolish and an object of derision?

Act 17:18 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbling wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—**because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.**

Paul believed in the power of the gospel. He preached the same gospel to both Jew and Gentile.

Act 17:19-21 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? (20) **For you bring some strange things to our ears.** We wish to know therefore what these things mean." (21) Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Do you see this? *These people, these academics, were entirely ignorant of Paul's message. They had never heard of Jesus or the resurrection.*

How does Elevation "church" talk about Easter without talking about Jesus and His resurrection? How do they talk about the Cross and the empty tomb? No doubt they would claim something like – "*Oh, but we do. We just use different words.*" My response to that feeble and dishonest excuse is that they are so

re-fashioning the gospel that it is no gospel at all. After all, where does this morphing business stop? *What words in the Word of the Cross ARE familiar to a pagan culture? Be sure that they are not going to stop with just removing the word “resurrection.” The entire Way of salvation in Christ is communicated ONLY in words which are strange and foreign to man in his sin. Justification, propitiation, wrath, judgment, atonement, redemption – not simply the WORDS, but the truths which these words communicate. It is all utter nonsense to the man or woman blind in their sin.*

Paul rebuked the Corinthians for listening to a false gospel brought to them by “creeps who crept in among them.” That altered and re-fashioned gospel appealed to them:

2Co 11:4 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, **you put up with it**

readily enough.

What *did* Paul do in that Athenian culture which was not only entirely ignorant of Christ, but in fact (as is academia in all eras), *hostile* to a Word which was entirely opposite to their “wisdom”? *What did Paul do?* Here he was – an open opportunity to preach in the very capitol of man’s “wisdom.”

This is what he did -

Act 17:22-31 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. (23) For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

(24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life

and breath and everything.

(26) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, (27) that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, (28) for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

(29) Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

(30) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, (31) because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising

him from the dead.”

First, Paul Showed them their Ignorance

The Athenians, in spite of their apparent knowledge and academic wisdom, *were nothing more than ignorant idolaters.*

Their city of Athens was *filled* with idols. Statues of false gods. Altars Temples. And yet, for all of their religiosity and gods, they remained ignorant of the one true God.

Rom 1:19-23 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

(21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

(22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Next, Paul Showed them the Obvious – He Introduced them to the Living and True God

(24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything

There IS a Creator. There is no other explanation for what *is*. There is a God, and He made the world and everything in it.

“Now, you Athenians,” said Paul, “have been very busy building houses for your gods, serving these gods by having your priests give them food and carry them around (think of the Roman Catholic processions even today carrying

their gods). *Do you really think that the God who is the Creator of everything, lives in some localized house you build for Him and needs you to feed Him and transport Him? The Creator is necessarily greater than the creature! Your entire religion is all upside down.”*

The Living and True God is Right Here in Front of You!

Paul continued:

“The Living and True God is, right at this very moment, giving YOU life and breath and your very being. The thing is plain and obvious, but you are blind to Him. You are in the dark. Your minds have been blinded or else you would have found Him already. You are blind men groping about in darkness, though you boast about how “enlightened” you are. His existence and presence and being is screaming at you right now, but you don’t hear or see Him.”

“If YOU are flesh and blood, how can you be so blinded in your thinking that you think god must be like a silver or stone image or some

other image imagined by you? YOU, the creature, are superior in your being to the ‘gods’ you carve and worship! Your minds have been blinded!”

Isaiah 44:14-17 He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. (15) Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. (16) Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” (17) And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!”

And Now Comes the Summation of it all -

(30) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, (31) because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Now, let’s think carefully here and be certain we see the obvious. *Paul is preaching to people who have NO concept whatsoever of Jesus or of resurrection.* None. He is preaching to people whose idea of God is sheer idolatry and falsehood. Whose “religion” is totally foreign to the gospel. What words did Paul use to present the gospel to them?

- He told them they were ignorant
- That God Commands them to Repent
- Paul spoke of God as “He” – a person, not some impersonal force
- Judgment Day is on His calendar
- God has appointed His Judge

- That Judge is a man, and yet the Son of God
- This Judge will judge the world in perfect righteousness
- God has proven who this Judge is – Jesus, the God-man.
- The proof is, *resurrection from the dead*.

Is our culture today any more ignorant of God and the Bible and Christ and true religion than Athens was? Of course not! But Elevation “church” and so many professing Christians today apparently think that they are better than the Apostle Paul. “After all, look at Paul’s results,” they would say. They are getting better results than he did:

Act 17:32-34 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” (33) So Paul went out from their midst. (34) But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Mixed results, you see. Some mocked. Others procrastinated. Some believed. “We can do better than that by being ‘relevant’” – that is the mantra of our day.

Notice the tipping point – for the Athenians, for these academic philosophers, it was *the resurrection*.

The fact that the real object of scorn and mocking was the resurrection tells us that this is a central truth that must never be played down, compromised, watered down, made less objectionable to the natural man.

It is interesting that even those centuries ago, people embraced a largely naturalistic view of the world. Paul had to correct the Corinthians on this:

1Co 15:12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Our Certain Hope

Christ is coming again on that Day set by the Lord, He is coming again in power. The resurrected Lord Jesus is coming. He is coming to judge the world and to raise every human being who ever lived, *bodily*. Some to death and hell... His own people to eternal life in the New heavens and earth. This is the certain hope of Christ's church, and the certain terror of all who mock and scorn Him. One thing is certain for all – every eye will see Him, because Christ is risen indeed.