

The Preaching of the Cross – I Corinthians 1:14-31

I. Introduction:

- A. A few minutes ago, I shared with you the salvation testimony of James A. Stewart.
1. Stewart was a thirteen-year-old Scot, who dreamed of becoming a soccer superstar, and he was well on his way to that goal, already playing before thousands of rabid fans as a center forward.
 2. But then the Lord sovereignly intervened and saved his soul, giving him a new spiritual heart.
 3. With that new heart came an overwhelming love for his Saviour, along with a 100% surrender to God's will.
 4. That involved a new love for people – for people who, like him, loved Christ.
 5. But also for people who were as he **had** been – lost in sin and headed for hell.
- B. Taking that biography into its next chapter, James Stewart immediately began sharing his Saviour with others.
1. No one told him that he ought to get out and invite others to Christ, he was just so filled with the joy of his new life, that it came automatically.
 2. By the age of fourteen, he was standing on Glasgow street corners with a Bible verse sandwich board over his shoulders, preaching the gospel.
 - a. He was young and small for his age.
 - b. He was still wearing the short pants small boys wore back in the 1920s.
 - c. He was truly a *“preacher boy,”* and this actually worked to his evangelistic advantage.
 3. When, after the death of his father, he wasn't working at the grocery store or later in a tailoring plant, he was joyfully sharing his testimony with strangers.
 4. By the time he was eighteen, he was ruining his health, constantly working or preaching; rarely sleeping.
 5. Hundreds of people were trusting Christ through his ministry, just as hundreds had done under Paul's ministry in Corinth.
 6. Jimmy described himself as in constant hand-to-hand combat with people, fighting for their immortal souls.
- C. For four or five years, his life was spent in preaching Christ **outside** – on street corners, in parks, at the gates of the football stadium and at race courses. But then there arose **a crisis** in his life.
1. He felt the leadership of the Lord accept the invitations of various pastors to preach in their churches.
 2. At that point he realized for the first time that he would have to spend time studying God's Word, not just sharing his testimony and simple verses like **John 3:16** or **Acts 16:31** – *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”*
 3. The boy he had been – the boy who wanted to play football, the one who hated school and learning – now realized that he was going to have to spend as much time in Bible study as he did in prayer & in preaching.
 4. Thankfully, as he began to study, the Lord blessed him in this – just as He did in his evangelism.
- D. As Paul introduced his letter to his friends in Corinth, it was necessary for him to correct their sins.
1. We assume that they were believers – saints of God through the Lord's saving grace.
 2. But they were forming parties & cliques – or we might even apply their divisions to Christian denominations.
 - a. There were Southern Baptists, American Baptists, Independent Baptists and members of the Baptist Bible Fellowship.
 - b. *“Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ..”*
 - c. But *“is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”*
 3. After his initial rebuke Paul turned to his primary ministry – his foremost responsibility.
 - a. *“Christ sent me not to baptize, but to **PREACH** the gospel.”*
 - b. *“For the **PREACHING** of the **CROSS** is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”*
 - c. *“For... it pleased God by the **FOOLISHNESS** of **PREACHING** to save them that believe.”*
 4. That was what James A. Stewart felt. That is what every Christian should feel.
 5. He didn't mind being *“a fool”* for Christ. That is what his former friends and football fans called him.
 6. Jimmy yearned for the salvation of lost neighbors, lost fellow citizens, lost souls of every race & nationality.

- E. I mentioned a moment ago that Jimmy Stewart came to realize that he needed to start studying God's word if he was to continue to be useful to the Lord.
1. So he learned to read more efficiently and to dig deeply into God's word, drawing out its eternal riches.
 2. Not only did he preach Christ, leading to the salvation of thousands throughout Eastern Europe and elsewhere, he also became skilled enough to write several books.
 3. And I confess that it was he who pointed me toward my theme for this morning.
 4. This is not his outline. Whatever damage I might do this morning, it is wholly on me.
 5. But Brother Stewart pointed out that in these verses **we** hear Paul speaking about *"preaching the gospel."*
 6. However, there are actually **three different Greek words** used to speak of that preaching here.
 7. In looking at these words, I believe I can see the **ACT** of preaching, the **MESSAGE** of Gospel preaching and then its ultimate **PURPOSE**.

II. What is the **MESSAGE** of Gospel preaching?

- A. I suppose that even before I get to this point I must point to the **need** of that gospel preaching.
1. Notice **verse 18** once again – *"For the preaching of the cross is to **THEM THAT PERISH** foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."*
 2. Beyond the commission which Christ gave to His evangelist, Paul was motivated in his missionary travels by the fact that everywhere he went there were people headed to hell and ultimately to the lake of fire.
 3. He saw that spiritual need in every face in every crowd.
 4. When he preached in the **Jewish synagogues**, he found people who had never met their Messiah.
 5. When he preached to the **gentiles** of Lystra and Philippi, he was attacked by pagan unbelievers for pointing out that their religions had not kept them from sin or delivered them from its consequences.
 6. And if he was in North America today, his message would be exactly the same – the same as John the Baptist and the same as the Lord Jesus' – *"Repent before God and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."*
 7. The preaching of the cross is necessary, because without it we are all – *"them that perish"* – eternal death.
- B. What is the **message** of the gospel?
1. Paul defines it for us later in **chapter 15** – *"How that Christ died **FOR OUR SINS** according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."*
 2. The **necessity** for gospel preaching lays in the fact that **sin exists** – that it exists **in you** – in **everyone**.
 - a. And our sin demands judgment from the most holy God.
 - b. Jehovah has said, *"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall **DIE**" – Ezekiel 18:4.*
 3. But – Christ *"died for our sins"* according to the declaration of the scriptures.
- C. The Greek word which is translated *"preaching"* in **verse 18** is *"logos."*
1. At the age of eighteen, Jimmy Stewart didn't know that, but later he did.
 2. *"Logos"* is a very common word in the original language of the New Testament.
 3. In 2/3 of its 330 uses, it is translated simply as *"word,"* but here is the *"**PREACHING** of the Word."*
 4. *"For the **WORD** of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."*
 5. Furthermore – that is the word used by John when speaking about the Son of God, the living, eternal word.
 6. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" – John 1:1.*
- D. And here is my point:
1. Most of the world doesn't mind us preaching about the death, or even the crucifixion, of Jesus – the cross.
 - a. **Muslims** acknowledge the existence of Jesus of Nazareth, and they admit that He was crucified.
 - b. Secular and religious **Jews** admit to the fact their forefathers encouraged the Romans execute Jesus
 - c. **Mormons** talk about the death and the crucifixion of Christ.
 2. But just as are thinking of a different Christ, it is with a death that is different than the one in the Gospel.

3. Think about **Catholicism** for a moment.
 - a. What do they claim in their celebration of “*the mass?*” It is the **re-sacrificing** of Christ.
 - b. Quoting some of their own literature, “*The Holy Eucharist is the perpetual continuation of this act of sacrifice and surrender of our Lord.*”
 - c. “*The Mass is the Sacrifice of the New Law in which Jesus, through the ministry of the priest, visibly presents to God in an unbloody manner the perfect offering of Himself under the form of bread & wine.*”
 - d. But a re-sacrificing of Christ is totally unnecessary and contrary to the clear declarations of the bible.
 4. Then following their Catholic ancestors, the average **Protestant** has an incorrect – or at least a weakened – perspective of the cross and the death of Christ.
 5. For them it is not the **horrific, hideous, shocking butchery** of the Lord Jesus.
 6. For millions of people, the cross is just a piece of jewelry, to hang around their neck or in both ears.
 7. It has value to the wearer, but it is equal only to the quality of the gold with which it was made.
- E. In **verse 23** Paul says, “*We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness.*”
1. We’ll come back to this verse in a minute, but at this point notice that the crucified Christ, which Paul preached, was a **problem** to the Jews and a **joke** to the educated Greeks.
 2. The Greek word behind “*stumbling block*” is “*skandalon,*” and behind “*foolishness*” is “*moria.*”
 3. This is the kind of message Paul preached – it was with **scandalous words** and with **words** considered to be **moronic**.
 4. The preaching of the cross to the early saints was not putting on some gold chain in the morning when they dressed for the day.
- F. The preaching of the cross **should OFFEND people**; the word of the cross should **SHOCK** people today.
1. **Why?** Because, not only was it the most sinful thing rebellious men have ever done.
 2. But also because so many churches today are not declaring the “*word of the cross*” as Paul did.
 3. The cross which was preached by the Apostle was **meant to attack** our sins head on.
 - a. But modern preaching doesn’t offend as it should, because people are not fully confronted with their sin.
 - b. Today’s preaching of the cross doesn’t demand the same kind of repentance that Paul preached.
 4. And today’s preaching doesn’t bring about any persecution, the way it did in Paul’s day.
 5. It is not the means of bringing sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, to salvation in the crucified Saviour.
 6. Today’s preaching is more often merely to invite struggling and failing “*good people*” to go to heaven.
 7. Today’s gospel preaching doesn’t carry the message of death – the brutal and bloody death of Christ – and the total death of the sinner before God’s sight.
 8. It is not the same “*logos;*” it is not the same “*word*” or “*message*” that it was in Paul’s day.
 9. But obviously, it should be.

III. There is another Greek word translated “**PREACHING**” in this paragraph.

- A. It is found first in **verse 21** – “*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of **PREACHING** to save them that believe.*”
1. It is also in **verse 4** of the next chapter:
 2. “*My speech and my **PREACHING** was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*”

- B. Simply put, this is talking about the **MANNER** of the preaching of the cross.
1. There may have been an occasion when Paul tried using the wisdom of men in his preaching.
 2. I'm not saying for sure that he did, but it appears to me that when he was addressing the intellectuals on Mars Hill in Athens, his preaching style was different from his usual.
 3. Usually, as when he when he went into the synagogues, he'd take up the Old Testament scriptures, just the way the Lord did, and he would preach to them that Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah.
 4. But not only was Jesus the future King of kings, but also, of necessity, He must be the Sacrifice of all sacrifices.
- C. I was chatting with our visitor last Wednesday evening.
1. I'm sure he wouldn't mind me sharing this with you. It was with a smile, because there is some humor in it.
 2. He said that shortly after the Lord saved him, he was reading through the Bible when he thought he found a hidden, but really spectacular, revelation.
 3. He told his pastor that **Isaiah 53** clearly spoke to him about the sacrifice of the Saviour for sins.
 4. He was **sure** that it was a **prophesy** about Christ Jesus.
 5. It was new and spectacular revelation to his heart. He couldn't contain his excitement.
 6. Of course, that is exactly true. **Isaiah 53** is a prophetic expression of the gospel.
 7. And I am sure that Paul preached that chapter to the Jews of his day.
- D. I apologize for one more reference to James Stewart's autobiography. I'll quit with this one.
1. He described a ministry he had for a while before he crossed the channel to a new ministry on the continent
 2. It reminds me of the sort of preaching Paul must have engaged.
 3. *"I would visit every **JEWISH** store in the city of New Castle to witness to the owners concerning Jesus Christ, their Messiah.*
 - a. *I found some completely indifferent when I asked them the all-important question, 'If Jesus Christ is not the true Messiah of Israel, then who is?'*
 - b. *I showed them from the Old Testament how that twenty-four great prophesies of the Old Testament, covering many centuries, were all fulfilled within twenty-four hours when Christ died on the Cross.*
 4. *Some were deeply interested.*
 5. *In the quietness of their business offices I read to them their own Holy Scriptures.*
 6. **Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22, and Isaiah 53** were my favorite portions.
 7. *'If you reject the true identification marks concerning the Messiah of the Old Testament, then you will accept a false Messiah,' I warned. 'He will be the Anti-Christ, the man of sin.'*"
- E. This illustrates the **Biblical method** of preaching the cross – simply taking God's word & sharing it with others.

IV. And what should be the **PURPOSE** of the preaching of the cross?

- A. It is expressed in **verse 17** – *"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to **PREACH** the **GOSPEL**, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross should made of none effect."*
1. The Greek word in this verse is *"euaggelizo"* (*yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo*) from which comes our word *"evangelism"*
 2. Paul's kind of preaching, the preaching which truly communicates the Christ of the New Testament, must begin with the sinfulness of man.
 3. You, my friend, **are not SICK** with the **disease** of sinfulness. You are **dead** – completely and entirely dead.
 - a. You are a stench in the nostrils of God. You are the off-scouring and refuse of eternity.
 - b. You are fodder for hell.
 4. Does that offend you? It should.
 5. It was meant to offend you, because we are all offensive to God because of our sins.
 6. The Lord has declared that *"all have sinned and come short of His glory"* – and that *"the wages of sin is eternal death."*

- B. But I'm here to preach about some really good news – the gospel – *“euaggelizo.”*
1. Those of us whom the Lord has already saved, we know that the preaching of the cross is **the power** of God **unto salvation** – **verse 18**. It is the **power** of God and the **wisdom** of God – **verse 24**.
 2. We know that the gospel is true and powerful because its message saved us – changed us from the rebels we were into willing and joyful servants of God.
 3. Yes, we may not be the perfect saints we ought to be, and this often grieves us, but we are not the sinners we once were.
 - a. We are no longer the drunks we were before we responded to the gospel.
 - b. We are no longer the gamblers, grumblers, gossips & gadabouts we were before Christ confronted us.
 - c. We are children of God by faith in the Christ Jesus who is the *“word”* of the gospel.
 4. Through evangelistic preaching *“of him are we in Christ Jesus, of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.”*
 5. And because of that Christ and that gospel which we heard preached, *“we glory, we glory in the Lord”* – **verse 31**.
- C. The good news of the gospel is that though you are a sinner, the Saviour has come to redeem you.
1. He willingly gave His life on Golgotha's cross as a substitute for people who are infinitely unworthy.
 2. He gave his life for people like me.
 3. The good news is that if you will humble yourself, acknowledging your wicked sinfulness before the Lord, and if you will reach out to Christ Jesus by faith, trusting Him to deliver you from your sin – He will do it.
 4. The good news is that there is nothing left for you to do in this matter – there is nothing you **can** do – to contribute to your salvation. Christ has done it all.
 5. The preaching of the gospel contains the promise of God – *“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”*
- D. Won't you say *“yes,”* to what the Holy Spirit is saying to your heart this morning?
1. I **plead** with you to surrender to the Lord, and believe the message of the gospel, putting your faith in Christ.
 2. I **beg** of you – make this the day of your salvation, by trusting the Christ who died on the cross.