

## ‘WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED’

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

“**We preach Christ crucified,**” declared Paul. And by the grace of God, Paul’s declaration is ours. We don’t preach ourselves. We don’t preach our accomplishments. We don’t preach watered-down messages devoid of such words as sin, punishment, hell, sacrifice, cross, or Christ. We don’t preach messages that present God as a doting, slightly senile grandfather, who cares nothing about the behavior of His children so long as they stop by his house on Sunday mornings. We don’t preach messages about a generic God who can be stretched, distorted, and manipulated to fit any human conception of Him.

We don’t preach about God’s love without connecting it to God’s immeasurable sacrifice; not simply “**God loves,**” but “**God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.**” We don’t preach a so-called “prosperity Gospel” in which Jesus Christ is more of a Banker than a Savior; rather, a Gospel that promises the infinite riches of God’s forgiveness and salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

We don’t preach self-righteousness, that salvation may be earned by good works or trying harder or resisting less; rather, that “**it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,**” Ephesians 2:8-10.

We don’t preach entertainment; rather, that “**the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,**” Romans 6:23. We don’t preach that all roads lead to heaven; rather, that Jesus Christ alone is “**the way and the truth and the life,**” John 14:6. And we don’t preach that following Christ will eliminate persecution; rather, that in many instances following Christ will bring persecution. “**If they persecuted Me,**” said Jesus in John 15:20, “**they will persecute you also.**”

We don’t preach from Einstein’s Theory of Relativity or Reader’s Digest or the Works of the World’s Great Philosophers—Socrates, Aristotle, Plato. We don’t preach from the Guinness Book of Records or the Koran or the Dakota-Herald or Time Magazine. We preach from the Bible because it alone is the inspired Word of God. And when we preach, we preach “**Christ crucified**” because He alone is God’s promised salvation, and therefore He is the only way to be saved. We preach “**Christ crucified.**” And here’s why.

**First, because “Christ crucified” is God’s Message, not ours.** “**Christ crucified**” has been God’s Message from the beginning of time and the Fall into Sin and the first promise of the Savior in the Garden of Eden: **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel,”** Genesis 3:15. Even here, in the first promise of salvation, deliverance was linked to sacrifice. To deliver fallen mankind, the promised Deliverer Himself would have to die.

The necessity of the cross was repeatedly explained throughout the Old Testament; and not only through the words of the prophets, but also through the sacrifices and symbols of Israel’s Old Testament worship. Think of the countless spotless lambs slaughtered over the centuries to celebrate the Jewish Passover, and at the same time to point hearts and minds to the true Lamb of God yet to come. How did John the Baptist introduce Jesus to Israel? **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** John 1:29. How did Paul describe Jesus in 1 Corinthians 5:7? **“For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”** Did you know that Jesus Christ may have died on the cross at the very hour Passover lambs were being sacrificed in Jerusalem?

Certainly no portion of Scripture describes the suffering and sacrifice of Christ in more detail than the words of Isaiah 53—written seven centuries before Jesus Christ was even born: **“Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,”** Isaiah 53:4-6.

In addition, multitudes of New Testament passages refer to the necessity and significance of Christ’s atoning death. 2 Corinthians 5:21, **“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”** Galatians 3:13, **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”** Ephesians 1:7, **“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”** And many others.

**“Christ crucified”** and risen is the God-ordained conclusion of all four Gospel Narratives. During His ministry, Jesus repeatedly warned His disciples of the necessity of the cross. For example, we read in Matthew 16: **“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at**

**the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to You!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’ ”**

Sadly, the same rebuke could apply to many churches today, even to those Christian Churches who have tried to remove “**Christ crucified**” from their Sunday sermons, their creeds, their hymns, and even their church buildings. Despite the packed audiences at Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Houston—40,000 attendees over five weekly services; millions of supporters watching on TV—there is not a single cross in Osteen’s church, and relatively few mentions of the cross, if any, in Osteen’s sermons. Instead, he focuses on feel-good themes, positive thinking, and material prosperity. “We don’t talk about the cross,” Osteen said in one interview. “That’s too negative.”

If you find this incredulous, then listen to the following quote from George Stallings, the former archbishop of a catholic church in Washington, D.C.: “We have realized that, as expressions of faith, there are certain symbols that have stood in the way. The cross has served as a barrier in bringing about a true spirit of reconciliation between Jews and also between Muslims and Christians; and thus, we have sought to remove the cross from our Christian churches across America as a sign of our willingness to remove any barrier that stands in the way of us coming together as people of faith.”

Compare such a statement with Paul’s clear declaration in 1 Corinthians 1:23, “**but we preach Christ crucified;**” or his words in 1 Corinthians 2:2, “**For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**” We preach “**Christ crucified**” because Christ crucified is God’s message and the essential message of the Bible.

**Second, we preach “Christ crucified” because this event and this message are God’s wisdom.** Paul wrote in today’s text: “**Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God,” 1 Corinthians 1:22-24.**

Jews were always demanding ‘miraculous signs’ from Jesus by which to prove His identity and authority. For example, of the first occasion when Jesus drove the money changers from the temple, we read: “**Then the Jews demanded of Him, ‘What miraculous sign can You show us to prove Your authority to do all this?’ ”** John 2:18. Jesus, of course, had provided countless miraculous signs: healings, casting out

demons, even raising the dead—and to such an extent that the apostle John wrote: **“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book, But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name,”** John 20:30-31.

Yet, we also read of the unbelieving Jews in John 12:37, **“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him.”** Jesus was not the ‘Christ’ many Jews expected or wanted. They expected a Christ who would bring happiness, peace, prosperity, and freedom from the oppressive Romans. Not a Christ from the insignificant town of Nazareth. Not a Christ who had no place to call home. Not a Christ who had twelve blue-collar disciples and associated with tax-collectors and notorious sinners.

And certainly not a Christ who died on the cross—an excruciating death reserved for the worst felons and failures, traitors and slaves. This Christ, the crucified Christ, wrote Paul, was a **“stumbling block to the Jews.”** The Greek word he used is SCANDALON. **“Christ crucified”** was literally a scandal to the Jews, as it is to all unbelievers, skeptics, and even some Christian churches to this very day.

To the wisdom-seeking Greeks—Corinth was a Greek city—the message of **“Christ-crucified”** was ridiculous and illogical. How could Jesus Christ be true God and true Man? How could Christ’s death bring life? How could God’s infinite strength be displayed in such apparent weakness? How could glory be achieved through humility? **“Foolishness,”** they said. Here the Greek word Paul used is MORIA, the source of our English word moronic. To the scholarly Greeks, people who believed in a crucified Christ were simply morons.

You may have wondered about the drawing on the back page of today’s bulletin, often referred to as the Alexamenos Graffiti. The crude drawing is that of Christ on the cross, with the head of a donkey, being worshiped by a Christian named Alexamenos. The graffiti was found near the Palatine Hill in Rome and dated by scholars to 200 A.D. The Greek inscription beneath the drawing reads “Alexamenos sebetai theon,” which means, “Alexamenos worships his God.” This is not praise. It is mockery. “What kind of God is this? Who would worship such a God?” Times haven’t changed much in 2000 years. You can still find the same mockery of **“Christ crucified”** on public bathroom stalls, on university campuses, and in the publications and websites of scholars, skeptics, and atheists.

Yet, what the world calls wisdom, God calls foolish. And what the world calls foolish, God calls wisdom. And what God calls wisdom is **“Christ crucified.”** His

cross is the evidence of mankind's sin. His cross is the evidence of mankind's salvation. His cross is the wisdom for the nagging questions and problems of human existence. How am I saved? **“Christ crucified.”** How can I find happiness and peace? **“Christ crucified.”** Where do I obtain a lasting sense of worth and purpose and contentment? **“Christ crucified.”** When I die, how can I stand before a just and holy God? **“Christ crucified.”**

In other words, from God's perspective, the answer for this life and the next is always Jesus Christ. I'm not speculating. Paul wrote in Colossians 2:3, In Christ **“are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** So what then should we preach, if not **“Christ crucified?”** Without **“Christ crucified,”** there is nothing of value to preach.

**“Where is the wise man?”** asked Paul. **“Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe,”** 1 Corinthians 1:20-21. God thoughts are not man's thoughts. God's ways are not man's ways. God's wisdom is not man's wisdom. For God's wisdom is **“Christ crucified.”**

**Third and last, we preach “Christ crucified” because this event and this message are God's infinite power.** Paul wrote in today's text, **“but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ the power of God,”** verses 23-24. And what power indeed.

Through the crucifixion of His own Son, God accomplished what only He had the power to do; namely, to atone for our sins; to bring about a lasting reconciliation between God and Man; to defeat the devil; and to change our loathsome status from **“dead in transgressions and sins”** to **“eternally alive with Jesus Christ,”**

Paul described the power of **“Christ crucified”** this way in Colossians 2: **“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross,”** Colossians 2:13-15. Through **“Christ crucified,”** what seemed like abject weakness and dreadful loss, was a complete victory and an overwhelming display of God's infinite power.

And the message of Christ crucified is still God’s power, which is precisely why the Bible uses the cross of Christ as the power and motivation for Christians to lead godly lives. Look at the front cover of today’s bulletin. Cut it out. Make copies of it. Place the copies in all the places you tend to worry, work, or fret.

Looking at that cross and the Christ who willingly died on it, say with confidence—to paraphrase that a graffiti-writer 2000 thousand years ago: “This is the God I worship; the God who loved me enough to die for me on the cross. In view of His sacrifice, is there any sin I can’t forgive? Is there any difference that I can’t reconcile? Is there any problem I cannot endure? Is there any temptation I can’t resist? Is there any need for me to worry about my material needs? Is there any more powerful message to share with my family, friends, or even strangers?”

We preach “**Christ crucified.**” God’s Message. God’s wisdom. God’s power.

On my heart imprint thine image,  
Blessed Jesus, King of Grace,  
That life’s riches, cares, and pleasures  
Have no power Thee to efface.  
This the superscription be:  
Jesus crucified for me,  
Is my Life, my hope’s Foundation,  
And my Glory and Salvation.”