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Preaching Christ Crucified

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“But we preach Christ crucified.” —1 Corinthians 1:23.

In the verse preceding our text, Paul writes, “The Jews require a sign.” They said, “Moses wrought miracles; let us see miracles wrought, and then we will believe,” forgetting that all the wonders that Moses wrought were altogether eclipsed by those which Jesus wrought while he was upon earth in the flesh. Then there were certain Judaizing teachers who, in order to win the Jews, preached circumcision, exalted the passover, and endeavoured to prove that Judaism might still exist side by side with Christianity, and that the old rites might still be practised by the followers of Christ. So Paul, who was made all things to all men that he might by all means save some, put his foot down, and said, in effect, “Whatever others may do, we preach Christ crucified; we dare not, we cannot, and we will not alter the great subject-matter of our preaching, Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

Then he added, “and the Greeks seek after wisdom.” Corinth was the very eye of Greece, and the Corinthian Greeks sought after what they regarded as wisdom; that is to say, the wisdom of this world, not the wisdom of God which Paul preached. The Greeks also treasured the memory of the eloquence of Demosthenes and other famous orators, and they seemed to think that true wisdom must be proclaimed with the graces of masterly elocution; but Paul writes to these Corinthian Greeks, “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.... And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

Now, in these days, there are some who would be glad if we would preach anything except Christ crucified. Perhaps the most dangerous amongst them are those who are continually crying out for intellectual preaching, by which they mean preaching which neither the hearers nor the preachers themselves can comprehend, the kind of preaching which has little or nothing to do with the Scriptures, and which requires a dictionary

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rather than a Bible to explain it. These are the people who are continually running about, and asking, "Have you heard our minister? He gave us a wonderful discourse last Sunday morning; he quoted Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin, he gave us some charming pieces of poetry, in fact, it was altogether an intellectual treat." Yes, and I have usually found that such intellectual treats lead to the ruination of souls; that is not the kind of preaching that God generally blesses to the salvation of souls, and therefore, even though others may preach the philosophy of Plato or adopt the arguments of Aristotle, "we preach Christ crucified," the Christ who died for sinners, the people's Christ, and "we preach Christ crucified" in simple language, in plain speech such as the common people can understand.

I am going to try to put our text into practice by telling you, first, *what we preach*; secondly, *to whom we preach it*; and, thirdly, *how we preach it*.

I. First of all, WHAT WE PREACH. Paul is the model for all preachers, and he says, "We preach Christ crucified."

In order to preach the gospel fully, there must be a very clear description of *the person of Christ*; and we preach Christ as God,—not a man made into a God, nor a God degraded to the level of a man, not something between a man and a God; but "very God of very God," one with his Father in every attribute,—eternal, having neither beginning of days, nor end of years; omnipresent, filling all space; omnipotent, having all power in heaven and on earth; omniscient, knowing all things from eternity; the great Creator, Preserver, and Judge of all, in all things the equal and the express image of the invisible God. If we err concerning the Deity of Christ, we err everywhere. The gospel that does not reveal a Divine Saviour is no gospel at all; it is like a ship without a rudder, the first contrary wind that blows shall drive it to destruction, and woe be to the souls that are trusting to it! No shoulders but those almighty ones which bear the earth's huge pillars up can ever carry the enormous weight of human guilt and human need. We preach to you Christ the Son of Mary, once sleeping in his mother's arms, yet the Infinite even while he was an infant; Christ the reputed Son of Joseph, toiling in the carpenter's shop, yet being all the while the God who made the heavens and the earth; Christ, who had not where to lay his head, the despised and rejected of men, who is, nevertheless, "over all, God blessed for ever;" Christ nailed to the accursed tree, bleeding at every pore, and dying on the cross, yet living for evermore; Christ suffering agonies that are indescribable, yet being at the same time the God at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. If Christ had not been man, he could not have sympathized with you and me, nor could he have suffered in our stead. How could he have been the covenant Head of the sons and daughters of Adam if he had not been made in all points like them, except that he was without sin? With that one exception, he was just as we are, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, yet he was

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as truly God as he was man, the One of whom Isaiah was inspired to prophesy, “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” So, in preaching Christ crucified, we preach the glory of heaven conjoined with the beauty of earth, the perfection of humanity united with the glory and dignity of Deity.

Then, next, we must very clearly preach Christ as *the Messiah, the Sent One of God*. It had long been foretold that a great Deliverer should come who should be “a light to lighten the Gentiles,” and to be the glory of his people Israel, and Jesus of Nazareth was that promised Deliverer, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. He was sent of God to be the Saviour of sinners. He took not this office upon himself without authority, but he could truly say, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God.” He became the Substitute for sinners, but this did not happen accidentally, but by divine decree, for we read, “the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all.” A priest unordained, a prophet unsent of God, a king without divine authority would have been only a mockery; but our great High Priest was divinely anointed, our peerless Prophet was sent of God, and our King is King of kings and Lord of lords, rightly ruling as the eternal Son of the eternal Father. Sinner, this truth should bring thee hope and comfort, the Christ whom we preach is the Lord’s Anointed; and what he does, he does by God’s appointment. When he says to you, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” he speaks for his Father as well as for himself, for he has the warrant of the Eternal to support his declaration. Therefore, come confidently to him, and put your trust in him.

When the preacher has laid a good solid foundation by preaching the person of Christ and the Messiahship of Christ, he must go on to preach *the work of Christ*. I can only give a brief summary of what would take all eternity to expound. We must so preach as to show how, in the everlasting covenant, Christ stood as the Surety and Representative of his people; and how, in the fulness of time, he came forth from the ivory palaces dressed in the garments of flesh; and how he first wrought out an active righteousness by the perfect obedience of his daily life, and at the last wrought out a passive righteousness by his sufferings and death upon the cross. Beginning at the incarnation, going on to the great work of redemption, telling of Christ’s burial, resurrection, ascension, intercession before his Father’s throne, and glorious second coming, we have a theme that angels might well covet, a theme that may well arouse hope in the sinner’s heart.

But it is especially *Christ crucified* whom we are to preach. His wounds and bruises remind us that we must tell you that “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” It is at Calvary that salvation is to be found; where Jesus bowed his head,

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and gave up the ghost, he overcame the powers of darkness, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. There is one word that every true servant of Christ must be able to speak very distinctly; and that word is substitution. I believe that substitution is the key-word to all true theology;—Christ standing in the place of sinners, and numbered with the transgressors because of their transgressions, not his own;—Christ paying our debts, and discharging all our liabilities. This truth involves, of course, our taking Christ's place as he took ours, so that all believers are beloved, accepted, made heirs of God, and in due time shall be glorified with Christ for ever. Brother-ministers, whatever you fail to preach, make your hearers always clearly understand that there is a divine and all-sufficient Substitute for sinners, and that all who put their trust in him shall be eternally saved.

When we have preached Christ thus, we must also preach *his offices*. We must preach him as the one great High Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us. We must preach him as the Prophet whose words are divine, and therefore come to us with an authority that cannot be set aside. And we must mind that we always preach him as King, putting the crown of praise upon his royal head, and claiming from his people the unfaltering allegiance and loyalty of their hearts, and the undivided service of their lives.

We must also preach *the qualifications of Christ for his offices*. Is he a Husband? We must tell how loving and how tender he is. Is he a Shepherd? We must proclaim his patience, his power, his perseverance, and we must especially tell of his self-sacrificing love in laying down his life for his sheep. Is he a Saviour? We must show how he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. We must talk much of the gentleness that will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. We must delight to speak of Christ as bending over the broken in heart, and binding up their wounds, and having his ear ever open to hear the cry of a contrite spirit. It is the character of Christ that is the magnet that attracts sinners to himself, and upon this blessed theme one might go on speaking for ever. When Rutherford was talking of the beauties of the Christ whom he loved so dearly, one of his hearers was constrained to cry out, "Now, mon, you are on the right string, keep to that;" and, indeed, this is a theme that might stir the stammerer to speak with power, and make the very dumb to be eloquent for Christ. Oh, how glorious is our blessed Lord! With the spouse we may well say, "Yea, he is altogether lovely." We cannot exaggerate his excellences and charms, and it must be our constant aim to paint such a portrait of him that sinners may fall in love with him, and trust him to save them with his great salvation.

We must mind that we ever preach Christ as *the sinner's only hope*. In the olden times, there were certain simpletons who sought after a universal remedy for all diseases,—a catholicon; but their search was in vain. All the advertisements of quack medicines that

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ever deceived silly people will never convince sensible folk that such a catholicon for all the diseases to which flesh is heir ever has been or ever will be discovered. Yet there is a catholicon for the diseases of the soul, and that catholicon is Christ. Be thy disease what it may,—the raging fever of lust, the shivering ague of doubts and fears, or the fell consumption of despair,—Jesus Christ can heal thee. Whatever form sin may take,—whether it be the blind eye, or the deaf ear, or the hard, stony heart, or the dull, seared conscience,—there is a medicine in the veins of Jesus that we may well call the divine heal-all. No case that was ever submitted to Christ has baffled his skill, and he is still “mighty to save.” We must be very clear in telling the sinner that there is no hope for him anywhere else but in Christ. Nine out of ten of the arrows in a minister’s quiver ought to be shot at the sinner’s good works, for these are his worst enemies. That “deadly doing” that needs to be cast “down at Jesu’s feet,”—that trying to be or to feel something in order that they may save themselves,—this is the curse of many. O sinner, if, from the crown of thy head to the soles of thy feet, there is no sound part in thee, but thou art full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores, yet, if thou wilt but believe in Jesus, he will make thee whole every whit, and thou shalt go thy way a sinner saved by grace.

We must also preach Christ as *the Christian’s only joy*. We wanted Christ as a life-buoy when we were sinking in the waves of sin, but we want him to be our meat and our drink now that he has brought us safe to land. When we were sick through sin, we wanted Christ as medicine; but now that he has restored our soul, we want him as our continual nourishment. There is no lack which a Christian ever has which Christ cannot fully supply, and there is nothing in Christ which is not useful to a Christian. You know that some things that we have are good, but they are not altogether of service to us. For instance, fruit is good, but there is the skin to be pared off, and the stone to be thrown away; but when Christ gives himself to us, we may take the whole of him, and enjoy him to our heart’s content. Everything Christ is, and everything Christ has, is ours. Therefore, Christian, make a covenant with your hand that you will lay hold on Christ’s cross for your only confidence; make a covenant with your eyes that you will look nowhere for light but to the Sun of righteousness; make a covenant with your whole being that it shall be crucified with Christ, and then be taken up to heaven to live and reign with him for ever. Yea, let this be the utterance of your heart,—

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
More than all in thee I find.”

II. Now, secondly, TO WHOM ARE WE TO PREACH THIS?

Possibly, one brother says, “You ought to preach Christ to the elect.” But how are we to know who are the elect? I read a sermon, some time ago, in which the minister said, “I have been preaching to the living in Zion; the rest of you are dead, and I have nothing to

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say to you. The election hath obtained it, and the rest are blinded.” Preachers of that sort have life to preach to the living, and medicine to prescribe for those who are whole, but what is the good of that? Fancy Peter standing up with the eleven on the day of Pentecost, and saying to the crowd gathered around them, “I do not know how many of you who are here are elect, but I have to say to you that the election hath obtained it, and the rest are blinded.” How many would have been converted and added to the church through such a message as that? Now Peter was at that time filled with the Spirit, and it was by divine inspiration that he preached Christ crucified to the whole of that mixed multitude; and then, when they were pricked in their heart, and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” he was equally inspired when he answered, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

I mean to do as Peter did, for I regard Christ’s commission to his disciples as binding upon us to-day: “Go ye into all the world, and *preach the gospel to every creature.*” I cannot tell whether every creature to whom I preach is elect or not, but it is my business to preach the gospel to all whom I can reach, resting assured that all of them whom God has chosen unto eternal life will certainly accept it. When a certain clergyman asked the Duke of Wellington, “Does your grace think it is any use preaching the gospel to the Hindoos?” he simply replied, “What are your marching orders?” As a soldier, he believed in obeying orders; and when the clergyman answered that the orders were, “Preach the gospel to every creature,” the duke said, “Then your duty is quite clear; obey your Master’s orders, and don’t you trouble about anybody else’s opinions.”

The main business of a true minister is to *preach the gospel to sinners*, and he is never so happy as when he is preaching to those who know themselves to be sinners. When he is preaching to those who are self-righteous, he is in great trouble about the effect of his message, for he fears that it may prove to be a savour of death, unto death to them; but when he meets with those who sorrowfully confess that they are guilty, lost, and undone, then he rejoices in hope of blessed results from his preaching. He feels that he is now among fish that will take the bait, so he drops his line into the river, and soon has the joy of bringing many to land. He knows that bread is always sweetest to hungry men, and that even bitter medicine will be eagerly swallowed by the man who is very ill, and who longs to be cured. He understands that it is the naked who want to be clothed, and the penniless who clamour for alms. O sinners, if you realize that you are foul and vile, full of all manner of evil, with nothing of your own that is worthy to be called good, and if you are longing to be delivered from evil of every sort, and to be made holy as God is holy, I am glad that my Master has given me in his Word such a message as this for you, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

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Still, a true minister of Christ will not confine his preaching to sinners who are sensible of their guilt, but he will *preach the gospel to sinners of all ages*. To the young, whose lives have not yet been defiled by the vices of age, he preaches Christ crucified as the children's Saviour, and he is glad indeed when the boys and the girls trust in Jesus, and are saved. To you who have reached middle life, he preaches Christ crucified as the balm for every wound, the cordial for all care, and thankful is he when you also are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. To the old and grey-headed, to the decrepit, to those on the very verge of the tomb, he still preaches Christ crucified; if he could find a sinner who had reached the age of Methuselah, he would have the same gospel to preach to him, for he knows that there is no Saviour but the crucified Christ of Calvary, and he also knows that, old or young, or if neither old nor young, all who trust him are immediately saved, and saved for ever.

And as he preaches Christ to sinners of every age, he also *preaches Christ to sinners of every rank*. He has nothing better than Christ to preach to queens, and princes, and nobles, and he has nothing less than Christ to preach to peasants, artisans, or paupers; Christ crucified for men of letters and learning, and Christ crucified equally for the ignorant and illiterate.

He also *preaches Christ to sinners of every sort*, even to the atheist, the man who says there is no God, and he bids him believe and live. He preaches Christ to the openly profane; when they pause for a while in their swearing, he tells them of that great oath which God has sworn, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." We preach Christ to the harlots in the streets; and oh, how joyfully have many of them received him, and how gladly have they found cleansing from their foul stains in Jesu's precious blood! We preach Christ to the drunkard, for we believe that nothing but the grace of God can rescue him from his degradation and sin, and many such sinners have we seen reclaimed by the gospel.

The preaching of Christ crucified, the lifting up of the dying Son of God "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," has power enough to turn the whole world upside down, and to change innumerable sinners into saints, so we mean to keep on *preaching Christ to all sinners of all sorts*. We do not intend to leave out one, not even *you*, my friend, who think you are left out, or ought to be left out. We know that there is a book of life before the throne of God, and that no more names can be written there; they were all recorded before the foundation of the world when the Father gave to Christ those who are to be eternally his. We cannot mount up to heaven to read the names of the redeemed that are written there, but we believe the list contains millions upon millions of names of those who have not yet trusted in Christ, so we mean to keep on preaching Christ to sinners of every age, of every rank, of every sort, of every degree of blackness and

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vileness, and we believe that “yet there is room,” yet there is mercy for the miserable, yet there is forgiveness for the guilty who will come and trust in Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

III. Now, lastly, HOW OUGHT WE TO PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED?

I think, first, we ought to preach Christ *very boldly*. I recollect a young man going into a pulpit, to address a small congregation, and he began by saying that he hoped they would pardon his youth, and forgive his impertinence in coming to speak to them. Some foolish old gentleman said, “How humble that young man is to talk like that!” but another, who was wiser though he was younger, said, “What a dishonour to his Lord and Master! If God sent him with a message to those people, what does it matter whether he is young or old! Such mock modesty as that is out of place in the pulpit.” I think that second man was right, and the first one wrong. A true minister of the gospel is an ambassador for Christ, and do our ambassadors go to foreign courts with apologies for carrying messages from their sovereign? It would be a gross insult to the crown of these realms if they showed such humility as that in their official capacity. Let ministers of the gospel keep their modesty for other occasions when it ought to be manifested, but let them not dishonour their Master and discredit his message as that silly young man did. When we preach Christ crucified, we have no reason to stammer, or stutter, or hesitate, or apologize; there is nothing in the gospel of which we have any cause to be ashamed. If a minister is not sure about his message, let him keep quiet till he is sure about it; but we believe, and therefore we speak with the accent of conviction. If I have not proved the power of the gospel in my own heart and life, I am a base impostor to be standing in this pulpit to preach that gospel to others; but as I do know most assuredly that I am saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and as I feel certain that I have been divinely called to preach his gospel,—

“Shall I, for fear of feeble man,
The Spirit’s course in me restrain?
Or undismay’d in deed and word,
Be a true witness for my Lord?”

But while we preach Christ boldly, we must also preach him *affectionately*. There must be great love in our proclamation of the truth. We must not hesitate to point out to sinners the state of ruin to which sin has brought them, and we must clearly set before them the divinely-appointed remedy; but we must mingle a mother’s tenderness with a father’s sternness. Paul was like both mother and father, in a spiritual sense, in his ministry. He wrote to the Galatians, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you;” and to the Corinthians he wrote, “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel;” and every true minister of Christ can in his measure sympathize

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with him in both those experiences. Yes, sinners, we do indeed love you; often, our heart is well-nigh broken with the longing we have to see you saved. We wish we could preach to you with Baxter's tearful eye; nay, rather, with the Saviour's melting heart and all-consuming zeal.

Then, next, we must preach *Christ only*. With Paul, every true minister ought to be able to say to his hearers, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The preacher must never mix up anything else with the gospel. Every time he preaches, he must still have the same old theme, "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Christ is the Alpha of the gospel, and he is the Omega too; the first letter of the gospel alphabet, and the last letter, and all the letters in between. It must be Christ, *Christ*, Christ from beginning to end. There must be no work-mongering or anything else mixed up with Christ. There must be no daubing with untempered mortar in our building upon Christ, the one foundation, that is laid once for all.

The preacher must also mind that he preaches Christ *very simply*. He must break up his big words and long sentences, and pray against the temptation: to use them. It is usually the short, dagger-like sentence that does the work best. A true servant of Christ must never try to let the people see how well he can preach; he must never go out of his way to drag a pretty piece of poetry into his sermon, nor to introduce some fine quotations from the classics. He must employ a simple, homely style, or such a style as God has given him; and he must preach Christ so plainly that his hearers can not only understand him, but that they cannot misunderstand him even if they try to do so.

Now, as the time has gone, I must close by saying that we must try to preach Christ *savingly*. O sinners, I would that ye would trust Christ this very moment! Do you realize how great your danger is? Unconverted soul, you are standing, as it were, over the mouth of hell, on a single plank, and that plank is rotten! Man, thou mayest be in thy grave before another Sabbath dawns; and then, if unsaved, thou wilt be in hell! Beware lest thou art taken away unprepared; for, if that is thine unhappy lot, there will be no ransom that can deliver thy lost soul from going down to the pit. See thy need of Christ, sinner, and lay hold of him by faith. None but Christ can save thee. Christ is the Way; thou mayest go about all thy days trying to find another entrance to heaven, but thou wilt not find it, for this is the only one. Why wilt thou not come unto God by Christ? Wherefore art thou so ungrateful as to despise the longsuffering mercy of God? Will not the goodness of God lead thee to repentance? Shall Christ die for sinners, and yet wilt thou, O sinner, turn away from him who alone can give thee life? If thou wilt but trust him, he will save thee; thy sins, which are many, shall all be forgiven thee; thou shalt be adopted into the family of God, and in due time thou shalt find thyself in heaven to go no more out for ever. If thou wouldst be happy, if thou wouldst enjoy the peace that passeth all understanding,

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if thou wouldst have two heavens,—a heaven below and a heaven above,—trust in Jesus, sinner, trust in Jesus this very moment. Go not out of this building unsaved. One believing look will bring thee salvation, for—

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner,—look unto him, and be saved,—
Unto him who was nail'd to the tree.”

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Look unto him, look unto him now; may the Holy Spirit enable you to look and live, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.¹

¹ Spurgeon, C. H. (1910). “Preaching Christ Crucified.” In *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (Vol. 56, pp. 481–490). Passmore & Alabaster.