

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Intro: If you are following the Bible reading calendar that we distribute at the beginning of each year, you have recently read 1 Corinthians, and have gotten through chapter 9 in 2 Corinthians. Every time we read any book of the Bible we get some fresh impressions of the truth presented in that book. I will have to say that the Corinthian epistles have been a great blessing to me as I have read them again. Although on the cruise to Alaska we had plenty to occupy our time, I managed to keep up with the Bible reading and thoroughly enjoyed going through the latter part of 1 Corinthians, finishing it just a couple of days before we got back home.

Perhaps one reason I have enjoyed these Corinthian epistles is because the Apostle Paul was dealing with problems not only that were characteristic of the church at Corinth, and of the Church generally in the first century, but they were problems that have been a hindrance to the Church in every generation since. And the problem that Paul got into in chapter 1 had to do with the temptation to give people what they wanted to hear, or at least in the something like the people were used to, rather than what the Church was commissioned to do.

Baptism had become a major issue, and this led the people in the churches to express their preference for one servant of the Lord rather than some of the others. Some were saying, "I am of Paul"; others, "I of Apollos," etc. And this led as we can see in verses 13-17 to boasting as to who baptized them. Paul was speaking for himself, but it surely must have been true that Apollos and Peter felt that same way that Paul felt. And what this did was to cause many people to place baptism ahead of the Gospel.

Charles Hodge pointed out in his commentary on 1 Corinthians that when we go back to what we often refer to as *the Great Commission*, in Matt. 28:18-20, we get the proper order. Let me read those verses to you:

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end

of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

The word “teach” in verse 19 literally means *to make disciples*, and then they were to be baptized. Now *to make disciples* is just another way of saying that people were to be saved, and then baptized. Salvation was to come first, and then baptism as an evidence of salvation. And it is impossible to move baptism ahead of salvation without minimizing the Gospel message. The only way for people to be saved is through the Gospel of the grace of God. You will remember that Paul said in writing to the church at Rome,

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 (Rom. 1:16).

If people are to be saved, God must save them. And the instrument that He uses is always the Gospel! There is no other way for people to be saved except through the presentation of the Gospel.

What is the Gospel? Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15:1-8: 1 Cor 15:1-8

- 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;
- 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.
- 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
- 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:
- 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:
- 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.
- 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.
- 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

This is the Gospel! This is the message that God uses to draw people to Christ. And as they hear and understand the Gospel, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else, it is through hearing that message that faith is given, people believe, and the result is salvation. This is what Paul had in mind when the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

So you can see that it is absolutely important that people hear the Gospel. No one is ever saved except through the Gospel. They have to know Who Christ is, what He did for the salvation of sinners, they must accept it as true, and trust in Christ alone for their salvation.

While Dr. Boyd was speaking at Camp he gave us the three essential parts of true saving faith. I don't know if I am using the words which he used, but he said that faith involves knowledge, belief, and trust.

It reminded me of an illustration that I used many years ago to show what faith is. And it had to do with an elevator. Our ship which we boarded for our cruise to Alaska had twelve elevators that I know of, and there could have been others reserved for the crew that none of us saw. There are always limitations to any illustration, and the limitation of this illustration is great because it does not picture the fact that salvation is a work of God. But perhaps it can be of assistance to us in understanding what is involved in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Explain the illustration.)

For many years well meaning Christians have been so concerned about getting a “decision” out of people so they can tell them that they are saved that this has resulted in countless numbers of people thinking that they are Christians because they have walked down an aisle, or signed a card, or joined a church when they may have been told little or nothing about God and sin and Christ and His work on the Cross.

Lucille and I recently sat in a service where the pastor told the people in his congregation that he knew that they had come to church because they were seeking community – and he explained that we all have a desire to belong to something, and to be with people. He never once mentioned sin, nor the saving work of Christ on the Cross. He probably felt that he was preaching the Gospel, but it was a far cry from what Paul had in mind when he spoke of preaching the Gospel.

Why are we so hesitant about preaching the Gospel? Why do we give first place to going to church, or to baptism, or to other good things, but things which all have to follow salvation.

Paul tells us in this passage.

See verse 18a. The Gospel is foolishness to the people of the world. And we soon learn this when we speak to people about Christ.

Then look at verse 21, and then verse 23. And finally look at verse 25.

In between verses 18 and 21 we see that God has decreed that no one will ever be saved by human wisdom, and he applied this in verse 20 to both Jews and Gentiles. People today have done a fairly good and thorough job of eliminating the word *sin* out of our vocabulary. And from my seminary days I have heard from people who should know better that if we want to see people saved, we must not talk about sin.

Man in his own wisdom refuses to believe that what Jesus Christ did two thousand years ago, has anything to do with us today. And again in many churches today more faith is placed in human psychology than in the Gospel of Christ.

Cf. what Paul told Timothy about these last days in which we are now living, days which began when Jesus Christ went back to heaven. (Read 2 Tim. 4:1-5.)

In verse 17 of our text we have Paul's statement of what the Lord sent him to do. (Read.) He had been sent to preach the Gospel – not to make people feel good, but to point out to them their sinful condition and the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners.

Now tonight we are here primarily to observe the Lord's Supper. The Lord established this Supper with His disciples before He went back to heaven. He did not say how often we should observe it, but it is very clear that we are to observe it. Why? Because it is the Lord's Supper that we are brought back to the basic Gospel message.

Please turn to the passage we usually read when we observe the Lord's Supper: 1 Cor. 11:23-26. (Read and explain.)

The KJV calls this "the preaching of the Cross." The NKJV renders it "the message of the Cross." At least one Greek scholar has translated it as "the doctrine of the Cross" (Charles Hodge). But it is all the Cross where the perfect Son of God offered Himself as a sacrificial Substitute for sinners, and, as our text tonight declares – (Read 1 Cor. 1:24-25.)