

WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED...AGAIN!

Last Lord's Day, in my lesson, *We Preach Christ Crucified*, I urged each of you to spend some time thinking about what you think the Gospel story is. I wanted you to think about how you would tell that story in your own words. I hope you did that and I won't embarrass anyone by asking for a show of hands, but I hope you did that and that you gave the matter some good thought, maybe even prayed about it.

I think it is important for every Christian to do that; not just once, but all the time, over and over again. We need to let the story of Christ roll around our mind and heart, praying, and hoping as we pray that it will get hold of us; that we will fall more and more in love with Him that we call the Christ, our Lord and our Savior. We need to do that...we need to do that because God wants this story told.

I know He hasn't made you an evangelist! He hasn't made you an apostle or prophet! But listen, what He did do is give you a story that even you can tell. It's a story that when it is told, it has incredible power to capture hearts and minds; it changes eternal destinies.

This morning I want to continue the lesson I began last Sunday.

I believe it is essential for the world to hear, and to learn, and it is critical for us Christians to remember that Christ did not die of old age. He did not spend his last few years lingering in a nursing home. His last few months were not wracked with pain from cancer. He did not die from a massive cardiac arrest. His life did not end in a tragic car accident. Christ died on a cross, which was a Roman instrument used for capital punishment. When Peter preached the first gospel sermon, there in **Acts 2**, he told that story. **Beginning in verse 22**, he said:

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- 23) this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

We read that and we know all of that, and it doesn't grab our attention, at least not anymore. Remember what I said last week, that for many of us, we have heard the good news so much that it has become old news, and it doesn't excite us anymore. That's partly because of the nature of things, but it is also partly because we are not telling that story to everyone we can. When we have that as our ambition, and when we tell His story as often as we can, we don't get tired of it, it doesn't bore us. Instead, it energizes us because in every line on every page of His story, there is something that we know is going to connect with someone, and lead them to becoming Christians.

Peter said, *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know."* What did Peter talk to these people about? After he got through dealing

with the accusation that he and the other apostles were drunk, and after he explained to the people how that what they were seeing and hearing had been foretold by the prophet Joel, the next thing he tells them about is Jesus.

Why did he do that? I know he was being acted upon by the Holy Spirit! I'm wanting you to think about this! Why did the Holy Spirit have him go there? Why didn't the Holy Spirit lead him to give the people a lesson on the three dispensations—Patriarchal, Mosaic and Christian dispensations? Why didn't the Holy Spirit have Peter launch into a discussion about the existence of God? Why didn't He lead him to explain the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, or at least the difference between the first covenant and the new covenant? Why didn't Peter explain why the question of authority if it is so, so important? How are we to explain the fact that Peter never even mentioned the word church; didn't talk about that at all? Why didn't Peter talk about baptism? Oh I know he commanded it in verse 38, but he didn't spend any time explaining what baptism had to do with anything. He didn't talk about the Lord's Supper; he really didn't have anything to say about worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Why do you suppose that is?

Are those things not important? Of course they are important! But what Peter did there, and I think it is a good model for us to follow, is that he told people about Jesus.

Why did he do that? He did that because as Paul said, "*we preach Christ crucified!*" In **1 Corinthians 1:17, 18**, Paul wrote (listen to this, will you!):

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 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.

A few lines later, in **chapter 2, verses 1 & 2**, he said:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Peter said, "*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.*" Peter wanted to tell people about Christ. And what did he mention?

First of all he refers to him as "*Jesus of Nazareth.*" What comes to your mind when you hear that? There is a whole host of information in the four gospels about Jesus of Nazareth, isn't there. That points to Christ's early history, where he came from and who he was, brothers, sisters and all. You also have those stories about His growing up in Nazareth and how the people of that village found it difficult to believe in Him as the Messiah. You see the story God wants us to share with people is about a real person. Any good story has a hero and the hero of

this story is Jesus of Nazareth! There are so many amazing, interesting things you can tell about Christ.

About this Jesus of Nazareth, Peter then says that he was *“a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst.”* What is Peter talking about? He is talking about all of those amazing, incredible, miraculous things that Jesus did and said, isn't he? Peter was reminding these people of things many of them had seen. Well, what did those things show? They showed that God was working through Jesus of Nazareth. That was Peter's point. He was wanting people to think about who Jesus was.

Think about it beloved: what do you want people to know about Jesus? You want them to know everything don't you, but don't you see, that means you can start just about anywhere. The story God wants people to hear can be started from almost any statement, any situation, any question. Think about all of the *“mighty works and wonders and signs”* that he did. Sure most people, at least in our world, have heard many of those stories, but the very fact that they involve this person, this Jesus of Nazareth, almost guarantees that people are going to give them a little more credibility. Even if they are skeptical, they are going to give what we share with them a little more serious thought. Paul said, *“We preach Christ crucified.”*

Peter then says, *“this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”* Wow! The plot thickens! Not only do we have this very real person, not only did he do amazing, incredible things in their presence, Peter told his listeners, all of this was in accordance with God's plan and foreknowledge! Whoa! What's going on here? Yes, Jesus was crucified. Yes, Jesus was killed. But think about it, who was this Jesus; that's the point.

We claim that He was God. What are some of the reasons why we believe that? What are some of reasons we can give people so they can believe that as well? Do you remember when you first began to believe? Do you remember when you first began to give serious consideration to turning to this Jesus of Nazareth for the forgiveness of your sins? What was it that *“sealed the deal”* for you? Was it some of the amazing things He did? Was it what He taught? Was it the fact that all of those amazing things, including His own resurrection pushed your belief way past any speculation or question? There was some moment when you knew, He was God, He had truly come into this world, He really had done all of those things. You knew this Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Son of God. They One telling you things you really needed to hear, telling you to do things you hadn't even thought of doing. And it all made sense, and it still makes sense because *“who was this guy?”* This was God who had come to find you.

Paul said, *“We preach Christ crucified.”* Who did Peter preach? He preached Christ crucified. That's who we are preach. We don't preach ideas, although ideas are important? We don't preach doctrines, even though doctrines are important. We don't preach history or proofs or even promises, even though there is an extremely important place for all three—history, proofs and promises. But why don't we preach history? Because, who is the center of all history?

Christ! Why don't we preach proofs? Because what is the greatest proof of all? Christ. Why don't we preach promises? Because without Christ, all bets are off and all promises are useless!

That's why we preach Christ crucified. We don't preach the crucifixion of Christ, although that part of the story does get told a lot. But lots of people have been put to death on a cross. As far as many people were concerned, Jesus was just another trouble maker that deserved to die a cruel death. But keep this in mind. It isn't the crucifixion that gives glory to Christ. It's Christ who gives glory to the crucifixion. What would that story be if it had not been Christ, the Son of God? It would be a story with a sad ending, right?

Do you get where I'm going with this? I really want to know because I hope you are following me here. It's important because God imagined that one day there would be a whole lot of people in this place we call Ponca City, people who would be forever telling this person and that person the story of Jesus. And they would be telling people His story, not because they had to, but because they wanted to. Or maybe I should say, they would be telling that story because really, they did have to. They couldn't keep from telling it, and they would be people who would look for anyone and everyone to tell the story to. They would love, as Catherine Hankey said, and we looked at her hymn last week; they would love to tell the story because His story had this amazing postscript in it; a postscript that was about them. They loved to tell the story because they were a part of that story, and because everyone could be a part of that story if they would just take the time to think seriously about the matter.

I'm going to give you another assignment for this coming week. I know some of you didn't get to it last week; maybe this week you will try harder to remember and try harder to set aside some time. For those of you who did your homework last week, this will be a little review for you, but if you did it last week, I am confident you will not mind reviewing what you did and maybe touch it up here and there. The rest of you, I want to urge you to take some paper and a pen, or maybe sit down at your computer, or your tablet, and take your Bible and begin putting His story into your own words. Just imagine if someone were to ask you to tell them more about your faith in Christ. What would you say? How would you begin? What would you include?

Now of course, we know, for the most part people are not coming to us and asking that, are they? But why is that? Let me tell you the reason why. You are not going to like it, but listen to me and see if this isn't the reason. The reason why very few, if any people are asking us about Christ, why they express little or no interest in the gospel of Christ is because we are not talking about Jesus of Nazareth. We are not preaching Christ crucified. We who have pledged ourselves to confessing Him before others, have not been doing that. We have not been talking about Jesus; people are not hearing us and seeing in us someone who is excited about Christ. For the most part, they really don't know what we believe or why.

And the amazing thing is, many of them would like to. They would love it if someone they know and like and respect would just talk to them about these things. People know they are in

trouble. People know there is a God, even though they don't know much about Him. They know that Jesus is believed by many to be God Himself and that He came into this world and took upon Himself a human form. They may not understand much about that but they would be open to someone helping them without trying to force something on them. Most people know that Jesus is alleged to have died on the cross but rose from the dead three days later. They may not really grasp what all of that means for them, but they would love to hear it from someone like you.

But they are never going to ask you anything if you haven't been telling them anything about Christ in the first place. Let me close by reminding you of the Samaritan woman's experience related for us in the 4th chapter of John. Do you remember her story?

John tells us that Jesus was passing through Samaria on His way from Jerusalem back to his home in Galilee. They stopped around noon at a well near the town of Sychar, and Jesus took the opportunity to rest while the disciples went into town to buy some food. While they were gone, a woman came out to the well. Usually women came together in groups, but this woman came alone. No doubt, as the rest of the story will suggest, she was not a woman that many other women wanted to be seen with. She came to the well to draw some water and Jesus used that as a place and way to begin a conversation with her. He said, "Give me some water to drink." She was insulted by that! First of all, she had already surmised that He was not a Samaritan, but one of those hated Jews. Secondly, he was a man addressing her, which wasn't really proper. She said some things back to him, and before long the two of them were engaged in a very important discussion. It wasn't long until she began to realize that this person was someone special, and she began to ask Jesus some questions. I love it when people begin to ask questions because that is a sign that they are interested, their curiosity has been aroused. They are beginning to hunger and thirst for understanding.

At some point, Jesus told her to go and get her husband. She replied that she didn't have a husband. Jesus told her that she had said that correctly because she had had five husbands and the one she had at the present was not her husband. She was shocked, and knew that this man was a prophet. She asks about the coming of the Messiah, and Jesus tells her that He is that Messiah. She takes off for town and begins to tell the people of that city about that man she had met out at the well. It isn't long until the whole city goes out to the well, because they want to see this man for themselves. They talk with Jesus and then began to urge him to spend some time with them, and he did, for two days. Finally they said, "at first we believed because of what the woman told us, but now we have seen with our own eyes, and now we believe that you are the Savior, the Christ."

Well, that's what we need to be doing. We need to be talking about Christ; telling people anything and everything we can about Jesus. We can share with them about everything Jesus did, and everything He said. When we do that some of those people are going to want to be a follower of Christ, and then we can teach them all of the other things that they need to know about being a Christian. Jesus told His disciples to go and make disciples of every nation, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and then teaching them to

observe all of the things that Jesus had taught them. People need all of that teaching, but we begin with the story.

Close.