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And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2:2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 2:3 And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. 2:4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 2:5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. –I Cor. 2:1-5

What was the heart of Paul’s preaching? Without question, Paul was the greatest missionary and evangelist the world has ever known. He laid the foundation of the church and the foundation of what we call Western Civilization. The first and obvious thing to note, of course, is that Paul was a special instrument of the Lord, and unique vessel that the Holy Spirit gifted to this great work. We will not see his like again, but it is useful to understand how he viewed his own preaching, and we can learn from it. There is a great deal that we can learn from this passage, in which Paul describes his preaching technique.

- I The summary of the content of Paul’s preaching. Two phrases summarize the content of the message:
- A) It is called the testimony of God.
- 1) The minister of the Gospel does not have his own message. The preacher does have a right to his opinions or his own ideas. His task is to make certain that people know the testimony of God. Follow me on this: It is absolutely essential that you understand this:
 - 2) Look at I John 5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.: It is our faith that overcomes the world. And what is faith? Faith is believing that Jesus is the Son of God. There is content: it isn’t just believing; it is believing something: and that something is about Jesus, and that something about Jesus is that He is the Son of God. That Jesus of Nazareth; he who was written about in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is the Son of God.
 - 3) 5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? 5:6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. 5:7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. 5:8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. The witness concerning Jesus Christ originated in Heaven in the counsel of the Triune God, and came to earth in the witness of the Holy Spirit; the witness of the sacrament of baptism; the witness of the conscience cleansed by the blood of Christ.
 - 4) 5:9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. 5:10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. 5:11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. Such important things concerning eternal life are so important that God did not leave the message to others, but bears witness Himself to its truth. Not to believe the record that God has given of His son is to make God a liar; and to lose all hope of eternal life. “Hath the witness in himself” Belief in the record is itself a witness. Those who believe the record have an even deeper witness in himself that He has not been in error to believe in Christ. The witness within is the result of believing the the **record. The summary of the record—the summary of the Bible—is that God hath given to us**

eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath love; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

- 5) 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. : This is why we preach. So that you will believe, and so that you will keep on believing, that your believing will get deeper and stronger. For that is your life; and this is the victory that overcometh the world.
 - 6) 14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 5:15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. Those who believe on Jesus Christ have entered into a fellowship of prayer: not a fellowship in which we command God and make Him do what we want; but a fellowship that teaches us to understand and ask for His will. Asking according to His will guarantees answers to prayer and true usefulness in the kingdom of God. Notice the language: we can have anything that is in His will. But that is HUGE. True prayer is not seeking to impose your will on God, but getting in tune with God’s will for you. It is a gracious fellowship of an unchanging holy God with a changing, frail, and sinful human being, through the blood of Jesus Christ. This means that God truly hears and answers prayer, but it also means that the divine is not controlled or changed by the human. The change is in us; not in God.
 - 7) This means that the people must consider the preaching of the Gospel as the testimony of God. It is a terrible thing to despise the preaching of the Gospel. It is a terrible thing to place human goals above the preaching of the Gospel. It is a terrible thing to despise prophesying.
- B) The second characterization of the content of Paul’s preaching is “Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified.” The power of the Gospel message is the power of the cross.
- 1) From beginning to the end, the message must be Christ and Him crucified. Everything must tend to that great end, for that is the message of the Bible. John says the same thing; that the record is the record that God has given of His Son.
 - 2) It is the cross that cuts through the vain pretensions of fallen mankind:
 - (a) The Cross exposes the vanity of philosophy and the pride of human thought. What a commentary the cross was on the pretensions of the Greeks! What does God think of your posturings and your vain ideas! Look at the cross of Christ. No wonder the preaching of the cross was foolishness to the Greeks. Oh, the Greeks were benevolent. They made room for all religions. In Stoicism there was a brotherhood of nations; a brotherhood that included everyone. There was room for everyone, and diversity was celebrated. What good was it? Why did Stoicism hate the early church and seek to destroy it? Because of the rebuke of the Cross. Salvation could never lie in us accepting our diversity and overlooking our sins. Look at the cross of Jesus Christ. God did not overlook our sins, but brought His wrath upon His only Son, when our sins were laid on Him. Where was the tolerance and the benevolence and the compassion when humanist hypocrisy came face to face with true virtue and true holiness? The cross reveals the true nature of humanistic benevolence. It is a sham and a deceit.
 - (b) The Cross exposes the vanity of the Jews and the pride of human morality and character. “We approve what is good,” the Jew could say. We know right from wrong. We have the law of God. We have traditions of self-restraint and discipline. But what good is that? O yes; far better to approve good than not to approve it; but what a gulf there is between approving the good, and actually doing the good. What a difference between good thoughts and good deeds!! The law will not be satisfied with our good intentions. Paul strips the mask away and tells us in Romans 2, that it is not those who approve the law that shall be justified, but those that do the law. You are not justified because you know that men should love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength; but because you DO love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind,

and strength. Paul concludes that the Jews were no better than the Gentiles; they just wore a different mask to hide their sinfulness. Those who crucified Christ and those who persecuted the early church “thought that they did God service.” They had a zeal toward God, but not according to knowledge.

C) So the content of Paul’s message is this: the Scripture which is the testimony of God concerning Jesus Christ. This is the reason that Paul’s writings, and we assume his preaching, made much of the Scriptures, for they reveal Jesus Christ. Not Jesus Christ as a great moral teacher, or as a great example, or as a great philosopher; but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. Why is Jesus important? Jesus is important precisely because He came to take away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. This is the gospel message.

II The Second Thing this morning is this: That the content of Paul’s message drove the manner in which it was delivered; the way in which it was presented. Paul says that the content of the message can be made vanity—of no effect, if it is not delivered in the proper way.

A) The message drives the form. In fact, the form of the message always gives an indication of what the real message is.

- 1) If the real message is that life is mostly to be enjoyed, then we will try to make the Gospel message as entertaining as possible. If we are successful, pleasure loving people will flock to our churches, and praise us for giving them a good time. There will be many stories about those who make Christianity boring. We will be praised for making it exciting and entertaining.
- 2) If the real message is that Christianity is a philosophy; then we will be sure to engage man’s speculative nature. We will become famous for the depth of our thought and erudition. Our churches will attract a much smaller constituency, but we will be on good terms with the most learned men of our community, the learned men of all faiths who will respect us.
- 3) If the real message is that Christianity is a moral theology, then we will engage man’s moral nature, and make much of the law of God and the moral dimensions of the Gospel. Our churches will be attractive to those who are troubled at moral decline and the excesses of the ungodly. We will build an island of sanctity around us and sniff at others.

B) What is the real message: That Christianity is the best philosophy; the most entertaining; the most moral? What is the message?

- 1) I did not come with enticing words of men’s wisdom. I was not a negotiator, but a messenger of the Lord of Host. I came with a message: Be reconciled to God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and has committed unto us the message of reconciliation. Be reconciled to God!!
- 2) Why be reconciled? Because you are alienated from God. You are at enmity with him, and you use these other things to hide your alienation.
 - (a) You think that if you have a lively, entertaining worship that the Spirit of God is there; and life in Christ is equated with the circus.
 - (b) You think that if you understand great mysteries and can sort out philosophic intricacies that you are coming to the truth. This also is a mask that is worn to keep you from facing the truth about your own alienation from God.
 - (c) You use morality and virtue to mask your alienation from God. You conceal the viciousness of your own heart and soul, and despise others.
- 3) The Cross of Jesus Christ sweeps away all the pretensions and masks that we put between ourselves and God. Paul did not use the enticing words of men’s wisdom, because that would make the cross of Christ of none effect. He did not philosophize with the Athenians, but spoke of the bloody death of Christ and His resurrection from the dead. He did not commend the Jew for his rigor concerning the law, but spoke of the offense of the cross. He did not engage in theatrics and vain shows, but by

the foolishness of preaching. He bore witness to the Gospel, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture; that he was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scripture.

- 4) The Cross of Jesus Christ is the centrality of the message, and the focus must not be taken away from it. Why the Cross? Why the crucifixion of Christ. Because of sin and misery. The eternal Word of God was manifested to take away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. What utter hopelessness is revealed here! What depth of sin is set forth here! Salvation can only come by the crucifixion of the Son of God! What sinners we are. How utterly hopeless we are.
- 5) How profound and wonderful is the love of God. Such love must not be trivialized. How profound is the love of God revealed in the Cross of Jesus.

John 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,

that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

- C) Paul would tolerate everything; do anything; suffer anything, so long as the Gospel was permitted to shine clearly. But he was a barracuda when anything threatened to dim the Gospel message. Did Peter give precedence to the Jews in Antioch, and withdraw from the Gentiles? Then Paul rebuked him to his face, so that the truth of Gospel might continue. Would some compel new Christians to be circumcised and live after the manner of the Jews? Then Paul wished them to be cut off. Did anyone not love the Lord Jesus? Then Paul said, “Let them be anathema.” Let them be damned. This was the glory of the Gospel that Paul preached, and He would let nothing obscure or obstruct it. To the Jew he was as the Jew; to the Greek as the Greek. He was willing to be unlearned; to be foolish. He was wise to the wise and foolish to the foolish. But one thing he would never forget: Every mercy and every gift that had come to him from God had come through this one channel: the Gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ. For it was by the cross that he was crucified to the world and the world unto him. God forbid, he said, that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. In all these things, Paul was not contending for a philosophy or for a theology or for a moral system, but for Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
- D) Paul said, ‘I did not come with enticing words of men’s wisdom, because I want your faith to stand in the power of God. Paul knew that those who are convinced by men, will be unconvinced by men. He wanted the proof of the Gospel in them to be from God, so that their faith would stand in the power of God. Preaching, therefore, is bearing witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ. The preacher is not the subject of the discourse; the witness of God is, in bearing witness of His Son.
 - 1) “Enticing” means persuasive. It is only used here in this verse in the entire New Testament. A similar word is used in Col. 2, when Paul fears that they be lured away from Christ with enticing words.
 - 2) The enticing words of men’s wisdom are compared with the power of God. Paul is not talking about miracles and signs and wonders, but the strongest of all proofs, the witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart, that persuades men that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Those who have been so taught can never be unpersuaded by the enticing words of men, be they so very eloquent and charming. Why else would Paul preach a gospel that was so unattractive to men: the Cross of Jesus Christ.
 - 3) Elegance and Form can never make that true which is false. Paul would have the gospel stand on its own merit—stand in the power of God, and not by the embellishments of men.

Conclusion: If you are a Christian, you are one because God has demonstrated the truth of the Gospel to you. You haven't been talked into it, or tricked into it, or bribed into it. You have known the power of God in your own soul, convincing you of the truth of the gospel message and you, by that power, have come to trust in Christ as your savior. It was so with Paul, and he desired that all men come to the truth of Christ as He set forth in the Gospel, for that is the power of God unto salvation.

Amen. May it always be so with us. God bless you.