

The Preaching of the Cross

I Corinthians 1:18-25, Reminiscere Sunday

February 28, 2010

Beloved of the Lord....It is written, "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, nor many noble, are called." God's Word here teaches the most well educated PHD's, the doctors or lawyers, those who are mighty among men: such as a rule usually are not Christians. Years ago I knew an exception to this rule, a Dr. Robert Taylor, of Christ Lutheran Church, Ft. Wayne, Indiana. He was a remarkable and well educated Christian who has now reached his heavenly reward. But he once lamented that almost all the doctors he knew were not Christians. Though he would try to bring them God's Word and convince them of the truth that would set them free, they would not listen. It brought him true sadness of heart and I could see it. God's Word is true: the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. God's love for us was so great and infinite that God humbled Himself and became a man. Jesus blotted "out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

Why is the preaching of the cross foolishness to them that perish? It is because after the fall of man into sin, the natural religion of every man is salvation by works rather than salvation by grace. The teaching that salvation from sin is free through the shed blood of Jesus, is absolutely foreign to man's sinful nature and only God through the Gospel can reveal this Light to those who live in darkness. The Bible says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned." To the unbeliever who is yet blinded by their love of sin in the devil's kingdom, it is pure folly to believe God came to this earth as a man, died on the cross to make blood payment for the sins of men, and rise again the third day. What kind of God is that, they reason? Isn't that a weak god if he died? Indeed the teaching that Christ the Son of God was crucified is so offensive to man's proud nature, the false religions of the world have invented many lies concerning the death and resurrection of Christ. The Jehovah's Witnesses teach Jesus died and did not rise, but God re-created Him. ISLAM teaches that before Jesus died, God switched the body of Jesus with Judas. Even worse, Judaism teaches Jesus received his just desserts and did not rise but the disciples stole the body. The Mormons teach Jesus was the physical offspring of Mary and Adam, and after he died he was promoted to the level of deity. Such teachings prove to us the enmity of the world

against Christ their own Savior. Though Christ died for all and rose again from the dead for the justification of all, He was despised of men, a man of sorrows. He came unto His own, but His own received Him not.

Yet as the Greeks said in our reading, so we by faith say, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Hence "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." What is this power of God? While God's infinite power is surely seen in His creation, His greater power and work is in the manner of our redemption, namely His work of our salvation by the cross. For it is on the cross that Jesus wrestled with and overcame the greatest powers this world has ever known, the power of sin, the power of death, and the power of the devil. On the cross believers do not see a weak god, but the Mighty God, the Lamb of God, the Son of God incarnate in the flesh, who by Himself bears the weight of the world's sins all upon His lone shoulders. Piled upon Him alone were the sins of all the ungodly, your sins and mine, the lust of our heart, the pride of our tongue, the unclean thought, the dirty word, the bitter heart....because our sins were there the fiery wrath of God pours out upon Him causing Him true travail of soul, yet Jesus out of pure and holy love for us, perseveres and endures through it all, putting all His trust in His heavenly Father. "Father into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

True believers, but only believers know Jesus suffered so horribly on the cross, because our own sins were there. II Corinthians 5:21 says the Father made Jesus "*to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." His great suffering for our sins is better revealed by Isaiah who writes, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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." He was counted as guilty, though He was not guilty, that we who are guilty, might be counted as not guilty. After it all God now says to the whole world, "Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace." Such is the preaching of the Gospel.

Thus when we speak of the "preaching of the cross" we are speaking of the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "Unto us which are saved it is the power of God." In, by, on, and through the cross your Jesus dear believer, your Savior had the power over your sin, over your death, so that your devil could no longer hold you in his clutches, for Jesus pulled you out of darkness into His marvelous Light! "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." If only you believe and put your trust in Him, you no longer

dwell in the darkness of sin and death, but the truth of the Gospel has set you free. By the preaching of the Gospel then God reaches into the darkness of our own unbelief, rescues and pulls us out so that we stand firmly in this Kingdom of Light, His Kingdom of Grace, a Kingdom of Peace, true peace, spiritual peace. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Oh how sad not all in the world believes this, though Christ died for ALL, and the Lord is not willing that ANY perish! Rather “The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” Speaking of the Greeks first, they were known for their wisdom and philosophy. Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom, a general understanding of values and reality chiefly by speculation or logic. While there is indeed a great value to logic, and God is the Creator of human reason, neither logic nor reason can reveal the Gospel way of salvation, Christ crucified. Man cannot think his way into heaven, but God must reveal Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. Thus God declares, “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe...hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world.” What does this mean? It means God will humiliate and bring low those who by their “wisdom” are opposed to the preaching of the cross. Sooner or later the Joel Osteen’s of the world are exposed and fall from grace. Our lesson here is this, we are never to put our trust in own reason or intellect, but we are all to have the faith of a child in God’s Word. Sadly our world today is filled with fallen ministers who by a superficial study of the Scriptures and the pride and deceit of their own heart imagine they have discovered a new teaching of the Bible never before discovered. They then teach a new or strange doctrine and deceive the hearts of the simple though there is nothing new under the sun.

As for those Jews who required a sign, time and time again Jesus told the Jews they should not seek after a sign, but they should simply hear and believe the word Jesus’ spoke. On this point Matthew chapter eight is quite telling. It says, “And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.” Jesus sighed because it made Him sad to know these sinners were not accepting His Words as they were, the Words of God. They stumbled over the stumblingstone, that Jesus was the Christ, God incarnate in the flesh. If only they would hear the Word of God and believe they would be saved, but their sinful pride, their “great” intellect interfered. To this day there are churches and people who want

more than the Bible. They want signs and miracles, gifts of healing, dreams and visions. But no sign will be given them, no miracle, only the Gospel Word found in our Bibles and preached from our pulpit. By the “foolishness of preaching”, by the Gospel preaching of the cross, God has converted one generation after another so that the hearts of even little children know, trust, and love their dear Jesus as their dear Savior. Hence Jesus said to the proud Pharisees that would not believe, “Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?”

In a way you might say God mocks the “wisdom of the world” by granting the wisdom of faith to even the littlest of infants. When we think then of the wise of the world, the doctors, lawyers, and PHD’s of this world, we should understand they are but fools in God’s sight compared to those little children who believe in Jesus. Indeed the little children in our own congregation are far wiser than them. Yes, the simplest Christian whom the world deems as foolish, stupid, and weak, is far wiser than they could possible imagine – not by our own reason or strength – but by the power of the Gospel He made us wise in the ways of salvation.

Finally, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” As Jesus appeared weak in the hands of Pilate and the Jews, His strength is revealed to us through weakness. This weakness of God was stronger than men. Jesus said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” His death was for our glory. His rising to live reminds us that we too shall rise and be glorified. Though we in this world appear as weak, helpless, even foolish Christians at the hand of men, though we will indeed be persecuted for His name’s sake, our cross here leads to the glory there in that world above. Let us therefore humbly take up our cross and follow Him. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” Truly the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. Amen.