

Christ and Him Crucified

by Conrad Mbewe

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing Jesus Christ and Him crucified in a personal and experiential way, and applying this knowledge in our lives, ministries, and evangelism.

Duration: 47:59

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1

Topics: "Christ Crucified"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher expresses concern about the state of preaching today, noting that much of it revolves around stories about the preacher rather than focusing on the message of God. He emphasizes that true preaching should not be based on eloquence or personal glory, but on a firm commitment to proclaiming the gospel. The preacher highlights the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ, from his birth in a humble setting to his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, and encourages listeners to reflect on the wondrous work of Christ. He calls for a return to preaching that brings out the unsearchable riches of Christ and focuses on the gospel message rather than personal achievements.

Transcript

Yeah, it's a great joy and honor to be with you on this occasion. South Africa has, in many ways, become a second home to me. I often joke with people that you're now on your third president in your multifaceted country and I'm yet to receive associate citizenship from any of them.

Hopefully, the fourth one will finally accept the fact that I have a lot to do with South Africa. And it's a joy to minister with John. I was just saying to him that I recall quite vividly in 1998 when we first ministered together in England.

And I'm glad that we could have this opportunity once again of a shared ministry. I was thinking real hard as to what to share with you on this occasion, knowing that I would have but one message to share with you. That's a very difficult process to go through.

I asked myself the question, if I was to meet with but one pastor rather than the numbers that I hear right now. And that one pastor was to say to me, just give me one sentence, perhaps one phrase that ought to mean everything to me in my life and ministry. What is it that I would say? The answer became rather obvious immediately.

And it's Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ. That make Him your all in all.

And you will not go wrong. Have a Christ-centered life. Have a Christ-centered ministry.

And on what would I base such a statement? Please do turn with me to 1 Corinthians 2. 1 Corinthians 2. The famous words of the Apostle Paul. I'll read to you the first five verses of this chapter. 1 Corinthians 2. The Apostle Paul says there, When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Let's briefly turn to the Lord once again in prayer. Oh God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity once again to turn to your unrivaled Word, that which is never obscure to those that seek you. We pray that by the aid of your Holy Spirit, you will enable us to hear you clearly with respect to your own dear Son.

You know my frailty, you know my weakness, but oh God, honor the name of your Son, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. In bringing to you the need for us to truly know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, what burdens me is the fact that that ought to be pretty obvious to everybody.

Especially those of us who are called to the preaching ministry. You would assume that that is a matter of course, that that's what we are called ultimately to do. But all you need to do is take leave from your ministry, perhaps when you are on holiday or vacation, and attend various churches in places perhaps you don't normally visit.

And it will grieve your heart to realize that so much of preaching today is really but stories about the preacher, and oftentimes larger than life stories. Stories meant to make the hearers believe that He finally is the great hero that we've all been waiting for. So that when all the preaching is over, instead of the people going home with great thoughts of a great Savior, they go home with great thoughts of a pitiful man.

And surely it ought to grieve our hearts. Perhaps if it was a one-off situation, you may not be as grieved. But often by the end of your holiday or vacation, having gone from one church to the other, you soon realize that this is the staple diet of so many of God's people.

Paul was concerned about this. He was concerned about it primarily in the context of 1 Corinthians, because having preached Christ, Christ, Christ, he comes to hear that the church is now fighting over whether it ought to be Peter or Paul or Apollos, instead of being all consumed with the person and work and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence he's writing this epistle.

He is concerned that the Corinthian church should get back to the foundation that he once upon laid when he ministered there. And that's the reason why I bring you to this second chapter of 1 Corinthians. Because what he's doing there is simply reminding the brethren concerning the ministry that he had carried out when he initially went to Corinth.

He says that when I came to you brothers, this is the way I came. I didn't come with eloquence or superior wisdom. I did not follow the normal Greek fashion of gathering a following for themselves.

It wasn't based on eloquence. It wasn't based on some kind of philosophical thinking that would make me stand out as a unique and special teacher in my own age. He says, no, I didn't do that as I spoke about God.

What did I do instead? He said, I resolved. And he's speaking about resolution in the next day or two. I resolved.

I made a firm commitment that it doesn't matter the winds that will be blowing. It doesn't matter what waves will be hitting and beating against the little boat of my life. I was committed to an unshakable resolution.

And it was this, to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And oh brethren, may we follow this man's example. If we are to do so, we need to make a firm resolution, first of all, at a personal level, to know Christ in a growing and experiential way.

That's what Paul is saying here. You would think that what he ought to have said is that I resolved to preach Christ and him crucified. But yes, later on I will expound that.

Let's begin with what he actually states. That I resolved to know nothing except Christ and him crucified. Clearly, to begin with, it had to do with cognition, knowing in terms of information, in terms of doctrine, thinking through who Jesus is, his person and his work.

And that ought to be, to all of us, a lifelong career. God have mercy on you if you think that that is kindergarten stuff. It isn't.

When we are thinking in terms of Jesus, we are thinking in terms of the blessed second person of the Trinity. God the Son, the one through whom all things were created and nothing has come into being without him. We are thinking about him upon whom angels gaze in adoring wonder as the beauty of his person glows before their very eyes.

And they do not ever feel that a slice of eternity is already too much as they gaze at his glory. No, eternity to the thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand angels is nothing! Too short in seeking to know something of the glory of his person. And who are you as a human being to think, I knew everything I needed to know by the time I came out through the graduation forum of my Bible college.

Oh no, beloved brethren, he is a sea that is too deep to be sounded. He in himself comprises a universe that the most powerful telescope can ever finish in terms of studying and gazing at him. I plead, especially for those of us who are preachers, may we first and foremost be students of this Christ.

Not only in terms of his person, but also in terms of his work. The work of creation, the work of providence, but above all his redeeming work. When he became man and was born in a cow shed, lived and labored among us, suffering something of the curse of God upon us as humanity, studying something ultimately of that final day and final hour, when passing through Gethsemane, sweating that which was like great drops of blood falling to the ground, an angel coming to strengthen him in his weakness as he made that last mile of the way and making his way to the cross.

And then more than that, to gaze again and again and again as he drinks in the bitter cup of the wrath of God against sinful humanity. And to sense something of the words of Isaac Watts, when I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my studying his work. Mining deeper and deeper into that rich vein of all, and bringing out precious jewels, precious metal from the work that Jesus Christ has done.

Again, to borrow the words of the Apostle Paul, bringing out the unsearchable riches of Christ. It is not by that saying that you cannot search out those riches, but you cannot exhaust them. When you have done your utmost, when you have lived up to the ripe old age, hitting close perhaps to a hundred years on earth, you have only but begun to search those depths, to drink in the richest of juices concerning Christ as prophet, priest and king.

Let me ask, where are you spiritually today in this matter? Are you still hungering to know him, to borrow the words of the Apostle Paul? Oh, that I might know him. And that is not at the beginning of his Christian life. No! He writes that to the Philippians.

Later on in his life, he is saying, I want to know Christ. I am hungering. I am thirsting.

I am like parched ground thirsting for the first rains, with respect to this whole issue of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. Writing to the Philippians, remember the words we heard earlier on. For to me, to live is Christ.

That is what life is to me. It is to know this Jesus. May I add, to experience this Jesus.

So that the knowledge here is not merely cognitive. It is not simply information coming to my mind, but it is information that is reaching my heart. It is information that is causing me to well up with affection towards him.

As that little chorus we used to sing many, many years ago, and perhaps some of you still have it on your regular menu, I keep falling in love with Jesus. Over and over, and over and over again. He gets sweeter and sweeter as the days go by.

Oh, what a love between my Lord and I. I keep falling in love with him. Over and over, and over and over again. If you are a preacher today, and what I have just spoken about is now history in your life.

You have backslidden. You have backslidden. And it may explain what is presently happening in your ministry.

Because this is not for those who are just beginning their Christian lives. No. It is to be true of us, not only in this life, but even when we arrive in eternity to know him, to love him, to love him back.

So you should not be surprised that Paul should be speaking here in terms of this resolution. To know the Lord Jesus and to know him in his crucified state. You shouldn't be surprised.

It is supposed to be normal Christian living, especially for those of us who are called to the preaching ministry. May God's people sense this aroma from our lives so that they also follow our example because we are role models in this matter. But then, as we rightly concluded, when Paul speaks here about knowing Christ and him crucified, he is speaking about him primarily in the context of a preaching ministry.

It is very easy to discern from the context here. For he says, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed. Or as it says in verse 3, I came to you in weakness and in fear and with much trembling.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words. So this knowledge is in the context of a preaching ministry. And especially with respect to Paul writing to the Corinthians, it primarily had to do with the church planting work that he was involved in.

You will recall that he entered Europe through Philippi and began to make his way downwards through Athens and Corinth and so on and so forth. And he is saying when he arrived in Corinth and saw this great city that was given to Greek culture, he brought one message. And it was a message of Jesus of Nazareth who probably by that time was not news to the known world of his day.

And particularly the crucifixion, the cruel death he suffered in shame upon a Roman cross. That was also not strange to them. But it was his understanding which had the Old Testament as a backdrop of what took place when Jesus was crucified.

What has he got in mind? Galatians 3 and verse 1 is helpful there. Galatians 3 and verse 1. You foolish Galatians, Paul says, who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you.

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard? That is extremely important. In other words, Paul was teaching in Corinth that there is only one basis of acceptance before God. There is only one basis by which God pours his blessings upon us, blessings in time and blessings in eternity.

There is only one basis. It is not by you trying to obey God's law. It is by you resigning your whole life, trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross.

When Jesus hung there, he was the blameless, upright, perfect, righteous, indeed the only undefiled sacrifice that was ever there before God. He alone could satisfy an infinitely holy God. He alone! And he did it when he expired and said, It is finished.

God, the infinitely righteous God, was finally, truly satisfied, so that I don't need to go to him with an iota of my own righteousness. No. To borrow the words of a hymn writer, I need no other argument.

I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died, and that he died for me. That was Paul's evangelistic message, not only in Galatia, but even when he crossed over into Europe and shared the same message in Philippi, in Athens, in Corinth, etc., etc.

It was precisely the same message, so that his hearers would not trust in anything else except the person and work of Jesus Christ. So that when they look to eternity, look to the day when they would gaze at the God who is the creator of the universe, passing judgment upon all his moral creatures, they would not tremble, not a bit, knowing that the satisfaction done by Jesus Christ was enough, more than enough, for their need in that great and awesome moment. Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, my beauty hour, my most glorious dress, midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed with joy, shall I lift up my head.

Brethren, where are we hearing this in today's evangelistic preaching? Where? Isn't today's evangelistic preaching all about accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior without contempt? Almost as

though it is some magic wand. Just accept Jesus as your personal Savior and all will be well. Where are hungry, broken, dying souls being called out of the multitude to come and feast their souls on this Jesus and the glorious work he has done for us? Where? Oh, may God help us.

For the sake of our generation, for the sake of generations to come, may he raise a great band of preachers. What is sad about today's situation is that because people are being given a Christ-less gospel, they have filled our churches, they are still carrying their Bibles, but they are still going to hell in so-called evangelical churches. That shouldn't be.

That shouldn't be. We are speeding them on into a Christ-less eternity by giving to them a Christ-less religion on earth. May we not be guilty of that.

May we not be guilty of that. And there is only one way to avoid that guilt. It is to fill our evangelistic preaching with Christ.

With Christ. So that whatever else the people listening to us forget about our preaching, there is one thing they will not forget. Jesus! Offer to them freely and in all His fullness.

They will never forget that. And on the day the Holy Spirit opens their eyes, indeed, unlocks their hearts, it is Jesus that they will fly to because He alone is the Savior. May we have gospel preaching that is truly gospel preaching.

There is only one good news on this side of eternity. Only one. Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

If your heart doesn't say amen to that, quit the ministry. There is no other. Our knowing Christ must be at a personal level.

Our knowing Christ must be in terms of our evangelistic preaching. May I also in the third place say, our knowing Christ must also be in our ministry to believe us. To believe us.

You see, this is what made Paul find it so difficult to understand the Corinthians. Because he is saying to them, look, it wasn't just when I arrived that I drew you to Jesus. As though after that, I then started saying to you, what you need is me.

No. No. The whole time I was with you, even in dealing with all the situations in your lives, it was Jesus I pointed you to.

And it is pretty obvious, even just before chapter 2, the way He handles the problem of disunity in the church. How did He handle it? Was He saying to the Corinthians, now look brethren, it's not nice. It's not good when people are seeing you fighting with each other like this.

For the sake of our public testimony, come on, just love one another and be united. I don't know about South Africa, but in Zambia, we have a very common phrase which amounts to something like this, it's not looking nice. It's a major argument back home.

It's not looking nice. And that's the kind of message that we can easily import from outside and start using in trying to unite believers who are fighting with each other. It's not looking nice.

Now, Paul's answer to the disunity of the believers is, hang on, was Paul crucified for you? Or Apollos? Or Peter? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? Or Peter? Or Apollos? It's Christ. It's Christ who was

crucified for you. It's in Jesus' name that you have been baptized.

He is the fountain of all wisdom. Christ is your righteousness. He is your redemption.

He is your all. And as it goes on to say in chapter 3, you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. In all things, Jesus Christ is the answer.

And brethren, all you need to do is to go through the chapters of Paul's epistles, and you'll see that in dealing with all the situations that he was dealing with in the context of the Christian church, it was always with respect to Jesus Christ. How do you resolve marriage problems? Well, I'll tell you how Paul dealt with it. Wives, submit your husbands in the Lord.

For as the church submits to Christ, so you ought to submit your husbands. It's the church's relationship to its head. There you have your ultimate example.

And husbands, love your wives as Christ loved. So when a husband is saying, No, I've given up on her now. I've given up.

I think we'll just go to the divorce court. Say, Hang on, hang on. You've given up? Yes.

You've done your best? Yes. Okay, let's look at what your best ought to be, and please tell me whether you've done that. Thank you very much.

It soon becomes evident that this person has climbed the Drakensberg mountains when he's being asked to climb, not even Kilimanjaro, the Everest. And he hasn't done that yet. That was Paul's method.

It was always calling the people back to Christ. He is the sum of all wisdom. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Look at the way he puts it to the Colossians. Colossians 2. That you don't just begin with Christ, but you continue with Him for the rest of life. Colossians 2. Having spoken about Christ in you, the hope of glory in chapter 1, and also speaking about Him in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge at the beginning of chapter 2, he says in verse 6, So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Paul is using the picture of a building. The foundation has been laid for your spiritual life on earth and in eternity, and that foundation is Christ. But as you are now putting up the superstructure of your life, you don't then go and build the superstructure elsewhere.

No! That same foundation that has been laid in your life, that's the one on which you are to continue building if you are to build into eternity, if you are going to build into heaven itself. And oh brethren, how Christians need this. We are feeding them with pods, with the outer shell, instead of giving them the kernel, the content, that which ought to be Jesus and Jesus alone.

We are building churches based on our own names, our own reputations, our cleverness, our ability to thread together nice platitudes. We are denying them of that which is manna from heaven, Jesus Christ and Him. Isn't this the reason why our churches are failing to impact the world? Because the Holy Spirit energizes His people as they are seeking to know Christ, to love Christ, to serve Christ.

As they are seeking to make Him their all in all. They are the fruit of God's Spirit working in their lives, making them more and more like Christ Himself. Oh, let's throw away our cleverness.

Let's throw away our petty squabbles over all kinds of doctrinal issues. Let us throw away all these things and make Christ and Him crucified, the staple diet of God's people. With Christianity plagued by so many personality cults, it would necessitate a Paul-like resolve not to flow with the wind.

And that's what we need. To refuse whatever the in thing is today. To refuse today's popular fad, popular fashion, and to insist that I'm not going to build a personal empire.

Even though it may be apparently working for other people, I will not do so. But to resolve to know Christ and Him crucified. To make Him my all in all.

Brethren, let us remember the warning of Paul in chapter 3. Verse 10 downwards. This is what he says. By the grace God has given me, I laid the foundation as an expert builder.

And someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

If any man builds on this foundation, using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

If it is bent up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping the flames. Verse 21.

So then, no more boasting about men. All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future. All are yours.

Why? For you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. May that be the tenor, the color, the one-stringed banjo that we will be playing in our lives and ministry. Christ.

Christ. Christ. And oh brethren, never think that you can exhaust that theme.

Never think that if you commit yourself to such a resolve, five years down the line, you will be scratching your head, pulling out your hair, wondering what you are going to give to your people. Never think like that. In fact, when you make this kind of resolution, you will wish you had ten thousand lives in order to preach the inexhaustible, unsearchable riches of this all-glorious Saviour.

Oh, may we all say in the words of George Whitefield, May the name of Whitefield perish, but Jesus live. May that be our cry as our lives, like the rising sun from the dawn, keep rising and rising and rising, and one day be caught up beyond the clouds, gone to the Saviour whom we came to know, to love, to serve, and to die for. Amen.

Let us pray. Oh God, our Heavenly Father, we have been challenged once again this morning, concerning joy, concerning affection and emotion. Oh, Lord, help us to find our joy in You, to find our joy in our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to make Him our summum bonum, our highest good.

Oh, glorious Savior, forgive us. Forgive us, oh Lord, for having traded You in for today's useless Christianity. Oh, Lord, forgive us for every soul that has entered eternity lost because we gave to them anything but Christ.

Help us today to get back to the Saviour for ourselves, for our lost community, and even for our churches. In Jesus' name we pray, and indeed for Your glory. Amen.

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