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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Knowing Nothing But Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

We all have a tendency toward hero worship. We tend to idolize great men and women, build monuments to honor them, establish museums to celebrate their achievements. It occurs to me that I went to a series of such monuments this past summer. Christi and I visited a Jane Austen museum in Bath, England, which celebrated the life and achievements of the great author of *Pride and Prejudice*. We also visited "The Eagle and the Child" pub in Oxford where C.S. Lewis and JRR Tolkien met with other literary figures to talk about the Chronicles of Narnia and the Lord of the Rings trilogy. In Belgrade, the missionary took me to the museum of Nikola Tesla, the greatest Serbian scientist, and the inventor of the AC motor. It had artifacts of his life – an actual suit of clothes that he wore, eyeglasses that he used, a journal that he wrote, and many replicas of his inventions. In Prileps, Macedonia, there is a new city center completely renovated in 2006 which features over two hundred statues of famous men and women that were instrumental in fashioning the history of Macedonia. The largest and most imposing statue is of a mighty warrior on a rearing horse with a sword in his hand... Alexander the Great, the greatest hero of that region of the world.

Honoring heroes is fine to a point. But the Bible repudiates hero worship with the greatest vigor by teaching us this truth about the human race:

Romans 3:10-12 "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Every human hero in the Bible is exposed as a sinner at some point; all of them fail, all of them show moral weakness or pride or rebellion at some point.

Even more dangerous are heroes that start religions that make themselves the focus of the entire movement... this is the central characteristic of CULTS... they focus on the leader, the visionary, the prophet, the guru... everything exists to satisfy his desires and pleasures and convictions... it's all about him. Muhammad and Islam, Joseph Smith and the Mormons, Charles Taze Russell and the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mary Baker Eddy and

Christian Science, Sun Myung Moon and the Moonies, Jim Jones and the People's Temple, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology...

One website speaks of the traits of a coercive cult leader:

1. He has a grandiose idea of who he is and what he can achieve.
2. He's preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, or brilliance.
3. He demands blind unquestioned obedience.
4. He requires excessive admiration from followers and outsiders.
5. He has a sense of entitlement - expecting to be treated special at all times.
6. He is exploitative of others by asking for their money or that of relatives putting others at financial risk.
7. He is arrogant and haughty in his behavior or attitude.
8. He has an exaggerated sense of power that allows him to bend rules and break laws.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/spycatcher/201208/dangerous-cult-leaders>]

Hero worship will ALWAYS let us down...Every man sins, every man fails...
BUT ONE... the perfect man, the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ

God wills to expose human pride and power and wisdom for what it is. He means to humble the human race while he saves a multitude from their sins

In this section of 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks of his own experience in preaching the gospel in Corinth. He shows them that God was humiliating him and all humans by the simple act of preaching the gospel of Christ crucified. Paul was not starting a CULT centered around himself...

By the act of preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified — all human wisdom and power is humbled; God’s wisdom and power is exalted, and sinners are saved by grace

Today, we’re going to talk about the center of evangelism: Jesus Christ, and him crucified. We’re going to talk about the humbling of the evangelist... weakness, fear, trembling; we’re going to talk about the power of evangelism: the Holy Spirit of God. We’re going to talk about the product of evangelism: faith in the power of God, not in human power

I. The Center of Evangelism: Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

A. Paul’s Resolution

1 Corinthians 2:2 I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1. Paul refers back to his mindset when he first preached the gospel to them
2. Context
 - a. He had just been rejected by the philosophers of Athens...
 - b. They had mocked him, scorned him, felt superior to him: “What is this babbling trying to say?!”
 - c. They especially mocked the idea of salvation by a man who died on a Roman cross and was physically raised from the dead
 - d. Paul made the 50 mile trip along the Greek coastline to Corinth, pondering the experience of humiliation and scorn he’d had in Athens at the hands of these great lovers of human philosophy
3. But what’s truly crucial is Paul’s determination, his resolution

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

B. The Center of the Gospel: Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

1. Paul calls it the “testimony of God”... as if Paul were a witness at a trial—God on trial in the minds of sinners
2. Paul rejected eloquence and superior wisdom, for these things could NEVER convert any human being from sinful rebellion to humble submission to God

1 Corinthians 1:20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

3. Paul resolved to KNOW NOTHING EXCEPT JESUS CHRIST and him crucified
4. He was not being anti-intellectual, as though he hated deep thinking
 - a. Paul had one of the most brilliant minds in world history
 - b. But Paul had seen through all the human wisdom and brilliance and knew it could never save a single human soul
5. He wanted to focus his mind on nothing except Jesus Christ
 - a. The infinite mystery of the person of Christ

Colossians 1:15-16 [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible

- b. From the moment Paul saw Christ's glory on the Road to Damascus, he had an insatiable desire to know him better

Philippians 3:7-10 I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. ... I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

6. So, when Paul came to Corinth, his focus was entirely on Jesus Christ... but not merely Christ as the Son of God, but Jesus Christ, and HIM CRUCIFIED
 - a. God in the flesh, whose flesh was nailed to a cross
 - b. God who had blood, whose blood was poured out on the cross

C. Embracing the Shock and Horror of the Cross... foolish to the Greeks, a stumbling block to the Jews... but salvation to the called

D. Application for us

1. Paul's determination must be ours as well
2. FBC Durham must forever preach Christ and him crucified
 - a. We must clearly teach the doctrine of the incarnation... that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully human; born of the Virgin Mary; lived a sinless life; did miracles—healings, feeding the 5000, walking on water, stilling

the storm, raising the dead... but absolutely human, flesh and blood, needing to eat and sleep

- b. We must clearly teach the doctrine of the SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT of Christ on the cross... that our sins were laid on him and he died the bloody death that the Law of God required... for “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22)

The church has always been under pressure to turn away from the bloody cross of Christ because it’s an unseemly and offensive and ridiculous message. I heard a story of a “seeker sensitive” church a few years back . A new worship leader who hadn’t been properly indoctrinated into the mentality of the pastor chose a series of hymns that centered on the blood: “Nothing but the blood” and “Rock of Ages” (which speaks of the blood which flowed from Christ’s wounded side) and “The Old Rugged Cross” ... when the pastor got up to preach, he actually apologized to the people for all the BLOOD songs and promised it wouldn’t happen again

It reminds me also of a story I heard from John MacArthur of a church which had this message on a sign on the side of the building: “We preach Christ, and him crucified” ... but there was a leafy vine that was growing on the side of the building too... and in the course of time it covered part of the sign; all you could see was “We preach Christ” (the crucified part was covered up); then, as time went on again, all you could see was “We preach” ... then eventually it just said “We” ... then you could see nothing at all

A church which turns away from preaching Christ and him crucified has signed its own death warrant... it’s only a matter of time before it is gone

- c. To “resolve to know nothing except Christ and him crucified” means to TURN AWAY from worldly issues and concerns...
- i) It shouldn’t be taken literally, as though Paul never thought about any other topics... money, marriage, parenting, the Roman Empire, politics, slavery, justice... there is evidence that Paul thought about all of those topics
- ii) BUT “to resolve to know nothing except Christ” = 1) TOP PRIORITY is the gospel, and human wisdom and power has NOTHING TO CONTRIBUTE to human salvation

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures

- iii) 2) ALL LESSER TOPICS are seen through the lens of Christ and him crucified... money is seen through the lens of Christ crucified;

marriage and parenting are seen through the lens of Christ crucified;
politics, slavery, justice are seen through the lens of Christ crucified

So... first and foremost, we see the CENTER of evangelism is preaching Christ
and him crucified!

II. The Humbling of the Evangelist: Weakness, Not Eloquence or Brilliance

A. Third in a Series of God's Surprising Humbling of the Human Race

1. The problem is human pride about our intelligence and our power
2. God chooses to humble us in some powerfully clear ways
 - a. First, by saving the world by the foolishness of the cross
 - b. Second, by saving people out of the world who are not the "best and the brightest"... the Corinthian church themselves were not many wise, influential, noble
 - c. Third, by choosing Paul as the messenger, who preached a humble message and who himself was very unimpressive

B. Paul Not a Polished Speaker Anyway

1. Clear statement by his opponents

KJV 2 Corinthians 10:10 For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

2. Apollos was a much more polished and powerful speaker

Acts 18:24 an eloquent man who was powerful in the Scriptures

Apollos was trained in the skills of public speaking... the Greeks made much of ELOQUENCE, and there were whole schools that taught rhetoric... the science of moving people by polished speech; sequencing arguments, using flattery, using high-sounding vocabulary

3. Paul knew about these things, and could have made a go of it; but he specifically REJECTED this approach

1 Corinthians 2:1 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

1 Corinthians 2:4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power

C. BUT More, Paul was NOT AT HIS BEST when he came to Corinth

1 Corinthians 2:3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

1. As we've noted, Paul was struggling with a high level of uncertainty and fears as he came to Corinth
2. He was wrestling as we all do with FEAR OF MAN... fear of human reactions
Fear of mockery and rejection... Fear of failure in his mission... Fear of attack and imprisonment... Fear of death
3. The encouragement Christ gave Paul in Corinth proves this

Acts 18:9-10 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

4. Paul had been mocked and rejected and beaten and imprisoned so frequently, he was deeply weary and not a little fearful... he was no PREACHING ROBOT, but a flesh and blood man

D. Paul's Presentation of the Gospel Was Weak and Fearful and Trembling

1. He was afraid, BUT HE PREACHED ANYWAY!!
2. He was afraid, but he was faithful to Christ and the cross
3. He put all his hope in the power of the message and the power of the Holy Spirit
4. If you had been standing there hearing him preach, you might have been tempted to mock his trembling, stammering, his obvious fear
5. BUT THERE WAS A HIDDEN POWER there that was at work through this weak, fearful, trembling man... a supernatural power for the salvation of eternal souls

E. God Humbles the Evangelists

1. We are in WAY OVER OUR HEADS!!
2. The forces arrayed against us are almost undefeated... the world, the flesh, and the devil usually win all over the planet, day after day, and that has been going on for millennia
3. The message itself is foolish and offensive... actually it is repulsive

4. We are calling people to repent from a whole lifetime of sins, to realize they deserve eternal condemnation, and that Christ crucified is their only hope; the gods and religions they and their ancestors have clung to are worthless idols that will not save them
5. We are calling on people to turn away from all sin, to trust in Christ alone, and to live a new, holy life contrary to all their family and friends and neighbors and fellow citizens
6. The impulse for people to mock or turn away shaking their heads is overpowering; almost as strong is an impulse to lash out in anger
7. To most people, we will appear to be bringing a STENCH OF DEATH rather than the fragrance of life...
8. Paul says "Who is equal to such a task?" ... God shows us we are NOT ENOUGH to do this

Illus. Looking out over the city of Shanghai... the largest city in the world (24 million); standing in an apartment building with a tiny cell church, having enjoyed the worship, but realizing that the church was barely a blip on the radar screen of that massive city... 401 miles of rail in their railway network, 393 railway stations, over 10 million people a day travel on their trains in the city... STAGGERING! And here we are, meeting with less than two dozen brothers and sisters in Christ, preaching a simple gospel of Christ and him crucified, in the face of overwhelming materialism on the part of the residents, and oppression on the part of the Communist government

9. This is the humbling of the evangelist

1 Corinthians 2:3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

Paul's converts were won DESPITE his performance, not because of it! Not by superior logic or dazzling eloquence... but by the true power of evangelism, the HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD

F. Application

1. Feel your own weakness as evangelists
 - a. Feel that reaching Durham is an overwhelming task
 - b. Feel that your efforts to convert worldly Americans from their worldly goals and their worldly lifestyles is an impossible task
 - c. Feel that, the more we are faithful in evangelism, the more difficult our lives will become, but that it's all worth it

2. Let your weaknesses and fears and tremblings not prove that you are unfit as an evangelist, but let it drive you more and more to prayer and to reliance on the Holy Spirit

III. The Power of Evangelism: The Holy Spirit

A. Paul's Strong Assertion

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

B. Jesus' Even Stronger Assertion

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

C. Power Comes Not from Human Resources But from the Holy Spirit of God

1. This sense of overwhelming humbling for the evangelist is not the end of the line
2. It is meant to drive us to prayer and to Bible study and to deeper reliance on the Holy Spirit of God

2 Corinthians 12:10 When I am weak, then I am strong.

The Holy Spirit delights to show his power in weak, fragile vessels that make themselves fully available to him

I think of David Brainerd, who lived in the first half of the 1700's and who was overwhelmed with terrible illnesses, like tuberculosis, and who was regularly beset with deep depression and terrible loneliness out in the woods of colonial America working to win the souls of Native Americans... a picture of weakness made strong by the Spirit of God

I think of Lottie Moon, who stood all of 4' 3" tall... and who at the end of her life in 1912 weighed only 50 pounds. But her fiery zeal for the Savior and for the Chinese people was poured out in letters which appealed to and ignited Southern Baptists to support missions financially. Her POWER came from the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit raises up weak, imperfect, frail people and empowers them to do what only He can do

3. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity and it is his unique role to take the blood of Jesus Christ from the cross and apply it to sinners WORLDWIDE to save them... his role is to make Christ Jesus famous in every generation

You owe your salvation as much to the Holy Spirit as you do to the Father who sent Jesus and to Jesus himself, who bled and died on the cross

The night of the final plague in Egypt, the dreadful night of the Angel of Death, the Jews were commanded to sacrifice a lamb. The blood of the Passover lamb had to be PAINTED on the door posts and lintels of the Jewish homes in Egypt; when the Angel of Death saw the blood applied, he passed over that house and did not kill the firstborn. So it is with us... Jesus PROVIDED the atoning blood, but it has to be APPLIED to sinners; it is the Holy Spirit's work to do this... and he does it by evangelism and missions

D. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism

1. Before the evangelist or missionary ever took his/her first breath, the Holy Spirit had written the gospel message in the Scriptures for all time
2. The Holy Spirit works in us a zeal for the glory of God and a love for the lost
3. The Holy Spirit orchestrates opportunities for the evangelist and the lost people to get together
4. The Holy Spirit overcomes weakness and sin in the life of the evangelist/missionary and moves that person to speak the words of the gospel clearly and effectively
5. The Holy Spirit works secretly in the hearts of the hearers to respond with faith; he gives spiritual sight to the blind, to see their own sinfulness and the glory of God in Christ crucified

E. Applications of this point

1. If you are a Christian, delight in the activity of the Holy Spirit in SAVING YOUR SOUL
2. Rely on the Spirit to give you POWER to be a witness for Christ to lost people around you
3. Pray for the Holy Spirit to be outpoured on us here at FBC to reach as many people here in Durham as possible while there's time
4. Turn away from all PRAGMATIC and man-centered approaches to evangelism

- a. So many evangelistic approaches rely on man-centered methods of putting psychological pressure on people, getting the music and the lighting right, flattering people or coaxing them to follow Christ
- b. Every genuine conversion is a MIRACLE OF SOVEREIGN GRACE that only the Holy Spirit can work

IV. The Product of Evangelism: Faith in the Power of God

A. The Ultimate Product of Genuine Evangelism is God-Centered Faith

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

- 1. In Corinth, God used an unimpressive Jewish man, displaying weakness, fear and trembling... preaching a foolish and offensive message to change their world
- 2. Only GOD could do that

B. The Rest of Your Lives

Our entire lives and our church's witness in this community must follow the same pattern:

The centrality of PROCLAIMING Christ and him crucified

The humbling of all human evangelists... weakness, fear, much trembling

The power of evangelism being the Holy Spirit

The final product of evangelism: faith in the power of God to save sinners