

The Message Is Christ

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

Fellow Ministers of Christ:

Joel Osteen pastors the largest church in the United States: forty thousand attendees over five weekly services and millions of supporters watching on television. Yet, incredibly, there is not a single cross in Osteen’s church complex, there are few mentions of the cross, if any, in Osteen’s sermons. Instead, his focus is on feel-good themes, positive thinking, and material prosperity. “We don’t talk about the cross,” Osteen said in one interview, “That’s too negative.”

Or consider this quote from George Stallings, a former, now excommunicated, archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church. Stallings said: “We have realized that, as expressions of faith, there are certain symbols that have stood in the way. The cross has served as a barrier in bringing about a true spirit of reconciliation between Jews and also between Muslims and Christians; and thus, we have sought to remove the cross from our Christian churches across America as a sign of our willingness to remove any barrier that stands in the way of us coming together as people of faith.”¹

Compare the words of Osteen and Stallings with the clear, unflinching words of the apostle Paul: *“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* Not that these were the only words Paul preached while in Corinth, rather, that “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” was always the focus of Paul’s message—as he explained in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, *“[B]ut we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

Early in my ministry, someone advised me to look for Christ on every page of the Bible. I wish I could remember the source because that godly counsel helped shape my entire ministry. Look for Christ on every page. Let Christ be preeminent in all your thoughts, words, deeds, priorities, and ministries. Not surprisingly, Martin Luther offered much the same advice, saying, “The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid.”² In another place, Luther remarked, “If you want to interpret well and confidently, set Christ before you, for He is the Man to whom it all applies, every bit of it.”

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” But how can we preach “Jesus Christ and him crucified” without preaching the reason for His crucifixion?

And how can we preach the reason for His crucifixion without preaching about sin?

And how can we preach about sin without preaching that we ourselves are

sinner?

And how can we preach that we are sinners without preaching that we cannot save ourselves?

And how can we preach that we cannot save ourselves without preaching about our desperate need for the Savior?

And how can we preach about the Savior who came to save us without preaching about God's love?

And how can we preach about God's love without preaching about its incalculable cost?

And how can we preach about the incalculable cost of God's love without preaching about the cross?

All of these blessed teachings are connected, and their focus is Jesus Christ.

"We preach Christ crucified," declared Paul, and by the grace of God, Paul's declaration is ours. We don't preach watered-down messages devoid of such words as *sin, punishment, Hell, sacrifice, or cross*. We don't preach messages that present God as a doting, slightly senile grandfather, who cares nothing about the behavior of His children so long as they stop by His house on Sunday mornings.

We don't preach messages about a generic God who can be stretched, distorted, and manipulated to fit any conception of Him. We don't preach about God's love without connecting it to God's immeasurable sacrifice. Our message is not simply, "God loves you," but *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son"* (John 3:16).

We don't preach a so-called prosperity gospel in which Jesus Christ is more of a banker than a Savior. Rather, we preach a gospel that promises the infinite riches of God's forgiveness and salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

We don't preach self-righteousness—that salvation may be earned by good works or trying harder or resisting less. Instead, we declare, *"it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We don't preach entertainment. Our proclamation is, *"the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

We don't preach that all roads lead to Heaven. We do preach that Jesus Christ alone is *"the way and the truth and the life"* (John 14:6). And we don't preach that following Christ will eliminate persecution, but rather, that in many instances following Christ will bring persecution. *"If they persecuted me,"* said Jesus in John 15:20, *"they will persecute you also."*

Finally, we don't preach from Einstein's Theory of Relativity or *Reader's Digest* or the *Works of the World's Great Philosophers* or the *Guinness Book of Records* or the *Koran* or *Time* magazine. No, we preach from the Bible because it alone is the inspired Word of God.

When we preach, we preach “Christ crucified,” because He alone is God’s promised salvation and He alone is the only way to be saved.