

"WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDEROUS CROSS"

Galatians 6:11-14

There is a moving story of an artist who lived many years ago by the name of Steinberg. One day he encountered a gypsy girl and he was so struck with her beauty that he took her to his studio and frequently had her sit for him. At that time he was at work on his masterpiece, "Christ on the Cross." The girl used to watch him work on this painting. One day she said to him, "He [referring to Christ] must have been a very wicked man to be nailed to a cross like that." "No," said the painter. "On the contrary, he was a very good man. The best man that ever lived. He died for others." The little girl looked up at him and asked, "Did he die for you?" Steinberg was not a Christian, but the gypsy girl's question touched his heart and awakened his conscience, and he became a believer in Him whose dying passion he had so well portrayed. Years afterward, a young Count happened to go into the gallery at Dresden where Steinberg's painting of "Christ on the Cross" was on exhibition.

The painting spoke so powerfully to him that it changed the whole tenor of his life. He was Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, founder of the Moravian Brethren Church. – Clarence Macartney, *Preaching without Notes*

This morning we begin a series entitled, "*The Cross of Christ*," for, as I mentioned in last Sunday's sermon when we looked at the Transfiguration of the Lord, following that miraculous event, as Jesus came down from that mountain, He set His eyes towards Jerusalem and what awaited Him there- the cross.

When you get your mail each day, do you ever get perturbed by, let's call it for what it is, "junk mail?" Too many of the letters we receive at home are for credit cards but there is a lot of other junk that comes our way. I mean, this "junk mail" is personal enough- my name is on it but so are the names of the thousands of others who receive the same, well, "junk." These letters have been massed produced by a computer and are part of an advertizing campaign. But no matter what, they can have a detached feel to

them. But when you get a true, real letter that has been written or typed by human hands and the person has actually signed their name to it, why, it just wants to make me jump out of my skin with joy. Well that is what the Apostle Paul does in our passage today. Because typewrites and computers weren't on the radar screen back then, Paul dictated what he wanted to say to a scribe, as was the custom back in those days. What Paul wrote for us to read today is his final thoughts. And what he has done here is bring together several things he has been trying to convey in this letter to the Galatians and put together a solemn conclusion. And what he is saying here, is that when all is said and done, when it is at the end of the day the only thing that matters is what? **The cross**. And that is his focus in our passage, the cross. When you read the entire letter to the Galatians, which I encourage you to do to understand the context, you will find that Paul is addressing some important issues like, whether or not Gentiles must become Jews before they can become Christians. You see, certain Judaizing

teachers had made their way into the churches of Galatia, which Paul had previously founded, and they said that in addition to having faith in Jesus Christ a Christian was obligated to keep the Mosaic Law. And Paul shot this down by saying that a person becomes right with God only by faith in Jesus Christ and not by the performance of good works and ritual observances.

Folks, there were false teachers in the church back then that needed to be corrected and there are false teachers in churches today. I mean, there will always be contradictory voices going on in the name of the Christian church so we all need to be aware and on guard so that we can differentiate what is true and what is false.

So let's begin by determining what is the true message of the Church.

What is the very heart and center of the Christian gospel and the

Christian message? I would suggest to you that it is what Paul is

reporting to us in verse 14-**the preaching of the death of the Lord Jesus**

Christ on the cross. When you read the New Testament in its entirety you

will discover that Paul and all the other apostles preached this central thing. They were clear to say that they were not preaching their own ideas, their agenda but the message that Jesus proclaimed, and it always pointed to the cross and what happened not only through that unbelievable event but what happened three days later- His resurrection.

But we have to understand that what Paul and the others preached was not a popular message, the preaching of the cross, that is. It was not popular back then, it has never been popular, it is not popular today. Paul even says in I Corinthians 1:22-23, "For Jews demands signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." I mean, think about it- the preaching of the cross of Christ has always led to persecution. People didn't like hearing about it back in Paul's day and it has led countless numbers of people to their death all because they would not compromise and would not stop believing it nor preaching it.

Now I don't want this to sound heretical so let me state it and explain it. **The message of the Christian gospel** is not, are you ready for this, it **is not primarily**, emphasizing the word, primarily **the teachings of Jesus**.

Many people would say that it is because Jesus' teachings are what the Christian message is all about. I mean, after all, Jesus was the greatest religious mind there ever was. He is the greatest philosopher there ever was. I mean, the Sunday school class I am sitting in right now that Keith Morgenstern is leading, and let me add, doing a great job, the class is studying the Sermon on the Mount and so those of us in the class could say that Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount are unparalleled and that is what the world needs to hear, for Jesus' teachings are the message of the Christian gospel. But think about this- if you just preach the teachings of our Lord they do not solve the problem, the issue of humankind, and in a way, you are only, even if you never thought about it this way, you are only preaching condemnation because there is not a one of us who can carry out

what the Sermon on the Mount teaches- we can try and we should, but it is impossible. So Paul and the others, in a way, did not preach His teachings saying something like, "Heaven forbid that I should glory, save in the Sermon on the Mount; God forbid that I should boast in the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ." No, because it was not the teachings of Christ, as important as they were and are, and it was not in even the example of Christ, as important as that was and is, and these points do play a huge role in the Christian message, but that is not where it all begins. For Paul and the others it began with the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and what that critical event meant and means and will always mean. And the cross was at the center of Christ's teachings. Let me give you examples of what I mean.

Example #1. Matthew 16:13-18. Jesus is with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi and in that place where other gods had been worshiped Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" and

Peter speaks up and says, "You are the Messiah [or you are the Christ], the Son of the living God." And you can read on how Jesus affirmed Peter because no human being had told him this, it came to him from God. But when you read further in Matthew 16:21 it says, "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." So we have Peter's great confession and then Jesus telling them of His forthcoming death and you can read in Matthew 16:21-23 that Peter didn't want to hear of his death and Jesus ends up rebuking Peter- the same one who only moments before claimed Jesus as Messiah.

Example #2. If you were here with us last Sunday we read the passage from Luke 9:28-37 where Jesus is transfigured right in front of Peter, James and John and Moses and Elijah appear. And the passage tells us that Jesus, Moses and Elijah were conversing and what do they talk

about? It says in Luke 9:31, they "were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem." They were talking about Jesus' death on the cross. Folks, the cross is crucial, it is paramount.

Friends, the point is this- read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and you will find countless times where you read about the death of Jesus. Look at how much print is given to Jesus' death. Even read the accounts of the actual crucifixion that are so graphic and detailed that you can almost hear the hammer hitting the nails into His wrist and feet.

Example #3. Read throughout the rest of the New Testament where it speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Places such as Acts 13:14-41 where Paul preaches to those in Antioch; and in Acts 17 and what happened in Thessalonica. And then read Romans 3; Romans 5; II Corinthians 5; and I Corinthians 11 where we read a Communion passage and we are told to eat the bread and drink the cup in REMEMBRANCE of Jesus; and, you get the point. Friends, the whole of the New Testament is filled with the

proclamation of the death of Christ on the cross at Calvary. Why? Because the cross is at the center of the Christian gospel, it is the good news of salvation.

Friends, why do you think Paul says in verse 14 that he never wants to boast of anything except the cross, or, as another translation puts it, he never wants to glory of anything except the cross? His answer is that by the cross we are saved. He preached about the cross because the cross sets you and I free, the cross gives us our salvation. The cross was not some sort of a plan gone bad; the cross was not some sort of an accident; it wasn't even the greatest tragedy of all times. People have tried to rationalize the cross and say that it was an accident, that it didn't need to happen, why, it shouldn't have happened. And if it wasn't for those politically minded Jews, if there wasn't so much jealousy, and if those Pharisees only had some common sense this tragedy shouldn't have taken place. But this is completely counter to the New Testament. We don't have

to regret the cross or the death of Jesus, and we certainly don't need to explain it away. So like Paul we should boast in the cross, we should glory in the cross because it is the means for our salvation; it is how you and I can be saved. If Jesus had never died no one would ever have, would or will be saved. Our sins would not be forgiven; you and I would not be reconciled to God; you and I would not be children of God; you and I would go to our graves and that would be the end- Period, exclamation point! And guess what? There would be no gospel to preach, and, well, you get the point.

Friends, look at the cross above the choir? Look at the cross over in that corner that is draped in purple. Now I asked you to look at these two crosses that are very visible in our sanctuary. But let me ask you this- have you ever really, I mean really looked at the cross? Have you ever, with Isaac Watts, surveyed this wondrous cross? For Isaac Watts wrote that tremendous hymn found in our blue hymnals- there are two versions- hymn

#100 & #101. I am asking us all to survey the wondrous cross this Lenten season and as we envision the one who is hanging there. Amen.

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Introduction: The artist Steinberg and his work entitled "Christ on the Cross"

"Junk mail" and the Apostle Paul

The only thing that mattered to Paul was the _____

What is at the very heart and center of the Christian Gospel and the Christian message? The preaching of the _____ of the Lord Jesus Christ on the _____ vs. 14

What Paul and the others preached was not a popular message
I Corinth. 1:22-23

The message of the Christian Gospel is not primarily the _____ of Jesus

Example #1- Matthew 16:13-18

Example #2- Luke 9:28-37

Example #3- Acts 13:14-41; Acts 17; Romans 3 & 5; II Corinth. 5;
I Corinth. 11

Why did Paul say in vs. 14 that he never wants to boast [or glory] of anything except the cross?

Look at the cross above the choir; look at the cross in the corner draped in purple...

Conclusion: Have you ever, with Isaac Watts (who wrote the hymn), surveyed this wondrous cross?