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— EDITORIAL —

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“*That He Might Deliver Us*”

By J. G. S. S. Thompson, Ph.D.

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Preaching Jesus Christ and Him as Crucified

Baccalaureate Sermon

By Dr. Wm. C. Robinson

Delivered at the Fortieth Anniversary of His Graduation from Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia

"For I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him as crucified."

—I Cor. 2:2.

The ancients built the tower of Babel to scale the parapets of heaven. Athens erected her altars to gods known and unknown. Modern man acclaims six great religions as good roads up the mountain to God. Today as yesterday, men are pinning their hopes on intellectual principles, survival values and ethical ideals.

On the other hand, Roanoke College's great teacher, Luther Augustine Fox, had grasped the fact that the Christian faith is founded not on an idea but on a person. With Paul, Dr. Fox presented that Person, Jesus Christ, and proclaimed Him to us as crucified and as risen from the dead.

God came down for us and for our salvation in His only Son. In utter self-abnegation, He came all the way to the Cross of Calvary. He Who was in the form of God took the form of a slave. The Most High became the most humble. Yet in that love and lowliness, God is still the Lord. For that man dying athwart the sky beyond the walls of Jerusalem is the Lord of Glory, I Cor. 2:8. God revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ Whose face can be seen only with the eyes of faith. Thus the apostolic procedure is to portray Christ as crucified for our sins, and to pray the Holy Spirit to bring men to faith by this testimony of God. It pleases God by the preaching of the Cross to save those who believe His message. As this Gospel is preached God puts us into Christ Jesus and makes Him to be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and our redemption.

Accordingly, this section of First Corinthians teaches us: first, how God does not reveal Himself; secondly, how the Father of mercies opens the fellowship of His family to sinners; and thirdly, the applications thereof.

I

First, then, God does not reveal Himself to us sinners for our salvation by the wisdom of our philosophers, by the height of our places in the world, by the eloquence of our orators, nor even by His own majestic work of creation.

The Jew looked for a Messiah who would receive Divine blessings without measure. But "he that is hanged is cursed of God." Stumbling over the fact that Jesus did not present the portentous sign of a messianic warrior delivering Israel from her enemies, the Jews rejected the revelation that God made in Him.

As the law was given to convict the Jew of sin, to school him in his insufficiency, and thus lead him to righteousness where alone it could be found, so was philosophy given as a tutor to the Greeks. Only let us be sure that we carry the analogy through.

"Was reason given to make us wise? Just as little as the Law was given to the Jews to make them just. Rather, it was given to convince us of the opposite; to show us how irrational our reason is, that our errors may be increased through reason as sin was through the law."—J. G. Hamann.

Plato has some glimmering of the situation when he urges us to

"... lay hold of the best human opinion in order by it to sail the dangerous sea of life as on a raft unless we can find a stronger boat, or some word of God, which will more surely and safely carry us." *Phaedo*, 85 Jowett, 1.434.

Luther understood that the world owes the Gospel a grudge because the Gospel condemns the wisdom of the world, *On Galatians*. Even when speaking of Genesis Calvin begs us not to begin with the elements of this world, but with the Gospel which sets Christ alone before us with His Cross and holds us to this one point.

"It is vain for any to reason as philosophers on the workmanship of the world, except those, who having been first humbled by the preaching of the Gospel, have learned to submit the whole of their intellectual wisdom to the foolishness of the Cross."

When the Apostle looked at the Christians in Corinth, he found that God had not called into his fellowship many that were wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. Likewise Jeremiah, 9:23, warns the wise

man not to glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty in his power, nor the rich in his wealth; and the Psalmist, 49.6-8, testifies that no man can give to God a rich enough ransom to redeem the soul of his brother. According to the *Magnificat*, God lifts the lowly to confound the mighty. Believers are born not of the nobility of bloods, not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man, but of God, John 1.13. In Corinth, God chose the foolish things of the world to answer the wise, the weak things to shame the strong, the base-born, the things that are of no account, those that are not, in order to put to nought the things that are. Yes, it pleased God that the world by its wisdom should not know God.

Accordingly, the Apostle did not set forth to meet the wisdom of the world with a torrent of his own oratory. To have fought the world with its own weapons, would have been to betray the cause committed to him. The Gospel is like a trumpet "more powerful and penetrating when it does not follow the range of the scale but keeps to one penetrating note." It is not a philosophy proved by the persuasive words of man's wisdom, but a message from God to be attested and accepted. The good news of God's great acts for our redemption needs and admits only of plain, straightforward telling, anything else is to empty the Cross of Christ of its power. Luther is sure that one does not need to shout or cry aloud in his preaching; for the power of the Gospel is not in the lungs of a man but in the might of the Spirit. Though the world count the Gospel folly and weakness, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God to those whom He calls. This foolishness of God is wiser than men, this weakness of God is stronger than men. Though it be Paul, the Apostle, who plants, and Apollos, the orator, who waters, it is only God who gives the increase. As the success of the Gospel is wholly of God, so we may expect Him to honor only that message which He has given, which is,

"Christ! I am Christ's and let the name suffice you;

Aye, for me too, He greatly hath sufficed
Lo! with no winning words I would entice you;
Paul has no honor and no friend but Christ."

—F.W.H. Myers, *St. Paul*.

The vast diamond-studded milky way is but as dust from the Almighty's moving chariot wheel. But He Who measures the heavens with a span and comprehends the dust of the earth in a balance, the Most High, has revealed Himself for our salvation not in His majestic might but in the weakness of the dying Saviour, not in His unfathomable wisdom but in the folly of the Cross. It is the Crucified Who is the mediator between God and men, the One by Whom we come to the Father.

Twenty years ago, the "German Christians" insisted that the great issue was theism against atheism, that the Nazis were believers in God and revivers of national religion, consequently that religious fealty should be given to Hitler in his leadership against atheistic communism. The Confessing Church countered this effort to by-pass Jesus Christ with the Barmen Declaration: The one word we have to hear in life and in death and obey is Jesus Christ our Lord.

As college men, let us not fancy that because we stand in a grain or two of knowledge above our fellows we can, without the Gospel, immediately comprehend the Almighty in His infinitude. Beware of the current hyper-intellectualism which presumes to describe the ways of God's self revelation as mere symbols. Who are we that we should classify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as a mere symbol for some term of man's making such as the ultimate ground of being?

"Biblical religion discloses God's self-disclosure, Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, which not only transcends and transforms, but also confounds and judges all human wisdom, ontology and theology not excepted." Kraemer, H., *Religion and the Christian Faith*, 1957, p. 433.

II

On the other hand, it pleases God to honor the preaching of Jesus Christ and Him as crucified with the power of the Holy Spirit Who brings men into the Father's fellowship.

According to First Corinthians, preaching Jesus Christ means confessing as Lord this Jesus Who has been raised from the dead on the third day, 12.3; 15.5f. It means calling upon Him for the grace and the peace which the Church needs, 1.2-3. It means looking forward to His revelation in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1.7.

In the first and second chapters of this Epistle, however, preaching Jesus Christ means pre-eminently preaching Him as crucified. The Church has never found the symbol of her faith anywhere but in His Cross. Since the Cross met Luther everywhere in the Scriptures, the Reformer declared: "When I listen to Christ, there is sketched in my heart a picture of a man hanging on a Cross, just as my countenance is naturally sketched upon the water when I look therein." *W. A.* 3.63.1; *W. A.* 18.83.9. Calvin is certain that only by the preaching of the Cross will any man ever find his way back to God as his Father. *Institutes* II.vi.1. In their chorus, we unite:

"Our glory, only in the Cross,
Our only hope, the crucified."

Paul preached Jesus Christ as crucified because there at the Cross, He consummated His

work as the one Mediator between God and men. In His holy majesty God is justly offended with our rebellious race. And "whoever thinks he can smile at God's wrath, will never praise Him eternally for His grace." H. Vogel, *The Iron Ration of a Christian*, p. 102. Without Christ, God and man are further apart than heaven and earth. But in Christ, true God and true man, God and man are much more intimate than two brothers. In Him, sun and moon do not come so near us as He does, for Emmanuel has come in our flesh and blood. God the Creator of heaven and earth became true natural man, the eternal Father's Son became the temporal Virgin's Son, *Luther on Is. 9.1*. He became our flesh and blood Brother, one of us, standing where we stand, representing us before God, offering for us His perfect obedience. As our fellow, He became our substitute, the Lamb of God Who took on Himself the sins of the world. He Who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. On that Cross, He was made a curse that we might receive the blessing of God. Thus He satisfied for us the demands of the law, averted from us the wrath of the holy God, delivered all those who trust in Him from the thralldom of the Devil and from the fear of eternal death.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. As His ambassadors preach the revealing, reconciling, crucified Christ, the risen Lord Jesus puts forth the hand of the Holy Spirit and draws us unto Himself. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He works faith in us and thereby unites us to Christ in our effectual calling. In the covenant of grace, the Father gave unto the Son a great host that no man can number out of every nation and kindred and tribe. The Son became man and in His atoning death suffered and endured enough to avert the wrath of God from this world of sinners. Now God the Holy Spirit comes as the Inward Teacher to open our hearts to the preaching of the Cross, to Christ as our Saviour and our Lord. We halt and hold back, too weakened by sin even to decide . . . and indecision is the first evidence of frustration. Then the Spirit places our hands in the riven side of the Saviour and calls us into the obedience of faith.

The objective revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed in the Gospel, the subjective work of the Holy Spirit by which we receive Christ in faith, these are the two hands of God by which the gracious Father brings back the prodigal to His own forgiving bosom. Here God acts in His love, His righteousness, His wisdom and His power to save sinners. The Gospel is not the mere proclamation of man's ideas. It is God's mighty work by which He snatches the victim of sin and death from the thralldom

of Satan and transports him into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. Preaching Jesus Christ and Him as Crucified is the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation.

Or in the words of Martin Luther to the Duke of Savoy:

"The commencement of salvation and the sum of Christianity is faith in Christ, Who by His blood alone, and not by our works, has made atonement for sin and put an end to the dominion of death . . . This faith is a gift of God, which is created by the Holy Spirit in our hearts and not found by our labors."

III

Thirdly, the Apostle calls upon us to realize the implications of this gracious action of God in our own faith and in our outward activities. By this preaching of the Cross, God has put us into Christ. "I have begotten you in Christ Jesus through the Gospel", 4.15. The Creator, Who said, Let there be light, has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. 4.7. It is not our wealth, our wisdom or our might that has made us Christians. It is something greater and more wonderful than all these. It is of God that we are in Christ Jesus, 1 Cor. 1.30. Our faith rests not on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God, 1 Cor.2.5.

"Let me no more my comfort draw
From my frail hold on Thee;
In this alone rejoice with awe—
Thy mighty grasp of me."

—J. C. Shairp.

If we would know that we belong to God, let us find ourselves where God has graciously placed us IN CHRIST JESUS. He is made unto us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. The Christ of

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God is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and our redemption. He won all this for us by His human life of perfect obedience, by His death in our stead. He revealed it to us by His Word. He gives it to us, makes us partake of it by His Spirit. To lay hold of Him by faith is to appropriate the wisdom, the righteousness, the sanctification and the redemption that comes from God. To find ourselves by faith in Him is to see ourselves filled with wisdom, clothed with His righteousness, liberated from the thralldom of Satan, and transplanted into the Kingdom of Grace. To have Him is to have forgiveness, peace, victory, the hope of glory! However manifold our sins, we were washed, we were sanctified, we were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God, I Cor. 6.11.

As we find our salvation in Christ Jesus so the Apostle calls us to begin our thinking and acting in Him. Begin intellectually where God has graciously placed you. Begin where the light is brightest, that is, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. In the bequest that established our oldest university, John Harvard directed:

Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main ends of his life and studies: to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all knowledge and learning and see the Lord only giveth wisdom. Let everyone seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seek Christ as Lord and Master.

For as the Apostle adds, other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ, I Cor. 3.10.

The problems of life today are too great to be faced in the strength of puny man. God gives us His power to meet the issues of life only when we stand upon the foundation He has laid. May we not turn from His testimony to the nostrums of men. Why should one forsake the fountains of living water for man-made cisterns which hold no true water? When we start with Christ as the foundation, the absolute, the subject, there are blessings for each issue in life. But when one takes up every popular project that culture offers, when he treats some great cause as God's new Messiah before which he relativizes Jesus Christ, everything is thrown out of order.

Some have taken total abstinence, others pacifism, others economic collectivism, others racialism as their primary interest and treated Jesus Christ as secondary. Thus, one man decides that all use of force is wrong, and that if Jesus struck anyone with the whip of cords in cleansing the Temple, he will have nothing more to do with Jesus. Another starts with current studies on the evils of alcoholism and

concludes that Jesus was wrong in turning the water into wine. Then he undertakes to excuse Christ on the ground of some kind of kenotic theory. Jesus Christ is the Lord, the Subject Who declines to be made the predicate for any human scheme. He is not a being Who ceased to be God when He became man. He is the living God Who became also man for us men and for our salvation. We begin with Him as absolute, we do not apologize for Him before the cultural program of alcoholism, pacifism, or any other ism.

First Corinthians twelve warns us that no man is speaking by the Spirit of God when to escape persecution he says, Let Jesus be anathema. Would the Apostle say that a man is speaking by the Spirit of God when he by-passes or relativizes, or corrects the Lord Jesus Christ in order to give first place to some popular program? Positively, Paul adds that only by the Spirit can a man call Jesus Lord. We do not take account of Christ and fit Him into our programs, rather He puts us into His shock troops with which He fights and wins His battles. As we face the sundry issues and problems of the day may God the Holy Spirit give us grace to call Jesus LORD, to recognize Him as the Absolute, the Beginning, the Foundation beside which no other can be laid. For when Christ is presented in His full-orbed grace and glory, the living God touches hearts and lives and saves them from drunkenness, fightings, selfishness, and race hatred. The Christian Church has no commission to reverse the process. Take God's way and His Spirit blesses it. Try to reverse God's way and the Church becomes no longer the ambassador of God, her preaching becomes merely the chaff of man and no longer the wheat which brings the bread of God to hungry hearts of men. The ambassador of the living God preaches the LORDSHIP of Jesus Christ, the Crucified.

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