

THE POWER OF CHRIST

SERMONS BY TEXAS BAPTIST PASTORS

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SERMON FOURTEEN

A CHANGELESS MESSAGE FOR A CHANGING WORLD

By

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“We preach Christ crucified” (I Corinthians 1: 23).

We live in a world of rapid and constant changes. Modes of travel, methods of communication, means of commerce, and inventions for pleasure and comfort change so frequently as to keep the whole industrial world in a stir. An automobile, a Pullman car, a radio, or a house that was thoroughly modern yesterday is discarded today for a newer model.

Our Texas Centennial this year, with its great exhibits in Dallas and other cities, has served to remind us of these rapid and marvelous changes. Man is no longer content to read by a tallow dip, he must have his Mazda reading lamp and indirect lighting. He will not ride in the pioneer stage coach or in a buggy behind “old Dobbin”; he must have an eight-cylinder automobile, a streamlined train or a transcontinental plane.

He no longer lives in the quiet of the humble cottage immortalized by Burns in his “Cotter’s Saturday Night,” but on a busy and crowded street in an electrified flat. His food no longer comes from the garden, smokehouse and cellar, but from the corner grocery store and delicatessen. His music comes to him by way of the radio. His children (if any) are born in a hospital, reared in a nursery and educated in a boarding-school. The wife and mother no longer rules the world by the simple expediency of rocking the cradle, for the old adage, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world” is only true when the hand rocks the cradle, and the hands of most modern women have far too many other things to do to rock cradles.

Governments rise and fall over night. The map of Europe has been made over in this generation and certain belligerent forces armed to the teeth seem determined to make it over again. Social customs, political principles and religious beliefs change so frequently that many find it difficult to know whether they are puritans or liberals in behavior; Democrats, Republicans, Socialists or Communists in politics; Christians, skeptics, agnostics or atheists in religion.

Ideals of conduct and standards of behavior which for generations have been thought necessary to personal purity, the sanctity of the home and the safety of the nation have been discarded. Countless millions rush pell-mell down the primrose path of "self-expression" and sinful indulgence to blighted hopes and wasted lives. One wonders if the three greatest inventions of the modern world, viz., the automobile, the radio and the motion picture machine, have not become our greatest curses.

Maxine Davis, during this year, has produced a book entitled "*The Lost Generation*," in which she makes out a terribly dark picture for the twenty-one million boys and girls in this country between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four. Her thesis seems to be that this host of young people are lost in a maze of difficulties in the economic, political, social and religious orders of their times. In her introduction she quotes from Housman in "*The Shropshire Lad*" to say to this generation of young people,

"In all the endless road you tread. There is nothing but the night."

It is no old man's lament, or pessimistic Jeremiad, for me to say that surely we live in a nervous, restless, troubled and changing world. With all these rapid changes about us, however, there are some things which do not change.

Fundamentally man changes but little. His elemental needs, physical, mental and spiritual remain the same, regardless of the changing times in which he may find himself. Man's inherent sin, his proneness to go away from God, the consciousness of his own need in the spiritual realm and his longing for fellowship and communion with the Infinite abides through all generations.

Job said, "**Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat, that I might set out my case before Him**" (Job 23: 3-4).

The Psalmist said, "**As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God**" (Psalm 42:1).

The apostle Paul, on his visit to Athens, found the cultured Greeks seeking after God and building altars to the Unknown God.

Augustine would say, "We are made for God, and our souls are restless until we rest in Him."

Dr. Link, an eminent psychologist of our day, in his interesting new book, "**The Return to Religion**," says that one of the influences which has turned him to the church aid to God has been the fact that so many people have sought to make him their God, that he has seen the absolute necessity for a real God in human life.

In this realm of the greatest need and deepest longing of men's lives the changing times have wrought havoc for many. Scientific investigators, intoxicated with the joy of a few discoveries in certain realms, have jumped to unwarranted conclusions.

- They have presumed to speak with the voice of authority in realms beyond their investigations.
- They have consigned to the Limbo of forgotten fables and traditions much that the Christian has held as truth and as eternal verity.

Modernism has blown its blighting breath across the pulpits of many Christian churches. Do we have a sure message for such a time, for such an age, and for such a world? In all humility, but with deep conviction and boldness unafraid, we may take our stand beside the first preacher of any generation, the apostle Paul, and declare that though **“The Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”** (I Corinthians 1:23, 24).

I. We Preach Christ Crucified in Obedience to His Commands

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:18-20).

“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

“Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47).

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side . . . Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:19-21).

Thus, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record the great Commission and then in Acts 1:8 Luke records that the last words spoken by our Saviour to His disciples as He was ready to depart from them were, **“Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”**

May I remind you that New Testament Christians knew no other message. They went everywhere preaching and testifying to the things they had both seen and heard. Christ crucified and risen again was their shibboleth. It was their pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.

Their chief spokesman in the early days in Jerusalem declared, **“Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). A little later the apostle to the Gentiles said, **“I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified”** (I Corinthians 2:2).

Many people resent the use of such words as “**command**” and “**obey**” in Christian service, but Jesus commanded, and if we fail to obey we are rebels against His authority; we are slackers in His kingdom.

In time of war and other emergencies extraordinary powers are conferred upon our President. In other countries the power of Dictatorship is sometimes usurped by rulers, but no earthly ruler ever claimed as much power or authority as Jesus claimed when He boldly declared, “**All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye therefore, and make disciples.**”

When Jesus uttered this command He was not a petitioner or a suppliant before His disciples. He had been crucified and had risen from the dead a conqueror. He stood before them a victor, clothed in the regal habiliments of His resurrection glory and of His kingly office.

II. We Preach Christ Crucified As An Expression of Gratitude

To all who shrink from the stern words of command and obey I make an appeal to the gratitude of your hearts, to a sense of your appreciation of what Christ’s death has made possible in your lives.

“Tell to others all around,
What a Saviour you have found”

We delight to sing the praises of loved ones and friends because of our appreciation for what they mean to us and what they have done for us. We never cease telling of the early teacher who influenced our life’s choices, of the earnest preacher who won us to Christ or baptized us, and of the faithful physician who ministered to us or to our loved ones in times of sickness.

If our gratitude thus leads us to tell others about these earthly friends, how much more ought we to tell them about the great Physician of our souls? In a busy day in the life of Jesus He came into, the country of the Gadarenes. A poor demon-possessed man was healed and then besought the Master that he might go with Him, but Jesus suffered him not, but said, “**Go home to thy friends and tell how great things the Lord hath done for thee and hath had compassion on thee**” (Mark 5:19).

Every redeemed person can join heartily in singing—

“All my life was wrecked by sin and strife,
Discord filled my heart with pain.
Jesus swept across the broken strings,
Stirred the slumbering chords again”

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
Sweetest name I know,
Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go.”

III. We Preach Christ Crucified in Answer to the World's Need

It is the only message that will save men from sin, that will deliver them from the powers of darkness unto light, and from Satan unto God. I believe that the very life of the Christian movement is now being threatened at just this point.

There are three trends in modern thought which lead away from the cross:

1. *There is the belief in man's own sufficiency, in the possibility of salvation by works, by self-righteousness, by education or by culture.*

The fundamental fallacy of this belief lies in the slight conception which men have concerning sin. They fail to reckon with the depravity of man's nature; the heinousness of man's sin in God's sight; and God's demand for righteousness. To a generation ignorant or unmindful of the awfulness of sin, its universal prevalence, its devastating blight, its dreadful consequences, the death of Jesus upon the cross is the needless sacrifice of a good man; the shameless martyrdom of a great teacher; the plain perversion of human justice; and a glaring contradiction of God's love.

“The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).

A child cannot grow up into a Christian.

Regeneration is more than an emotional and temperamental adjustment brought about by proper guidance during the adolescent age. It is the change wrought in the heart of a penitent believer by the Holy Spirit, in which spiritual life is imparted.

This life, which is begun the moment such a believer puts his trust in the crucified Son of God, and is continued until the whole nature of man is brought into complete subjection to the will of God.

“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

“I've tried in vain a thousand ways,
My fears to quell, my hopes to raise,
But what I need, the Bible says
Forevermore in Jesus.

“My soul is night, my heart is steel,
I cannot see, I cannot feel,
For light, for life, I must appeal
In simple faith to Jesus.

“He died, He lives, He reigns, He pleads,
There’s love in all His words and deeds.
There’s all a guilty sinner needs,
Forevermore in Jesus.

“Though some may sneer, and some may blame
I’ll go with all my guilt and shame,
I’ll go to Him because His name,
Above all names, is Jesus.”

2. Another trend in modern thought, which leads away from the cross, is the disposition to accredit other religions, if sincerely believed and devoutly lived, with having efficacy in them to save the lost.

This fallacy has put a question mark in the minds of many people about the necessity of our modern Christian missionary program. If the religions of the East have in them any person or power which can forgive sins and cleanse the sinful heart, can pardon the guilty sinner and impute righteousness beyond his own, can blot out the stain of sin and enable him to live a new life, can conquer death and give assurance of immortality and a heavenly home, then the Christian message is not needed and we are arrogant and impertinent intruders by our missionary efforts.

The moment one grants the possibility of salvation through any other name than that of Jesus Christ and through any merit save the merit of His shed blood, that moment his interest in the evangelization of a lost world begins to die.

If one can be saved without a personal faith in the shed blood of the Son of God as “**the lamb slain from the foundation of the world,**” so may we all be saved, “**for, there is no difference. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God**” (Romans 3:22, 23).

It is as true today as it was when Jesus declared, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me**” (John 14: 6), and when Peter preached with great boldness: “**Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved**” (Acts 4:12).

“I know of lands that are sunk in shame,
Of hearts that faint and tire.
I know of a name, a name, a name,
That can set those lands on fire.

“I know of lives that are steeped in sin,
That no man’s art can cure.
I know of a name, a name, a name,
That can make those lives all pure.

“I know of souls that are lost to God,
Bound down by things of earth,
I know of a name, a name, a name,
That can give those souls new birth.

“Oh, listen, my soul, the Saviour speaks
To save the world from dross,
Christ Jesus is the name,
He saves by way of the Cross.”

3. A third trend in modern thought which leads away from the cross is the disposition to recognize the historic Christ and to give Him a large place among men; perhaps the chief place among all the world's teachers, reformers and religionists, but to deny or belittle His death as a vicarious atonement for sin.

Some there are who make much of the teachings of Jesus concerning human relations and deduce therefrom what is known as the social gospel.

They prattle much about the Golden Rule, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Christian principle as a way of life. Their difficulty is that they do not begin at the beginning. They extol the fruits of Christianity without accepting the source of Christian living.

Before one can live up to the Christian way of life, he must have Christ formed in him the hope of glory. He must have more than a principle or an ideal held up before him. He must have spiritual life begotten within him, **“because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be”** (Romans 8: 7).

Those who clamor for social justice in human relations without pointing men and women to the one source where selfish greed and unholy ambitions are crucified, are wasting their time. *“The fatherhood of God”* and the *“brotherhood of man”* are but empty phrases and idle dreams until men become brothers in Jesus Christ and until they have received **“the spirit of adoption whereby they cry, Abba, Father.”**

Society can only be saved as individuals are saved. Universal peace will never come in this world until the sovereignty of the crucified and risen Lord, who is the Prince of Peace, is recognized. This cannot come from acknowledgment of the beauty of the character or the sublimity of the teachings of Jesus, but from the peace that comes to one's own troubled spirit when he comes to the cross and finds pardon and peace.

I call my brother preachers, our honored laymen, our faithful women, and our blessed young people back to a new crusade of witnessing to the glorious gospel of the Son of God.

Let us say with a new emphasis, **“I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified”** (I Corinthians 2:2), and **“God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world”** (Galatians 6:14).

This is the one message that will bring pardon and peace to troubled hearts;

- That will transform crooked lives;
- That could change an impulsive and unstable Simon into Cephas a Rock;
- That could change Saul, the persecutor of the early church, into its chief defender and mightiest messenger;
- That could send the poor outcast woman of the street back into society without a harsh word or a scornful look, but with the tender, encouraging words, "**Go thy way and sin no more**";
- That could make the selfish, grasping Zacchaeus willing to make restitution to all he had wronged and ready to give half of his goods to feed the poor.

This is the only message that could have sustained the Christian martyrs of the first century as they burned at the stake or were devoured by wild beasts in the arenas of the wicked, sensuous, pleasure-mad, rotting Rome.

This is the only message which could change the dissolute Augustine into the self-sacrificing monk and saint; Spurgeon, the uncouth country lad, into the mighty Metropolitan preacher; John Wesley, the cultured Oxford student, into the fiery Methodist evangelist; William Booth, the unknown, itinerant preacher, into the head of the Salvation Army; Moody, the shoe clerk, and Billy Sunday, the carefree young baseball player, into the mightiest evangelists of the past century.

In a revival meeting in a little town in north Texas this message was being preached.

A young woman was converted. Her father, her brothers and sisters were all lost. Her mother was a backslidden Christian. One by one, all who were old enough were saved through her efforts and their faith in the crucified Christ. The preacher was invited into the home and sat down to a bountiful meal. After thanks were expressed to God for His mercies, the husband and father said something like this: "Preacher, it has been more than twenty years since a preacher ate at my table. I have been a wicked man. I have cursed the churches and preachers, and have often said that no preacher would ever eat of the food which my labor had provided, but it is so different now and it is such a joy to have you in our home, and to eat at our table."

How could this change be explained except through the transforming power of the gospel?

In a great city in our state a preacher was called on Monday morning to a hotel room. He found a middle-aged man who had fallen by drink. It was a long story of sad and tragic experiences. A brilliant mind dulled, a strong body weakened, a resolute will broken by the demon of drink. There was the reading of God's Word, there was earnest prayer on the part of the victim. Arising from his knees, a smile wreathed the man's face, and in the tone of a conqueror he said, "I believe I'm saved. I believe that Christ has come into my life." Eight months had passed. The same preacher and the same man, whose wife was now with him, were in another hotel room. After the wife and the man had told the preacher of the great happiness which had come to them in the transformation that had been wrought in the man's life, he concluded by saying,

“Wherever you go to preach, tell the fellows that I said it would do no good to swear off from their bad habits. I have tried it a thousand times, only to fail. It takes the power of Jesus Christ in a man’s life to deliver him from his bad habits.”

It was the close of a beautiful summer day. It was the Lord’s Day. I sat beside the bed of my dear wife, the sweetheart of my youth. She was slowly dying from that most dreaded of all diseases, cancer. The nurse was taking her time off and the children were away for a needed rest. She requested that I bring her Bible and read certain passages which she had marked and then she asked that I pray.

This I did as best I could, and then she said to me, “There is something I want to tell you which may help you personally and help you in your ministry. I find,” she said, “that I have been entirely too narrow and selfish in my views about heaven. I think the average Christian is. I have always thought that when I got to heaven I wanted first to see my precious baby, my mother, your father, and other loved ones, but as I approach that glorious moment I find that these are not the thoughts uppermost in my mind. I long above everything else to see my Saviour and to join with the innumerable hosts described by John in the Revelation, in singing the praises of Him who loved me and gave Himself for me upon the cross, and has washed me in His own precious blood.”

“We preach Christ Crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:23-24).

Dr. Walter Hale McKenzie was born near Dublin, Tex., Sept. 17, 1885. Education, Baylor U. and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (A.B., Th.M., D.D.). Ordained, Apr. 7, 1907. Pastorate: Chico, Tex., Nocona, Tex., Ervay St., Dallas, Tex., Waxahachie, Tex., University Baptist Church, Austin, Tex., Sept. 1, 1931 to date. Preacher, Texas Baptist Convention sermon, 1936. Chairman, Executive Board of Baptist General Convention of Texas.

University Baptist Church, Austin, has 1,200 members. Since Sept. 1, 1931, under Dr. McKenzie’s ministry, there have been 1,800 additions. Total contributions have been \$150,000. Total value of all church property is \$200,000. This church is located just across the street from the University of Texas (All statistics as of Dec. 15, 1937).

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