

“To Preach Christ”
 Sermon for 4 July 2021
 Texts: Gal. 1:15-16; Gen. 3:1-8

What does it mean **to preach Christ**? That’s what I propose that we dig into this morning. And I feel compelled to do so because there is a critical difference between preaching about Christ, and yet another difference between preaching Christ and expositing his teachings (here’s what people thought, and what they heard, *and what Jesus meant*). Neither is **preaching Christ**, as I have come to understand it, to be as it relates to Paul’s calling in Galatians, there preaching Christ means making an **offer of Christ**, it means inviting others to “close with Christ.” Paul is only able to make an offer of Christ because he is in Christ, and Christ dwells in him. *It is not possible to give away what you do not have*—so it is absolutely essential *to possess Christ* and the only way to possess Christ is accept the **offer of Christ**. It isn’t essential because I say so, however, it is essential because **union with Christ**, or **being found in Christ** is justification, righteousness, holiness, sanctification and peace with God. Another way to frame this is to say: Jesus is the gospel. Jesus is the good news of God’s love spoken into the world, Jesus is the word of God spoken to the whole world, believers and unbelievers alike—it is free. It is not contingent on anything—it is an **offer**—it is made regardless of your state, or condition . . . regardless of your sin, or your conviction of sin (including the absence, or indifference to sin). An offer is what a giver does (in this case God is the donor and Jesus is the donation) but the rest is up to the recipient who either receives, or rejects the offer.

I had an alcoholic friend named Patrick—of course, friendship is problematic when you are dealing with a drunk. Yes, it’s problematic because you cannot be sure if you are talking to a person, or, if he’s intoxicated, the substance he is under the influence of. He asked me for money. I “offered” him lunch. He played along, convinced, I am sure that either I was insincere, or, more, likely he could exchange my “lunch” for the money he needed to buy himself more drink. Now, surely, there was no guess work in this. I spent hours with Patrick. I repeated my offer. After the third offer, if I remember correctly, we got as far as sitting down at a table. Patrick was agitated, nervous. Then he blurted out, “I see that you ‘re a fine gentleman and you’re as good as your word, but I can’t take your food. What I want is your money so I can buy some drink.” “I know, Patrick, I am unwilling to pay for your death by alcohol. But I am willing to feed your life. The offer still stands.” He rose, thanked me and shuffled out the door. That’s when I decided to shift tactics. I began to pack a sandwich and a piece of fruit for him in my lunch. Then when we sat down to visit I would pull his sandwich out and put it towards him on the bench. “I made this for you. Enjoy.” There is no moral I’m trying to draw out here. Patrick didn’t live much longer—I was out of the country when he died. But I do remember gifting him with a blanket. He didn’t actually say thank you. He said, “You knows I rather have the money for drink.” “I know, Patrick, but this blanket will keep you warm. The drink will only trick you into thinking you aren’t cold. Now, on your word, sir, this blanket is a gift. It’s not for sale. And if

you do hawk it, the proceeds belong to me.” He smiled, wryly, and then, he thanked me. “So you trusts me with a blanket, eh?” “Yes, Patrick, it’s between friends.” No, he never sobered up. No, there was no happy ending. But he didn’t starve, and he didn’t freeze to death.

The story is about an **offer**. The offer of God expresses a much higher and costly exchange. His offer establishes his goodness, his generosity—unwarranted, unmerited, unearned—the lavishness of his grace. That is what God showed Paul so that, having accepted the offer, he could then **preach Christ to the Gentiles**. Prior to his conversion, Paul was an unadulterated legalist, and as hardhearted as they come. I wish I could claim to be better than that, but that would be dishonest boasting. Paul had the humility to declare himself **least of all the apostles**, and **the chief of all sinners**. There is an odd comfort of sorts in knowing that because Paul has first place as **the chief of all sinners**, the best (or worst actually) I could place is second!

So, back to preaching Christ. This has got to be so infuriating. First because it exposes the little legalist sinners that we tend by nature to be. And second we have the lavishness of God’s free grace. It is like the rain, it pours on both the just and the unjust. We are always measuring, comparing and contrasting but God loves without measure. Listen and hear if this doesn’t sound familiar (Isaiah 55)?

**“1^[a] You there! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no ^[b]money come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost.
2 Why do you ^[c]spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance.
3 Incline your ear and come to Me.
Listen, that ^[d]you may live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
*According to the faithful mercies ^[e]shown to David.***

Doesn’t that sound like an offer Jesus might make?! Here’s Jesus is speaking for himself (John 7):

37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, ^[a]let him come to Me and drink. 38 The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘^[b]From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

Perhaps Jesus has Isaiah 12:3 in mind: **With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation.** Perhaps the image is of Ezekiel 47, water flowing out from under the restored temple. Or he is summing up a biblical theme with images.

Jesus is the real drink for which mankind thirsts— they thirst for the waters of everlasting life. There’s a deep yearning for union, or reunion with God in the

human breast and that **the offer. Come to Me and drink! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters . . .** just come. If you are in Christ, not only have you imbibed. There is a fountain of life dwelling up out of you!

I've got a river of life flowing out of me
 Makes the lame to walk and the blind to see,
 Opens prison doors, sets the captives free
 I've got a river of life flowing out of me.

Chorus:
 Spring up, O well (*splish splash*)
 Within my soul,
 Spring up, O well (*splish splash*)
 And make me whole,
 Spring up, O well (*splish splash*)
 and give to me
 That life abundantly!

If Christ is the gospel, and you have Christ because you are in Christ

Have others had enough of dust, death and destruction? Are their mouths dry and throats parched? Give the drink to the panting. Make the offer.

I have a word for those who are building a city, erecting a tower, sheltering from evil, for all the snake bitten, paralyzed by hopelessness and despair: take your eyes off what's out there! Ask yourself, "Am I not thirsty? Have I a hunger for God, for my home with him? Who can fill this ache for love, but God?" Here's good news: **God has sent for you, he is calling you to himself! Hear from Zion, you are chosen. He has set his love upon you. Love open another as Christ has loved you.**

I must repeat these few conclusions: *no one can preach Christ who does not have Christ!!* They cannot give what they do not have! They cannot give faith, or forgiveness, or hope, or love, or Christ—or any worthwhile thing in full measure, unless they first be filled.

**Sing aloud to God our strength;
 Shout for joy to the God of Jacob!**

O Israel, if you would but listen to me!

**I am the Lord your God,
 Who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.**

open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Until I asked for Jesus to be my friend, I had not Christ and what God had for me was kept inaccessible against, or until that day!

**11 “But My people did not listen to My voice,
And Israel did not [a]obey Me.**

**12 So I gave [him] them over to the stubbornness of their heart,
To walk by their own plans.**

**13 Oh that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!**

**14 I would quickly subdue their enemies
And turn My hand against their adversaries.**

**15 Those who hate the Lord would pretend to obey Him,
And their time *of punishment* would be forever.**

**16 [He would feed him] But I would feed you with the [fat] finest of the
wheat, And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”**

There it is: the paralysis of doubt and snake-bit unbelief versus freedom of life in the joy of the Spirit! Death or life? Has Jesus not promised us life abundant?

**I am the door If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in
and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill
and destroy. I came that they (my sheep, those who are in me!)
may have life and have it abundantly. John 10:9-10**

God says, **Be fruitful.** Jesus says, “Let’s do it.”

Amen.