

CHRIST IS MAGNIFIED NO MATTER HOW PREACHED!

Today's Text: Phil. 1: 1-30

Extracts:

But I want you to know, brethren, *that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice [Phil. 1: 12-18].*

“Killing Jesus” is a three-hour film scheduled to premiere sometime this year.¹ It is based on a book of the same title by Fox News star, Bill O’Reilly, and Martin Dugard. Unlike “Passion of the Christ” (2004) and “The Greatest Story Ever Told” (1965), it looks at the life of Jesus the Christ from a human perspective, based on the economic, political and cultural realities of His time on earth. The man who plays Jesus, Haaz Sleiman, is a Muslim actor born and raised in Lebanon. When some Christian conservatives raised eye brows on the choice of a Muslim for such a critical role, Sleiman told reporters, “I cannot speak for Jesus, but I can quote his teachings, and he said, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ...I’ve been heavily shaped by his teachings.”

Sleiman saw love in the words of Jesus that he had to memorise for the film. He saw love among the cast and crew of the movie. So, even if, as a Muslim, he did not believe in Christ as the Son of God, Sleiman was not the same again after that role. Indeed, he had unwittingly preached Christ to himself and close relations. Your motive for preaching Christ to your congregation or other listeners may not necessarily be wholesome or edifying but, surprisingly, you could still be winning souls for Him more than you may think! That is the point that Paul is making in the Bible verses for today’s study. By truth or pretence, Christ can be preached. How can that be? How do you preach Him? Let us find out from this interesting study.

¹ Story is based on “Muslim Actor Defends His Casting in ‘Killing Jesus’ by Quoting Christ’s Teachings,” Jan. 08, 2015; <http://www.aceshowbiz.com/news/view/00078816.html#ixzz3OKMgZ37M>

1. Background: Jesus is preached all the same

Soon after choosing His twelve apostles, Jesus sent them out on their first mission- to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, saying, “As you go, **preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’** Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” [Matt. 10: 1-8]. Then on the day He ascended to heaven (after His death and resurrection), He commissioned the same apostles (minus Judas Iscariot who had committed suicide after betraying his Master) to **go into all the world “and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”** He went on to list the signs that will follow believers. We are told that, after He had left them, His disciples “went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word through the accompanying signs” [Mk 16: 14-20].

From the foregoing, we have a clear idea of what it means **to preach Christ**. It **entails preaching** the gospel, that is, **the message of the cross** [1 Cor. 1: 17-18], **the very basis for the grace that believers are relying on for their salvation**. But the signs and wonders that follow confirm the power behind the gospel, that is, Jesus Christ Himself. **So to preach Christ is to say or do things that will bring people to salvation instead of away from it. But do the signs that follow work only for the righteous? Can Christ also be magnified when people are only preaching in His name for their own selfish motives?** Those and more are the questions that we shall attempt to answer in today’s study. Paul’s letter to the Philippians gives us good background material for that purpose.

Paul wrote from his prison cell in Rome. Apparently, some people had taken advantage of his absence to preach Christ according to their whims and caprices, some “from envy and strife” and some “from goodwill.” Yet, **Paul concluded that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and in that he rejoiced** [Phil. 1: 12-18]. For that conclusion to ring real in our ears, let us use some cases from the Scriptures to test it.

In general, the preachers that we come across in our congregations or in the world can fall into one of the following:

a) *Some are true disciples*

Writing to the Philippians, Paul said, “Only **let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ**, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that **you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel**” [Phil. 1: 27]. In other words, those who preach Christ should also walk their talk; they must behave like true disciples.

Take Peter's sermon soon after the Holy Spirit had fallen on the apostles on Pentecost Sunday [Acts 2: 1-4]. We are told that when the listeners had heard him, "they were cut to the heart" and said to him and the other apostles with him, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter urged them to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour by being baptized in His name. About three thousand people who had gladly received the message joined the new church of believers on that day. We are told, "Fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." Much more, people saw love in action among the growing church of believers and they praised God as they found favour among the people [vv. 37-47].

In this case, Christ was preached and the listeners saw in the conduct of the preachers what they were being told about Jesus. You are a disciple if you fall into this category. You are preaching Christ in truth; you believe in and practise what you preach. The Lord then adds to His church daily those who are being saved [v. 47]. Christ is magnified and people are saved.

b) *But many are tricksters and jokers!*

Paul wrote, "Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill. The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely" [v. 15]. In other words, the problem is not with what they say about Jesus but their motives for preaching Him. *Some people are actually entrepreneurs running a family business, using their place of worship as their business premises. Some are tricksters and magicians who are taking advantage of the gullible to line their own pockets with ill-gotten gains. Yet, Christ is still magnified!*

Take the case of the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest during Paul's missionary journey to Ephesus. They were exorcists, that is, people who use prayers or religious rituals to drive out evil spirits supposedly possessing a person or a place. They had seen people on whom Paul laid hands receive the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. They had seen how God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, such that even handkerchiefs or aprons from Paul's body had healed the sick and cast out evil spirits from them. So, the exorcists took it upon themselves to cast out evil spirits in the name of Jesus, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." The evil spirit in the possessed man replied, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" The demon-possessed man attacked them and overcame the exorcists who fled naked and wounded [Acts 19: 1-16]!

The news spread throughout Ephesus. Fear fell on the people and "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." Many people who had practised

magic gathered and burnt their books, valued at over fifty thousand pieces of silver and “the word of God grew mightily and prevailed” [vv. 17-20]. In this case, the “preachers” (exorcists) were hurt and disgraced but more followers were won for Christ. *That confirms Paul’s conclusion that no matter your motive or methods, Christ is preached all the same [Phil. 1: 18] - and magnified.*

c) *And many more are persecutors*

Paul writes, “The things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains are in Christ and ... are much more bold to speak the word without fear” [vv. 12-14]. In other words, those who think that they can stop the work of Christ by persecuting preachers of His gospel may actually be magnifying Christ more than they can imagine! The arrest and imprisonment of Paul and Silas at Philippi makes this point quite vivid [Acts 16: 16-40].

Paul and Silas had come across a slave girl there who used the spirit of divination to bring her masters much gain by fortune-telling. For several days, she followed Paul and Silas, saying aloud, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” [vv. 16-17]. She preached Christ quite correctly! Nonetheless, Paul cast out the evil spirit in her in the name of Jesus. For losing their means of profit, her masters seized Paul and Silas and handed them over to the magistrates on cooked-up charges. The judges put them in maximum security jail [vv. 19-24].

At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns which were heard by all the other prisoners. Suddenly a great earthquake shook the foundations of the prison; all the prison doors were opened and every prisoner’s chains were loosed! The prison keeper woke up and, thinking that his job was on the line, drew a sword to kill himself. Paul called out loud to him not to harm himself because he and Silas were still there. He brought light, fell trembling before them and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They told him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” That night, the prison-keeper and his entire household were baptized! The following day, Paul refused a quiet release because their jailers had imprisoned Roman citizens without following due process [vv. 25-40]! Persecution had magnified Christ. The persecutors became followers of Christ.

From the foregoing, we can agree with Paul “that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached” [Phil. 1: 18]. Therefore, Christ’s glory is

what matters and there is NOTHING we do that can diminish it. So, what lessons can we learn? How can we as true believers preach Christ for our own good?

2. Lessons for the true disciples of Christ

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul said, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” [1 Cor. 9: 24-27]. Therefore, in preaching Christ, we need to pay attention to the following lessons:

a) *It is God that gives the increase*

Sometimes, we are under the illusion that the effectiveness of our preaching is determined by our speaking skills or high education or hard work, among other things. The truth is that it is the Holy Spirit that gives utterance [Matt. 10:20; Acts 2: 4]. Jesus Himself has said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” [Jn 6: 63]. Paul adds, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” [1 Cor. 3: 6]. Therefore, nothing happens outside of God’s will.

So, when you go out there to preach Christ, do it as God has directed you. That way, there is no room for you to lay claim to the success of your ministry. The day you step out of His will, you are on your own!

b) *Every action has its consequences*

Christ is magnified no matter how we preach Him but there are consequences for how we do so. The word of God says, “Do not be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Those who sow in the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but those who sow to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life [Gal. 6: 7-8].

In many congregations these days, the emphasis has shifted from discipleship to what somebody has aptly called mercantile Christianity. You hardly hear of repentance or salvation. Instead, emphasis is on breakthrough, favours, prosperity, etc. In the process, earthly blessings have become a measure of a ministry’s success. Yet, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil and many believers have in their greediness pierced themselves through with many sorrows by straying away from the faith. A man (or woman) of God, on the other hand, should rather pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience [and] gentleness [1 Tim. 6: 10-11], which are among the manifestations of the fruit of the Holy Spirit [Gal. 5: 22-23]. The Laodicean church was full of very wealthy members who had “need of nothing.” Yet, because they had become lukewarm,

Jesus called them “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked” [Rev. 3: 14-17]. *Therefore, the best thing to do is to always place the kingdom of God over and above pecuniary gains in your preaching ministry.*

In sum, here is what Paul is telling us today: *it is immaterial how people preach Christ because in every case, Christ will be magnified. However, to gain from preaching Him, you must “let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ... stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” [Phil. 1: 27].* After all, what does it profit you to gain the whole world (by preaching Christ for earthly/ulterior motives) but suffer the loss of the soul [Mk 8: 36]? May that never be our portion, in Jesus’ name!

3. Conclusion: Christ is inevitable- and His return is imminent!

In the great commission to His followers, Jesus assured them, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” [Matt. 28: 20]. Elsewhere, He added, “And, behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” [Rev. 22: 12-13]. *Without Him, you can do NOTHING [Jn 15: 5].* Therefore, Christ is unavoidable -and His return to judge the whole world is imminent!

Religion or denomination will not do it. Longevity in service will not count. Eloquence is irrelevant. What matters is your personal relationship with Jesus on the day His Father calls you home to eternity or on the day of His return, whichever comes first. Can you imagine your joy when He welcomes you into your mansion in His Father’s house on that day?

So, preach Christ as a true missionary, not as a clever mercenary!