

Preaching Jesus

Preaching Jesus involves more than just the story about His life, death, and resurrection. Even so, that story must always remain the foundation of everything else.

*“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, **preached Jesus to him**” (Ac. 8:35).*

*“But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, **preaching the Lord Jesus**. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Ac. 11:20-21).*

*“For I determined not to know anything among you except **Jesus Christ and Him crucified**” (1 Cor. 2:2).*



The casual reader of the book of Acts cannot help but notice the role of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the preaching of the early Christians. “Preaching Jesus” became a shorthand description of their message, because it summarized beautifully the story they were trying to impress upon their listeners.

Some have therefore concluded that “preaching Jesus” involves *nothing but* the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. Peter’s first sermon concluded with a plea for his audience to “repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins” (Ac. 2:38). As Philip “preached Jesus” to the Ethiopian eunuch, it was the eunuch who requested baptism (Ac. 8:35-36). So baptism must have been part of Philip’s message. In Corinth, Paul “determined not to know

anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”—then proceeded to set the Corinthians straight on a wide variety of topics relating to morality, worship, personal character, church benevolence, authority, and treatment of false apostles (read 1-2 Corinthians). “Preaching Jesus” obviously involved much more than the bare historical details about this unique Man.

Consequently, we are well within our rights to challenge those who want to limit gospel preaching to nothing more than lofty language about what Jesus has done for us.

But correcting that mistake exposes us to the risk of an equally serious mistake. In our eagerness to straighten out all the erroneous thinking on these ancillary details, we can unwittingly relegate Jesus to the status of a poster boy for Christianity, a kind of token representation of the *real* meaning of our faith, namely, the entire system of doctrine and practice that grew out of His work. We can begin to treat Jesus as a mere vehicle for carrying the important stuff, the larger body of teaching that *really* defines who we are.

When we do that, we have stripped our religion of its power. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is not a starting point for Christianity; *it is the foundation of Christianity*. Paul called the story of Jesus “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3, ESV). It is the central hub around which everything else revolves. There is not a single element of genuine New Testament Christianity that does not in some way owe its legitimacy to the sacrificial work of Jesus. Not merely “because Jesus said so, and He’s the boss,” but because every detail reflects the spirit of humble service that He displayed in His life and death. This applies to the rite of baptism (Rom. 6:1-7), how we manage our relationships with others (Phil. 2:1-8), our moral character (Rom. 12:1-2ff), how we organize ourselves (1 Pet. 5:1-4), the simplicity of our worship (2 Cor. 11:3-4), and on and on. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the template upon which our entire life of faith must be modelled. Without that understanding, we are simply trying to save ourselves through law-keeping—a hopeless and depressing enterprise.

In the closing years of my preaching career, I have come to recognize the need for linking every sermon to some aspect of the life and sacrifice of the Master. If I cannot tie my topic to that foundational truth, am I really “preaching Jesus” at all?

— David King