

The Preaching of Christ Crucified, the Means of Salvation

by Samuel Davies

The preaching of Christ crucified is the means of salvation, and it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Scripture: Psalm 85:10, Psalm 130:4, John 12:32, Romans 3:26, 1 Corinthians 1:22, 2 Corinthians 5:14, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:18, 1 John 4:19, Revelation 5:9

Topics: "Christ Crucified", "Salvation Through Faith"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the significance of Christ crucified as the means of salvation, highlighting how the preaching of the cross reveals the love, justice, and mercy of God in a way that no human wisdom or philosophy could ever achieve. He emphasizes the necessity of faith in Christ crucified for salvation, the powerful attraction of the cross for repentance and obedience, and the assurance of reconciliation with God through the sacrifice of Jesus. Davies urges believers to reflect on the impact of the preaching of Christ crucified on their hearts and to embrace the hope and joy of salvation through the crucified Savior.

Transcript

The Preaching of Christ Crucified, the Means of Salvation

by Samuel Davies, April 25, 1759

"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God!" 1 Corinthians 1:22-24

If we would consider Christianity only as an improvement of natural religion, containing a complete system of morality, and prescribing a pure plan of worship--it would be a matter of the utmost importance, and worthy of universal acceptance. In the one view, it is necessary to inform the world in matters of sin and duty, and reform their wicked practices; and in the other, to put an end to that foolish and barbarous superstition which had over-run the earth, under the notion of religious worship. And these ends the Christian religion fully answers. Never was there such a finished system of morality, or such a spiritual and divine model of worship invented or revealed, as by the despised Galilean, and the twelve fishermen who received their instructions from him.

But this is not the principal excellency of the gospel; and did it carry its discoveries no farther, alas! it would be far from revealing a suitable religion for lost sinners. A religion for sinners must reveal a method of salvation for the lost, of pardon for the guilty, and of sanctifying grace for the weak and wicked. And, blessed be God! the gospel answers this end; and it is its peculiar excellency, that it does so. It is its peculiar excellency that it publishes a crucified Christ as an all-sufficient Savior to a guilty, perishing world. It is its glorious peculiarity that it reveals a method of salvation, in every way honorable to God and his government, and in every way suitable to our necessities. And that is--by the substitutionary sufferings and death of Christ, the Founder of this religion.

This is the ground, the substance, and marrow of the gospel; and it is this, above all other things, that its ministers ought to preach and inculcate. It should have the same place in their 'sermons' which it has in that gospel which it is, their business to preach; that is, it should be the foundation, the substance, the center, the drift of all. This was the practice of the most successful preacher of the gospel who ever bore that commission: I mean the apostle Paul. And in this he was not singular; his fellow apostles heartily concurred with him, "WE preach Christ crucified!"

The sufferings of Christ, which had a dreadful consummation in his crucifixion; their necessity, design, and consequences, and the way of salvation thereby opened for a guilty world--these are the principal materials of our preaching! To instruct mankind in these, is the great object of our ministry, and the unwearied labor of our lives. We might easily choose subjects more pleasing and popular; more fit to display our learning and abilities, and set us off as a witty preacher, or a fine orator; but our commission, as ministers of a crucified Jesus, binds us to the subject; and the necessity of the world peculiarly requires it!

Further, this was not the apostle's occasional practice, or a hasty wavering purpose; but he was determined upon it. "I determined," says he, "to know nothing while I was with you--except Jesus Christ and him crucified!" Corinthians 2:2. This theme, as it were, engrossed all his thoughts; he dwelt so much upon it, as if he had known nothing else--and as if nothing else had been worth knowing! Indeed, he openly avows such a neglect and contempt of all other knowledge, in comparison to this: "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord!" Phil. 3:8.

The crucifixion of Christ, which was the most ignominious circumstance in the whole course of his abasement, was an object in which he gloried; and he is struck with horror at the thought of glorying in anything else! "God forbid," says he, "that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Galatians 6:14. In short, he looked upon the cross as the perfection of his character as a Christian and an apostle. He was a constant student, and a zealous, indefatigable preacher of the Cross of Christ! Christ Jesus, and that under the most ignominious circumstances possible, namely, as crucified, was the principal object of his study, and the substance of his preaching.

But though a crucified Jesus was of so much importance in a religion for sinners; though this doctrine was the substance of the gospel, and the principal object of the apostle's ministry; yet, as it was not the invention of human reason! Neither was it agreeable to the proud reasonings, or corrupt taste of the world. The preaching of the cross is, to those who perish, foolishness. However, there were some who had the same sentiment of it with Paul; even as many as were in the way of salvation. Unto us who are saved--it is the power of God, verse 18. To all who are saved--that weak and contemptible thing, the cross, was the brightest display of divine power to be found in the universe!

Mankind had had time enough to try what expedients their reason could find out, for the reformation and salvation of a degenerate and perishing world. The sages and philosophers of the heathen world had had a clear stage for many hundreds of years. But, alas! did any of them, amid all their boasted learning, succeed in the experiment? Or could they so much as find out a method in which sinners might be reconciled to their God? No! In this most significant point, they were either stupidly thoughtless, or all their searches issued in perplexity, or in the most absurd and impious contrivances.

"Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" Let them appear and produce their schemes upon this head. But has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? verse 20. Yes, indeed! He has, by proposing a method most perfectly adapted to this end, which they not only never would have once thought of--but which, when revealed, their wisdom cannot relish. Their wisdom appears but folly, for in that some four thousand years which they had--they could not, in all that time, find out any successful expedient to amend and save it!

And now, if anything can be done at all, it is time for God to do it; and how strange, how unexpected, how mysterious was his expedient! and yet how glorious and effectual! "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" verse 21. This was the contrivance for effecting what all the wisdom and learning of the world could never effect--the plain unadorned preaching of Christ crucified; which, both for the matter and manner of it, was counted foolishness by the perishing world. But how did the world bear this mortification of their intellectual pride? And what reception did this bounteous divine scheme meet with when revealed?

Alas! I am sorry to tell you: Though the prejudices of their background and education were different--they were unitedly set against the gospel. The JEWS had been educated in a religion established by a series of miracles; and therefore they were extravagant in their demands of this sort of evidence. Notwithstanding all the miracles Christ was working daily before their eyes, they were perpetually asking him, "What miracle will you show us?" Those who are resolved not to be convinced, will be always complaining of the lack of proof, and demanding more, to vindicate their infidelity.

As for the GREEKS, their prejudices were of another kind; it was even a proverb among them, that "miracles were for fools;" and therefore they did not desire that sort of evidence. But they seek after human wisdom. They had been accustomed to fine orations, strong reasoning, and a parade of learning; and these were the evidences they desired to recommend a religion to them. And finding the doctrine of Christ crucified had none of these embellishments, they despised and rejected it as foolishness and nonsense!

The method of salvation by the crucifixion of a supposed malefactor, was so extremely opposite to the reasoning, pride, and prejudices of Jews and Gentiles--that they could not bear it!

The JEWS expected the Messiah would appear as a victorious temporal prince, who instead of falling a prey to his enemies, would subdue them all with an irresistible power, and advance the family of David to universal empire! And of all other deaths, that of crucifixion was the most odious and abominable to them, because, according to the custom of the Romans, it was the punishment only of slaves! And by their own law it was pronounced accursed; for it is written, "cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree!" Galatians 3:13. Deuteronomy 21:23. Hence, by way of contempt, the Jews called the blessed Jesus, 'the hanged man'.

Nay, this was a shock to the faith of the apostles themselves, until their Jewish prejudices were removed by better information. Finding that, instead of setting up a glorious kingdom, their Master was apprehended by his enemies, and hung upon a cross--they had nothing to say, but, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel," But alas! now we see our mistake. Luke 24:21. No wonder the cross of Christ should be a stumbling-block to such as had imbibed such notions of the Messiah. When, instead of the power of signs and miracles which they were extravagantly demanding, they saw him crucified in weakness, they could not admit the thought that this was that illustrious character of an universal king! They were so dazzled with worldly glory, and so insensible of their spiritual condition and needs--that they had no notions of a spiritual Savior, and a kingdom of grace; nor could they see how such prophecies were accomplished in one who only professed to deliver from the slavery of sin and Satan, and the wrath to come. Hence they stumbled at the cross, as an obstacle which they could not get over!

When Christ called Lazarus from the dead, he had crowds of followers, who attended his triumphant procession into Jerusalem as a mighty conqueror; and when he had fed so many thousands with a few loaves, they were about forcibly to make him king; for they knew that one who could raise his soldiers to life after they had been killed, and support an army with so little provisions, could easily conquer the world, and rescue them from the power of the Romans! But when they saw him seized by his enemies, without making resistance, or working a miracle for his own defense--they immediately abandoned him; and the hosannas of the multitude were turned into another kind of cry, "Crucify him!" And when they saw him hanging helpless and dying upon the cross, it was demonstrated to them that he was an impostor!

It was this that rendered the preaching of Christ by his apostles so unpopular among the Jews: it seemed to them like a eulogy upon an notorious malefactor; and they thought it an insult to their nation to have such a one proposed to them as their Messiah. Thus Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block.

As to the GREEKS, who were a learned philosophic people, it seemed to them the wildest folly to worship one as a God--who had been crucified as a malefactor; and to trust in one for salvation, who could not save himself. Their Jupiter had his thunder, and according to their tradition, had crushed the formidable rebellion of the giants against heaven. Their Bacchus had avenged himself upon the despisers of his worship; and the whole rabble of their deities had done some fabled god-like exploit. And would they abandon such gods, and receive in their stead a despised Nazarene, who had been executed as the vilest criminal by his own nation? Would they give up all their boasted wisdom and learning--and become the humble disciples of the cross, and receive for their teachers a company of illiterate fishermen, and a tent-maker from the despised nation of the Jews, whom they held in the utmost contempt because of their ignorance, bigotry, and superstition? No, the pride of their minds could not bear such a mortification.

If their curiosity led them to be Paul's hearers, they expected to be entertained with a flourish of words, and fine philosophic reasoning; and when they found themselves disappointed, they pronounced him a babbler, (Acts 17:18,) and his preaching foolishness!

Corinth, to which this epistle was sent by Paul, was a noted city among the Greeks, and therefore, what he says upon this head was peculiarly pertinent and well applied. The prejudices of the Jews and Greeks in this respect outlived the apostolic age, as we learn from the writings of the primitive fathers of the Christian church, who lived among them, and were conversant with them.

Here you see that the cross was a stumbling-block, which the Jews could not get over in a hundred years; nay, they have not got over it to this day. Lactantius, about three hundred years after Christ's birth, observes, that the sufferings of Christ were accustomed to be cast upon Christians as a reproach; it was thought a strange and scandalous thing that they should worship a man--a man who had been crucified, and put to the most infamous and tormenting death!

A Gentile said, "He who represents a man punished for his crime with the severest punishment; and the savage wood of the cross, as the object of their worship, and a ceremony of their religion--ascribes a very proper altar to such abandoned and wicked creatures, that they may worship that which they deserve to hang upon." And referring to the many barbarous persecutions they then groaned under, he jeers them! "See here," says he, "are threatenings for you, punishments, tortures, and crosses, not to be adored--but endured!"

Thus you see, the doctrine of the cross was, of all other things, the most unpopular among both Jews and Gentiles, and the most disagreeable to their taste. A man could not expect to shine as a man of sense and learning, by making this the subject of his discourses. But will Paul give it up, and display his talents upon some more acceptable theme? This, as a fine scholar, he was very capable of; but he abhors the thought! "Let the Jews and Greeks desire what they please! We," says he, "will not humor them, nor gratify their taste; however they take it! We will preach Christ crucified; though to the Jews he should prove a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, utter foolishness."

And there are some who relish this humble doctrine. To those who believe, both Jews and Greeks, whether learned or unlearned, whether educated in the Jewish or Pagan religion, however different their prejudices, or their natural tastes--to all who believe, notwithstanding these differences, Christ, that is, Christ crucified, is the power of God, and the wisdom of God!

The wisdom and power of God are not the only perfections that shine in this method of salvation by the cross; but the apostle particularly mentions these, as directly answering to the respective demands of Jews and Greeks. If the Jew desire the sign of power in working miracles--the believer sees in Christ crucified a power superior to all the powers of miracles. If the Greeks seek after wisdom--here, in a crucified Christ, the wisdom of God shines in the highest perfection. Whatever miracle or wisdom the Jew or Greek desires and seeks after--the believer finds more than an equivalent in the cross. This is the greatest miracle of power, the greatest mystery of wisdom in all the world.

The prejudices of the Jews and Gentiles were not only confined to the early ages of Christianity; the same depraved taste, the same contempt of the humble doctrines of the cross may be found among us, though professed Christians! Some resemble the Jews, who were perpetually demanding signs; they seek all the reveries of enthusiasm, instead of the preaching of Christ crucified. Others, like the Greeks, through an affectation of flamboyant harangues, moral discourses, and a parade of learning and philosophy, nauseate this sort of preaching Christ crucified, and count it foolishness.

It is therefore high time for the ministers of the gospel to stand up as advocates for the cross, and with a pious obstinacy to adhere to this subject, whatever contempt and ridicule it may expose them to. For my part, I know not what I have to do, as a minister of the gospel--but to preach Christ crucified. I would make him the substance, the center, the end of all my ministrations. And if we, or an angel from heaven, preach unto you any other gospel--you know his doom--let him be accursed! Galatians 1:9.

We are to consider the apostles as sent out into the world to reform and save the corrupt and perishing men, and the preaching of Christ crucified as the only means they used for this important end. This is the formal view the apostle had of preaching Christ in this place, namely, as a means found out by the wisdom of God to save those who believe, after that all the wisdom of the world had tried in vain to find out a method for this end. This is evident from verse 21, "Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never find him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save all who believe." That is, by the preaching a crucified Savior, which the world counts foolishness. This is the excellency of this preaching, this is the reason why the apostle could not be prevailed upon by any motive to desert it, that it is the only means of salvation; and it is in this view I now intend to consider it. And if your everlasting salvation is of any importance to you, certainly this subject demands your most serious attention.

I have been the longer explaining the context, because it is so closely connected with the subject I have in view, and reflects light upon it. And I shall only add, that preaching Christ crucified is the same thing, as preaching salvation through the sufferings of Christ. His sufferings were of long continuance, even from his conception to his resurrection; and they were of various kinds, poverty, weariness and labor, hunger and thirst, contempt and reproach, buffeting, scourging, and a thorny crown.

But there are two words, which by a synecdoche are often used in Scripture to signify all his sufferings of every kind, from first to last; namely, his blood and his cross. And the reason is, the shedding of his blood, and the death of the cross, were the worst kind and highest degree of his sufferings. In his crucifixion all his other sufferings were united and centered; this was a complete summary and consummation of them all; and therefore, they are frequently included under this. In this latitude I shall use the word in this discourse; which I hope you will take notice of, that no part of the meaning may escape you.

Our inquiry shall be, What are the reasons that the preaching of Christ crucified is, above all others, the best, and the only effectual means for the salvation of sinners? These reasons may be reduced under two general heads, namely:

That through the crucifixion of Christ, and through that only--a way is really opened for the salvation of sinners;

and that the preaching of Christ crucified makes such a discovery of things, as has the most direct tendency to bring sinners to repentance, and produce in them that temper which is necessary to salvation.

Or in other words, in this way: salvation is provided, and sinners are made fit to enjoy it; both which are absolutely necessary.

Our world is deeply and universally sunk in sin! Men have cast contempt upon the divine government, broken the divine law, and so incurred its penalty; they have forfeited the favor of God, and rendered themselves liable to his displeasure. Had mankind continued innocent, there would have been no difficulty in their case. It would be very plain what would be fit for the divine government to do with dutiful subjects. But, alas! rebellion against God has made its entrance into our world, and all its inhabitants are up in arms against Him! This has thrown all into confusion, and rendered it a perplexing case--as what to do with them. In one view, indeed, the case is plain, namely, that proper punishments should be executed upon them. This would appear evidently just to the whole universe, and no objection could be made against it, though the criminals themselves, who are parties, and therefore not fit judges, might murmur against it as unmerciful and severe.

But the difficulty is: how such rebels may not only be delivered from the punishments they deserve--but made happy forever. If they cannot be saved in a way that displays the perfections of God, and does honor to his government; a way in which sin will meet with no encouragement, but, on the other hand, an effectual warning will be given against it; a way in which depraved creatures may be sanctified and made fit for the pure bliss of heaven; I say, if they cannot be saved in such a way as this--they cannot be saved at all; their salvation is quite impossible! For each of these particulars is of such importance, that it cannot be dispensed with.

God is the best and most glorious being in himself; and it is fit that he should do justice to his own perfections, and exhibit them in the most God-like and glorious manner to his creatures. To do otherwise, would be to wrong himself, to obscure the brightest glory, and dishonor the highest excellency. This therefore cannot be done; men and angels must be happy--but only in a way consistent with his glory; otherwise they must perish; for the display of his glory is a greater good, and a matter of more importance, than the happiness of the whole creation.

God is also the moral Governor of the world. And his government over our world is a government over a country of rebels; and that is a tender point, and requires a judicious management. An error in government, in such a case, may have the most fatal consequences, both as to the ruler and his subjects in all parts of his dominions. A private person may, if he pleases, give up his rights, may pardon offenders, and conceal his justice, and other qualities for government; but a public ruler is not at liberty in this case. He must maintain his character, make known his capacity for government, and support the dignity of the law. Otherwise, all might rush into confusion and lawless violence.

If the ruler of a small kingdom on our little globe should fail to do justice; if he should pardon criminals, and admit them into favor, and into posts of honor and profit, without giving proper expressions of his displeasure against their conduct, and a striking warning against all disobedience, how fatal would be the consequences! How soon would such a ruler fall into contempt, and his government become unhinged! How soon would his kingdom become a scene of confusion and violence! Criminals might like such an administration; but I appeal to yourselves: would you choose to live under it?

Now, how much more terrible and extensively mischievous would be the consequences, if the universal Ruler of men and angels, and of more worlds than we have heard the fame of--should exercise such a government over our rebellious world? It would be reproachful to himself; and it would be most injurious to his subjects! In short, it might throw heaven and earth, and unknown regions of the universe, into confusion. He must, therefore, display his own virtues of justice and righteousness; he must maintain the honor of his government, he must show his displeasure against disobedience, and deter his subjects from it!

I say, he must do these things in saving the sinners of Adam's race--or he cannot save them at all. Should he save them upon other terms, it would reflect dishonor upon himself and administration; and it would be injurious to the good of the whole, which is always the end of a wise ruler; for the favor thus unjustly shown to a part of the creation in our world, might occasion a more extensive mischief in other more important worlds; and so it would be promoting a private interest to the detriment of the public, which is always the character of a weak or wicked ruler!

Again, sinners cannot be saved--until their dispositions are changed, so that they can relish and delight in the fruition and employments of the heavenly state. Provision, therefore, must be made for this; otherwise,

their salvation is impossible. Now, the way of salvation, through Christ crucified, most completely answers these ends in the most illustrious manner.

1. The salvation of sinners by the substitutionary death of Christ, gives the brightest display of the perfections of God, and particularly of those that belong to him, as the Supreme Ruler of the rational world; and maintains the honor of his government. Justice and mercy, duly tempered, and exercised with wisdom--is a summary of those virtues which belong to a good ruler. Now these are most illustriously displayed in a happy union in Christ crucified. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other!" Psalm 85:10

Justice shines brighter in the cross--than if every sin had been punished upon offenders, without any mercy!

Mercy shines brighter in the cross--than if every sin had been pardoned, and every sinner made happy, without any execution of justice.

Mercy appears in turning the divine heart with such a strong propensity upon the salvation of sinners!

Justice appears in that when the heart of God was so much set upon it--yet He would not save them without a complete satisfaction to His justice.

Mercy appears in providing such a Savior!

Justice appears in inflicting the punishment due to sin upon Him, without abatement, though He loved Him more than the whole universe of creatures!

Mercy appears in transferring the guilt from the sinner upon the Surety, and accepting a vicarious satisfaction!

Justice appears in exacting the satisfaction, and not passing by sin, when it was imputed to the darling Son of God.

Mercy appears in pardoning and saving guilty sinners!

Justice appears in punishing their sin!

Mercy appears in justifying them, though destitute of all personal merit and righteousness!

Justice appears in justifying them, only and entirely on account of the merit and righteousness of Christ!

Thus the righteousness or justice of God is declared not only in the punishment--but in the forgiveness of sins, Romans 3:26; and we are justified freely through His grace, and in the meantime by the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, (verse 24.)

Mercy appears in providing a Savior of such infinite dignity!

Justice appears in refusing satisfaction from an inferior person!

Mercy appears in forgiving sin!

Justice appears in not forgiving so much as one sin without a sufficient atonement!

Mercy, rich, free mercy--towards the sinner!

Justice, strict, inexorable justice--towards the Surety!

In short--mercy and justice, as it were, walk hand in hand through every step of this amazing scheme of salvation by the substitutionary atonement of Christ! They are not only glorious each of them by itself--but they mingle their beams, and reflect a glory upon each other!

By this scheme of salvation by the Cross of Christ, also--the honor of the divine government is secured and advanced. The mercy and compassion of God towards his rebellious subjects, are most illustriously displayed. And in the meantime, he takes care to secure the sacred rights of his government.

Though innumerable multitudes of rebels are pardoned--yet not one of them is pardoned until their rebellion is punished according to its demerit in the person of the Surety!

The precept of the divine law, which they had broken--was perfectly obeyed.

The penalty which they had incurred--was fully endured and paid, indeed not by themselves--but by their divine substitute.

Hence the divine law is magnified, and made honorable, and the rights of government are preserved sacred and inviolable--and yet the sinful rebels are set free, and advanced to the highest honors and blessedness!

2. In this way of salvation of sinners by the substitutionary death of Christ--God's hatred to sin is manifested in the most striking light! The evil of sin is exposed in the most dreadful colors! Now it appears, that such is the divine hatred against all sin, that God can by no means forgive sin, without punishment; and that all the infinite benevolence of His nature towards His creatures cannot prevail upon Him to pardon the least sin--without an adequate satisfaction.

Nay, now it appears that when so malignant and abominable a thing is but imputed to his dear Son, his co-equal, his darling, his favorite--that even he could not escape unpunished--but was made a monument of vindictive justice, to all worlds!

What can more strongly expose the evil of sin--than the cross of Christ? Sin is such an intolerably malignant and abominable thing, that even a God of infinite mercy and grace--cannot let the least instance of it pass unpunished!

It was not a small thing that could arm his justice against the Son of his love. But when he was made sin for us, and was perfectly innocent in himself, God spared not his own Son--but delivered him up unto death, the shameful, tormenting, and accursed death of the cross. Go, you fools, that make a mock at sin! Go and learn its malignity and demerit--at the cross of Jesus!

WHO is it that hangs there writhing in the agonies of death--His hands and feet pierced with nails, His side with a spear, His face bruised with blows, and drenched with tears and blood, His heart melting like wax, His whole frame racked and disjointed; forsaken by His friends, and even by His Father; tempted by devils, and insulted by men? Who is this amazing spectacle of woe and torture? It is Jesus, the eternal Word of God; His Elect, in whom his soul delights; His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased!

And WHAT has He done? He did no wickedness; He knew no sin--but was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. And WHY then, all these dreadful sufferings from heaven, earth, and hell? Why, He only stood in the law-place of sinners; He only received their sin by imputation. And you see what it has brought upon Him! You see how low it has reduced Him! What a horrid evil must that be, which has such tremendous consequences, even upon the Darling of heaven!

Oh! what still more dreadful havoc would SIN have made, if it had been punished upon the sinner himself in his own person! Surely all the various miseries which have been inflicted upon our guilty world in all ages, and even all the punishments of hell, do not so loudly proclaim the terrible desert and malignity of sin--as the cross of Christ!

And hence it follows, that in this way of salvation, the most effectual warning is given to the whole universe, to deter them from disobedience. Rebels are pardoned and made happy, without making a bad precedent, or giving any encouragement to others to repeat the transgression. And this was the tender and critical point. If rebels can be pardoned without reflecting dishonor upon the divine government, and doing injury to the society, it is well; but HOW this shall be done is the difficulty. But by the astonishing expedient of a crucified Savior, all the difficulty is removed. Sinners can no more presume upon sin, with a pretense that the Supreme Ruler has no great indignation against it, or that there is no great evil in it; for, as I observed: the infinite malignity of sin, and God's hatred to it, appear nowhere in so striking and dreadful a light--as in the cross of Christ! Let a reasonable creature take but one serious view of that cross, and surely he must ever after tremble at the thought of the least sin!

Again, though sinners are pardoned in this way--yet no encouragement is given to the various territories of the divine dominions--to flatter themselves that they also will be forgiven in case they should imitate the race of man in their rebellion.

There is but one instance that we know of in the whole universe of the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of rebels into favor; and we are so happy as to find that only instance in our guilty world! But what a strange revolution has been brought about! what amazing miracles have been wrought in order to prepare the way for it! The eternal Son of God must become a man, and die the death of a criminal and slave upon the cross! The very first effort of pardoning grace went thus far; and is it possible it should go any farther; or is there reason to hope that such a miracle should often be repeated? --that the Son of God should hang upon a cross as often as any race of creatures may fall into sin? Such hopes receive a damp from the case of the apostate angels, for whom he refused to die and assume the office of a Savior.

Or is there any other being who can perform that task for some other kingdom of rebels which Christ has discharged for guilty men? No! He alone is equal to it; for no other has sufficient dignity, power, or love. This, therefore, must strike a terror into all worlds at the thought of sin, and leave them no allowance to presume that they shall escape punishment, when they observe that the redeemed from among guilty men could not be saved, but at so prodigious an expense, and that the fallen angels are allowed to perish without any salvation provided for them at all!

3. In this way, provision is made for the sanctification of sinners, that they may be fit for the fruitions and employments of the heavenly state. By nature, their taste is so vitiated, that they have no relish for that pure bliss, and therefore can no more be happy in heaven--than a sick man can relish the entertainments of a feast. And they are so far gone with the deadly disease of sin, that they are not able to recover themselves! Nay, they are not so much as disposed to use the means of grace for that end. They are

estranged from God, and engaged in rebellion against him--and they love to continue so! They will not submit, nor return to their duty and allegiance!

Hence, there is need of a superior power to subdue their stubborn hearts, and sweetly constrain them to subjection; to inspire them with the love of God, and an implacable detestation of all sin. And for this purpose, the Holy Spirit is sent into the world; for this purpose he is at work, from age to age, upon the hearts of men. And though he is most ungratefully resisted, grieved, and despitefully treated, and he gives up many to the lusts of their own hearts--yet numerous and glorious are the conquests he has gained over rebellious sinners! Many a stubborn will--he has sweetly subdued! Many a heart of stone--he has softened, and dissolved into ingenuous repentance, like snow before the sun! Many a depraved soul--he has purified, and at length brought to the heavenly state in all the beauties of perfect holiness.

And hence it is, that there is any such thing as true religion to be found upon earth, and that any guilty men are recovered to obedience and happiness. But for this inestimable blessing of the Holy Spirit--we are indebted to a crucified Christ. It is the dear purchase of his blood; and had it not been so purchased, it would never have been communicated to our guilty world; and consequently never would one rebel have submitted, never would one heart have felt the love of God, among all the hell-bound sinners!

Thus, my brethren, you see a way is really opened for the salvation of sinners, through the crucifixion of Christ. And oh! what an amazing, unexpected, mysterious way! How far beyond the reach of human wisdom! And how brilliant a display of the divine! This display the perfections of God by occasion of sin more illustriously--than if sin had never entered into the world, and thus bring the greatest good--out of the greatest evil! God pardons and saves the sinner--and yet condemns and punishes his sin! God gives the brightest display of His justice--in the freest exercise of His mercy! God gives the richest discovery of His mercy--in the most rigorous execution of His justice! God dismisses rebels from punishment--and advances them to the highest honors; and yet He secures and even advances the honor of His government against which they had rebelled! God gives the most effectual warning against sin--even in rewarding the sinner! God lets sin pass unpunished--without making a bad precedent, or giving any encouragement to it! God magnifies His law--in justifying those who had broken it! God reveals the utmost hatred against sin--in showing the highest love to the sinner!

What an astonishing God-like scheme is this! What a stupendous display of the infinite wisdom of God! Could the philosophers of the heathen world, ever have found out an expedient to answer this end, and reconcile these seeming contradictions? No! this would have baffled both men and angels! For in what a strange, unthought-of way is it brought about! that the Son of God--should become the Son of man; the Head of the universe--should appear in the form of a servant; the Author of life--should die upon a cross; the Lawgiver become the subject of his own law, and suffer its penalty, though perfectly innocent! Who would ever have thought of such astounding events as these? This is to accomplish astonishing things in an astonishing way. You may as well set a human understanding to draw the plan of a world--as to form such a scheme as this. Oh! it is all divine; it is the wonder of angels; and the greatest miracle in the universe!

Thus, you see, there are very good reasons, reducible to this head, why the Cross of Christ should be the grand weapon to destroy the kingdom of darkness, and rescue sinners and bring them into a state of liberty and glory.

And there are reasons, equally important, that fall under the other head, namely: That the preaching of Christ crucified makes such a discovery of things, as has the most direct tendency to bring sinners to repentance, and produce in them that temper which is necessary to their salvation. If a representation of the most moving, the most alluring, and most alarming matters, can affect the mind of man--then certainly the preaching of the cross cannot be without effect; for,

1. The preaching of a crucified Savior gives the strongest assurance to guilty men, that their offended God is reconcilable to them, and willing to receive them into favor again, upon their penitent return to him. The provision he has made for this end, and particularly his appointing his Son to be their Savior, and delivering him up to the death of the cross for them--leaves no room for doubt upon this head. It is full demonstration that he is not only willing--but that his heart is earnestly set upon reconciliation; otherwise he would not have been at such infinite pains and expense to remove obstructions, and clear the way for it.

Now this is an assurance that the light of nature could never give. It leaves us dreadfully in the dark. And indeed, nothing but an express declaration from God himself, can inform us what he intends to do with criminals that lie entirely at his mercy, and that he may do whatever he pleases with. The heathen world were either stupidly thoughtless about this point, or full of anxiety; and their philosophers, amid all their boasted knowledge, could only offer plausible conjectures.

And yet this assurance is necessary to keep up religion in the world, and encourage rebellious sinners to return to obedience; for with what heart can they serve that God, if they fear that he will not accept of service at their hands; or return to him, when they have no encouragement that he will receive them? The hope of acceptance with God, is the spring of repentance, and of all attempts for reformation. And when once the sinner concludes that there is no hope, he lies down inactive and sullen in despair, or confirms himself in hardened impenitence, and gives the full rein to his lusts.

This the Psalmist observed long ago: "There is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared." Psalm 130:4. The fear of God is often used in Scripture for the whole of religion; and so it seems taken here. As much as to say, "There is forgiveness with you; and you have assured us of it--that religion might be preserved in the world, that mankind may not abandon your service as wholly in vain: or give up themselves to sin, as despairing of acceptance upon their repentance."

Oh! what an acceptable assurance must this be to a guilty, trembling sinner! And how suitable a remedy to such sinners is the preaching of the cross of Christ, which alone gives them this welcome assurance!

2. The preaching of a crucified Savior gives the most moving display of the love of God; and love is a strong attractive to repentance and obedience. There cannot be so strong an expression of love--as the sufferings of Christ. For God to give us life, and breath, and all things--what is this, in comparison to the gift of his Son, and those immortal blessings which he has purchased with his blood? To create such a world as this for our residence, to furnish it with such a rich variety of blessings for our accommodation, and to exercise a tender providence over us every moment of our lives, this is amazing love and goodness. But what is this--in comparison of his dying love! To speak an all-creating word--and to hang, and agonize, and expire upon the cross! to give us the blessings of the earth--and to give the blood of his heart; these are very different things; they will not hold in comparison.

My brethren, let me make an experiment upon you with the cross of Christ, and try with that weapon to slay your sins, and break your hearts. Can you view such agonies--and question the love that endured

them? Or can you place yourselves under the warm beams of that love--and yet feel no love kindled in your hearts in return? What! not the love of a worm--for the dying love of a God! The apostle John reasons very naturally, when he says, "We love him--because he first loved us," 1 John 4:19. Love for love, is but a reasonable return; especially the love of a redeemed sinner--for the love of a crucified Savior. Paul felt the energy of this love irresistible: "The love of Christ constrains us!" 2 Corinthians 5:14; or according to the emphasis of the original word--it carries us away like a resistless torrent! And it appeared to him so shocking, that he could not mention it without weeping, that any should be enemies to the cross of Christ: Phil. 3:18.

Hear what expectations he had from the agony of his cross, who himself hung upon it. "I," says he, "if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." John 12:32. This the evangelist teaches us to understand of the manner of his death, namely, his being raised up from the earth, and suspended on the cross. There, sinners, he hung to attract your love: and can you resist the force of this attraction, this almighty magnet?

Jesus, if I may so speak, expects that this will carry all before it: that every sinner who sees him hanging there will immediately melt into repentance, and be drawn to him by the cords of love. And oh! can you find in your hearts to resist! Where, then, is the gratitude? Is that gracious principle quite dead within you? I must honestly tell you, if the love of a crucified Savior does not attract your love--then nothing else will! You will continue to be his enemies--and perish as such. This is the most powerful inducement that can be proposed to you! All the reasonings of the ablest philosophers, all the persuasions of the ministers of the gospel, all the goodness of God in creation and providence, will never prevail upon you, if your hearts are armored against the attraction of the cross. But, blessed be his name who died upon it, many an obstinate and reluctant heart has this cross allured and subdued! And oh! that we may all feel its sweet constraints!

3. The preaching of Christ crucified gives such a representation of the evil of sin, and the dreadful punishment due to it, as naturally tends to turn sinners from it, and bring them to repentance. In the Cross of Christ--the sinner may see what malignity there is in sin--when it brought such heavy vengeance on the head of the Surety. There the sinner may see how God hates it--when he punished it so severely in his beloved Son. If the almighty Redeemer sunk under the load--then how shall the feeble sinner bear up under it? If God spared not his own Son, who was but a surety--then how can the sinner escape, who was the original debtor!

Oh sinners! never call it cruel that God should punish you for your sins; so he dealt with Jesus, his favorite; and how can you hope for more favor? Read the nature of sin, as written in characters of blood on the cross of Christ, and surely you can make light of it no more. You must tremble at the very thought of it; and immediately reform and repent of it. All the harangues of moralists upon the intrinsic deformity, the unreasonableness, the incongruity of vice, never can represent it in such a shocking light as you view it in the sufferings of Christ! And can you look upon your sins piercing him, stretching him upon the cross, and slaughtering him--and yet not mourn over them? Oh! can you indulge the murderous things that shed his blood? Then you practically pronounce him an impostor, and join the cry of the Jewish rabble, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

4. The preaching of Christ crucified presents us with such a perfect pattern of obedience, as has at once the force of an example, and an inducement to holiness. We need no longer view the law in theory: we see it reduced into a uniform practice, and presented to the life, in the whole of our Lord's conduct towards God and man. We see one in our nature, upon our guilty globe, in our circumstances, behaving exactly

agreeable to the divine law--and leaving us an example that we might follow his steps. And shall we not delight to imitate our best friend, and the most perfect pattern that ever was exhibited? Oh! how sweet to walk as he walked in the world, and to trace the steps of his lovely feet!

Until the doctrine of the cross was introduced, the world was sadly at a loss about a rule of duty. All the admired writings of pagan antiquity cannot furnish out one complete system even of morality; but here we have a perfect law, and a perfect example, which has the force of a law. Therefore, let us be followers of this incarnate God as dear children.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

1. Hence we may learn our great happiness in enjoying the preaching of Christ crucified. It is but a very small part of the world which has heard this joyful sound; and the time has been, when none of the sons of men enjoyed it in that full evidence which we are favored with. Now, since it pleases God by this foolishness of preaching, to save those who believe, since this is the most effectual means for our recovery from sin and ruin! How great, how distinguishing, how peculiar is our privilege! It befits us, my brethren, to know our happiness, that we may be thankful. How few among the sons of men enjoy this privilege! How does nearly the whole world lie in wickedness! Alas! they are fatally unconcerned, or fruitlessly anxious about a way of reconciliation with God. Their priests and philosophers can afford them no relief in this case; but either mislead them or increase their perplexity. But we have the strongest assurance that God is reconcilable to us; and the clearest discovery of the way. We have the most powerful inducements to repentance, and the most effectual restraints from sin. And what gratitude does this call for from us, to our divine Benefactor! and how solicitous should we be to make a proper improvement of our peculiar advantages!

2. Hence we may learn the shocking guilt and danger of our modern infidels, the Deists, who, like the Greeks, count the preaching of Christ crucified to be foolishness. This is to reject the best, the last, the only remedy! Now, let them consult their feeble reason; let them go to the oracles of wisdom in the heathen world, and ask of them how guilty offenders may be restored into favor with God, in consistency with the honor of the divine perfections and government! Alas, they can find no satisfactory answer! Now also, they have lost the strongest motive to love and obedience, when they have turned away their eyes from the cross. They have lost the most full and amiable view of the divine nature and perfections, that ever was exhibited to the world. Should they shut their eyes against the light of the sun, and abhor all the beauties of nature, it would not be such an astonishing instance of foolishness! Paul represents it as the most amazing folly, nay, a kind of witchcraft and incantation, that any should desert the truth, who had ever had the least view of Christ crucified. "Oh You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified!" Galatians 3:1.

What wickedness, what madness, what an unnatural conspiracy against their own lives must it be for men to reject the only expedient found out by infinite wisdom and goodness for their salvation! What base ingratitude thus to requite the dying love of Jesus! Can such monsters expect salvation from his hands? No! they willfully cut themselves off from all hope, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. If the cross of Christ does not break their hearts--it is impossible to bring them to repentance; the last and most powerful remedy has proved ineffectual; the last and strongest effort of divine grace has been used with them in vain! Since they obstinately reject the sacrifice of Christ--there remains no other sacrifice for their sin, and nothing awaits them but a fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation, which shall devour them as God's adversaries!

3. Hence we should inquire what effect the preaching of Christ crucified has had upon us. Since this is the grand means which Divine Wisdom has found out for the recovery of our wicked world, when all other means had been in vain, it is of the utmost importance to us, that we should inquire, whether it is likely to answer this end upon us. It pleases God by this foolishness of preaching, to save those who believe. Observe the limitation--those who believe. They, and only they, can be saved by it. As for unbelievers, they cannot be saved in this or any other way. Let us then abandon every other concern for a while, and seriously examine ourselves in this point.

Faith comes by hearing; and have we been brought to believe--by hearing the preaching of the cross? Do we relish this humble, despised doctrine with peculiar pleasure? Is it the life and nourishment of our souls, and the ground of all our hopes? Or do we secretly wonder what there can be in it, that some should be so much affected with it? "To those who perish," says the apostle, and to them alone, "the preaching of the cross is foolishness." And is that our dreadful characteristic? Or does a crucified Christ appear to us as the wisdom of God, and the power of God, as he does to all those who believe, however different their natural tastes, and the prejudices of their education, and their outward circumstances?

Do we suspend all our hopes upon the cross of Christ? Do we glory in it above all other things, whatever contempt the world may pour upon it? Do we feel our necessity of a Mediator in all our transactions with God, and depend entirely upon the merit of his death for acceptance with God; sensible that we have no merit of our own to procure one smile from God? Have we ever had our hearts enlightened to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? Have we admired the scheme of salvation through a crucified Jesus, as illustrating the perfections of God, and securing the honor of the divine government, while it secures our salvation? And do we delight in it upon that account?

Or are we quite indifferent about the glory of God, if we may be but saved? Alas! hereby we show we are entirely under the government of selfish principles, and have no regard for God at all. Do our thoughts frequently hover and cluster about the cross with the tenderest affections? And has the view of it melted our hearts into the most sincere lamentings for sin, and given us such a hatred against it, that we can never more indulge it? My friends, put such questions as these home to your hearts, and then endeavor to come to some honest conclusion with regard to yourselves. And if the conclusion is against you, then,

4. Consider your guilt and danger! Consider your ingratitude in rejecting all the love of God, and a crucified Savior! Consider your hardness of heart, which has not been broken by the glorious cross of Christ! Consider the aversion of your souls to God, which have not been allured to him by the powerful attraction of the cross! And oh! consider your danger! The last remedy has been tried upon you in vain! Christ's grand expedient for the salvation of sinners has had no effect upon you! Had the religion of the Jews, or of the heathen world, failed to bring you to repentance, there might be still some hope that the preaching of Christ crucified might prevail. But, alas! when that fails, how discouraging is your case!

Therefore, I beg you, heed the alarm, and labor to get your hearts affected with the cross of Christ. Oh yield to the attraction of the cross! Do not attempt such an exploit of wickedness as to resist the allurements of such love. And oh! cry to God for his enlightening Spirit. Alas! it is your blindness which renders you unaffected with this moving object. Did you but know the Lord of glory, who was crucified; did you but see the glory of the plan of salvation through his sufferings, you would immediately become the captive of his cross, conquered by the power of his love! And such, believe me, such you must be, before you can be saved.

But if the result of your examination turns out in your favor, then,

5. You may entertain the joyful hope: of salvation--by the crucified Savior; of crowns of glory--through him who wore the crown of thorns; of fullness of joy--through the man of sorrows; of immortal life through one that died upon a cross! I say, you may entertain a joyful hope of all this! God will be glorified in glorifying you, the law magnified in justifying you.

In short, the honor of God and his government concur with your interest; and, therefore, if you heartily embrace this plan of salvation, you may be as sure that God will save you, as that he will take care of his own glory--for they are inseparably connected. And do not your hearts, as dead as they are, spring within you at the thought? Do you not long to see your Savior on the throne, to whose cross you are indebted for all your hopes? And oh! will you not praise his name while you live, and continue the song through all eternity? Are you not ready to anticipate the anthem of heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing! For you have redeemed us to God by your blood!" Revelation 5:9, 11.

6. Finally, let me encourage my fellow pastors, on their being made ministers of the New Testament, which reveals that glorious and delightful subject, "Christ crucified!" in full light, and diffuses it through all their studies and discourses. The Lamb who was slain is the theme that animates the songs of angels and saints above, and even our unhallowed lips are allowed to touch it without profanation. Let us, therefore, my dear brethren, delight to dwell upon it. Let us do justice to the refined morality of the gospel; let us often explain and enforce the precepts, the graces, and the virtues of Christianity; and teach men to live righteously, soberly, and godly in the world. But let us do this in an evangelical strain--as ministers of the crucified Jesus, and not as academic scholars.

Let us labor to bring men to a hearty compliance with the method of salvation through Christ; and then we shall find it comparatively an easy matter, a thing of course, to make them good moralists. Then a short hint of their duty to God and man will be more forcible than whole volumes of ethics, while their spirits are not cast in the gospel-mold. Thus may we be enabled to go on, until our great Master shall take our charge off our hands, and call us to give an account of our stewardship!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/samuel-davies/the-preaching-of-christ-crucified-the-means-of-salvation/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net