



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## The Message of the Cross

CALIFORNIA

1 CORINTHIANS 1:17-24

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**THIS MESSAGE WAS PRESENTED BY FRANK ERB IN NOVEMBER 2013 THROUGH A TRANSLATOR TO AN INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF PASTORS AND MINISTRY LEADERS FROM TEN NATIONS WHO ARE REACHING OUT TO THEIR GOVERNMENT LEADERS.**

Good afternoon. I am Frank Erb from sunny California. It is good to be here in cold Washington, D.C. with you.

I have been invited to speak on "The Message of the Cross." I think some other speakers here may feel jealous of me because this is such a wonderful topic. Now I realize, of course, that this is a topic that is well known by nearly everyone here, but it is still very good for us to be reminded about what our message is.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul described his message:

***1 Corinthians 1:17-24 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. 18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

This passage tells us four important things about our message.

### 1. OUR MESSAGE IS FOCUSED

***1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.***

Some things are good. Baptism is very good. But Paul did not focus on that which was good. He focused on what is best and most important.

We who minister to government leaders are often tempted, or even pressured by others, to bring a message that is good but not best. But let us be clear:

- Our message is not the reformation of *society*.
- Our message is not the reformation of *morality*.
- Our message is not the reformation of *politics*.

Our message is the reformation of the *heart*, and this can only come about through the good news of Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins and he was raised again and he is alive now to intercede for those who trust in him (See 1 Corinthians 15:1-11). Those who do trust in Him are forever changed from the inside out, for His glory. This is the wonderful message of the cross.

This was Paul's one and only message. *1 Corinthians 2:2 "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* And so this should be our message also. Sometimes I need to bite my tongue and not speak about morality or politics so that I will have the opportunity to speak about that which is more important.

Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher in London in the 19th century said,

"Man's fall, his need of a new birth, forgiveness through an atonement, and salvation as the result of faith, these are our battle-ax and weapons of war. We have enough to do to learn and teach these great truths, and accursed be that learning which shall divert us from our mission, or that willful ignorance which shall cripple us in its pursuit. More and more am I jealous lest any views upon prophecy, church government, politics, or even systematic theology, should withdraw one of us from glorying in the cross of Christ. Salvation is a theme for which I would fain enlist every holy tongue. I am greedy after witnesses for the glorious gospel of the blessed God."<sup>1</sup>

It was said of Spurgeon that no matter what portion of the Bible he was teaching he always moved as quickly as possible to the cross of Jesus Christ. This is a good example for us to follow.

Billy Graham also once wisely said,

### CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES (DURING SESSION)

**LEGISLATORS / STATEWIDE LEADERS: WEDNESDAYS @ 8:00 AM AND @ 12:00 NOON IN ROOM 3171  
LEADERS / STAFF / LOBBYISTS / STATE WORKERS / PUBLIC: TUESDAYS @ 12:00 NOON IN ROOM 125**

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"I care less and less how many people come forward – whether anybody comes forward or not. The important thing is whether I have made clear the gospel and the cost of following Christ."<sup>2</sup>

And so also, in our ministry, let us be very clear about our message. Whatever we are teaching about, let us be exceedingly clear about Christ and him crucified.

### 2. OUR MESSAGE SEEMS FOOLISH TO MANY

*1 Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ...*

The Jews expected a victorious Messiah, not a dying one, and so they did not care about Jesus. The Greeks and Romans reserved the cross for the lowest of criminals, and so they did not care about Jesus.

And so it continued in the early centuries after Christ. You may have seen the ancient graffiti picture that was drawn on a wall in Rome sometime in the first few centuries AD. It is a picture of a donkey being crucified on a cross, and it says, "Alexamenos worships his god." Even back in the second or third century A.D. there was a man who was being ridiculed for trusting in Jesus.



It is still this way. The world has many philosophies that it values. Where I live, in California, we have many. You probably have them where you live also. There is:

#### a. The philosophy of Entertainment

In California we have Hollywood. My brother lives in the Los Angeles area and has often sees movie or television actors. Our governor was even the movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger. And so, many people want us to entertain them. When I am teaching a Bible Study I am sometimes tempted by this. I feel a desire to say whatever people want to hear or to skip over the parts of the Bible that do not seem interesting or that might seem offensive to them. But we are not here to entertain.

#### b. The philosophy of Business

In California we have many great companies - Apple Computer, Hewlett Packard, Intel, and others. I spoke with a wealthy businessman once. He asked me, "Why do you waste your time teaching the Bible? You will never make any money doing this. You should do something else." And so we can be tempted to leave the ministry. Or, some ministry leaders think of their ministry as a business and are always concerned with how to get more money. But we are not here for money.

#### c. The philosophy of Attractiveness.

In California we have scenic beaches with models in swimsuits. People feel that what matters is being attractive. And so some people even see ministry as a way to be popular. Some people wanted this of the Apostle Paul, and complained that "*his personal presence is unimpressive and contemptible*" (2 Cor 10:10). But we are not here to bring attention to ourselves.

#### d. The philosophy of Pleasure.

I live close to San Francisco, where drugs abuse and sexual promiscuity first became popular in the United States. Many people there say that what matters is pleasure and the freedom to do whatever you want. People do not always want to hear about the need to obey a crucified Christ. But we are not here for personal pleasure.

#### e. The philosophy of Education.

We have many great universities in our state. Unfortunately they sometimes teach that only unintelligent people believe in God. Sometimes I see a government leader and I know it is an opportunity to talk about the Lord. But then I think, "That person will think I'm crazy," and so I don't say anything. Other times, I am tempted to try to sound intelligent to impress others. I think Paul was also aware of this temptation, and so he said in 1 Corinthians 2:2 "*And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom.*" No, we are not here to impress with our intellect.

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### f. The philosophy of Morality

Many, many people in churches want to see morality restored. They are concerned about sinful behavior. I am interested in this too. We must remember though that the Scribes and Pharisees were the most outwardly moral people in Jesus' day, and yet they were still inwardly disgusting to God. And so, we are not here for morality.

### g. The philosophy of Politics

Our capitol has its own philosophy. That says that what matters most is power and popularity.

Of course, who wouldn't want power and popularity? I had a little taste of it this year. There was a crowd of many hundreds of people standing outside our Capitol shouting for our governor to come out and hear their concerns. Then, I walked out of the Capitol doors right next to his office. Now, our governor is a man who is tall and thin and does not have much hair, and he wears a black suit and a white shirt. And when I walked out on the patio the crowd ... for some strange reason ... thought that I was the governor. And they all cheered with joy! I did not realize why they were celebrating. I looked around me to try to figure it out. But then I realized that they thought that I was the governor. And for just a few seconds, I felt what it must be like to have thousands of people celebrate you. And, I admit, it felt very good. But then I walked toward them, and one-by-one they all realized that I was not the governor. And their cheering unfortunately stopped.

Another time earlier this year I introduced myself to a new legislator outside the Capitol. He seemed very happy to see me. I was dressed in my suit and I handed him my business card, and so he no doubt thought I was a lobbyist. However, once he found out who I am and why I am there, he threw my card back at me, walked away, and refused to speak to me further.

Everyone wants to be popular or powerful, and our message doesn't always make us those things. As Paul said in *1 Corinthians 2:6*, "*The wisdom we speak is 'not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away.'*" We are not here for politics or power or popularity.

Yes, our message is foolishness to the world, but this is the way the Lord has planned it. *1 Corinthians 1:27* says "*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.*"

And so, Paul brought a unique message and he could not be intimidated. The educated philosophers in Athens did not intimidate him where they laughed at him. They did not intimidate him in Corinth where they called him an unimpressive fool. They did not intimidate him in Ephesus where they ran him out of town. They did not intimidate him in Galatia where they tried to kill him. They did intimidate him in Jerusalem where his family, friends, and the religious leaders thought he was crazy. All the learned philosophers of Rome did not intimidate him. Paul was eager to preach Jesus Christ.

Like him, we have the important message of salvation through Jesus Christ and the world needs to hear it.

### 3. OUR MESSAGE IS FORCEFUL

*1 Corinthians 1:18 ... but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

The world may think of our message as weak, but in fact it is supremely powerful because it is the only message that can change a person's heart.

I remember hearing about some wealthy businessmen who said they were going to change the world by giving computers with Internet access to poor children so that they could become intelligent and improve their society. And so they started a company and raised millions of dollars and gave small solar powered laptop computers to children in poor villages. "Just think how smart these children will become," they said, "and how that will improve the world!" But things did not go as they planned. Instead, these children immediately began to use the computers to look at evil content online, and the project was stopped. The technology was good, but the human heart is not.

But the message of the cross can change a heart! I will never forget as I shared the good news of Jesus with a lobbyist in the halls of the Capitol. We prayed together as she asked Christ into her life, tears pouring down her face. And she was changed. And then there was the time that I met with an influential Senator whose laws were extremely offensive to many Christians. As I shared the good news of Jesus with him in his office he said to me, "Frank, I think this is what I need." He was right.

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The world's social problems, moral problems, and political problems are all a result of a bigger spiritual problem. And so the world needs the spiritual solution found in Christ. When the gospel finds a receptive heart, the heart changes, and when the heart truly changes then everything begins to transform, including family, morality, ethics, politics, and everything else that we care about.

### 4. OUR MESSAGE IS FOR EVERYONE

*1 Corinthians 1:22-24 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

The gospel is for *both Jews and Greeks*. This means it is for all people in every nation. They may reject it, or they may believe it, but we must give them the opportunity to hear it.

It is for all countries, for men and women and children, for rich and for poor, for intelligent and unintelligent, for all religions, for everyone.

It is even for government leaders. In Acts 26 we read about the Apostle Paul as he stood on trial before the Jewish king Agrippa and the Roman governor Festus. These were sinful, evil, powerful men. It may be surprising then that Paul's message to them was not about morality or politics, but about the cross of Jesus Christ and how Jesus had transformed his life!

He then told them he wanted to go to Rome. Why Rome? Because Rome was the Capitol city. It was where the government leaders and the world influencers were. *Romans 1:15-16 "So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ..."*

And so, little Paul went to big Rome, with his "foolish" message. And the message of the cross changed everything! Everything! It spread like a holy fire. Slave and freemen, men and women, business leaders and government leaders were saved. The persecutions against Christians stopped. The Roman Empire was transformed. The simple message of the cross changed the world.

And, more recently, it changed *our* lives, didn't it. Like Paul, we were sinners, apart from God (1 Timothy 1:12-17). But he had mercy on us, and forgave us our sins, and gave us a new life.

### CONCLUSION

I heard about a man named Roberto Goizueta. He was the CEO of Coca-Cola up until 1997. Consider what he once wrote about his life's goal. He said:

"All of us in the Coca-Cola family wake up each morning knowing that every single one of the world's 5.6 billion people will get thirsty that day...and we are the ones with the best opportunity to refresh them. Our task is simple: make Coca Cola and our other products available, affordable and acceptable to them, quenching their thirst and providing them a perfect moment of relaxation. If we do this... if we make it possible for these 5.6 billion people to escape through Coca-Cola ... then we assure our future success for many years to come. Doing anything else is not an option."<sup>3</sup>

Imagine that! Giving your life for Coca Cola?! If this can be said of a sugary drink, how much more is this true of the good news of Jesus Christ? Nothing else in this world can so refresh, quench the thirst, or provide peace or transformation. We are so blessed to share this message of the cross, and doing anything else is not an option for us.

I heard a great story about some Christian missionaries who once visited Mahatma Gandhi in India. Gandhi asked them to sing him one of their hymns. "Which one?" they asked. He replied, "Sing for me the one that best expresses what you are preaching." It took them a moment to decide, and then together they sang "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."<sup>4</sup> They made the right choice.

And so let us go forward and boldly and lovingly share this wonderful message of the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*.

<sup>2</sup> Billy Graham, *The Evangelical World Prospect*, Oct. 13, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *New Life Resources* newsletter from Campus Crusade for Christ, Dec. 4, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Preaching of the Cross*, 1991.