

Introduction

I was asked to speak in a church located in the heart of the Bible Belt of the United States. The senior pastor only knew me through one of my books, so he was taking a chance by allowing me into his pulpit. I was troubled immediately when I walked into his sanctuary and saw the pulpit raised high above the people. It felt oppressive. A huge cross hung at the front of the sanctuary. When the worship proceeded, all the songs centered around the death of Jesus and the need to surrender our lives to God. When the senior minister took the offering, he stood behind the elevated pulpit and spoke from the perspective of the cross of Jesus. He exhorted the people to die to themselves and give to God.

I was concerned deeply. Whenever I visit a church centered on the death of Jesus, rather than the life and person of Jesus, I want to shout good news, declare freedom for the people, and break their chains.

After the minister took the offering, he turned the pulpit over to me. I climbed the pulpit tower and greeted the congregation, but it didn't feel right, so I descended to ground level and talked to them on a more personal level. I noticed that the senior minister was uncomfortable with me leaving his high perch. He grew increasingly upset as I spoke to the people about the life available to us through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Came Out of the Tomb...So Can You!

The next morning I learned how upset the pastor really was. He had decided to cancel the rest of my meetings. The veins in his neck bulged as he spoke of his passion for the cross of Jesus, and how he firmly believed that the cross must be the center of every church service. He complained about another church located nearby which emphasized joy, abundant life, and freedom. The leaders of that church were not leading their people to repent of their sins, and hence, he doubted whether the people in that church were truly saved.

Several times during our intense conversation the pastor defended his position, saying: “The apostle Paul declared, ‘The *cross* is the power of God for salvation!’” It was not until an hour into the discussion that I was able to tell him that the phrase he had been quoting is not in the Bible. What the apostle Paul actually said was:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation....

(Rom. 1:16)

The Gospel—not the cross—is the power of God. The emphasis is on the good news. When I pointed this out the pastor was stunned.

I have seen such a reaction in many Christians’ lives. They want to believe a certain way, so they actually memorize Bible verses, inserting words which they think should be there but really are not. Further distorting our individual understanding of

the Scripture is the fact that we all have heard passages taught from a certain perspective. Our individual perspectives may be wonderful, but they always are limited. Therefore, we must listen and consider how others understand the Scriptures to see if they are seeing things which we have not discovered.

After a long discussion, the pastor's anger subsided, and he agreed to let me speak at one more meeting, but he assigned me the topic and forbade me to pray over any of his people at the end of the service.

I am grateful to God for His manifesting presence. In the second meeting, God came and blessed the people in a deep and wonderful way. The pastor, who certainly loves God and is trying his best to please Him, recognized the presence of God and allowed me to minister at two more meetings with no restrictions.

I departed from that church in good relationship with the pastor, but I do not think he understands what is meant by Life-giving Christianity (also referred to as Resurrection-based Christianity). I hope he and thousands of other Christian leaders will consider the implications for their own lives and the lives of people to whom they minister.