

Sermon for Sunday, October 8, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"WHEN JOHNNY-ONE-NOTE TURNED CHRISTIAN"

I Corinthians 2:1-5

Text: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." I Corinthians 2:2

According to legend, Johnny-one-note really couldn't sing. He only knew one note. But he loved music and his heart was full of joy, so he sang the one note he knew with great gusto, and he sang it over and over. Whatever you might think about his ability to sing, you do have to admire the enthusiasm of Johnny-one-note. In a very real sense, St. Paul was a Johnny-one-note. He was a man who had a singleness of heart; he was a man who had one purpose that dominated his life. From his writings, we discover that at one point in his life, he was dominated with the desire to live by the Jewish law. He has a singleness of purpose to live by God's rules. Later on, he had another note to sing and this time his tune was persecution of the Christians. He himself tells us with what singleness of purpose, with what rabid devotion, he set out to capture those who worshipped Jesus. But then, when Jesus met him on Damascus Road and turned his life around, from that point on Paul-One-Note had a new tune. It was a note he was to sound for the rest of his life. That single tune, that lone note, that focus of purpose, is stated in our text for this morning where he says, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." That was the vision that dominated his life; that was the single purpose that undergirded all he was to do. Yes, St. Paul was a Johnny-one-note when it came to Jesus.

Let me ask you this morning, what note are you singing? For most of us there is one dominant theme that runs through our lives. It may be making money, or getting ahead in business. It may be keeping a lovely home or rearing our children properly. It may be achieving success or being the best in our field. But the fact is, most of us have a one-note theme that dominates our lives. So, what note is your life sounding? What tune are you playing this morning?

The note we Christians ought to be singing today is Jesus. These are several reasons why this is so. First, it is the command of Jesus. As he came to the end of his earthly time, he instructed his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of men. Over and over during those last days after his resurrection, he told them their mission was to witness to him. As Paul was to put it in his letter to Timothy (2:4) it was the desire of God that all men be saved.

A second reason we ought to be singing the Jesus song is because of the desperate need of the world today. There are so many people out there in the world who are singing the wrong note. And because they are, their lives are frustrated and confused. There is so much unhappiness, so much desperate need. I think of Judas after he betrayed Jesus. He went back to the officials of the temple and he was crying out for help. "I have betrayed innocent blood," he said. There was so much anguish, so much hurt, such a plea for help. "What is that to us," said the priests, "see to it yourself." And there are so many in the world today for whom life is not working out well. They are crying out for help in dealing with their guilt and failure. But the Church is often singing the wrong note. The church is singing about revolution to start a new economic order; or the church is sponsoring revolution in places like Rhodesia; or the church is operating politically to change the structures of society. And all the time, the desperate and the guilty have their cries for help go unanswered. Judas was rejected and he went and hanged himself. So many who turn to the church for help today are being rejected because the church has another agenda, it has another mission.

O, how men and women long to hear the good news that God loves them and in Jesus forgives them and wants them to have a new life. That's why we need to sing the one-note song about Jesus. Do you remember the story about Jesus preaching out in the wilderness to a great throng of people? When the day was far spent, and the people were hungry, the disciples came to Jesus and they said there was no way to feed the people. There was no McDonalds, no Colonel Sanders. So they said, "Lord, send them away." But Jesus said, "Bring them to me." There are so many spiritually starved people, so many who hunger and thirst after the bread of life, and Jesus is saying, "bring them to me." Do you remember the incident, late in the ministry of Jesus, when some Greeks came to the apostle Philip? And they said to him, "Sir, we would see Jesus." I tell you there are so many out there in the world whose lives are not working very well, who have broken hearts, broken relationships, broken vows, and they are so desperate to see Jesus. Who will show them the master's face? Who will sing the Lord's song? Who will sing the Jesus tune? Who will bring them to see Jesus?

So, two reasons we ought to be singing the one-note song about Jesus is because he commands us to, and because the need is so great. Just last Sunday we had 198 visitors, the Sunday before 175, the Sunday before 186. Why? Because people have a need for spiritual reality in their lives. And who will sing the one-note song about Jesus?

Let me suggest some things we need to have in our lives if we are to sing the Jesus song. First, we have got to get our own lives changed. That happened to St. Paul. On the Damascus Road, Jesus turned him around and he was never to be the same again. What we need today are men and women whose lives have been changed, radically transformed, by the power of Jesus. Only he can change a life and he needs to be free to change your life and my life. I simply cannot give to someone else what I don't have myself--and neither can you. In the church today there need to be a spiritual revolution in the lives of us Christians so that like Peter and John, we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Second, like St. Paul, we need to make up our minds about what note we will sing in our lives. St. Paul said, "I have decided..." Have you made such a decision about sharing Jesus? The other day at the Tuesday Business Men's Luncheon, one of our young members was sharing and he said this: "I decided to make myself available to Jesus to share with others..." Well, this is what must happen in this congregation. We must be a people who have decided--who have made up our minds to share what we believe and who we believe, to make ourselves available to Jesus.

You business men, you have to make up your minds--will you or won't you share Jesus? You young people at college and at school, you have to make up your minds about who and what you will be. There on campus, in the class, will you sing the one-note Jesus song or not? You housewives, you working women, you retired persons, you have to decide, to make up your minds, will you share him whom you have believed?

The third thing I would say to you is this: the content of what you have to share is Jesus. Sometimes people talk about their church or their preacher or their program. But St. Paul said that he had decided to know nothing except Jesus and him crucified. That's what the world needs. The world doesn't need a good organization, there are more good organizations now than we can participate in; the world doesn't need another program, there are more now than we can afford; the world doesn't need a new moral code or a new ethic or a new philosophy. We've got more now than we can obey. No, what the world needs to know is that God loves us, that he forgives us, that Jesus died for our sins, and that God wants to give us power to live for him. And that's what the world needs--it needs to hear about Jesus and him crucified.

The fourth thing I would say to you about sharing Jesus is this: don't worry about being successful or having skills to share. St. Paul had this to say about his witnessing; "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Few of us have the skills of persuasion to convince men about the Lord. But God is at work in our witness. Remember the story about the Ozark farmer whose mule kicked his mother-in-law to death? A great crowd came to the funeral and strangely enough, they were mostly men. "My", said a friend, "Your mother-in-law must have been popular." "No," replied the farmer, "they are all here trying to buy the mule." The fact is, when you have something people need and want, you don't have to have any skills.

St. Paul wasn't trying to sell himself. He wasn't trying to convince people by his logic or his great rational arguments. He said his speech was not in plausible words of wisdom. No, he counted on the Lord to touch people's hearts in spite of himself. We are like the young man trying to sell himself to his sweetheart. "Darling," he said, "I'm not rich like Jerome, I don't have a yacht like Jerome and I don't have a mansion like Jerome. But I love you." "Well," she replied, "I love you too, but tell me more about Jerome." We don't have anything to offer, but Jesus has it all.

St. Paul says that our faith should rest in the power of God and not men. Do you remember the story of the woman at the well? She shared her faith and because they saw she had a changed life, they went to see for themselves. And then they made this amazing statement, "Now we believe because we have seen him for ourselves." That's what we need--people who point beyond themselves to Jesus.

Yes, what we need here in this congregation are some Johnny-one-notes, people who are singing the Lord's song--who are eager to share with others what Jesus has done for them. Do you remember the story of Philip who was let out into the country by the Lord? He saw a man going by in a chariot and the Bible says of Philip that he ran to the man. He was so thrilled to share Jesus that he could not restrain himself

Here in this city there are thousands upon thousands of people who do not know Jesus. They are sounding the wrong note in their lives. And like Judas, they are crying out for help in their anguish of broken hearts, broken lives, broken relationships. Who will run to them and sing the one-note song of Jesus that St. Paul sang when he determined to know nothing but Jesus and him crucified. Will it be you?