

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JANUARY 8TH - 9TH, 2022 // BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

THE WORD OF THE CROSS (1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25)

In the previous section of chapter 1 (vs. 10-17), Paul had appealed to this church to be united and stop dividing into factions centered around their favorite leaders or teachers (Paul, Apollos, Cephas).

- In vs. 17, Paul had touched on the fact that building a following around him was silly because he'd not even come to Corinth with words of eloquence or human wisdom.

One of the problems in this church was a critical lack of humility - people were using their spiritual gifts and the platforms of the church to make it all about themselves and their other favorite personalities.

- Paul hadn't come to Corinth to build a following using eloquence or impressive rhetoric - he'd come simply to preach the gospel and the cross of Christ.

The worldly standards of what counts as impressive, strong, eloquent, or wise don't even align with the Christian message.

- The very message of the cross is "folly" to some (vs.18) - to those who reject the salvation of the cross, the idea of being saved through the work of a Jew who was crucified seems ridiculous.
- To those perishing, both the necessity of salvation and the method of salvation seem absurd.

Even though this is a strange message that's regarded as foolishness by those who are perishing to those who trust in it and are being saved, this "word of the cross" is the actual power of God (vs. 18b).

- The way of God doesn't rely on worldly standards of human wisdom.
- In obsessing over who was the most talented, smart, and humanly "wise" in their church, these Corinthians weren't even thinking or acting like believers.

Paul then quotes Isaiah 29:14 to show that in spiritual matters, God opposes the wisdom of man.

- All the "wise ones," "scribes," & "debaters" of this age come up short in trying to find the ultimate reality and the meaning of life apart from God.
- We have a tendency to think that the smartest and wisest people will know the most about God - but the pursuit of human wisdom and manmade philosophies can never bring the true knowledge of the true God (vs. 21a).

The world's way to be saved and find redemption is to use human wisdom and manmade philosophies, but God's way is to "save those who believe" (those who have faith in Christ).

- This message of "Christ crucified" was strange and foolish to both Jews and Greeks.
- The Jews "demanded a sign" from anyone claiming to be the Messiah, so the idea of Christ being crucified was blasphemy and a "skandalon."

But the Greeks sought after wisdom and philosophy to find God and salvation, and the idea that God could become a man and be crucified for our salvation seemed foolish.

- But, "...the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (vs. 25).
- The message of the Christian gospel transcends human wisdom and infuses liberating, life-giving power into people unable to rescue themselves from the bondage of sin and death.

THE WEAK TO SHAME THE STRONG (1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31)

The Corinthian believers were most likely beginning to think of themselves in high, lofty terms because of God's work in them through spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14).

- Paul wants to remind them that most of them were not wise, powerful, or of noble birth by human standards (vs. 26).
- According to the world, they'd be among what was considered the "foolish" & "weak."

Paul isn't shaming them for their social status or class; he's simply reminding them that they had no basis to assert superiority over one another or to boast.

- God chose them not because they were so wise, strong, or powerful by the world's standards, but because they weren't!
- He did this to "shame the wise" and the strong in order that humanity can't boast (vs. 27-29).

God specializes in taking people the world has written off and using them in miraculous, incredible ways (David, Moses, Gideon, Abraham).

- He chooses the "weak" in order to display His power to those who boast in their own strength.
- God loves to rebuke the idolatry of human wisdom and strength by showing His power through very unlikely people.

This text isn't saying that it's better to be foolish or uneducated - rather, it's saying that human wisdom, status, and education don't earn us salvation or a higher ranking before God.

- When we realize how weak, foolish, and unqualified we are spiritually before God, yet He still chooses us, saves us, and works through us, it should cause us to have no grounds for boasting (vs. 29).

True wisdom and knowledge of God doesn't belong to the noble, powerful, talented, and intelligent - it belongs to the believing (vs. 30-31).

- Jesus perfectly shows us the wisdom of God - and that wisdom is given to those who are in Christ Jesus.
- He also is our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption- so if we boast, let us boast in the Lord! (vs. 31, Jer. 9:23-24).

JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED (1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5)

The Apostle Paul was apparently not a very impressive personality.

- The only physical description we have of him is from the "Acts of Paul," which says that he was a "...man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were far apart; he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long."

Paul was single, a scholar, probably had poor eyesight and was painfully aware of his own weaknesses ("thorn in my flesh," 2 Cor. 12:7).

- His critics even said of him that "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive" (2 Cor. 10:10).
- So, when Paul came to Corinth with the gospel, he didn't come in like a politician, salesman, or an impressive philosopher.

Instead of using "lofty speech or wisdom," Paul simply proclaiming the testimony of God, knowing nothing among them except Jesus Christ and him crucified (vs. 1-2).

- Paul was certainly a man who could reason and debate persuasively (Acts 17, 26), but he made a conscious decision to put the emphasis in Corinth on Jesus Christ and not his own skills of rhetoric and debate.

When Paul was in Corinth preaching the gospel, he had "weakness, fear, and much trembling" (vs. 3).

- Perhaps during his ministry in Corinth, he had physical ailments or illnesses, or maybe he was fearful because of the threat of persecution.
- Whatever it was, Paul had come to Corinth as a weak person who was completely reliant on the gospel, not on his own strength.

His speech and message weren't in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (vs. 4).

- Even though Paul's presence wasn't imposing, and his preaching wasn't impressive, the Holy Spirit of God showed up.
- People believed upon Jesus and received powerful demonstrations of the Spirit's transforming power among them.

All of this was so that the church in Corinth would put their faith in the power of God, not the wisdom of men (vs. 5).

- What Paul is doing is pleading with the Corinthian believers to stop putting so much emphasis on talent, worldly wisdom & strength, skill sets, status, and personality within the church.
- The power of the simple gospel, brought through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, was the foundation for their faith.

GREATNESS, WISDOM, POWER.

- **King Solomon** (990-931 B.C., \$2 trillion USD), **Alexander the Great** (356-323 B.C., \$500 billion USD), **Julius Caesar** (100-44 B.C., \$4.6 trillion USD)
- **John D. Rockefeller** (1839-1937, \$650 Billion USD), **Andrew Carnegie** (1835-1919, \$11.8 Billion USD), **Elon Musk** (1971-present, \$304 Billion USD), **Jeff Bezos** (1964-present, \$196 Billion USD)
- **Jesus of Nazareth** (0-33 A.D., \$0 USD).

RETHINKING GREATNESS.

- Some of us struggle with massive insecurity because we don't feel worthy to be in God's Kingdom or to be used in His service.
- Others of us feel great pride in being a Christian or serving God in ministry because we feel especially talented, moral, smart, spiritual, or of "noble" birth.
- But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the great equalizer - God humbles the proud and exalts the humble (James 4:6)
- As the King of all Kings, Jesus redefined greatness for a world obsessed with self-glory, self-promotion, and fame by choosing humility, service, and sacrifice.
- This is the path He's called us to follow Him in walking.
- This kind of "greatness" seems so foolish, weak, and absurd to a world obsessed with celebrity and self-importance - but the wisdom of God seems foolish to man.
- Do you want to be great? Follow Jesus (Mt. 20:26).
- The world's way to be saved, find redemption, unlock meaning, and discover inner peace in life is to use human wisdom, self-help, individualized spirituality, and manmade philosophies.
- God's way is to, "save those who believe" upon the Lord Jesus Christ.
- True wisdom and knowledge of God and ultimate reality doesn't belong to the intelligent, insightful, and ethereal - it belongs to the believing.

RETHINKING POWER.

- The world's definition of power is the possession of control, authority, or influence on other people.
- Power is gained in the world's systems through harnessing your talent, mastering your craft, attaining financial affluence, manipulating your circumstances and the people around you, and working your way to a position of domination.
- None of these things can give anyone the kind of power needed to rescue a person from sin or death.
- When we believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, real demonstrations of power that the world does not know show up in our hearts and lives through the Holy Spirit.
- This power isn't earned by the charming, beautiful, or competent - it's given as a gift to those who believe in Jesus.
- This power seems strange and weak to the world - but admittedly, it's an elusive power the world doesn't know.