

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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Date: 21 December 2008

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning on this Thanksgiving Day weekend. It is great to have you here, and what a perfect way to begin the Lord's Day through the listening to His Word and the participation in His meal.

We are traveling at a preaching level this year through 1 Corinthians, and so each week as you come, you'll notice the New Testament reading sequentially follows through that letter, and today we arrive at chapter 2, verses 1 to 5, and I hope if you have a Bible with you, you'll keep that open.

In the Museum of Science and Industry, along the north wall of a rather expansive hallway that joins one exhibit room to another is a set of full-length mirrors.

I think there are probably three or four in number, and it's quite the attraction for children, especially, although there have been adults who have enjoyed it as well.

It's not unusual to see lines forming in front of each of the mirrors with impatient children awaiting their moment at the front when they can see the impression of themselves upon that glass.

[1 : 3 2] The attraction, of course, is that these are no ordinary mirrors. The glass intentionally distorts the figure. So the figure in front is either elongated or truncated.

It's expanded or contracted, and as the children move to and fro, their own likeness takes on rather hilarious forms.

In fact, I've been in that hallway with my own children when they were young and remember them saying, look at me, Daddy. I like this one the most.

This is my favorite. I want to do that one again. It's certainly a humorous exhibit and obviously harmless. But eventually, the crowds push their way along to one exhibit hall or the other.

As we look at the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, now concluded, it's become obvious to me that Paul does not find the mirroring tendencies of the young congregation in Corinth to be humorous nor harmless.

[2 : 4 5] In fact, Paul took their lining up behind various leaders rather than the gospel to be a distorting effect.

And more than a distortion, if left unchecked, he felt it would actually dismantle the Christian message, that it would empty the cross of all of its life-giving power.

So, in what we have seen, then, is Paul in chapter 1 beginning to speak like a parent by verse 13, mimicking their lining up and taking them by the hand.

And by verse 17, leading them into a very different exhibit hall. It's an exhibit hall that could be called God's ways. In the mirrors on this hall, we see God actually inverting the ways of the world.

So that the quotation from Isaiah 29 in verse 19 becomes key. Let me show you how God works. He destroys the wisdom of the wise.

- [3 : 53] And the discernment of the discerning, he thwarts. God's ways are different than our ways.
- And the adolescent congregation, mirroring the various shapes and forms of its leaders, distorts the gospel. In fact, it only demonstrates that they were more interested in Corinthian culture than they were the Christian message.
- And he says that's not the way of God. And if you remember last week, by the point of verse 26, he now illustrates God's ways in two ways.
- First, consider your calling. In other words, he holds the mirror up to themselves. You were not wise. Not many of you. Not many of you were of noble birth.
- And on and on, validating his argument that when you come to the gospel, you come to a different kind of exhibit, unlike anything else in the world. And now today, our own text.
- [4 : 54] And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come in a particular way. So there's his illustrations. They form an illustration for him that validates his point. Consider your own calling.
- Does that not actually mirror the work of God in the world? And consider my coming, both in my manner and my message.
- Validating his point. And in a sense, safeguarding the congregation from acting like children. For indeed, there is nothing more in Paul's mind than to have them grow up to be mature in Christ.
- Let's take a look at Paul using himself as an illustration for the way God works in contrast to the culture of which the Corinthians found themselves.
- Verses 1 and 2 is, in a sense, the major idea put in one form. And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.
- [6 : 00] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. There it is, in full. His ways were different than the Corinthian ways.
- Their love of lofty rhetoric and the pursuit of wisdom. Let me take a look at two observations from those verses.
- I'm very struck by this word decided. For I decided to know nothing among you. According to Donker's lexicon, this word focuses on the mental processing of arriving at a decision.
- In other words, for Paul, he didn't just arrive into Corinth and begin ad hominem work for the gospel. No, when he came, he came with a self-conscious reflection that in his way and with his words he would mirror the way God works.
- Which meant a restricting of his vocation. There is something to this about Paul.
- [7 : 13] This thoughtful, reflective intention that leads to a decided approach. Think back to Acts 18. You might turn there if you have time to look at it.
- Acts 18, which highlights Luke's summary of Paul's visit to Corinth. Acts 19, and when you begin to see his efforts there, it uses the word occupied.
- So what Paul was doing in verse 5, Paul was occupied with the word. By occupied, he was, in a sense, surrounded with only one thing.
- Many exhibit halls that he could have trafficked in. But he restricted himself by decision and approach.
- This was the way of Paul. He had a focus, a self-imposed limit on his manner and his message.
- [8 : 17] The second thing I want you to notice about Paul, by way of illustration, is the words Jesus Christ, and in particular how it ends, its emphasis. And him crucified. That's his point.

That's where he's been leading to. When I came to you, I focused on only one thing, not the full array of liberal arts that I could have enjoyed in Corinth.

No, I decided to focus on one thing, and that was Jesus Christ, and in particular, by way of emphasis, him crucified. Now, for the Corinthian culture, one who was crucified was defeated.

Just recently, I finished reading Robert Harris' wonderful little two volumes on the life of Cicero. He imagines Tyro penning this biography.

There's a moment where, of course, you remember, Crassus has this great military conquest. He puts down a slave uprising led by Spartacus.

[9 : 22] And he now is approaching Rome for his triumphal entry, his Roman triumph, where a general, if awarded the distinguishing honor by the Senate, would parade himself in through the gate.

And so here comes Crassus along the Appian Way, having financed an army of his own means, having put down this incredible rebellion. And this is what he did along the way. He crucified on a cross a slave every mile along the road, even more than a mile, closer than a mile, to the point where historians tell us he crucified no fewer than 6,000 slaves on his way into the city.

Indicative of Roman culture. That the crucified one was a defeated one, the powerless one, the inept one, the despised one.

Now, in 44 B.C. A.D., Rome is now making Corinth a Roman colony again.

And all the ambiance of what it is to be a Roman resides within Corinth. For, indeed, they despised the defeated one.

[10 : 44] And what Paul says is, when I came to you, I came to you with one thing to say. I put all my focus on Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Malcolm Muggeridge became a Christian late in life. And in his book, *Jesus Rediscovered*, he writes this, We are henceforth to worship defeat, not victory.

Failure, not success. Surrender, not defiance. Deprivation, not satiety. We weakness, not strength.

That's what Paul says their faith rests upon. This great Corinthian culture with all of their games and rhetorical practices and wealth of learning.

Verses 3 and 4, he extends that general idea, notice, to actually separate it out to his manner of life and his message. Or verse 3, in a sense, his way.

[11 : 54] And verse 4, his words. His very person and his proclamation. So you see in verse 3, And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

That was my manner. Very unlike a rhetorician that would stand upon the rostrum and wax eloquently with self-assertion, confidence, and one who would deride all of his opponents.

No, Paul says, no, when I was with you, I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And in fact, when you look back at Acts 18, the record of Paul in Corinth, he was so fearful that the Lord actually appeared to him in a vision, verse 9, And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you and no one will attack you.

Because Paul had actually been attacked in previous cities. Physically harmed under the threat of persecution, derision. And it made him afraid to say anything about Christ and him crucified until the Lord gives him a vision of strengthening.

So when he says, I was with you in fear, he means just that. It was difficult for him in that context to preach the gospel of Christ crucified. Such was the rejection that he anticipated on every front.

[13 : 21] Verse 4 puts the manner of life in context to his message. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit of power.

I thought of Martin Lloyd-Jones, who was a pastor in London, 20th century. He delivered some sermons in the great city of Oxford and its university.

It's a fascinating retelling of what happened when Lloyd-Jones, a London preacher, preached amongst the cultural and intellectual elites in Oxford.

Quote from the biography, It was, of course, chiefly a congregation of students. I preached to them as I would have preached anywhere else. It had been announced that if people had any questions, an opportunity would be given to them, that if they retired to another building at the back of the church after the service had ended, I would be there.

So the vicar and I went along expecting just a few people, but we found the place packed out. Immediately, a bright young man sitting in the front row got up and said he had a question.

[14 : 35] He paid the preacher some compliments and said that he had much enjoyed the sermon, but there was one great difficulty and perplexity left in his mind as the result of the sermon. He could not really see, but that sermon might not equally well have been delivered to a congregation of farm laborers or anyone else.

He then immediately sat down and the entire company roared with laughter. The chairman turned to me for a reply. I rose and gave what must always be the reply to such an attitude.

I had to admit that until that moment I had regarded undergraduates and indeed graduates of Oxford University as being just ordinary common human clay and miserable sinners like everybody else and held the view that their needs were precisely the same as those with the agricultural labor or anyone else.

I had preached as I had done quite deliberately. And then he sat down. What a stunning truth. To realize that by intention, the preacher in a university context laid aside all other conventions and interests and spoke to men and women as though they indeed did have the same universal condition.

And he forewent lofty language. Now this is important for us, for you, for me. I've reflected on my own ministry this week, in fact, given that Paul uses himself as an example.

[16 : 05] Imagine the day some years from now, I hope, 20 or 30, when I'm laid to rest and the resume is done and the church is seeking a new senior minister for Hyde Park.

Will a Ph.D. be required on the man they're looking for? Now there's nothing wrong with a Ph.D., but would it be required? Must we have one in our midst, given our context, that is so learned in both manner and in message that he's familiar with all the workings of all the disciplines?

Must he be one who is in attendance at every level of learning? Or will we be a congregation that says, no, we want a pastor who will restrict himself, who will limit himself, who will confine himself, who will occupy himself with Christ and him crucified?

That we might know that our faith does not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Well, that would indeed be the sign of a mature congregation, and one very unlike Corinth.

Look at what he says in verse 5. He's done this, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Mirroring one of two worlds, the Corinthian culture, or Christ and him crucified?

[17 : 50] Well, today we have the table. And by our very standing and waiting in line to take it, we see a very different image.

And when we're at the front and it's our turn to partake, it's not, look at me. I love the novelty of the mirror. No, it's, this is where I have come.

For in this, my faith rests. Our Heavenly Father, strengthen us with this meal. And may we always remember and hold fast to working the way you work, even as we consider our callings and our coming.

In Christ's name, amen. And it's, it's time to pray. Thank you.