

Nothing Except Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

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[0:00] Good morning. It's good to see all your lovely faces this morning. I am not ashamed of the gospel.

! It is the power of God for salvation to all who believe. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, God of all true wisdom, power, and glory, I pray now that as I set about to share your good news about Jesus with your people this morning, keep me from using human cleverness. Let me speak of nothing except Christ and him crucified. In my weakness, fear, and trembling, despite my shortcomings, let my words demonstrate your spirit and power so that the faith and fruit bearing of your people will rest not in my wisdom, but in your power. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Amen. We are continuing in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. We're going to be in verses 1 to 5 this morning.

It's on page 1213 of your pew Bible. I invite you to open and follow along. If you remember that since 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 18, Paul, in this letter of 1 Corinthians, had been engaged in a singular argument.

And the argument is this. It is that the cross of Christ, which the world sees as foolishness and weakness, is in fact the wisdom and power of God. He boldly proclaims this to the Corinthians in verse 18 to 25.

[2:04] Paul makes it clear that this was God's intention all along. And he intended it that way to thwart human wisdom, which arrogantly thinks it can arrive at truth and life independent of God. This worldly wisdom cannot grasp the wisdom of God.

That's what Paul has been showing us. And the wisdom of God essentially is the good news of Jesus' crucifixion, is death and burial, and is powerful resurrection. Now the world sees the cross as folly and weakness, and are therefore blinded to the power of God that is displayed in it. And in verse 26 to 31, we saw that Paul asked the Corinthians, and inferentially asking us as well, to recall, to remember, to consider that it is that very gospel proclaimed from his mouth in the power of the Holy Spirit that brought them to saving faith.

They themselves were the nobodies of the world. Nothing to write home about, the lot of them. Foolish, foolish, powerless, and without pedigree, according to worldly standards.

Paul reminds them that it is such people, such people as they were, such people as we are, that God has brought into union with Jesus Christ, who is the wisdom of God.

This wisdom is displayed supremely in three aspects of our salvation. Paul wants us to see that the cross is in complete contradiction to the world's wisdom.

[4:00] So much so that we cannot begin to employ human cleverness to improve upon the wisdom of God. And he invites us, Paul does, to look at how God used such seeming foolish and weak means to accomplish his great work of redemption.

And many of the recipients of this great gospel are not the wise, the influential, and the well-connected people of the world. It was so, it was true about, that was true in Paul's day, it is still true in our day.

And so we are not to be tempted then, because oftentimes when we see that it's the well-connected that have the gospel, we might not be tempted to think that it is human wisdom that has allowed them to come to this knowledge.

It is the power of God that is at work in bringing everyone to saving faith.

All that will come to saving faith. It is the power of God that is at work in accomplishing it. So now in chapter 2, verse 1-5, Paul continues this argument with another series of proof to show them that indeed the power of God lies at the proclamation of the cross, the message of the cross.

[5:24] So in chapter 2, verse 1-5, Paul asks the Corinthians and us, by inference, to look at the way in which he brought the gospel to them.

The manner in which he brought the gospel to them. Some of you might have heard this phrase, What you win people with is what you win people to.

What you win people with is what you win people to. Now that phrase is in reference to what our mission here at Holy Trinity is.

What and who we proclaim and the methods we employ in proclaiming him is at the heart of our ministry, our Christian life together, our life together as the people of God.

What you win people with is what you win people to. And that phrase is nothing if not a loose paraphrase of Paul's argument here in chapter 2, verse 1-5.

[6:32] Paul means to tell us that the means of faithful Christian ministry has already been arranged by our Lord. It is deciding to know nothing, Paul tells them.

Know nothing at all. Deciding to know nothing in all that we do except Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is the content of our message, of our proclamation.

This is the form even of our proclamation and of our ministry. After all, it is this very event of the cross, Christ's crucifixion, Paul insists.

It is this very event that is the wisdom and the power of God. Now, you know, sadly, the problem is that the Corinthian church has moved on from Paul.

And they've moved on from his method. They have started to employ the wisdom of the age in their church. And this is why Paul, in fact, starts this letter to them by explaining how the gospel is in complete contrast with human wisdom.

[7:43] Because the Corinthian church has given themselves over to worldliness. Paul will now have them remember that the gospel is sufficient.

They need not borrow from anything else. The gospel is sufficient because it is how God has proposed to accomplish his work. Paul showed that this is the way he preached the gospel to the Corinthians when he first came to them to establish the church, to found the church.

Look there in verse 1. He says to them, When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

Now, the word wisdom there is meaning the wisdom of the world. The high-sounding rhetoric with a display of human cleverness.

Paul says, When I came to you, I did not come proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ using those means. Lofty speech or human cleverness.

[8:53] Paul reminds them that he did not employ what we will come to know as the Corinthian way of doing things.

Now, it might be up for us to know what exactly the Corinthian way is. And you remember that Paul had earlier referenced the philosophers or debaters of this age in chapter 1 verse 20.

And if you remember, these seemingly great philosophers of Corinth were the celebrities of that age. Remember, I said a few sermons ago that on a Friday evening, instead of going to the movies, what you do in Corinth is you go and listen to these great philosophers, these debaters of the age.

That's the thing to do, to listen to their oratory and their rhetoric and the manner in which they presented their arguments. Friends, these people were traveling speakers, circuit speakers, as you might say, going from city to city, blowing people away with their lofty speeches, and making very good money at it, too.

Historians have given us some evidence of what this looked like in a city like Corinth. When a new speaker, a new rhetorician comes in, when he first comes to the city, seeking to establish himself as a professional debater, philosopher of the age, what he will do is he will be escorted into the city with much fanfare.

[10:28] He would have hired a bunch of people to go ahead of him, his promoters. Let me know if this sounds familiar, actually. It's not much different from the 21st century.

So the new speaker, the new rhetorician will come into the city, and he will have promoters go ahead of him. And they will even escort him into the city with much fanfare.

Presumably, those he hires will sing his praises. They will tell people how great he is. They will tell people of his pedigree. They will tell people of the extent of his learning, what school he went to.

Yale, Harvard, Stanford. They will tell of the extent of his travels, the many people he had defeated in his debates.

And they will tell of his eloquence with words. And then they will toot his horn to gin up attention and to drum up a crowd.

[11:31] That's what, that was the practice of the day in Corinth. And then when the speaker comes to speak, when he comes to speak, it is not, keep in mind here, what really moves the crowd is not the truth of his arguments.

It's not that, that's not what the people care to actually hear. Not the truth of his argument. Rather, it's the, and it's not in fact the persuasion of truth that matters to them, but the style in which he speaks.

The fervor in which he speaks. The way he uses words. His mannerisms. That's what impresses the audience. That's what entertains the people.

And this is the manner of rhetoric in Corinth. Now that this, that the Corinthians preferred this style of wisdom, human wisdom, that they preferred this style, that they prefer, in fact, style and mannerisms over substance, it should not be a surprise to us.

Because it is still often present the way it is in our age. But it should be a cause of sorrow to know that the Corinthian church the church of Christ, as Paul says in the beginning of this letter, were also seeking after such empty human wisdom.

[13:13] That's where the problem lies. And it's a cause of sorrow to know that the 21st century church is very much like the Corinthian church in this way.

Seeking after worldly sophistication today, many pulpits in many churches are filled with showmen and self-promoters.

They employ the methods of the world. They use the arguments of the talk show hosts in their pulpit. They exegete the news of the day instead of preaching Christ from the very book, from the very book of the Bible.

people. Rarely do they call their heirs to reckon with their sin which separates them from a holy God. Rarely do they call people to repentance.

Our culture has developed more tools than first century current in this manner of sophistication. times. Not only do we employ today love to speech and stylistic flourish, not only do we employ self-promotion as the practice of the day, what we now do is also emotionally manipulate people through music that's often used in the service to gin up human emotions rather than the worship and praise of God.

[14:45] we have churches with light shows and the sophisticated hip looking preacher with his skinny jeans and his \$800 sneakers.

Thank you, thank you, Jack. Jack points at me and says, that's not you, you're not that cool. And I appreciate that. And I know that as Anglicans we are often far removed from many of this, right? Our church doesn't have any of the things that I've just described. Now that's one of the benefits of liturgical worship. But I don't, we should not think that we cannot be vulnerable to worldly wisdom as well.

We can be. You know, the most sinister ways that worldly wisdom takes over the church is when the church starts to exchange the gospel of Jesus Christ, the proclamation of Christ crucified for another gospel.

And that, brothers and sisters, is something that we, even as a liturgical church, are very, very vulnerable to. We are susceptible to this even here at Holy Trinity, as well as any other church of Christ, if we're not on God.

[16:12] When what we want to hear from the pulpit is a version of the political pontifications that you heard all week from your preferred news network or radio talk shows, when you come to the church, if that's the same thing you want to hear, that's a clear sign that you are seeking after worldly wisdom, rather than the wisdom and power of God proclaiming the cross of Christ.

When our boasting is in anything else, no matter how seemingly good those things are, other than in the cross of Christ, we have started to adopt the Corinthian way.

We must beware. I hope we can see clearly what Paul will have us know in this argument that he's making. He says to them, remember, the man in which I came.

And in verse 2, he says, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Verse 3, and I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.

So Paul says to them, upon coming to Corinth, I was careful not to employ the methods and the manners of the itinerant speakers of Corinth.

[17:35] I was intentional in not employing those methods and those manners. Unfortunately, the church in Corinth, so far given to wordliness, even started to criticize Paul for this very weakness because he was an embarrassment to them.

they wanted him to employ the means and methods of the world around them. But Paul does not care. He has not been called as an apostle of Jesus Christ, as a minister of the gospel by them. He's been called as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and he's not been called to be a man-pleaser. He knows the message entrusted to him. He knows who it was that entrusted the message to him. And he humbly and boldly proclaimed this message. He proclaimed it in its simplicity, in its stark counter-cultural proclamation.

He proclaimed it against the tide of cultural acceptability. He decided not to bend the gospel message to tickle human sensibilities.

[18:50] human values and human wisdom. Not only did Paul preach a weak gospel by the world's standard, according to Corinthian standards, the way he even preached it, the way he preached this gospel was also unimpressive.

Paul was a man in appearance, of a man of weak physical appearance. Tradition tells us that he was a really short, unimpressive looking man.

At this time, it's likely he had a physical ailment, having to do probably with his eyes. He doesn't cut an impressive figure.

In fact, earlier we were told in Acts, when he was in Athens, he was accused of being a babbler. He was mocked for being a babbler. there's a lot in view here when Paul talks of his weakness and his fear and his much trembling.

He didn't come to Corinth having anyone tooting his own. He didn't hire promoters to go ahead of him in the street markets. He went straight to the synagogue upon coming to this city.

[20:07] And when he preached the gospel there in weakness and much trembling, what did they do? They kicked them out. I encourage you to look in Acts 18.

You can find more of this after church. Go and read Acts 18. You can find Luke's historical account of Paul's ministry in Corinth. They kicked them out of the synagogue and he took the few who believed the gospel with him into a private home and he started a church there.

Apparently, Paul didn't study the church planting out to a book. And I've already said his appearance was nothing to write home about.

Paul had already, upon coming to Europe in his missionary, gospel missionary journey, he had left Asia Minor, he was coming to Europe. He had first gone to Macedonia and there in Macedonia he had endured physical beatings.

In Philippi they beat him with rods. They put him in jail. It's very likely that upon coming after Philippi coming to Corinth and going to Athens and coming to Corinth he was still suffering from the result of this physical ailment.

[21:24] Perhaps it was there actually that he had the problem with his eye. The Bible doesn't really tell us but Paul makes it clear. When I came to you I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

Here was a man battered physically psychologically probably in fear of a place like Corinth a place of power a city that celebrates power and influence and he comes with a weak message according to human standards and he was a weak messenger.

And what's more Paul knew all this he knew all of this and yet he didn't try to adopt the Corinthian methods as he preached the gospel to them.

He says to them my speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom. In fact what he's trying to tell them is that I didn't use enticing words and clever words.

I didn't use those. My speech and my message was in the demonstration of the spirit and of power. The plausible or enticing words of the rhetoricians of Corinth had nothing to do with truth.

[22:55] Remember that. It wasn't about truth. They're methods. It's more about flattery and manipulation and Paul will not employ those means in the preaching of the gospel.

The rhetoricians of Corinth day sought the crowd's approval and they sought the crowd's applause. They sought to increase their own status and thereby influence and gain influence in the people's eyes.

Self-promotion. Paul refused to use those methods in the proclamation of the gospel. Paul had nothing to do with all of that. I want you to know that by Paul's argument here, by these arguments,

Paul does not mean to say that he didn't actually make a cogent argument and rational argument in his presentation of the gospel.

Paul, after all, you might not know this, Paul was a trained philosopher. He was trained in actual philosophy, he was trained in the law, he was a trained lawyer.

He was actually not like the false people pleasers and the rhetoricians of Corinth. He was a learned man. And such was the manner in which the Corinthian rhetoricians behaved and the methods that they employed, that even great philosophers of the day, like Cicero, wrote in disdain of their methods.

[24 : 32] Now, Cicero was not a believer, but he was a man who actually knew what it means to use truth, to argue from truth rather than just to be believed. And he wrote their written writings of his writing in disdain of this means of manipulation and people pleasing and crowd pleasing.

But I don't want you to think that Paul didn't employ good arguments in his presentation of the gospel. I don't want you to think that Paul didn't engage the minds of the Corinthians, because he did.

Neither do I want you to think that what some people have come to think today, that when you come to church, you must leave your mind and intellect at the door before you come in.

That's not what Paul is saying here. Paul's very argument in these verses from 18 to chapter 2 verse 5 is that he's intentionally employing his words and arguments to appeal to the Corinthians mind, to remind them in clear argument based on truth, to remind them, their mind and their reason, to remind them of the power of the gospel.

people. But ultimately, Paul proclaims the message of Jesus Christ faithfully as it has been given to him.

[25 : 52] Because Paul knows that it's not the methods and the manners, but it is God himself who calls people unto salvation. It is God himself who calls people unto salvation.

You know, oftentimes we are tempted to think that it depends on us. through the strength of our arguments or the earnestness of our words. It depends on us to convert people.

Whereas, nowhere in God's word are we tasked with that responsibility. The only thing we're responsible for as the people of God, the only mission we've been given is to proclaim the gospel. Proclaim the gospel. and then God himself uses our faithful proclamation to bring to himself those whom he has called unto salvation.

Now, take a second to think about that truth. I think if we think about it, it might be an encouragement to us. And it might give us greater faithfulness in sharing the gospel actually.

[27 : 00] Because you then know that it's not dependent on you or your expertise or your ability to put words together. All that depends on you is faithfulness and proclamation.

And you proclaim it even in your weakness, in your inadequacies. And yet God uses that very means and that faithfulness to bring people unto salvation.

All we are tasked with is faithfully proclaiming Christ crucified. crucified. And here lies the crucial point of Paul. And this is why our paraphrase of this message is what you win them with is what you win them to.

Paul knows that although the world thinks the gospel of Christ crucified is folly and weak, he knows full well that it is the power of God unto salvation.

How does he know this? He knows it because it is the seemingly weak Christ, this shameful crucified figure that accosted him on the road to Damascus.

[28 : 10] It is this same Christ that rescued him from death to life eternal. Paul had a first-hand experience of this power of God displayed in his life.

And here he is reminding the Corinthians as well, you also have a first-hand experience of this. in the manner in which I brought the gospel to you.

I might remind you brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ, you have a first-hand experience of this. It is this weak, seemingly weak proclamation of the gospel, of Christ crucified, that was proclaimed to you, if you are indeed in Christ and come to him, that you believe in by faith, the Holy Spirit bringing regeneration into you, bringing you from death to life.

It is this weak gospel, this wisdom and power of God. And so Paul says, my speech, that is, the way I preached and my message, that is, the gospel itself, was not impressive by Corinthian standards, yet it came to you in power, and it came to you in the Holy Spirit's demonstration.

And why would God decide to do it this way? Look at verse 5. It's so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, so that your faith might not rest in human cleverness, but it might rest in the power of God.

[29 : 40] Paul ends his argument the same way he ended it in verse 31, that we looked at last week. He's telling us that the ground of our boasting, the ground of our comfortness, the ground of your faith is not in human wisdom, human capability, or ability, but in the power of God, displayed through the preaching of the weak gospel.

Human cleverness, there are two things in view here, human cleverness or God's power. power. Which of the two will you want to place your trust in?

Human cleverness or God's power? I want to believe we will all say God's power. Because as we look around at human wisdom, as we look around, even in our day, at human ingenuity philosophy, and philosophizing, it does not produce much confidence, does it?

Look at our culture. Look at what is now the wisdom of the age. And it's not just our age, it's age after age, civilization after civilization.

Since the fall, human wisdom has always failed when it stands in opposition to God, when it thinks it can stand independently of God.

[31 : 18] And human wisdom cannot deliver humanity from the wrath of God due to our sin and rebellion. And the fruit of that sin and rebellion is that in every age, as Paul writes in Romans 1, 24 and 25, because sinful humanity has exchanged God's truth for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, God has given them up to the lust of their hearts, to impurity and to dishonor.

Look around. Paul's words are evident all around us. This is how God destroys the wisdom of the wise and thwarts the discernment of the discerning.

But as one commentator puts it, this gospel proclamation, this gospel power is defined in terms of the cross.

The Corinthians were wanting to go beyond the cross. Many churches in our day, and the temptation is for us as well, to go beyond the cross, to start to employ human methods and human wisdom.

but the only place where the wisdom and power of God lies is exactly at the cross of Jesus Christ, the proclamation of Christ crucified.

[32 : 47] This gospel power is defined in terms of the cross. So, Holy Trinity, here is what we are called to. We are called to win people with the proclamation of Christ crucified and nothing else.

the proclamation of the cross of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation for all who will believe. And this is what God does in His wisdom and in His power.

He takes our proclamation of this gospel in its weakness and its simplicity and He uses it to open blind eyes and to wake those who are spiritually dead.

And I hope and I pray this morning that you will come to know this power made evident in your life if you don't know it yet.

That through the preaching of Christ crucified, the Holy Spirit will open your hearts, give sight to you, to your blind eyes, to see Christ crucified, having paid on the cross the penalty for your sin.

[33 : 57] knowing that there is nothing you can do before a holy God to make it right, knowing that you are a sinner. For God Himself came in love, lived the life that you should have lived, a perfect righteous life, and then went to the cross and bore upon Himself the punishment that should have been yours, that in fact is yours, became cursed for you so that you can be the righteousness of God.

This is the proclamation of the gospel. If you don't know it yet, this is it, this is what it means to come to Christ, to trust in what Christ has done on the cross, to put your faith in it, to believe in it, and upon doing so, to be welcoming to the wisdom of God.

And if you have come to know it, if you are come to know this wisdom, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, let us not be like the Corinthians.

Let us not try to be embarrassed by the cross of Christ. Let us not try to go beyond the cross of Christ to other things. Let us not seek to employ the means and methods of the world around us. We have the means, we have the method, we have the prescribed message that God has given us. We have been given the power by which people can come to faith in Jesus Christ and by which we ourselves will continue in that faith in Jesus Christ.

[35 : 33] It is the proclamation of Christ crucified. Let us not abandon it, this power and wisdom of God for the Corinthian way.

may God help us and keep us faithful in the proclamation of his gospel.

May we keep us steadfast in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.