

What does your Faith rest on

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[0 : 00] Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your word which you have given us. We pray that you would use your word to grow and shape us to be more like your son today.

We pray that your spirit would be at work applying your words to our hearts and minds. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Is it possible to move?

So it had been 10 months since we'd arrived on Groot and I'd been doing some reflecting about what people thought of us and how they received us.

I'd just come to the stark realisation that no one from this little community would notice, or care for that matter, if we just disappeared, if we just flew off Groot.

We were invisible people, outsiders, totally insignificant in this place. We'd left a supportive church back in Melbourne and now attended a church with very few people.

[1 : 13] We'd left a nice street where we knew our neighbours and now lived in a community of strangers. We'd left friends we could just go visit. And now when I visited someone, I quickly got the feeling they were waiting for me to leave.

So much of what had supported me, so much of what had supported my faith, back here in Melbourne, had been stripped back. What was my faith resting on?

Today we're looking at 1 Corinthians 1, verses 18 to 2, verse 5. And I'm going to share a bit of our story over the past three and a half years on Groot and how this passage has been significant for us, giving us encouragement, comfort and hope from both personal perspective and from a ministry perspective.

And so as you hear God's word and my reflections on it from the Groot context, hopefully it will encourage you and help you see some implications for your own life here in Melbourne.

So what does your faith rest on? Paul's answer here in the beginning of 1 Corinthians is that our faith needs to rest on the Gospel. He gives us two reasons to rest our faith on the Gospel.

[2 : 36] First, he gives us the negative. We're not to rest your faith. Don't rest your faith on human wisdom because God has brought judgment on human wisdom.

And the second is the positive. Rest your faith on the Gospel because the Gospel is God's wisdom and power to save. God is bringing judgment on human wisdom.

And we see this through human wisdom's failure to access the goodness of the Gospel. In verse 19, Paul quotes from Isaiah.

In particular, he quotes from what people call a woe oracle. He says, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent. I will frustrate. Destroy, frustrate?

These aren't soft words. They're judgment words. Did you hear the rhetorical questions in verse 20? Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law?

[3 : 37] Where is the philosopher? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of the world? These questions are taunting humanity's wisdom. And that last one, Paul answers in 21.

In the wisdom of God, the world, through its wisdom, did not know him. God has tipped humanity's wisdom upside down.

He's made a fool of it. Humanity's attempts to come back to God inevitably fail. We, as humanity, cannot know God through our own wisdom, through our own thinking, lifestyle, philosophy, culture, religion, technology, whatever else we might come up with.

And in verse 22, Paul highlights two major cultural ways of assessing things. Judaism, he says, demands signs of power.

And the Greeks, well, they look for wisdom. But the cross flips them both. The story of Jesus, the promised king, hanging, dying a shameful death on the cross.

[4 : 44] Through their own cultural lenses, both cultural groups cannot access the glorious goodness of this message. One culture stumbles at the thought of the Messiah dying a failure.

The other one dismisses it as foolishness. God is bringing judgment on humanity's wisdom by making it useless, redundant, when it comes to accessing his saving gospel.

And we also see this, God's judgment on human wisdom, when we see the makeup of the Corinthian church. It's like God is choosing a sporting team and he says, don't worry about the all-stars, just give me the losers.

Verse 26, Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many influential, not many of noble birth. But there is method in God choosing the losers.

God chooses them to shame the wise. He chooses them to shame the strong. He's flipping the values of the world upside down and bringing judgment on them.

[5 : 56] But why is God's judgment directed at humanity's wisdom? To understand this, we need to understand a little bit more about wisdom. In Proverbs 9 verse 10, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Godly wisdom is living, doing and thinking, which is grounded in the fear of the Lord.

In other words, godly wisdom is seeing God as God and living life accordingly. Whereas human wisdom, on the other hand, is living, doing and thinking in a way that doesn't see God as God.

In a way that rejects him. In a way that rejects his message of the cross as foolishness. This is why God is bringing judgment on human wisdom.

For me, the first 10 months on Groot was really helpful. The stripping back of my support structures, the realisation that I was totally insignificant in the community.

[7 : 08] It was humbling, it was unnerving, but what a super valuable lesson, being pushed back to the gospel. God doesn't save me through a super vibrant church.

God doesn't save me through the great preaching of my favourite preacher. God doesn't save me based on my level of significance in the community. These things may be a blessing and they may be helpful, but these things are not what I should be resting my faith on.

They are not what saves us. God has saved us through sending his son to die on the cross in our place. God's judgment on human wisdom also influences the way Paul does ministry.

See chapter 2 verse 1. I didn't come with eloquence or human wisdom, says Paul. And in verse 4, my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words.

When doing ministry in Corinth, Paul rejects the cultural wisdom of the day, which said that you need to be a great orator. He lets the message of the cross shape his ministry.

[8 : 22] On Groot, power is the go-to cultural wisdom that many outsider organisations seek.

So they seek power to achieve the goals of their particular program. And there are many programs on Groot all trying to get Aboriginal people to do this or to do that.

There are edible garden programs, going to school programs, work for the Dole programs, social enterprise programs, support programs, and the list goes on. And now there's two types of power that these outsider organisations try and harness.

There's outsider power, which is usually in the form of money and resources coming from outside. And there is cultural power or insider power.

The outsider organisation will seek a culturally powerful person so they can piggyback off the power and influence that person has in the community to help their particular program succeed.

[9 : 27] This is an example of human wisdom that we see on Groot. But this passage pushes me to rethink it, pushes me to actually reject this kind of wisdom.

And actually, this passage pushes me to depend more on the foolish and weak gospel of Christ.

And actually, our experience on Groot is that it's the vulnerable people, like the nobodies in Corinth, that are amongst the most open to the gospel.

Our neighbour is one example. She is an Aboriginal woman, but she's an outsider to the community. She comes from the desert region, so doesn't know the local language.

She's a woman, so culturally she has less power than men. Her husband is in jail, so she is alone and doesn't have any family support. She is vulnerable in the community.

When we first met her, she was very shy. But slowly, slowly over time, Kate got to know her. Kate learned about her children.

[10 : 39] Sometimes they'd come and play with our kids. Kate got to learn about the struggles that she was going through. Kate got to learn that she'd actually been to a Christian school for a bit when she was young.

And eventually, our neighbour shared how she was interested in turning back to God. So that's Groot. What about Melbourne? What's the cultural wisdom here?

What is it that people value? Let's pretend that you've got a friend who isn't Christian. Hopefully, you do have a friend who isn't Christian.

And you're thinking about who you might introduce your friend to, so that, just to get some help in introducing them to Jesus.

Are you going to introduce your friend, to your Christian friend, who is witty and confident and charming, but who just struggles to be open about their faith in Jesus?

[11 : 46] Or are you going to introduce your friend, to your other Christian friend, who is a bit stilted and awkward, slower in conversation, but somehow, they manage to introduce Jesus into conversations regularly?

Of course, I think there's probably conversations to be had around spiritual giftings, et cetera, but I think we need to be careful in this, in not taking on the world's wisdom.

Often, during the last three and a half years on Groot, I've looked around me and wondered, is there any hope? There are social, health, political, spiritual issues.

And I feel so small and powerless, surrounded by what I perceive as insurmountable issues. We come to, and we now come to Paul's answer to the question of what our faith should rest on.

If it's not human wisdom, what? Paul's answer is not with humanity, but it's with God. Our faith should rest on the gospel, because the gospel is God's power and wisdom to save.

[13 : 07] The whole way through this passage, the message of the cross is linked to people being saved. Verse 18, for us who are being saved, the message of the cross is the power of God.

Verse 21, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believed. And verse 24, to those whom God has called, both Jew and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

So we see that it's through the message of the cross, the gospel, that God saves. And it's this message that is God's wisdom and power. In verse 30, Paul says that it is because of God that we are in Christ, and that Christ has become for us the wisdom from God.

But what does it mean that Christ has become for us the wisdom of God? It's important to remember that wisdom is not just ideas, rather it's living, doing and thinking in light of truth.

Christ is the wisdom from God, means that he is God's wisdom embodied or lived out. So if you want to know what it looks like to be wise in God's eyes, look at Jesus.

[14 : 36] Verse 30 says that God has included us in Christ. This is salvation. Because we are in Christ, God sees us not living according to human wisdom, but according to his wisdom.

In Christ, God sees us as righteous, holy and redeemed. We are saved from living a life in line with human wisdom, which is under God's judgment.

And at the same time, we are saved to a life that is in line with God's wisdom. We are saved to live out a life that is marked by righteousness, holiness and redemption.

And God's wisdom and power to save is not just a bunch of words. It's actually demonstrated by the Spirit's work. Paul says in chapter 2, verse 4 that he didn't preach with wise and persuasive words, but rather with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

Here he's saying to the Corinthian Christians that you've been saved, you've been changed, you've experienced the Spirit's power. That transformation in them is the demonstration of the Spirit's power.

[15 : 57] So we see that it's through the Gospel, through the message about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, that God saves His people. There is hope.

That is why we need to rest in the Gospel. On Groot, I have the privilege of catching up and reading the Bible with a friend.

My friend reminds me that in Christ there is hope. My friend is a Christian. He had a background of drug addiction and dysfunctional relationships.

But one day a local Christian man who himself hadn't been a Christian long shared the good news of Jesus with my friend and he became a Christian.

Now, ten years later, he's still committed to trusting Jesus. Over that time, he has had very little discipleship input and has very low literacy so he can't read the Bible for himself.

[17 : 02] But God has sustained my friend's faith over many years despite such little support. Today, my friend's character is testimony of the work of Christ in him.

There are signs of righteousness, holiness and redemption. He is a demonstration of the Spirit's power at work through the Gospel. So, regardless of how I feel when faced with what I perceive as insurmountable issues, there is hope.

When I'm tempted to despair saying there is no hope, I need to turn back to the cross of Christ and be reminded that there is hope because this message is God's power to save and change.

It's God's power to save and change me. It's God's power to save and change you. It's God's power to save and change those whom you love and anyone who rests their faith in it.

The fact that the Gospel is God's wisdom and power to save influences Paul's ministry. We see in chapter 2 verse 1 Paul gives us insight not just into his message but also his method he says so it was with me brothers and sisters when I came to you I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words Paul's method matches his message the weak gospel he preaches is matched by his weak ministry perceived weak ministry but why does Paul let the cross shape how he preaches not just what he preaches in verse 5 we hear how comforting is that to know that when you put your faith in the gospel you're not depending on some human wisdom that changes in time and place but rather you're resting your faith on God's almighty power to save and it should also be a comfort to you when you're feeling timid and weak trying to pluck up the courage to introduce

[19 : 42] Jesus into that conversation with the neighbour over the fence or with the person at the cafe or the person at work remember it's Jesus hanging on a cross that deals with sin that saves it's not your eloquence or persuasiveness it's the spirit applying the good news of Jesus to the hearts and minds of people that saves it's not your charm or confidence be encouraged and talk so what is your faith resting on hopefully you've heard how this passage has grown our conviction about God's wise and powerful gospel and how your faith needs to be resting on God's power and wisdom that we see in the gospel rather than some form of human wisdom which is under God's judgment I trust that you can continue to work this out here in your own context I know that we are looking forward to returning to Groot and working with his people there to share this foolish message about

Jesus