

'God's Foolishness, not Human Wisdom'

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[0:00] And please turn your Bibles back to 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18. About 200 years after Jesus, there was a Greek philosopher called Celsus who said this about Christianity.

! Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near to Christianity. Christianity makes sense only to the foolish, the dishonorable, and the stupid. As my son Kai always says, stupid is a mean word, daddy.

How do you feel? How do you feel when you hear such a view about Christianity? That people still do, I think, some of them consider it foolish, shameful, and just so weak.

Having two kids makes me realize something innate to the sinful human nature. We love power. Even from a young age, my kids, they always want to win against each other.

They want to be faster, stronger, smarter than people around them. They want to assert power and brilliance over others.

[1:15] And of course, I think sometimes adults are just more sophisticated versions of that. And it's easy to bring that sinful nature, that desire for power and to dominate into the church, isn't it?

And when we hear comments like Celsus, we feel offended and offended. And ashamed. Is that really what people think of my religion, about my God?

But in our passage today, Paul tells us that, yes, definitely at the center of Christianity is something that does look weak and foolish to the world.

The cross. But actually, through the cross, God shows His power and wisdom. Look at verse 18.

Paul says, For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it's the power of God. In the first century, the Christians didn't walk around with a cross as a necklace.

[2:29] The cross was an instrument of shame. It's a shameful thing. It's an instrument of torture, humiliation, death. The person on the cross was displayed for the world to see, usually naked, defeated by the empire, killed.

So imagine telling people that the Savior of the world, for Christians, was killed on the cross to save them.

What? We could hear an echo of what the Jewish leader said to Jesus on the cross. He can't even save himself. How can he save us?

But Paul says, To us who are being saved, it's the power of God. Why? How? How does the cross show God's power?

Paul continues in verse 19 to 21. For, or because, it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.

[3:42] Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached, that is the message of the cross, to save those who believe.

The cross is the power of God, because through it, God saves those who believe, by using something that humans thought was foolish and weak.

By quoting our Old Testament passage from Isaiah 29, Paul shows that this has been God's plan all along, hundreds of years before Jesus had come. So that, in verse 20, human wisdom and human power are proven to be foolish, worthless, useless when it comes to salvation.

Our wisdom can't save ourselves. Bring all the wisdom of the world, our science, our technology, education, politics, can any of them defeat deep human problems like greed, hatred, and the ultimate problem of all, death?

No. How many deaths have we seen in the past couple of years alone with the wars? How much hatred have we seen despite all the advancements of technology and human wisdom?

[5:24] Human wisdom can do many useful things. We live in an age of extraordinary discovery and technology.

We can purify water, cure diseases, and grow food more efficiently. We can explore the vastness of space. We've been to the moon. These are remarkable abilities that we have as the image of God. And they make humans feel powerful and wise, and yet, human wisdom and power cannot solve the problems of the human hearts, let alone death.

Paul even says in verse 21 that human wisdom can't even help us to know God personally. We can know God's world through science, but not God himself.

let alone give us salvation. And so, God was pleased to show that if the highest of our power and wisdom can't save us, He can use what seems weak and foolish like the cross to do that.

[6:45] He shows His power through using something that our power or wisdom can't even think of using. My wife and I tried and tried last week to come up with an illustration for this, but everything that we could think of just fell short.

And even movies and stories that we came up with that we suggested to each other, like Narnia, Harry Potter, the Lord of the Rings, they're just puny echoes of what God has done in Christ on the cross.

Our wisdom just can't think of a plan like this. Think about it. At the cross, it looked as if evil, Satan, sin, and death had won.

The Son of God was humiliated and killed. It looked so foolish and weak, but in God's wisdom and power, He flipped it all around. At the cross, God won against sin by taking it on Himself and then breaking its power.

He won against shame by turning the place of humiliation into the throne of glory. He won against pride because the Son of God humbled Himself for sinners, and yet He was elevated for glory.

[8:10] He won against death by entering it, carrying it into the grave, and living it there as He rose back to life. Jesus took on sin and death on the cross, as if to say, is that all you've got?

And destroyed them both. Human wisdom or power can't do that. There's no way. Sure, God could have used the worldly means of power like military conquest or philosophical brilliance to achieve His purposes, but He shows the greatness of His power and wisdom when He used something that no humans could even think of using.

The cross, a symbol of torture, defeat, and shame to bring the opposite effect. Glory, life, blessings. How great is He? And so Paul continues in verse 22 to 25, Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God, for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Here, Paul addresses two cultures that were prominent in Corinth, Judaism and Hellenism, Jews and Greeks. Jews demanded signs.

[9:57] They wanted displays of miraculous divine power before they could believe. Greeks demanded wisdom. They wanted intellectual and cultural sophistication before they could believe.

But the message of Christ frustrates them both. The message of salvation through the shameful death of God just doesn't make sense to the world.

And yet, verse 24 says that actually, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. the cross doesn't only reject human power and wisdom, it also reveals what is true power and true wisdom which come from God.

The crucified Christ frustrates human expectations of what power and wisdom should look like, but he also fulfills the deep longing of those expectations for those who believe.

In the cross, God shows greater wisdom and power than anyone could have imagined. Defeating sin and death through taking sin and death on himself?

[11:15] Who else can do that? Who else in this world can take on sin and defeat it without falling into it? Who else in this world can take on death and live?

That's paradoxical according to our human wisdom. What Jesus did on the cross shows real wisdom and power.

Now, it's not just Jews and Greeks who want power and wisdom, right? Even 2,000 years after this letter was written, we're still obsessed with power and wisdom.

No wonder people are only attracted to Christianity when it appears to come with worldly power and worldly wisdom. Some people are drawn to Christianity only when it looks powerful in a worldly way. When prosperity and miracles are promised. When the church has political influence. or when being in the church gives them a platform for power.

[12 : 28] Some people are attracted to that kind of strong Christianity but strong only in a worldly way. Others are drawn to Christianity when it offers worldly wisdom.

When it gives self-help strategies. Inspirational slogans. Wise-sounding sayings. Without taking them to the cross.

Like, God helps those who help themselves. Where is that in the Bible? Or, believe in yourself. No, believe in Jesus.

These all sound wise but they don't point to the cross. People are attracted to the kind of Christianity that is embellished with worldly power and worldly wisdom rather than the kind that always goes back to the cross of Christ.

Which says that we are sinners who can't help ourselves. So the Son of God had to come down here to die for us. Which serves like the cross of Christ in weakness rather than in strength.

[13 : 41] Which demands sacrifices like the cross of Christ rather than prosperity. And what kind of Christianity do we want?

The Christianity of the world that comes with worldly power and worldly wisdom? Or the Christianity of the crucified Christ? Only the latter shows God's power and God's wisdom.

Paul continues verse 26. Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential.

Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him.

The picture described here is of God choosing people from different places to form his kingdom. And again, we see the upside down wisdom of the cross.

[15 : 04] If I were to choose people to form my kingdom, to change the world, I would choose only the Mahatma Gandhi's, the LeBron James, the Bill Gates of this world, so I can form a strong and wise kingdom that overpowers the rest of the world.

But the fact is, many people who are strong and smart, who seem to deserve to be in the kingdom of the king of kings, don't make it into God's kingdom.

Because God wants to show that it's completely his power and his wisdom that save, not theirs. So that, verse 29, no one can boast.

We can't say that we've become Christians because of our success or our intellect or our power. In fact, based on verse 27, we have to say that God calls us to be Christians because we are foolish. We are weak. We can't save ourselves. So we need God's power and wisdom to save us. In fact, we are so weak and foolish that we can't produce anything to save ourselves, so God gave us everything we need for salvation.

[16 : 35] Verse 30, it is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God, that is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. What's our role in our salvation? None except repenting and accepting.

It's because of God that we are in Jesus. It is he who has become wisdom for us. It is he who is our righteousness, holiness, redemption, all the things that we need for salvation.

We can't boast in anything that we do. The amount of our offering, the amount of time we give for church, the amount of energy we use to serve people, none.

So if we want to boast, verse 31 says, we can only boast in the Lord and all that he has given us. And I think that is very encouraging.

[17 : 51] Some of us may feel weak, unimpressive, according to the world's standards, or inadequate compared to others. others. We might have some disabilities that don't allow us to serve like others.

We might not be able to learn as much to be as smart as others. But look at the cross. If God can use an instrument of shame and torture to accomplish his mighty plan to save the whole world, can he not use people like us?

God has chosen you to be his people, even if you have disabilities, weaknesses, illnesses.

God wants to use you in his kingdom because he alone will empower you. When I was considering full-time ministry, I was 23.

I told my mom about it. My mom said, first thing that she said was, no way, Ricky, you can't even speak properly in public. And she was right.

[19:14] I'm an extreme introvert by nature. When I had to speak in public, I would stutter.

Sometimes I still do. You might notice when I do notices, I wouldn't be able to find the right words.

I would sweat, I would jitter. But I said to my mom, you're right, mom, but if God calls, I think he will empower me. My preaching to you right now is a testimony to God's power.

I have no grounds for boasting, no grounds for saying, look at me. I can only say, look at what God has done in me. Knowing the cross as God's wisdom and power gives us confidence, not in ourselves, but in him who empowers us.

If God could use an instrument of death like the cross to save, he can use us. And Paul himself embodied that confidence in Christ, chapter 2, verse 1 to 5.

And 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.

[20:45] I came to you in weakness, with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

power. The great apostle Paul embraced his weaknesses because of the cross. Now, when Paul says in verse 2 that he resolves to know nothing except the crucified Christ, it doesn't mean that he knows nothing at all.

The context of verse 1 and verse 3 gives the meaning. So, in verse 1 he says, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom, and in verse 3 he says, I came in weakness and fear.

So, I think what he means by knowing nothing except Christ crucified, he means that he knows no other source of power, no other source of confidence except Christ crucified, not his own wisdom, not his own power.

power. And the same is true in verse 4 to 5. When Paul says that his preaching was not with wise and persuasive words, it doesn't mean that he's teaching intentionally using foolish arguments and logical fallacies.

[22:15] In his letters, Paul uses wisdom and persuasive words. But from the context of verse 5, it means that he doesn't use wisdom and persuasive words for the sake of drawing people to his wisdom.

He wants to preach to draw people to Christ, using God's power so people might put their trust in Christ, not to put their trust in Paul and his wisdom.

That is the goal of Christian ministry, isn't it? Not to inflate ourselves, but to point to Christ crucified. It's easy, isn't it, to fall into that temptation to inflate ourselves in ministry, to make it about our performance.

When we want to speak about Jesus to others, for example, we want to gather all the intellectual arguments before we feel ready. Again, it's not wrong to have intellectual arguments.

arguments. We don't want to sound stupid. Oops, that's a mean word. But there's a temptation to gather intellectual arguments, to draw people to our smartness, so they might be impressed at us rather than the cross.

[23:42] Or when we do ministry at church, again, we want to be competent and faithful. We do.

It's a good thing to do. But there's a temptation to be competent and faithful so that people might be impressed at our competency and faithfulness rather than the cross.

I feel the temptation, too, every single week. And sometimes I fall into it. But when I fall into it, let me tell you, when people praise my ministry, I boast in myself.

At least in my head, I do. But when people criticize me, I get deflated, demotivated. I lose the motivation to keep serving.

It's a trap because I make it about me. But if we do ministry to lead people to Christ, it's not about us. Then we don't boast when we're praised.

We can simply say thanks, and then we say to ourselves, God's power and wisdom. And when we're criticized, we don't get deflated.

[24:58] We can use it as an occasion for prayer. Lord, I don't want this people pleasing anxiety inside of me. Get rid of it. Take it away. Help me grow in my serving to you.

Use all my weaknesses to point people to Christ. Or in parenting, when we serve our kids, can we embrace our weaknesses and foolishness to reveal the power of the cross?

There's a lot of pressure, I think, for parents to appear like they've got it all together all the time, to keep our emotions in control all the time.

If we say the wrong word, it might mess up their entire lives. But what if we embrace our weaknesses and foolishness?

What if we say to our kids, yep, mommy and daddy are sometimes naughty too. That's why we need Jesus. That would be so counterintuitive for your kids to hear.

[26:12] But we can point our kids to Christ that way. Friends, the world and ourselves will tell us every single day that we need to prove ourselves, to be stronger, to be smarter, to be more successful than others.

But the cross of Jesus Christ tells us a completely different story. God, in his power and wisdom, can use the weak and the foolish to accomplish his purposes.

In fact, he prefers to use the foolish and the weak so that he gets the glory. So let's stop trying to prove our own strength or wisdom.

God's greatest power was clothed in absolute weakness. his deepest wisdom was wrapped in what the world called foolishness. After church today, let's walk out of those doors boasting in nothing and no one except Christ and him crucified.

Let's pray. pray. Father, we praise you for what you have done in Jesus on the cross.

[27:40] It shows us your great power and great wisdom that you are able to use something like the cross to save the world. So help us, Lord, not to boast in ourselves but to boast in what you have done and what you can do and what you will do when Jesus comes back and lifts us up in glory.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.