

But We Preach Christ Crucified

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[0 : 00] Well, turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. 1 Corinthians chapter 1. It's quite a long reading this morning, but it all fits together.

We're going to read from verse 10 down to verse 31, where Paul writes, I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you may be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

It's been reported to me by Chloe's people. There's quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, I follow Paul or I follow Apollos or I follow Cephas or I follow Christ.

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you are baptized in my name.

I baptized also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

[1 : 27] For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach, to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks.

Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

[2 : 32] For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

And may God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word. And particularly, let's focus of course on that section that we read, but particularly verse 23 where Paul says, but we preach Christ crucified.

That word of the cross, that message of the cross that Paul's telling the church there in Corinth and telling us, even today, of the importance of the message, the word of the cross.

[3 : 53] And yet, in contrast to the word of the cross, as we'll see, there's the wisdom, the man-centered wisdom that seeks to find, through satisfaction, out with God.

For us, we have the wisdom of God that gives true meaning, true purpose, true satisfaction in man's deepest need, even the need to know the Lord Jesus as Saviour, the word, the word of the cross, that we preach, Christ crucified.

As I mentioned in the notices, next Lord's Day, next Lord's Day morning, God willing, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is going to be dispensed, the Lord's people are going to gather together, we're going to remember the Lord's death, we're going to take the bread and the wine that represents Jesus' broken body and his shed blood, we're going to show, by these signs, we're going to show that Jesus died for us, for me, for you.

It's a simple supper, we know that, you've seen it, a simple supper that points to what Jesus did on the cross for sinners. But that service, next Lord's Day morning, God willing, that service won't just be the taking of bread and wine.

That service is going to involve the preaching of God's word. It's going to be preaching. There are going to be words that are spoken based on the word of God, the Bible.

[5 : 24] Because the word of God is going to accompany the act of remembrance. The whole service is going to be word and sacrament, preaching and partaking of the supper.

You see, see how important preaching is. And not just preaching, not just simply preaching, but preaching Jesus. Jesus at the centre.

Preaching Jesus. Jesus who lived for you, who died for you, who rose again, who rose for you, and has risen for you. Jesus was crucified for all for whom he gave his life so that you might know eternal life.

And that truth is going to be preached. It's going to be preached with words. There's going to be that word centre focus that God has blessed us with to direct your minds, to direct your hearts, to know Jesus, to see Jesus, and to see what Jesus has done for you by his life and by his day.

Paul said, we preach Christ crucified. He wrote these words nearly 2,000 years ago. But it's the same truth that we declare even today in 2021 and will be continually proclaimed until the Lord Jesus returns.

[6 : 45] And as Paul preached Christ crucified, crucified. So all who love the Lord Jesus and preach his word will proclaim and preach Christ crucified.

So don't ever despise the preaching of God's word. Don't ever think that preaching is some kind of, you know, add on to the service or even of preaching is to be endured rather than enjoyed.

No, preaching has to be at the core, absolute centre of the service because God in his wisdom, God's given and God's declared the preaching, the preaching of the word is that means to convey truth.

It's that means to convey the truth about Jesus, to tell you that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life to show what Jesus is when he spoke of himself as the way, the truth and the life.

But of course, when that word is preached of Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. Of course, that same word, that same word divine, that's what Paul is expressing especially as we see from verse 18 where Paul writes that the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved is the power of God.

[8 : 04] Now, we'll look at that division in a moment but of course we have to see where does Paul reach when he speaks of the word of the cross being foolish to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it's the power of God.

How does Paul come to this point? We need to get the background, we need to get the context and that's why we read before verse 18, we read even in verse 17 where Paul remembers stating his primary purpose in ministry.

He said it was to preach the word, to preach the gospel and he said not with eloquent wisdom, not with words of eloquence as he said lest the cross of Christ be emptied of his power.

Paul was going to use words to tell the good news. He was going to use words to tell of the gospel of the Lord Jesus but it wasn't going to be any kind of words.

It wasn't the kind of words that impressed the philosophers of the age who enjoyed hearing these wonderfully put together eloquent sentences, eloquent pieces of work.

[9 : 12] No, fine sounding ideas that were couched in intellectual language. That wasn't what Paul came to do. No, Jesus had sent Paul to use words that would be clearly understood about Jesus.

You might even say simple but not simplistic. And you know, I'm sure you've heard that saying, preach the word and use words if necessary.

No. That was a complete no to Paul. And it's the same for all who proclaim the Lord Jesus. Words are absolutely crucial.

God's given you speech. He's given you words to speak. He's given you a particular language, maybe even some of you, different languages. But using the language that God's given you to tell of the Lord Jesus and to use these words that tell of him, to use these words because these words tell of something so wonderful.

They tell of the word of the cross. Look at verse 18 again. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved, the power of God.

[10 : 28] The word of the cross. Another way of putting it is the message of the cross. That message that's given by word of mouth.

Now yes, as we've said a moment ago, it's a message that divides because it's a word, a message about the Saviour who died on the cross for sinners. It's a message about Jesus who hung there, body battered, his life ebbing away in the throes of death, his blood being spilled.

And on that cross, Jesus looking every bit a weak, a weak failure, and whose even very words on the cross would just disappear to the point of silence, seeming to be a victim of cruel injustice.

Jesus. And the word, the message that was conveyed there of Jesus on the cross, the word of the cross, would seem to indicate a man who failed.

Paul tells us, for those who hear the word of the cross, the message of the cross, who hear that message without saving faith, who just see in the cross the blood spattered, broken body of Jesus, it would appear anything but the message of salvation, anything but that great word that tells us that by Jesus' death, he's given life for all, who put their trust in him.

[11 : 58] And Paul tells us that the faithless response to Jesus on the cross, Paul tells us that that's foolishness. But to you who see the same Savior, you who see him by faith, by saving faith, and hear the word of the cross and rejoice in that word, rejoice that Jesus bore your sins on the cross.

That's not foolishness. That's the greatest word ever uttered, ever conveyed, because it's the message of power, power in the blood, power in the blood of Jesus.

It's the message of power, power to save, power to change your lives, power to change lives from death to life, all because of the crucified Jesus, all because of the word of the cross.

What's your response to the word of the cross? What's your response to the message of salvation that's found and seen in and through the Lord Jesus who died for you, who died for sinners?

Do you see that message, do you see that word as foolishness? Or do you see in that word power, power to save, the power of God that changes lives eternally, even your life, even my life?

[13 : 22] Because Paul tells us there's that eternal difference, that eternal difference that can never be bridged between those who see the cross as foolishness and those who see the cross, the word of the cross as the power of God.

Well, we mentioned differences. Let's look at these differences. foolishness to those who are perishing, but the power of God to those who are being saved.

Let's look at the first one. Foolishness to those who are perishing as opposed to power of those who are being saved. There's no greater contrast. Perishing as opposed to being saved.

No greater contrast in the world. Because perishing speaks of, well, it speaks of being destroyed. It speaks of being lost, abandoned, hopeless.

And being saved speaks of the act of God, that act that changes, that converts, that saves and keeps saving. So that you'll never perish because of the power of God seen in Christ crucified.

[14 : 29] Perishing as opposed to being saved. Have you given your life to Jesus? Have you believed in him? Well, listen to the words of another.

Apostle, Apostle John, disciple who became the Apostle John. John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Again, sending God the Son or giving God the Son so that all who are sons and daughters of God, who are sons and daughters by adoption won't perish.

But you'll see the word of the cross. You won't see that word as foolishness. But you'll know in your heart that that word truly is the power of God to save and to save eternally.

But then, let's look a little more closely then at what Paul's saying about where foolishness is, where real foolishness is in relation to the cross of Jesus. It's the foolishness of unbelief, foolishness of disbelief, as we see in the wisdom of man, or the self-generated, if you like, wisdom of man.

[15 : 48] See what Paul's saying in verse 22 when he says that Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

Paul's speaking of the whole world, Jew and non-Jew. In other words, the whole world without Christ. The whole world that has its own views, its own self-defined views of Jesus.

Because for Jewish non-believers, and of course we thank God there are many Jewish believers, but for Jewish non-believers, they're, what we might say, they're benchmark for belief in a Messiah, the promised Christ.

For them, they needed to have signs. They wanted a Messiah who appeared powerful and acted powerfully and showed his power to authenticate his claim to be the Messiah, the one sent from God to rescue his people.

They wanted a mighty deliverer, someone like Moses and yet greater than Moses. Someone who delivered his people. Moses delivered his people from the Egyptians when they were sent in the Exodus.

[17 : 04] And the Jewish non-believers, they wanted a Messiah who'd act in even greater power, visible power. Remember when Jesus was on earth, his Jewish opponents, they were constantly asking him, show us a sign.

Show us a sign that you're the one you claim to be. Some visible, physical sign that's going to convince us. But even if signs had been given by Jesus, and of course, signs were given by Jesus, the signs of his miracles, the signs of healing those who are sick, we know from Scripture that unbelief still remained.

And I think you see that most clearly in the parable that Jesus taught of the rich man and Lazarus. Remember in hell where the rich man, he begged Abraham to send another who was saved, Lazarus.

Send Lazarus back to my five brothers so that he'll convince them to be rid of their evil ways, change their hearts. Someone goes to them from the dead, they'll repent, said the rich man or the once rich man.

But remember in the parable what Abraham said. Even if these brothers, you know, had listened, well, in their lifetime, they hadn't listened to Moses and the prophets.

[18 : 27] And even if someone does come from the dead, they'll still not believe, still not believe. They hadn't listened to the words of Moses and the prophets. They hadn't listened to the words of the Old Testament.

They hadn't listened to the words that spoke of the one to come who'd be the suffering servant, who'd be the sacrificial lamb. They hadn't listened to these words, these words that pointed to the Lord Jesus and fulfilling these words.

And even when another Lazarus, when Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, remember when Lazarus was brought from the grave to life by Jesus, when Jesus showed, yes, his power to give life.

These Jewish opponents of Jesus, they didn't believe in him. They planned to put Jesus to death. And that position of these Jewish opponents, you know, seeking after a sign, well, that may well be the kind of excuse, even that we see and hear of today.

You know, that thinking that, you know, God will only do something for me. If only he'll change my circumstances, if only he'll do something that I can be convinced of, then I'll believe.

[19 : 43] It's the kind of thinking that says, well, I'm not going to believe, I'm not going to believe unless God conforms to the way that I think he should step into my life.

But God's already shown you the way. And he's not done it by external signs. But he's done it by that evidence of the change of heart that you see around.

The heart that receives Jesus by faith. Remember when the jailer, the jailer who'd been looking after the apostle Paul, and Paul had been freed from his chains in that jail in Philippi, and that jailer asked, what must I do to be saved?

And Paul said, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll be saved. Now, won't you be saved? Won't you believe? Hear the word of Jesus call to you and give you that message, the message of the cross, the word of the cross.

See him who is crucified there in your place, so that you might not face the wrath of God against sin, even your sin.

[20 : 54] See, there were no external signs, if you like, of the Messiah on the cross. But there was that fulfillment of what was prophesied of Jesus, that Jesus would be and was the lamb.

Lamb, the lamb that was taken to the slaughter, the lamb who died in sinner's place, the one who was pierced for our transgressions, by his stripes were healed.

You see, the externals, the externals on the cross, they would suggest that somebody was already defeated. But Jesus was the victor on the cross.

He cried out, it's finished. It's accomplished. He'd been crucified, but crucified not in defeat, but crucified in triumph. He triumphed over sin.

He triumphed over Satan. And three days later, triumphing over death itself. What about the attitude of non-Jews to Jesus? The attitude of Gentiles?

[21 : 58] The Greek-speaking contemporaries of Paul, who lived in places like Athens and Corinth, where this letter was written, they prided themselves on intellect and learning.

Well, their own self-derived wisdom, if you like. Paul said, if you remember what we read, they seek wisdom. They prided themselves on their own sort of self-generated wisdom.

They thought that they could find every answer in life somehow from their own mind, their own human-centered reason without the true wisdom of God.

Because these so-called wise, they believe that somehow by the exercise of the mind alone, they could discover true meaning, true meaning in life.

And of course, it's the same kind of thinking today. People who believe that by the mind alone, the human mind alone, that all of life's issues, all of life's problems, all of life's perplexities can be solved.

[23 : 02] You know, that human-centered reason alone can solve everything without recourse to that true wisdom from above. You know, that somehow mankind can be saved by the advancement of human-centered thinking to the exclusion of God.

Yes, God has given us minds and minds that have been exercised wonderfully in so many areas. But without the mind of God, without knowing the mind of God, we can't save ourselves.

That kind of thinking is foolishness. Not by your own thinking. You can't know true peace, true purpose, true contentment, true salvation, other than by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, those who seek signs and those who by their own wisdom think that they can find that knowledge that's sufficient for true fulfillment. No.

Unless you know God, unless you've been given that wisdom from God and that wisdom of God, you will not be saved. Because Paul tells us of the wisdom of God in verse 23.

[24 : 16] And we go back to the great verse that we started with, verse 23. The wisdom of God. But we preach crucified. That's the wisdom of God. But it's a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

But we preach Christ crucified. Now, this isn't any kind of, you know, proud boast from Paul. You know, as if to say, look at me, I'm fine, I'm okay.

I'm superior to these others. Well, absolutely not. Paul spoke in humility. I mean, Paul's contrasting the weakness and foolishness of those who had no saving faith with the privilege of knowing Jesus, receiving Jesus, and proclaiming Jesus.

Because Paul knows that he's got that privilege that's not by his own learning. He knows that he doesn't know Jesus as a saviour because of any signs, any external signs.

He knows that Jesus came into his life not by signs, not by any kind of advanced learning, but because of grace, the saving grace of the Lord Jesus, the saving grace that was sufficient for him.

[25 : 30] That grace made possible because of Jesus having died on the cross for such as Paul and all who are Christ by faith. And so Paul will preach Jesus.

He'll preach Christ. He'll preach Christ crucified as the only answer to man's deepest need. But what then does the cross say to unbelieving Jew and Gentile?

The cross actually says madness, weakness, foolishness. I mean, you know, to any Jewish unbeliever, whether even then or even now, you know, putting these two words together, Christ crucified, put these two words together, and it appears to be an absolute contradiction.

You know, we said a moment ago, the Jewish unbeliever, they believed in a, if you like, a powerful Messiah.

One who, not somebody who's going to end his life on a cross. Not someone who's going to be put to death by the hated Roman authorities. Because to them, Messiah, or the Greek equivalent word Christ, means power, means victory.

[26 : 48] Crucifixion means weakness. It means defeat. And putting these two words together, Christ crucified, just didn't seem to make sense. And to be told that Jesus died on, well, not just died, but died that cruel death, and died as state criminals were put to death.

It was a stumbling block. In other words, the word is scandal. It was the ultimate scandal. How could anyone who hung on the cross be God's servant?

I mean, the words of the Old Testament, the book of Deuteronomy said that anyone who's hung on a cross, or should I say hung on a tree, is under God's curse. How could the Messiah, the Christ, be under God's curse?

It was a scandal to them, a scandal of the greatest proportion. But of course, to you who believe, you who are blessed with that saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, yes, Jesus was crucified on that tree, on that wooden cross, and he was made that curse of God.

God the Father made God the Son that curse, so that the Son, God the Son, might take that punishment that you and I deserve, deserve for our sins. And Christ crucified tells of that curse being received willingly by Jesus and willingly for your sake, so that the word of the cross that you know by faith, you know is the power of God for salvation.

[28 : 22] Without Christ crucified, you're lost. Without Christ crucified, all of us are lost. But with Christ crucified, you're found, you're saved, you're delivered from that terrible curse of God, that curse that condemns.

Yes, Jesus was that curse, condemned in our place. But what about the foolishness of non-Jews who, you know, about the preaching of Christ crucified?

Well, they called it foolishness. In other words, something that was mad, madness. You see, to first century Gentiles, first century non-Jews, you know, preaching Christ crucified, it just seemed mad.

That message that, you know, that the cross where Christ was crucified, it tells a victory. You know, when we see Christ crucified to believe that we should revere and honour and trust him and believe in him and follow him, to these non-Jewish unbelievers, that was madness.

But it wasn't madness to Paul. And it wasn't madness and isn't madness to anyone who honours and trusts and believes and follows the Lord Jesus, the Christ who was crucified.

[29 : 43] Because by faith, you believe the word of the cross. And by faith, you echo Paul's words that yes, the cross is the power of God and it's the wisdom of God.

It's that wisdom that's rooted in all eternity. Because it's the only way, the only way for sinners to be saved and made right with God.

And the only way was and is or was by that perfect sinless substitute, the one who would face and did face the wrath and curse of God, who faced the penalty for sin in your place, my place.

So where do you stand this day? Do you stand still with those who seek signs and, you know, just think you're going to be able to use man-centered reason, man-centered wisdom to know God?

Are you going to stand with those who truly do thank God for the word of the cross and rejoice when you hear again Christ crucified and you rejoice to hear that truth proclaimed, preached and proclaimed and preached to the glory of God?

[30 : 58] Which side are you on? Well, I pray that you're all on that side with Jesus, the one who is crucified for you, the one who died for you, the one who was dead for you, the one who was raised for you, so that you might have everlasting life in heaven, the Christ who was crucified.

Amen. And let us pray. Lord, we bless you for your word, even that word of the cross. May that word penetrate even the very hardest of hearts, even, perhaps even watching on this morning, or even in the building this morning.

But Lord, may that word that's sharper than any two-edged sword, may that word penetrate even to the hearts of those who have been so foolish to resist the call to believe in Jesus and be saved.

But hear us, Lord, as we cry it unto you. Hear us, Lord, as we give you thanks for that word, the word that saves, the word that delivers, the word that gives eternal life.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name.