

How Do You Respond To The Word Of The Cross

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Our God, open our hearts to your word and your word to our hearts. We ask in Christ's name. Amen. The passage on which I want to speak to you this morning is 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 18 to 25.

And if you turn it up in your few Bibles, you'll find it quite a lot easier to follow because I'm going to stay pretty closely to the text and you can verify the things I want to say.

There's a sequence of numbers, 1, 2, 3, and 4, which will get us well into the text. And I want to use them first. Number one, there is one thing in the whole of creation, which is the word of the cross.

And the purpose for which we come to church and the purpose for which we have our children baptized is because of that one thing, which is the word of the cross.

But that word of the cross divides the world into two. It is either folly to those who are perishing or it is the power of God to those who are being saved.

[1 : 47] So there is either the perishing or those who are being saved. Now our brave new world has created a wonderful, large, wide, broad, expansive middle ground between those two.

But all that ground is reduced to one word, the word of the cross. And in response to that word, there's only two possibilities.

Either that you are the servants of Apollyon, the keeper of the bottomless pit, or you are the servants of Jesus Christ.

And you measure that by the word of the cross and how you respond to it. If in your wisdom and sophistication you say, nonsense and foolishness, you can tell from this verse who you belong to.

And if you say in response to this word of the cross, this is indeed the power of God, you can tell who you belong to. So one word creates two people.

[3 : 04] But then it reveals that God is doing three things. And if you look at the text, you'll see the three things that God is doing.

The first thing he's doing is that he is saving. We don't save ourselves. We are being saved. We are being saved from the wrath to come by the only one who can save us from it.

Environmentalists will tell you about the wrath to come. People who examine the ozone layer will tell you about the wrath to come.

People who are examining the buildup of nuclear arms will tell you about the wrath to come. But that's just a certain amount of foreplay before the wrath of God, the just wrath of God, falls on us.

And we either are the servants of Apollyon, the keeper of the bottomless pit, or else we are those who believe that the word of the cross is the power of God.

[4 : 19] So God is doing three things. He is saving. He's destroying the wisdom of the wise. You can imagine eight canoes ready to go down the Fraser River and somebody comes along and puts his foot through the bottom of six of them in order that they don't try to cruise the Fraser River in such boats.

It's the same thing that God has to do. He has to come and destroy our human wisdom because we begin to imagine that it will carry us through and it won't.

And so God, in addition to saving, has to go about destroying the wisdom of the wise. The third thing that God is doing is he's thwarting the cleverness of the clever.

And if ever there was a clever society, it's ours. But this cleverness has to be thwarted. One of the instruments of his thwarting was George Grant who died a few weeks ago but was a great Canadian.

One of the quotations in the Globe and Mail about him in which I delighted which talks about thwarting the cleverness of the clever, George Grant said, technology does not reduce human drudgery.

[5 : 48] It only reduces human purpose. And that's what you call thwarting the cleverness of the cleverness.

So those are the three activities that God is involved in. Primarily saving but then destroying the wisdom of the wise for their own benefit and thwarting the cleverness of the clever so that they will see beyond it.

And then Paul asks four questions. One word of the cross divides us into two. God is doing three things and Paul asks four questions.

The four questions beginning in verse 4 are where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?

Now you might think of Brian Mulroney, John Turner and Ed Broadbent. I don't care who you think of as the wise man, the scribe and the debater of this age.

[6 : 59] but what is what Paul is asking those questions for is to make us aware that the experts on whom we rely are not reliable when it comes to the ultimate issue and that the wisest of the wise men cannot point.

When I left London two years ago they were moving towards the big boom anyway they were all going to all the stock markets in the city of London were going to go on to computers in a big way and then they would know all the answers.

Well this week happens to be the anniversary of the day that the wisdom of the wise was not sufficient and we almost created a global disaster because we relied on the wisdom of the wise and the scholars can't find it.

The mathematician cannot in a mathematical textbook find the ultimate answers to the ultimate question so that the wise men and the experts in our society can't do it.

And similarly the debater of this age does not know how to define the issues. We are living in the world of great debaters these days but are we hearing what the ultimate issues are?

[8 : 31] So Paul says where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Then the fourth question that he asks is has not God made foolishness the wisdom of this world.

We can't do it. There is no accumulation of human wisdom by which we can ultimately answer the ultimate human question.

I want to tell you that in the course of visiting families in preparation for baptism this week a young lady five years old asked me do we have to die?

Well the wise man doesn't answer that question he avoids it and so does the scribe and so does the debater of this age. We avoid the question because we don't know what the answer is and that's what Paul said we would do.

When it comes to these questions we avoid them. But then he says why do we avoid them? We avoid them because we have discovered what Paul says in verse 21 and 21 is a magnificent verse.

[9 : 58] It's a verse which I could wish would be tattooed on your brain so that you would never forget it. In our super sophisticated information age with all the computers in the world verse 21 stands that in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom.

That is we're not going to find the answers that way. And if you want to know God there's only one way you can know him. And Paul goes on to tell us then what that way is.

God through the folly of what we preach. chooses to save those who believe. God has appointed fools like me to stand up and tell you about the person of Jesus Christ so that you will look to him, the person on the cross.

I'm to tell you about him for it says very plainly it pleased God.

God is pleased through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. Now the profession that I am in is treated with ridicule in many, many ways and not without deep deserving.

[11 : 30] but the message which is there concerning the person of Jesus Christ is something you ridicule at your peril.

You can't ridicule that or that person. Preachers are a dime a dozen. but the folly of the cross is the wisdom of God.

It's as though if I was to in a crowd shout out fire and there was no fire and everybody panicked and people bumped into each other, knocked each other down, walked on each other and so on.

What a fool I would be. But if there was a fire and I didn't shout it, I'd be a worse fool. And so that's the job of the preacher, to tell you about the man we crucified and to tell you that in him is locked

the wisdom of God.

Now, Paul says this is very difficult. In verse 22 he says Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom.

[12 : 52] Well, lots of us are proud because we seek signs or we seek understanding, but we don't come to the place of knowing God.

We want God on our terms. If you will demonstrate yourself to me in this way, then I will believe. If you don't, then I will.

Now, the Jews said, we want a sign. And Jesus said, or God said to them, okay, here's a sign. And he portrayed Jesus Christ publicly crucified before them.

You want a sign? There it is. Do you want any more? And they were scandalized. That's what it means tripped up by the sign that God gave them.

the Greeks came and they said, we want wisdom. And God says, you want wisdom? I'll show you where wisdom is to be found.

[13 : 56] And again, Christ is publicly portrayed before them as crucified. And it was a matter of social convention among the Greeks that in polite society, you did not even discuss the execution of a slave.

it was beneath contempt for them to consider the wisdom that God chose to put before them in the person of Jesus Christ.

It goes on to say, though, that despite the proud Jew who looks for a sign, and he could as easily be a proud Anglican, or the proud Greek who looks for understanding, in spite of that, God is calling Jews and Greeks together.

And the reason that he's calling them is to present them with the reality of who he is as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

God. Can I just conclude by telling you what happens when a person discovers God? If you discover, you know, how to make gold out of lead, you patent it, hire a big office downtown, a battery of lawyers, bankers, and accountants, and you protect what you've got, and you can live happily ever after on the basis of God.

[15 : 28] But what happens when you discover God? Well, you have a lot of records in the New Testament of what happens when you discover God. One man would not lift up so much as his eyes towards heaven, but said, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

Another, with childish wonderment, cried out when he discovered God, Abba Holy.

Another, when he saw a vision of God, said, I am a man of unclean lips, and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

And Job, who was a very wise man indeed, and suffered greatly for the wisdom that he acquired, when he had God reveal himself to him, when God showed himself to Job, Job was breathless.

And he said, I know thou canst do all things. No purpose of thine can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?

[16 : 49] I have uttered what I did not understand. things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, and I will speak.

I will question you, and you declare to me, I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee.

Therefore, says Job, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. When God reveals himself to us in the cross of Jesus Christ, all our wisdom, all our knowledge, all our proud presumptions are crushed, and we fall down in repentance and in acknowledgement that the wisdom of God is wiser than men, and the foolishness of God is more powerful than men.

And those who bring their children to be baptized this morning are saying that they believe that God has revealed his wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross, us, and that they don't want to be among those who are perishing, among those who, in fulfillment of God's purpose of love towards us, are being saved by his sovereign grace at work in our lives and hearts.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[19 : 30] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Let us pray.

Let us begin by praying for peace on earth and for unity of all Christian people. O Lord, you came to bring peace, to offer reconciliation, to heal the separation between people, and to show how it is possible for men and women to overcome their differences and to celebrate their unity.

[24 : 00] you revealed your father as father of all people, a father without resentment or desire for revenge, a father who cares for each one of his children with an infinite love and mercy, and who does not hesitate to invite them into his own house.

But today our world does not look like a world that knows your father. Our nations are torn by chaos, hatred, violence, and war.

In many places, death rule. El Salvador, Northern Ireland, Iran, many other countries have not experienced peace for many years.

Even in countries which are officially at peace, such as Spain, Italy, and Turkey, violence is never absent. peace. O Lord, do not forget the world into which you came to save your people.

Do not turn your back on your children who desire to live in harmony, but who are constantly entangled in fear, anger, lust, violence, greed, suspicion, and jealousy.

[25 : 18] bring your peace to this world, a peace that we cannot make ourselves. Awaken the consciousness of people and their leaders.

Raise up men and women who are full of love and generosity, who will speak and act for peace. Show us new ways in which hatred could be left behind, wounds healed, and unity restored.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. Let us pray for ourselves and for each other in this congregation.

Dear Lord, Vince Van Gogh once said, It is true there is an ebb and a flow, but the sea remains the sea. You are the sea.

And although we experience many ups and downs in our emotions, and often feel great shifts and changes in our lives, you remain the same. Your sameness is not the sameness of a rock, but the sameness of a faithful lover.

[26 : 32] Out of your love we come to life. By your love you sustain us. And to your love we are always called back. There are days of sadness and days of joy.

There are feelings of guilt and of gratitude. And there are moments of failure and success, but they are embedded in your unwavering love.

Lord, there are times when we carry pain that feels like it crushes us. Times in the midst of loss when we feel like we will not survive. Times when we feel like we will never be whole again.

In these times our temptation is to doubt your love, to think of ourselves as beyond the reach of your love, to remove ourselves from the healing touch of your love.

To do these things is to move into the darkness of despair. O Lord, be of love and goodness. Let us not fear too much the storms and winds in our daily lives.

[27 : 39] Let us know that there is an ebb and flow, but that you always remain. Lord, in your mercy. Amen. Let us pray for Harry and Ernie and for the many other members of this congregation who speak God's word at Regent, in our schools and universities, in the marketplace, and within this church.

Lord, it often seems that the problems of the world are so complex and intricate, and your word seems embarrassingly simple. But you said, O Lord, be as clever as servant and as innocent as thou.

give your servant innocence and simplicity in the midst of this complex world. That they know as they seek to be informed and to understand problems that face the world, that what really counts is that their information, knowledge, and insight would allow them to speak more clearly your truthful words.

Do not allow evil powers to seduce them with the complexities of the world's problems. Give them strength to think clearly, to speak freely, and to act boldly in your service.

Give them the courage to sow the dove in a world that is full of serpents. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

[29 : 15] Lord, let us come before the Lord with thankful hearts. Lord, we want to come to you with joyful hearts.

We want to serve you with gladness, to thank you because you are God, and it is you who made us, and not we ourselves. Thank you that you call us to be your people, and that you care for us.

we have come to your house today with thanksgiving to sing your praises. We give thanks for your goodness, and bless your name. Your loving kindness is everlasting, and your thankfulness is forever.

Lord, in your mercy, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[30 : 31] Amen. Amen. Good morning. My name is Margaret diamond, deputy warden. It is my great pleasure this morning on behalf of all of you to welcome the family and friends of the children who were baptized this morning.

It's lovely to have you with us. I'm aware that some of you are visitors to St. John's, and it's a pleasure to have you. I would also like to congratulate every one of you, the choir of St. John's, for the singing this morning, and to especially thank those members who sang the anthem from the gallery.

During this interim period, when we don't have a regular choir, Ed Norman, our music director, would very much welcome the services of any musicians in the choir who would like to give their talents to the musical portion of the service.

So if you would like to respond, please see Ed Norman. The Learner's Exchange began this morning at 9 o'clock, and for any of you who missed it or forgot, it will continue for the next few weeks.

There are three subjects, and you can still sign up for the Learner's Exchange at the Coffee Hour at the Information Desk. This is the weekend that our youth have been away at Main Island, and I'm happy to report that 42 teenagers are there this weekend and will be concluding this afternoon.

[31 : 56] A few notes about some of the things that are happening this week. Beginning this evening at 7.15, Bishop Mazareka of Rowan Zore, Uganda, will be our preacher.

He comes from a community of 250,000 people in Uganda, and 100,000 of them are Anglicans. If you can come out to the service at 7.15 tonight to worship and to hear his sermon, I'm sure you will also learn a lot about that part of the service.