

with God's power

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[0 : 00] Gracious Father, we thank you for the cross, and we pray that that power might impact us day by day. May it not be a relic of the past, but present power to take up our cross and follow you, and we ask it for your sake.

Amen. Please be seated. Just quickly, an update. I believe you've prayed already for Joshua. Fantastic. He went into surgery on Friday. Didn't go so well, so he went back into surgery again yesterday, and I just received a text from Josh. Sorry, from Josh. He's an advanced kid. From Stuart and Emma saying, Josh doing much better this morning. Surgeon happy. Praise the Lord. Please thank everyone for their prayers. So please continue to uphold them as they walk in these days, and thank God for the great news. Perfect Liberty Church used to be the fastest growing church in the world. It had its origin in Japan and has since spread to a number of different locations in the world, including Brisbane. Mostly exotic locations, except for Brisbane, I'd imagine, but mostly spread through a number of different places in the world.

[1 : 09] The headquarters in Japan is considered a paradise. At one point, it boasted in having the most complete recreation complex in all of Japan, and the landscaped delights like artificial lakes and cherry trees and waterfalls were just marvellous to comprehend.

Perfect Liberty Church had a very simple theology. Everyone who is a member is a child of God who finds the way to eternal peace by freely exercising individuality, and therefore you are free to express as members of the church to express your individuality and discover eternal peace through prayer, through golf, through group sex, and frankly, whatever else you wanted to do.

The crucial thing is total freedom for individual expression. You can do whatever you want, so long as it makes you happy, and it's called church.

That would be on their board in their foyer. Come in here and do whatever you like. On one level, it's not hard to see why it was the fastest growing church in the world at one time.

On another level, it's a bit hard to fathom why it would grow so fast. The message of this church is to do whatever you want, whenever you want, with whomever you want, so long as it makes you happy. So how's that different than anyone else in the world?

[2 : 36] One of the tenets of salvation for the Perfect Liberty Church was you had to give lots and lots of money, which is why it had money for its landscapes and recreation facilities.

So why would you give up your perfect freedom there to come into this church to give lots of money in order to have perfect freedom? Makes no sense in my mind. Perfect Liberty Church would have grown pretty well in Corinth.

Corinth was a city on the up. After being flattened by the Romans in 150 BC, they then decided they made a mistake, dramatic transformation, and poured lots of money into it and rebuilt it in the early part of the first century.

Money came from all over the empire to rebuild and improve the infrastructure. Sorry, Corinth was a major trading centre in Greece, crucial for the Roman Empire, in fact, for the world.

It was a very popular tourist destination and a great place to party. The morals of Corinth were pretty low bar. So it was a great place if you wanted to let your hair down and have a great time.

[3 : 44] The population of Corinth had exploded from all over the Roman Empire in the early days of the first century. They came to take advantage of the Corinthian cosmopolitan lifestyle.

Many of those who came were former slaves who had bought their freedom and were now players in the financial services industry. And as far as we could work out from the book of Acts, Paul stayed in Corinth for a couple of years to teach and establish this new church.

By the time he left, there was a church family there of around about 60 people. The church was multicultural and predominantly middle class, not unlike St. Paul's Chatswood.

There were a few rich people and there were a few slaves, but most people were somewhere in the middle. The other thing that we need to understand about this church before we launch into this letter is that it had some pretty major problems.

This letter, 1 Corinthians, is Paul helping this church to get back on track. And so just imagine it there. You're squeezed together in one of the houses of one of the rich people at Corinth because they're the only ones who can fit 60 people in.

[4 : 58] And you're there to hear Paul's letter. And he says, Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and our brothers, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank God for you because of his grace given to you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way, in all your speaking and in all your knowledge because our testament of our Christ was confirmed in you.

Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God who has called you into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. Notice that Paul starts his letter by describing his church in Corinth as to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord.

And again, I always thank God for you because of his grace given to you in Christ Jesus. And again, you have been enriched in every way. And again, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed and he will keep you strong to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 27] You see, at the beginning of this letter, Paul looks back to what this church has received in Jesus Christ. And then he tells them to look forward to the goal as you eagerly await the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

And he promises them that God who has called you into fellowship with his son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is faithful. They have a beginning in Jesus and they have a future to aim for.

The day when Jesus Christ is revealed. And the problem for this church in Corinth is they have forgotten what it means to live in between times.

They've forgotten what it means to live out their future hope in the present. Even though they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was in this church.

And so Paul's writing this letter to get them back on track. And how does he do that? He does it by getting to refocus on Jesus. Twelve times in the start of this letter, we have Jesus Christ or our Lord Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus our Lord mentioned.

[7 : 40] Paul is simply telling this church to refocus on the crucified Jesus as the foundation of how they live out their life together in the present.

That is fundamentally his core message through this letter. There is a beginning in Jesus and a future that they are heading to. And in between, he's calling them right now in the present to live the cross shaped life.

That is what the Corinthian church needed to get because they weren't living the cross shaped life. They were operating like perfect liberty church. The first evidence of that is the divisions and the factions in the church.

Listen to how Paul describes it in verses 10 to 17. I appeal to you brothers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

My brothers, some from Chloe's household, she got doxed in, have been informed me and informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this, one of you says I follow Paul, another says I follow Apollos, another I follow Cephas, still another I follow Christ.

[8 : 52] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised in the name of Paul? I'm thankful that I did not baptise any of you except Crispus and Gaius so no one can say that you're baptised into my name.

Yes, I also baptised the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I don't remember if I baptised anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel, not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Corinth was no different than Jatswood, no different than Sydney, no different than Australia. Like us, they had a celebrity culture. The big celebrities in Corinth weren't the singers, or nowadays the chefs.

They weren't the movie stars, they weren't the socialists, they weren't the sports people, they were the public speakers and the orators. People flocked from everywhere to hear these speakers deliver their lectures on the latest ideas.

When Paul talks here about human wisdom, he's talking about human worldview. These guys came in and just spoke about stuff. They would speak about everything and anything, politics, architecture, sex, leisure, art.

[10:12] The better that they presented, the more adherence they got, and the bigger the payday it was for them. People would come and hear their favourite speakers, and then they would argue their viewpoints with one another.

The disciples of each one of these speakers would argue their viewpoints with each other. One of Paul's contemporaries, a Greek orator and historian of the Roman Empire, a guy named Dio Chrysostom, wrote this about Corinth.

He himself was a historian and an orator. He said, When I arrived, I was escorted with much enthusiasm and respect, the recipients of my visits being grateful for my presence and begging me to address them and advise them and flocking around my door from early dawn.

One could hear rival crowds around the temple shouting and reviling one another. Disciples of one fighting with the disciples of another as the writers read their stupid works.

It's a little ironic that he should call other people's works stupid when one of his most famous works was a speech called, In Praise of Hair. It was against baldness.

[11:27] So what Dio Chrysostom describes there wasn't football hooliganism, it was philosophy hooliganism. The celebrity culture, the worldviews of Corinth fed all into the life of the church.

We see it there in verses 10 to 17. If the Corinthians were a little bit underwhelmed by Paul and his speaking, they loved Apollos. Oh, we love Apollos.

He could really preach that guy. And this led them to start saying things like, well, we're Apollos people. Another group over there said, well, we, Paul's our guru, we're Paul people.

Another group says, no, no, we're Peter people, most likely the Jews, we're Peter people. Some who presumably thought they were all above all church leadership.

No, no, no. We're Jesus people. That's the trump card on you all. Even the Jesus people faction here are meant to be read negatively because they weren't Jesus people out of submission to Christ.

[12:31] They were Jesus people to beat the other factions. The church hadn't actually split, but they were heading that way because they had adopted the wisdom and the worldview of Corinth and focused on personalities and outward gifts and appearances and skill and polish rather than this cross.

And here I think is one of the main issues for them. They began to think of their teachers, their pastors, in terms of itinerant philosophers and celebrities.

and their new faith in Jesus as the product, as a new wisdom for Corinth.

The gospel message became something that they just attached to the end of their life. The Christian faith has become more than, nothing more than just simply a bunch of ideas that they have given intellectual assent to and claim to believe.

And Paul's message here in this chapter, in fact, I think the rest of the book, is that the crucified Jesus isn't another piece of wisdom that you collect and you stick it on your CV.

[13:50] The message of the crucified Christ stands in total contrast to human wisdom and power.

The cross of Christ is in fact the great reversal of all those things that you long for. This is how Paul puts it in verse 18, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God for it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the intelligent of the intelligent I will frustrate.

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? 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 to save those who believe.

Jews demand miraculous 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 man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. You see, power was a big issue in the culture of Corinth.

[15 : 20] It didn't matter whether you were Roman or whether you were Greek or whether you were Jew, sort of the three main cultures that made up Corinth. Power was essential in one way or another. That is why they had forgotten the cross because Jesus on the cross looks defeated.

He looks weak. It's an embarrassment in that culture. It's a stumbling block in that culture to preach a crucified Messiah.

And if I asked you today, just today, to share with me now, if we had a roving mic, stand up and share with me some of the great displays of the power of God in the Bible.

There is a number of things that you could turn to but who here would stand up and say the cross of Christ? That's the power of God.

That's the display of God's power. God's power. What sort of philosopher in human wisdom would ever come up with God himself dying on a cross in total weakness being the great demonstration of that God's power?

[16 : 40] Jesus, through his weakness in dying on the cross, has dealt with sin and has become life and power for all of eternity. He descended to the lowest of lows in weakness and he is now given the name that is above every name.

That at the name of Jesus, every knee would bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord over everything. God's power and he is now given what Paul is saying here is you can't get the cross of Christ and attach it to your human wisdom.

It blows human wisdom out of the water. God has more wisdom on a bad day than all the minds of the world together on a good day.

He has more power in his little toe than the might of a world superowl. And the only answer for this church at Corinth is to abandon their human wisdom and look to the crucified Jesus.

There's only one thing that can bring this church family back together and to stop it splintering.

There is only one antidote to their boasting about their cleverness and about their cultures.

[18 : 03] It's the message of Jesus. Death on the cross. What they need to discover is that the message of the cross isn't simply another idea to intellectually debate over and to put in their CV.

The gospel isn't another form of wisdom. The gospel means belonging to Jesus. It's not just the intellectual idea.

It means you belong. That's what the gospel is. Chapter 3 says, And you are of Christ and Christ is of God. Chapter 6 says, You were bought at a price, therefore honour God with your body.

You no longer live for yourself. You belong to Jesus. The only answer to all the Corinthian problems and our problems, the problems of individualism and personal preference is to live a cross-centred life together.

And what does that mean? It actually means to make Jesus and his death the main thing in our lives, both individually and corporately.

[19 : 14] make Jesus and his death the most important thing in your life, the thing that you're passionate about, the thing that shapes your behaviour and your thinking and your decision-making and your choices.

This really is the central message of this letter. We are to be people of one thing, people of the cross, living cross-centred, cross-shaped, cross-defined lives.

The overarching challenge of this letter is to live all day, every day, together in a way that is controlled by God's wisdom and he has shown it on the cross.

And that means taking up our cross and dying to self. I was at a birthday party yesterday and one of the questions during a party game was something like, use one word to describe the birthday girl.

I was thinking about various people yesterday as I was writing some of this and I was thinking, can I come up with one word to describe what they are passionate about?

[20 : 31] You know, you look at the person, you just, you know, hold random, look at the person and go, yeah, golf. You know, surfing, retirement, children, job, career, flowers, caravan, gardening,

ballroom dancing, single malt scotch, fishing, travel, holding cars, Sydney swans.

I mean, it just quickly came to my mind, just think a whole random, one thing to identify them. Now, don't get me wrong, there's nothing evil about any of those things, with the possible exception of Sydney swans.

What I'm saying is, they cannot be the main thing in our lives. It is just foolishness.

The wise thing to do, the only wise thing to do is to make Jesus and his cross the controlling centre of our lives. And I suspect that if I did a similar sort of thing today in a survey and just whipped around all of St.

Paul's and said, what's the main thing about St. Paul's? There is a number of things that we could identify with and say, this ought to be our main thing. And what this passage says, no, no, no. If it's not Jesus crucified, it's not the main thing.

[22 : 06] And so Paul does something really unusual as he finishes this chapter. See what he says there in verses 26 and 27? Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. None of you were wise by human standards.

Not many of you were influential. Not many of you 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. He basically says there, hey guys, just for a moment, look up. Look up. He said, heads up, just look around the room. Look at the people sitting in front of you and beside you.

Look at each other. Aren't you a strange lot? What a weird collection of people.

people. He basically says only the cross of Christ can explain that. Conventional human wisdom can't explain it.

[23 : 12] You're not here because you were wise and powerful and you wanted to join a group of wise and powerful people. If God worked according to conventional wisdom, if God had handpicked his church on the basis of human qualification, let's face it, I for one wouldn't get a gig.

It dawned on me this week in preparation, I didn't include it, it dawned on me this week, I'm not number one in the world at anything. At anything.

In fact, I'm pretty sure I'm not number one in chats would at anything. I'm pretty average.

That's partly depressing, but it's the wisdom of God. The cross is the very expression of how God works.

He works to bring people like us, relatively unimpressive people from all different backgrounds together, and he empowers us to do what we cannot do on our own, and that is to die to ourself and pursue unity in Jesus.

[24 : 33] That is the wisdom that the United Nations hasn't got and the power that they don't have. If we make Jesus our main thing, then God gives us the power to do something incredible, the power to stop boasting about ourselves and our personal preferences and our cultures.

See what it says in verse 28, he chose the lowly things of the world and the despising the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him. You see, when we look to Jesus, when we look at Jesus on the cross, we won't look to ourselves.

We won't waste our breath trying to convince ourselves or anyone else that we are fantastic. Oh, but friends, how prone we are to do that.

How skilled we are at it. I think it would be both entertaining and quite revealing if each of us had a flashing beacon on our heads and that beacon was wired to our hearts and it went off every time we started to talk about ourselves and to think ourselves up.

Every time we thought high thoughts of ourselves, every time we took credit for other people's ideas, every subtle little reference to how spiritual we are or how good parents we are or how well things are going at work and how smart at all, or even if it's just simply, my, my, I would not do that.

[26 : 09] And the beacon would go zzzz. It would be particularly entertaining so long as I could take mine off and watch everyone else's go off.

And more importantly the red beacon would go off. More importantly it would be so revealing because it would be a reminder to us every time we took our eyes off the cross.

That's what's happening when the beacon goes off. We're taking our eyes off the cross and we're putting it fair and square on ourselves. You see, when we focus on the cross, we simply can't talk ourselves up.

We can't boast about ourselves, but we will start raving about Jesus. We also won't make our personal preferences and our culture the main thing.

The very things which every day threaten to divide us. You see, it wasn't Paul, it wasn't Apollos, it wasn't Cephas, it wasn't Steve Jeffrey, it wasn't Chris Jones, it wasn't Brian Tung, it wasn't Fay Lowe or anyone else who died for you.

[27 : 26] It wasn't anyone else who brought you in to the family of God. It was Jesus. He is the one who brings us into his family and he is the one we are to follow. He is the one we serve, he is the one we boast about.

Right at the end of the chapter, verse 30, Paul says this, just a reminder of the significance of Jesus. He says, because of him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God, that is, our righteousness, our holiness and redemption.

Paul uses three very different words here to describe what Christ has done for us and the motivation for us to keep looking to him and to live the cross-shaped life. The first word here is from the law courts, it's righteousness, it's a legal term.

Jesus has made it possible for us to be given a perfect record, not just a clean record, a flawless record. One where we've done absolutely everything right.

The second word is from the temple, it's holiness, it's Jesus who has cleaned us up and made it possible for us to come into the very presence of God. And the third word is from the slave market, it's redemption.

[28 : 36] it's Jesus who has broken the chains, broken the chains of slavery, slavery to sin and selfishness and individualism and the judgment of God.

Jesus has broken the chains of bondage and brought us home to a master who makes us part of his family. This is what Jesus has done for us, this is what the cross achieves for us, and what should we do?

we're enslaved to boasting about Jesus. Verse 30, therefore as it is written, it's written in Jeremiah, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

And so friends, we're not the perfect liberty church, doing whatever we want to do that makes us happy, but we have perfect liberty in Jesus, a perfect liberty that serves Christ and serves each other.

We have been set free and empowered to do what we cannot do, that is to serve Christ and to serve each other. And 1 Corinthians calls this church to do what Jesus called his disciples to do when he says to them in Luke chapter 9, verse 23, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.

[29 : 59] That's what Paul's calling the church of Corinth to do. You see, Christ died to save us from hell, not to save us from the cross.

He died so that we could be glorified, but not to keep us from being crucified. crucified. The cross of Christ is not merely a past place of substitution.

It is also a present place of daily execution for the Christian to die to self. And so, 930 congregation, it is only by looking to the crucified Jesus and taking up your cross will you in a couple of weeks walk willingly down to Chatswood Club in order to do church without grumbling.

It's only the cross of Christ that will allow you to do that, to do it for the sake of others. When Christ died on the cross for sinners, he not only stood in my place doing what I could never do, that is, forgiving my own sin, but he also showed me what I must do if I would save my life, namely to take up my own cross and to join him on the Calvary Road and die to self.

And so I beg of you today, don't treat the cross as a historic relic. it is the very power of God to change everything in your life and especially the power to change our inclination to make much of ourselves.

[31 : 54] If you would be his disciple, if you would save your life and not lose it, take up your cross and treasure Jesus together. Amen.