

1st Corinthians 1

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[0 : 00] Because we seem to see a society that has completely or generally has turned its back upon the gospel, turned its back upon the things of God, really turning its back upon God himself.

And we see a growing movement, a secular movement, a humanist movement, that can be quite aggressive in many ways and is seeking to eradicate and to remove.

All the influence of Christian things within our land and within society. And be very easy to become despondent and say, well, where's it all going to end?

What future have we got? What hope is there? And I'm sure, as we think like that, it's very good for us to come back to God's word.

Because Paul lived in a day which was even worse. And he lived in a city which was completely decadent. It was a city that was given over to every vice going.

[1 : 10] It was a city that was probably as godless and as pagan and as depraved as any city in the modern world in those days.

And if Paul had looked at the situation and as he walked through the streets of Corinth, it would be very easy for Paul to say, oh, well, I might as well just turn around and head off.

There is absolutely no point in doing anything here because there is, there is, I am not going to make any headway at all. But that's not how it was.

Paul went there believing this is where God had taken him. And the Lord spoke to Paul and Paul, and said to Paul, you know, he said to Paul, I have many souls yet in this city.

That's not how it looked. But God was going to work through the apostle. And God was going to work through the preaching of the word. And many people in Corinth were going to come become Christians.

[2 : 16] And there was a Lord was a church that had its divisions and its problems. And that's why Paul wrote these two letters to the church. It was still an amazing church. And in some ways was a was the very crown of Paul's labor.

So that's why I say we have to always take encouragement from God's word. And always remember that God is still on the throne, that his power is greater than any other force or any other power at all.

And we must be constantly seeking him, seeking that he will come again in power and mercy upon us as a land. Now, as Paul writes this letter, he's talking here about how the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.

And Paul mentions two distinct or two classes of people in verse 22. He talks about the Jew and the Greek and then the Jew and the Gentile.

But he talks about the Jew and the Greek. And he says that the Jew is not believing because they're looking for a sign. Very interesting. We mentioned that this morning.

[3 : 28] That very thing. The Jews were saying to Jesus, give us a sign. They were always wanting a sign. And Paul is saying to the Jews, you see, you have the two classes of people, the Jew and the Greek.

Now, the Jews, we see, they were very religious people. But so many of them, they were steeped in Judaism and did not accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

They were still bound in the old ways. They hadn't come to the liberty and the freedom in the gospel. They were bound by the old ways and the old laws and them multiplying all these laws so that it became a burden on them.

And the Jews kept looking for a sign. What does Paul mean by that? Paul is saying the Jews won't accept Jesus because they're looking for something else.

The Messiah that came is not the Messiah they wanted. Not the Messiah they expected. See, the Jews had worked it out. The kind of Messiah that the Messiah would be.

[4 : 37] And when Jesus came, he didn't tick the boxes for them. And so they weren't prepared to accept him. But it's far deeper than that.

Because they kept saying to Jesus, give us a sign. What were they wanting? Jesus' three years of ministry was a constant sign.

His whole life was a life where he was constantly performing miracles. He was healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind. He was enabling the dumb to speak again, the deaf to hear.

He was making people whose hands and arms and legs were paralyzed, enabling them to move again and become mobile. He was even fed thousands and thousands from five loaves and two fish.

He was raising the dead. He was healing the lepers. For three years, he was going around and about amongst them doing this. And they're saying, give us a sign.

[5 : 44] What other sign could Jesus give? And of course, there were times when they said, look, give us a sign. And he talked about, well, I'll give you a sign, the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be in the earth. But they refused to believe in Jesus because he wasn't the Messiah that they expected.

They were looking for the spectacular. They were looking for a king who would come in triumph, a majestic king. They weren't looking for a carpenter's son. They were looking for somebody born out of royalty, or so they thought.

Somebody who would deliver them from the tyranny of Rome. And Jesus was so far removed from what they expected. And all the time they were saying, give us a sign.

Even to the very moment when Jesus was being crucified, they were still at it below the cross. They're still saying, give us a sign. They said, look, you come down from the cross and we'll believe.

[6 : 53] To the very end, they were refusing to believe, but they were still saying, give us a sign. Would they have believed? Of course not. Because their hearts were so darkened.

It didn't matter what sign or what miracle or what spectacular thing Jesus did. And Jesus never did anything for effect. But it didn't matter what he did, they refused to believe.

And as we said, even when they were shouting to him to come down from the cross, and then they would believe. And of course, we know that Jesus couldn't come down from the cross. He couldn't save himself and us at the same time.

And so this desire for a sign, it was part and partial of their whole time with Jesus.

And you know, it's still the same today. There might be somebody in here tonight, and you're saying, you know, I need something spectacular.

[7 : 57] We mentioned that this morning. We're living in an age where people are fed up, people get bored, people, they're fed up of the ordinary things in life.

They always want the buzz, they want the thrill, they want the excitement, they want something new, always looking for something new. And we've always got to guard against that in the church, the thinking that, now don't get me wrong, we've always got to be moving and moving forward.

But we can begin to put down on the ordinariness. Remember, life, the bulk of life is lived in the ordinary.

And Jesus works in the ordinary. And we mustn't always be thinking it's only, if there's something novel or something new, that it's only in that that the Lord will work.

Yes, he does in that as well, but we mustn't be caught up with thinking it's only in the novel, it's only in something spectacular. But maybe there's somebody here tonight and say, you know, if I got a sign, if I saw an angel come down from heaven, if an angel popped up at the end of my bed and spoke my name and said to me, hey, you believe.

[9 : 10] I tell you, I would believe. No question about it. But Jesus says, no. Unless you believe the word, unless you believe me.

And remember the conversation that there was between the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man in hell. And Jesus tells that powerful story, the rich man and Lazarus.

And the rich man is saying as he arrives in hell, oh, send Lazarus. Send Lazarus back home to my brothers. And, I mean, if he goes home and warns him about this place, they'll believe.

And the words came back to the rich man, no, supposing one rose from the dead, they will not believe. They have the word. They have Moses and the prophets.

Jesus is saying the same. It's not about signs. It's not about wonders. It's not about miracles. Well, it is, in a sense, the cross, everything is a miracle. And salvation is a miracle.

[10 : 10] But it's not in signs and wonders. It's in the word. It is believing what Jesus says of himself. So, that was the Jews.

And then there were the Greeks. They were the people who were known for their wisdom. They were cultured. They were incredibly clever. It was a period when the Greeks were in the ascendancy with all the different philosophies.

And their wisdom was legendary. It was worldwide. And even to this day, some of their wisdom has been passed down. But, you know, the sad thing, for all their wisdom and all their knowledge, they kept looking in the wrong place.

And they looked on the cross in the same way as the Jew looked on the cross, as foolishness. For the Jew, it was a stumbling block. For the Greeks, for these cultured, people filled with natural wisdom, they looked to the cross.

They heard what Paul had to say, and they dismissed it. To them, it was foolishness. They couldn't understand what it was all about. But then Paul says, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.

[11 : 30] But he says, to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. And you see, this is what is so important to understand.

And just before we come to look at what is being said there, what is the problem that people have with the cross? Because, you know, it's the same today. So many people look at Christianity.

They look at the cross, and they dismiss it. They think, nah, it's irrelevant. Or they think that Jesus, good man, a failure.

Good cause, it died with him. People look at the historical Jesus and just say, well, yeah, he was a good man, a great man, a revolutionary, a radical in his day.

But his cause died with him. And that's how they look at it. See, the problem is this. As long as we look at the cross through human eyes, it looks foolish.

[12 : 31] But we're coming at the cross from the wrong angle. We have to look at the cross from God's perspective. Otherwise, the cross doesn't make sense. If we look at the cross any other way, it will be foolishness.

And that's why we've got to steep ourselves in the word, where we come to understand what the word is saying, because it's through the revelation of the word, as God is revealing to us what the cross is all about.

It's then, and only then, it makes sense. And that's why Paul says, if we look at the cross just from human point of view, it's folly. And that's how it is to those who are perishing.

They're looking at it through human eyes, and it doesn't make sense. But it's only when God reveals to us, and this is what he does in his word, that the cross makes sense.

And then Paul goes on to say to us, 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. So what does the cross bring?

[13 : 42] Well, the cross, first thing that the cross does is, it brings light into our situation. Because as we are naturally, we're in darkness.

It's all, you know, there is that darkness that we don't understand. When Jesus was on the cross, remember, a darkness fell upon the whole place.

For three hours, while Jesus was in the height of his suffering, which was a picture, in a sense of Christ, the hell that he was going through.

Because Jesus on the cross was bearing the punishment of sin. He was bearing the punishment of the sins of his people. He was taking their hell upon himself.

And there was this darkness, which symbolized everything that was happening. But you know, naturally speaking, we are in darkness. And that's why people look at the cross, and it just, it doesn't make sense.

[14 : 46] But, when the light of God begins to dawn in your soul, you begin to see, ah, this, this, this does make sense.

This is God. This is God at work. This is all love. People can't understand love. What's love got to do with it? It seems barbaric. It seems cruel.

No, my friend, it's a great demonstration of love. God so loved the world that the only way he could save the world by sending his own son, the most precious gift of glory in heaven, the one who was equal to the Father, Father sends him into the world to come in our place, to stand in our place, to take our punishment.

And unless we see this and understand this and grasp this, then we're still in darkness. And you know what it's saying, really?

If we're still in darkness and the cross is foolishness to us, it means we're perishing. And tonight, I want you to grasp this fact.

[15 : 59] I want you to ask yourself, do I tonight see? I'm not asking you that you understand it completely because none of us here understand it completely.

But do you tonight see the importance, the all importance of the cross? Do you see Jesus as the only way of salvation?

Do you see how it was necessary for him to die for you? Well, if you see that, you know, that's good. But if you can't see that, then it means that you're still in darkness.

And if you're still in darkness, it means, as things stand just now, you're perishing. Because that's what it says. For the cross is folly to those who are perishing.

But then again, not only was the cross, excuse me, not only was the cross a place of light, it was also a place of strength.

[17 : 05] And yet it was a place of strength that came out of weakness. Now again, this is a strange thing. Because a lot of people cannot understand this. This is part of the, where people have the real problem.

And they look at Jesus and they say, right, if Jesus is the Son of God, how come he was taken and he was nailed to a cross?

Surely if he's the Son of God, he could have resisted. Surely if he's the Son of God, he could have overthrown those people who came to capture him. Surely if he's the Son of God, he could have prayed to his father and his father would have destroyed these people who are trying to put him to death.

And people look on the weakness of Jesus as something to be pitied and something almost to be despised. And people don't understand that Jesus, in fact, his weakness is his great strength and that he is giving himself.

He could have annihilated. He said that to Peter. When Peter pulled out the sword, I said, put the sword away. He said, I could call on twelve legions of angels, but I'm not going to.

[18 : 20] Christ could have, at that moment, destroyed, annihilated all those who were opposed to him. But his strength was giving himself in weakness.

Giving himself, giving himself, giving himself. And that's why people look to the cross and they see failure. They see somebody who had great ideas, but they all died with him.

And you know, there are still people who look on Christianity as something for people who are weak. They equate Jesus with weakness. And they equate the followers of Jesus with weakness.

They look on Christianity for wimps, as something for those who are weak in body or weak in mind. There are a lot of people like that. Because they look on Christianity and they look on Christ as somebody who was weak.

But Jesus is displaying the greatest strength. That is strength. When you have the power and you have the authority and you could have destroyed all your enemies and tormentors in a moment, but you choose not to.

[19 : 35] Because you are going to, in weakness, in the strength of weakness, hand yourself over. And that is the wonder of it.

And that is where the gospel becomes power to us. Because it is the power of God. It is the strength of God. That's how, that's how we become a Christian.

Because God works within our heart and He takes us to Himself and despite all that we are, helps us to go on day by day by day.

The oldest Christian in here is still following the Lord, not because of themselves, not because of strength of character or strength of will. They're following the Lord today, even although it might have been a bumpy road, even although there might have been days where they slipped and stumbled, they're still following because of the grace that won't let them go because of the power of God.

God's power will not let anyone go. That's the wonder of it. And that power strengthens. That's why the apostle was able to say, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

[20 : 50] But then again, the cross is power because it brings forgiveness. And this forgiveness came through condemnation.

This is the amazing thing. Through the condemnation of Christ. Christ, remember, is standing in our place and instead of us being condemned, Jesus is condemned.

It's extraordinary, isn't it? Jesus is the one who takes our condemnation upon Himself so that we may be forgiven.

We were singing there in Psalm 32 about what that forgiveness is. The psalmist is talking about these blessings. The word forgive means to lift up and carry away.

And that's what Jesus has done for us. He has lifted up and carried away our sin. That doesn't mean that tonight I don't have sin, you don't have sin.

[21 : 50] Of course we do. We're still sinners. But it means, first and foremost, that with regard to the court of law, the heaven's court of law, as God looks at us in Jesus, He has pardoned and forgiven our sin.

It's as if we have never sinned at all. But there will come the day when our sin will be finally eradicated and removed. And that is, of course, when we die and go to glory with the Lord.

But this idea of lift up and carry away, do you know what it says in the Bible? There are two places that the Lord it talks about where the Lord has put our sins. One is into the depths of the sea.

And the other is behind his back. Now, if you never want to see something again, I could imagine you or I going out into a boat into the middle of the minch and saying, right, that's it.

Never want to see that again. Or if you never want to see something again, you throw it behind your back so that you're not seeing it. These are the pictures that the Bible gives us of what God has done with our sin to the depths of the sea behind his back.

[23 : 07] That's what forgiveness is. It's a wonderful, wonderful picture. That's what Jesus has done on the cross. And again, it talks about in Psalm 32 about whose sins are covered.

In other words, they're concealed, they're hidden. And the only way for us to have our sins covered and concealed is by owning up to them. When David wrote that Psalm, initially his problem was that he was trying to cover his sin.

He didn't, to begin with, own up. And he said he was in torment. He said it was like even his bones were sore until he came to the place where he had to confess.

And you know, that's the only place where we can discover the freedom, the liberty. Because when we open up before God and confess our sin and ask for his forgiveness, he will then cover them.

If we try and cover them, we can. Only God in Christ can cover them. And that's what Jesus was doing on the cross.

[24 : 20] He was forgiving sin. I think the cross is an amazing place because that very picture of that forgiveness is shown to us on the cross.

Remember what Jesus spoke several times on the cross. And as he hammered the nails into his hands, what did he say? Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

And as Jesus hung on the cross, remember how one man on the cross beside him turned around and said, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus said to him, truly, I say to you, today you'll be with me in paradise. on the cross, a criminal who, remember, owned up and said, I deserve to be here.

This man doesn't. That criminal found forgiveness. And we also like to think that the centurion who was in charge of operations, remember how it tells us that the centurion who stood apart from the other soldiers, he was the one who was in charge of the crucifixion the others were doing, he was standing watching things.

[25 : 33] And it tells us that he was facing Jesus. And for all the hours that Jesus hung up on the cross, that centurion was standing there watching, listening, taking note of everything.

And when Jesus gave up the ghost, when Jesus dismissed his spirit, the centurion cried out and he said, truly, this was a righteous man.

This was the Son of God. And there was that amazing confession came from the man who was in charge of putting Jesus to death.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And we see that forgiveness coming to play even on the cross.

And that's what we are here about tonight is that this cross is a message of forgiveness. And the last thing we would say is, that 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.

[26 : 41] That is the great message of the gospel. That is why we never, ever, ever will stop preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Paul went to the church in Corinth, you know what he said to them?

This is what he said, I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified. I'm not interested in all the other things.

Oh, you're talking about this, that, and the next thing. Not interested. There's only one thing, one passion. It's Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is where our focus is to be because this is where the power is.

the power of Jesus to change people's lives. He can change your life tonight. Ask him that this power will be released in you.

Let us pray. Amen.