

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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- [0 : 00] I come to you this morning in weakness and in much fear and trembling.
- So let's pray. Lord, we thank you that by your grace you have gathered us here this morning.
- And we thank you that your spirit, Lord, enables us. Lord, enables us to hear your word, enables us to sing your praises.
- Lord, enables us to turn towards you. Lord, when in all of our bent we would turn away and run. In all of our bent we would do something else.
- But God, you have turned us towards you. And what a grace that is. Lord, I pray this morning that you would be manifest among us by your spirit.
- [1 : 14] Lord, that as we look at your word, you would fill our hearts with the glory of all that you are. And we would respond in worship.
- Praise. Adoration. Love. Sacrifice. Service. For you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.
- I wonder if you've ever been embarrassed by Jesus. I was thinking about this as I was preparing this week. A couple of years ago I had the privilege of opportunity.
- Privilege might be the wrong word. I had the opportunity to go to one of my uncle's funeral. He had lived a good life. And I had a chance to go.
- And interact with my extended family that I don't get to see very often. And the question always comes up. Oh, so what are you up to these days?
- [2 : 16] What are you doing? Well, I'm a... And I found welling up in my heart just a little bit of embarrassment. Embarrassment about how they might view my answers.
- What they might think. You're an Ivy League graduate who's a Baptist pastor. You identify with those people that I really have no interest in knowing.
- From what I know. From the media. From my perception. I found myself traversing the minefield of what I feared their perceptions of my answers might be.
- But deep down inside I wonder too if I was just a little embarrassed about Jesus himself. If I was just a little bit concerned about how...
- More concerned about how they would think of me than what my Lord would think of me in that moment. And underneath that I wondered if maybe deep down I lacked a kind of certainty in the moment.
- [3 : 28] That Jesus would be all that I could ever want him to be. For me and for this world. You know, in that context I want to be winsome and not unnecessarily offend.
- I don't want to be boorish or identified with some things that honestly I'm embarrassed by. And the perception of what people think about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in this world.
- I want to avoid those things. But I wonder... What I saw that day in my own heart was that... At its core it wasn't just those things.

It was that I was a little embarrassed. I was a little uncertain as to whether Jesus really was all that I need him to be. This doubt is reinforced in the worlds that maybe you live in.

The academy asks... Aren't we beyond that? That's so 30 AD. We've gone beyond that now. Our knowledge has increased. That can't be real.

[4 : 32] Or we meet the suffering. And they say... Where is this Jesus? He hasn't fixed my problem yet. We meet the businessman. And he says...

Well, what good is Jesus going to do for my bottom line? That's not very practical. So heavenly minded but no earthly good. The high achiever says... Jesus?

I've made it this far on my own. Why would I need him? The tolerant society says... You don't really think Jesus is everything, do you?

Like... How could you deny all these other things? And the hurting say... Why... Why would Jesus be everything to me if I still hurt the way I do?

I don't know if you're here exploring Christianity here this morning. Maybe you've been in church for a long time. But you find that you ask these questions. You hear these questions.

[5 : 33] And you see in your own heart some doubt. Some uncertainty. You ask yourself... Is he really enough? How do we show this in our lives?

Well... I think sometimes we hedge our futures. Yeah... Jesus is everything I need. But I really need a really killer resume as well. So that I can get ahead.

Yeah... Jesus is all that I need. But in these contexts, I kind of need to downplay that. And let people know about these other things that are going to be really impressive. These other identities that I embrace.

So that you'll think highly of me and accept me. We hedge our reputations. I don't want to be known as that guy in my circle.

That kind of fringy, out there, Jesus guy or gal. And ultimately, friends, we can hedge our very salvation.

[6 : 39] Yeah, Jesus is everything for me. But don't I have to... Can I... Isn't there something I need to do? Isn't there something I need to add to it? Isn't there something else that I contribute to it?

That... I feel so helpless. I feel like I should be doing something. So that Jesus will find me acceptable. These are ways in which I think we show our doubt.

That Jesus really is enough. That Jesus is all that we would want. Our passage this morning helps us think more clearly about it.

We're continuing in our series in 1 Corinthians. We're looking at page... 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 1 through 5. We're on page 952 in the Pew Bible.

If you want to look there with me. And as you're turning there, let me just give us a little bit of recap of where we've been. This whole section, starting back in chapter 1, verse 10, is about divisions.

[7 : 39] And divisions that have divided the church related to their identification with particular leaders. I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos. I'm of Cephas. Those sorts of things. And Paul says, your divisions are rooted in misplaced identity and a missed evaluation of what's really important in your spiritual leaders in such a way that you have allowed the wisdom of the world, the way that the world around you, the Corinthian world, the competitive get-ahead, ride-the-coattails-to-the-top world, you have allowed those things to shape how you are living together as followers of Jesus.

You are more Corinthian than you are a Christian in these ways. The Corinthians were on the side of worldly wisdom rather than God's wisdom, which makes foolish the wisdom of the world.

And he went on in verses 18 through 25 to say, God showed the foolishness of the wisdom of the world through the very act of salvation, by the cross of Christ, by sending Jesus to die.

He shamed all of this worldly wisdom. He exposed all of the human-centeredness of those in the church.

And he said, I want you to see this so clearly, how you have been infected and how you have been shaped by the wisdom of the world. So he went on at the end of chapter one, verses 26 through 30, and he says, look, you're competing with one another about being great or being wise or being powerful or being spiritual or being important.

[9 : 21] But who were you? You can't even make it in the world's eyes, let alone by the kingdom of God. But isn't it great that God has chosen you to display his grace and so that you might not boast in yourselves, but that you might boast in God and the greatness of the work that God has done.

Paul's saying, in your Corinthian example, this is partly how you see the cross of Christ shaming the foolishness of the world and exalting the wisdom of God in achieving salvation the way he did.

And then the passage we come to today, chapter two, verses one through five, he says, and not only was your experience of that, but remember what I was like among you.

I want to use my own ministry as an example. of what God is doing when he confounds the foolishness of the world.

So, having said that, let's look at the passage together. Chapter two, verse one. And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[10 : 42] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Paul uses his own example, his mode of ministry, to try to point the Corinthians again to the thing that he's been trying to help them see for quite a while now in this passage.

He's reminding them again, Jesus Christ and him crucified is everything you ever need him to be. He's the content of the gospel. He's the pattern of the gospel messenger.

And he alone is the one who gives us true hope of real salvation. So let's look at those things, the content, the pattern, and then the hope of salvation.

In verses one and two, look with me again. What we see is that Paul says that the content of the gospel testified to is the crucified Christ. His point is actually really simple.

[12 : 00] It doesn't take a lot of exegesis to see what his main point is. I decided to forsake all of the forms of speech and pattern that you might think would be so impressive and to simply proclaim to you the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Paul says, what did I talk to you about? What did I boast to you about? I talked about one who came and died, one who came and lived a perfect life.

And yet, though he deserved all honor and glory and power, he humbled himself, made himself a servant, offered himself up in the place of you and me, was crucified as a rebel, he who had always obeyed his father.

He offered himself up in the place of our sin as the perfect substitute and as a sacrifice, giving his very own life to pay the penalty that our sins deserve.

He said, this is what I knew among you, you worldly wise who love all these other things. He says this in a context where the Corinthians loved those who were self-reliant and self-exalting in their rhetoric.

[13 : 29] We might know of a place like that nearby here where people think well of fine-sounding arguments and brilliance and groundbreaking ideas and concepts, where people are in love with those kinds of shows and displays.

And underneath it, Paul's exposing the heart, the heart of the wisdom of the world that says, can you meet my standard of judgment?

Can you entertain me, tickle my fancy, impress me, will you? Can you compete and show yourself to be impressive?

And you know, it's not only at that fine university next door, but in all of our tribes, no matter where we live, there's gonna be some evaluation of I'm gonna give you respect because you speak to me or you show yourself in a certain way.

Those of you who are in high school, think about this. What do your high school friends value? Sarcasm. Irony. Quick banter.

[14 : 48] An ability to communicate in incomprehensible acronyms on a little device in your hand. That's my old man's version of it, right? 140 characters.

Whatever it is, I don't know. You guys know better than I do. But in each of your tribes, there are gonna be certain ways that you're gonna be seen as impressive. In each of your little social milieus, there's gonna be a certain way that people are gonna think well of you if you kind of play along and do the dance.

Paul says, I will not play along in order to be heard. Now, let's make sure we don't misunderstand Paul in some other ways that people have misunderstood him.

Paul is not saying that you shouldn't be thinking or engaged in a healthy conversation with people. Right? If you go through the book of Acts, particularly chapters 18 and 19, in Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus, you see Paul reasoning and persuading.

Paul isn't saying, I just am gonna preach, Jesus died on the cross for your sins and that's all I need to say. Paul was engaged in these long conversations, proving from the Old Testament how Jesus was the Messiah, showing how Jesus is the hope, and by the resurrection of the dead that he is actually the thing that you've been longing for as you worship these idols that you don't know about in Athens and on and on and on.

[16 : 14] So it's not about not thinking or not engaging or not seeking to persuade a reason. It's also not about not contextualizing.

As we read ahead in chapter nine, Paul himself will say, I became all things to all men so that I by all means might win some. To the Jews, I became like a Jew.

So we wanna remove every stumbling block to someone understanding the gospel, every cultural barrier, every personality trait that might somehow mar my ability to share with you about the great news of what God has done in Christ.

There's an important place for that. It's not about Paul saying, well, in order to depend on the spirit and power, I'm not gonna prepare for my sermon this week.

I'm just gonna believe that God's gonna lead me and give me the words, and so I'm just gonna stand up there and be completely unready and hope that God will bless me. That's not what Paul is saying.

[17 : 22] Paul is also not saying that he didn't know anything. He actually knew how to make a tent, it seems, because that was his job. He's not saying that the only knowledge that has any value in the world is the knowledge of Christ.

So for those of you who are exploring the intricacies of how the immune system is unable to attack a cancer cell, for those of you who spend your life figuring out the best way to parent a teenager through all of the joys and trials of that time of life, for those of you who actually know how to change a tire and swing a hammer, all of those knowledges God blesses and then loves and enjoys and wants you to see it.

There's an important place for it. But what Paul is saying is that I am focused on this above all things. I am focused on Christ.

If I know all things but I don't know Christ, I don't know anything that's really important. And if I know Christ, all the other knowledge that I have becomes properly placed in my world, I find that my exploration of all this other knowledge becomes a great joy because I see it fitting in with a God who created the world and a God who has redeemed the world and a God who will remake the world one day.

But Christ is at the center and the focal point of all of that understanding. And Paul's not only saying this is what I focus on but he's also saying this is what I rely upon.

[19 : 07] It's not my message. Did you see in verse 1? I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God. Paul's saying this isn't my story that I've made up for you.

I am simply telling you what I have seen and heard. What God has objectively done in history that I am now explaining to you and proclaiming to you.

This isn't a self-generated message. This is one that I have received and that I am passing along to you. This is what Paul was trying to say in verse 17 and 18 of chapter 1 when he talks about I wanted to come to you but not in words of human eloquence lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Verse 18 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. And that's what I'm relying on.

God's message is going to come to you and as I speak it it is God's power that is going to be at work at you. Not because I'm clever or because I'm impressive. There are lots of applications for us today lots of ways for us to think about how we pursue ministry but we have much more to say so quickly I simply want to ask these questions what do you focus on?

[20 : 39] What do you focus on in your life? What do you spend time investing in? What do you talk about? What do people know you for? Secondly what do you rely on?

When things get difficult when the pressure is on where is your default? Is it to run to the shadow of the cross and to find their strength and comfort and solace and hope?

Or do you run to every other strategy every other hope every other prop to try to get you through? And Paul says I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified he's saying Christ is all that you ever really need.

He's not only the content of Paul's preaching but he's also the pattern. Look with me again in verses 3 and 4. Let's read it.

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling in my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power. Again it's fairly straightforward it seems Paul's saying I wasn't relying on myself I actually came to you in weakness and in fear and in trembling.

[22 : 06] And it's interesting the commentators wrestle with what was Paul afraid of? Paul didn't seem to be shrinking back and not proclaiming the glory of Christ nor in fact did it seem like he was ineffective.

There were actually people responding to his preaching but interestingly in the middle of that account where some were responding and some were not as is typical as we saw in the book of Acts as we saw the proclamation of the gospel the Lord comes to Paul at night.

Do you remember what he says in Acts 18? The Lord says don't be afraid I have many more in this city. Paul wasn't afraid of man's response.

He wasn't afraid of persecution. He wasn't afraid of his own inability. I don't even think he was afraid of the fruitlessness of his ministry. I think he was afraid that he might not be able to faithfully discharge the calling that God has given us.

And he might be afraid humanly. He might have said is this really is this really worth it? Can I actually do this? And God comes in and he says Paul remember this isn't your ministry.

[23 : 33] This is mine. I'm using you. Go be faithful but do so in great freedom and boldness not fear. Do it in great faith because I am the God who already has people in the city.

I'm going to be at work. So don't be afraid. Paul's weaknesses in Corinthians are often tied to his physical inability to his lack of impressiveness of his persona.

There are lots of different ways that people have seen this. Paul says I came to you in that way. It reminds you a little bit oh and then he says I came to you in that way in a demonstration of the spirit and of power.

Well what does that look like? It reminds you a little bit of the church in Corinth. Paul writes to them about this. We know brothers loved by God that he's chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

You know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake and then he goes on to say and you endured great suffering as a result of your faith and you were steadfast and that's because I saw that though I came and proclaimed to you what was real was that God had worked in your life.

[24 : 58] In fact this is exactly what he says further on in the letter of 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 13 he says we thank God constantly for this that when you receive the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it not as the word of man but as what it really is the word of God which is at work in you believers.

Paul says when I came the whole manner of my coming was not to make much of me but to follow in the patterns of John the Baptist I must decrease so that he must increase so that Jesus would be exalted so that when others heard his preaching they didn't think wow Paul's a great order they thought wow Jesus is a great savior and they would be cut to the quick they would see the weight of their sin and the offensiveness before God and they would see the glory of what God has done in Christ and they would turn and believe and be filled with joy at their forgiveness that they have be filled with a new life that overflowed in so many ways Paul came with dependence not displays or skill or ability he came in humility not in human exhibitionism he came in weakness not in a show of power or authority he came like the blind man in John 9 said I don't know about that Jesus but once I was blind and now

I can see he came like the woman in Samaria who went back to her town that had shunned her and said come see a man who told me everything I ever did her shame was completely gone as she knew the acceptance of this Jesus he came as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread and it's humbling isn't it it's humbling to admit you're a beggar who needs bread and that's how God shames the wise and the self-sufficient and the self-important and the self-reliant Paul then finishes this sentence with a purpose statement and this is actually where I want the weight of our time to land today Paul came saying I came only proclaiming Jesus Christ and him crucified I came demonstrating this as a pattern of how I want to live but verse 5 is the sweetness of this passage

I believe in so many ways and you see the heart of the apostle look with me at it verse 5 that might even be stronger translated so that in order that I did these things with a purpose that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of men but in the power of God Paul's greatest fear is that as the Corinthian church was influenced by the world that they lived in as they took up the mantle of this wisdom that was being that was infiltrating into their hearts and minds as they were beginning to esteem and to trust in and to rely on and to honor these things that their faith would be put in the wrong thing that their faith would ultimately be put in something that cannot bear the weight of what they're trusting it for that their faith would be in the wrong foundation that they would build their identity on the spiritual leaders they attach themselves to and in doing so they would divide over a competitive spirit as they tried to find themselves getting ahead in the church that in their comparison they would fall into boasting about themselves and ultimately finding as many of us do at one point or another in our life that the things that we boast about and the things we rely upon cannot bear the weight that the wisdom of the world is ultimately shown to be empty and therefore foolish to trust in he wants to destroy this self-exalting self-saving self-justifying spirit to point to another way so that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of men but in the power of God now I want you to look with me for a minute go back to verse 18 of chapter 1 because the power of God there is not just a generic power of God so that your faith might rely on the power of God because he created the world even though he did that or the power of God because he can move mountains because he can do that but it's not it's not a generic term for him it's actually a part of his argument verse 18 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 as Paul says in Romans 1 the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe it is this message not just the message of Jesus but particularly the message of Jesus Christ crucified hanged on a tree nailed in a bloody execution

Paul says this is the one place where you will find something to believe in that will not fail you something to believe in that will not let you down because as verse 24 says Christ is the wisdom of God and the power of God Christ crucified how can this be true when I walk into my family reunion when you walk into your lab at work when you go about your daily life raising your kids doing your shopping taking your classes whatever it is that employs your day how could it be true that Jesus Christ crucified is the wisdom of God and the power of God

[32 : 16] I think this is the question that Paul wants us to dig into to understand why he did what he did Christ the wisdom of God Christ crucified the wisdom of God how can that be it seems foolish right the king of the world the creator takes on human form and becomes a part of the creation he who had all power laid it aside he who knows everything submitted himself to another why is this the wisdom of God to do it this way well there are lots of arguments and lots of ways we could explore this I want to explore it in one particular way that I hope you will find sufficient turn with me over to Romans chapter 3 there's a statement here that when we understand it will help us see the wisdom of God in Romans 3 21 through 25 if you don't know this passage you should spend the next three months reading it because it is one of the most significant explanations of the very core of the

Christian message in the gospel then read the rest of Romans for the next 10 years and then you'll understand how significant it is and then man your heart will be in a good place but verses 21 through 25 Paul is saying that the problem of sin against a holy God has created a huge problem how can we stand as sinful people before a holy God where can we find a righteousness sufficient for us in that courtroom and in his presence and Paul says well he's provided Jesus Jesus and his perfect righteousness is now given to us so that he is given to us as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith this was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins verse 26 here's the key it was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in

Jesus now in our culture today this doesn't seem very impressive do you know why we think we're okay and we don't think God has very high standards so we walk into the holy courtroom and we're like hey I know the speed limit says 30 but I was going 34 it's not that bad your radar can't really calibrate to within five so I'm good I've got to be good before like I'm really okay here I need to be let loose I need to be set free I need to be justified in this courtroom I didn't really do anything wrong deep in our hearts we want God to be God who says yeah that's okay it's not that bad don't worry about it it's fine and that's why this verse doesn't have any meaning to us but if we understand that God is perfectly holy and in his holiness he loves all that is good and beautiful and right in the world and therefore any deviation from that perfection is an aberration and an offense to the beauty of that perfection that

God is and that God intended for us as human beings and that our step away and out of all of that goodness and beauty and perfection that God is is an act not just of misstep but is an act of rejection it is an act of wanting to go in the ways of the world and to say I know better than God what is good and right in this world and in light of that when you see the depth of the offense of sin and how tragic and how terrible it is you are then left with a question if you follow the logic well how then can God ever accept any where where is there a righteousness that I can stand in under which God will accept me and Paul says this is Christ crucified because only a

God who became man could live a sinless life only a man could offer himself up in the place of another man for their sin only Jesus could live both the perfect sinless life that was required for a righteousness that was acceptable before God and offer himself up in the place of sinful man and so we see the remarkable wisdom of God how else can we be saved all the Corinthians things that they were running after were different ways of saying maybe this can save you maybe this can save you maybe this can save you maybe these things will be enough or hedge your bets by including these things in the process but the gospel says friends there is nowhere there is no righteousness good enough there is nothing nothing you can build there is no goodness you can create concoct or dream up or live out that will ever overcome the sin that stains your heart the fatal flaw of self that

[38 : 29] John preached about a couple of weeks ago and so God has stepped in and in his infinite wisdom has done something unbelievable no one would have thought this up the mystery of the trinity becomes the mystery of the incarnation becomes the glory of the crucifixion and the resurrection so that God might accept sinners like you and me this is the wisdom of God yes God had created by his own righteousness and by the sin in the world what seemed to be an unsolvable problem and then he stepped in and he solved it in the most unimaginable way so that we might know that salvation is not of us but it's of God from first to last so that we might not boast in anything of ourselves but boast only in

Jesus Christ this is why Paul felt that that was sufficient for his preaching content this was sufficient to say what he needed to say this is the wisdom of God and when we receive this then we are free we are freed from all of the performance and all of the effort we spend trying to make ourselves good enough we are free from all of our trying to figure out if I can only latch myself on here or develop this skill or get ahead in these ways things we are free from the illusion of self promotion and self boasting and we are free instead to receive from God a salvation that we could never create on our own and in doing so we have an untouchable confidence before God not only is

Christ crucified the wisdom of God in this way but Christ crucified is the power of God the power of one whose life was not taken from him but who laid it down willingly in love for his people the power of one through whose death the power of the devil that is the enemy who seeks to accuse and destroy us was broken according to Hebrews 2 turn with me in 1st Corinthians again to the end of the book 1st Corinthians 15 well known verses Hanel's Messiah captures it beautifully death where is your victory death where is your sting the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but in the flow of the argument

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and therefore thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ because when we are identified with Christ by faith when we take upon his righteousness then we now know that we will be raised with him that death is no longer the great enemy but death is a defeated foe and death is actually a gateway into eternity and glory with God that the stain of sin has actually been removed and by his resurrection we know that there is a life for us that will have no more sin and therefore no more tears no more sorrow and no more strife and also no more boasting and no more self promoting and this is the power of God that this creator God who entered in to this incredible act of crucifixion he also rose from the dead and he did this to rescue us and to create a kingdom not by oppression not to impose himself forcefully upon us but by humility and by submission to his father by offering himself up as a sacrifice he gained the greatest victory in all the world friends we want so much for there to be a power in the world that makes things right don't we we want the famine to end we want the terrorists to be stopped we want the sickness to be cured we want our own little kingdoms of our lives to be successful and happy but friends

Jesus comes and he says all the powers of this world can't solve those things they've been going on for a long time haven't they as much as we so desperately want to believe it'll get better it's not going to but Jesus has come and Jesus has defeated the power of sin and death in this world and those are the greatest enemies think about how the world would be changed if we were not afraid of death anymore think about how much good we could do in the world if we didn't spend all of our time justifying ourselves see about how different it would be if we walked in the pattern of one who came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many the power is not in the display and the power is not in the show the power is in the substance of Jesus Christ and him crucified and part of what

[44 : 31] Paul is saying to the Corinthian church is you know this power because you are here you have heard this message and it has changed your life and I say that to many of you this morning you know this power don't doubt it don't question it what we think is wise is not really wise enough to help us navigate the world we live in what we think is strong isn't really strong enough against the most profound enemies of life but friends we have Christ crucified the wisdom of God and the power of God and if you're exploring this morning figuring out what Christianity is all about I tell you this is it Jesus Christ and him crucified understand it seek it seek to understand how this could be true how anyone could believe this and if you are a believer be strengthened in your belief don't doubt don't doubt don't be embarrassed by

Jesus and him crucified but believe let's pray Lord we thank you for Jesus and we thank you for him crucified Lord this is the great work that you have done for us Lord we pray that you would this morning help us to understand and to see it and in in doing so that we would believe and by believing we would have life in your name for your glory we pray in Jesus name amen there's no fitting way to follow up from a sermon like this than to do a baptism to testify to the power of God in our lives so John or Greg I don't know what the thank you