

The Gospel makes sense

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to turn, please, in your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 18. So 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 18 and our reading is going to go through to chapter 2 verse 5.

There were going to be a selection of verses that I was going to read, but I felt that in the end that this passage here makes by and large the same point of the importance of the gospel. Now that can be found of course throughout the whole of the New Testament. In fact, even in the Old Testament you can find out the need and the importance of the gospel. But this here in particular is of key importance.

So now hear God's word. 1 Corinthians 1 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.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?

[1 : 30] Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom. It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to the worldly standards. Not many of you were powerful. Not many of you were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in this world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in this world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in this world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.

[2 : 45] So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and our sanctification and redemption.

Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. And 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 Christ Jesus and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in 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. Well, may God bless his word and bless us as we come to his word. And please, if you have your Bibles with you again, have them open to 1 Corinthians.

[4 : 09] I want to begin this week with drawing your attention to where we were last week. And that's on the importance of faith and how faith comes.

Faith is belief and it's belief in what God has revealed to us. But now I want to draw your attention, if I can, just for a moment to the world that you live in.

And to the many faiths that are out there, the many beliefs that are there. The many views that different people have. The many ideas that they have about life.

And how they use all of them to determine and to make sense of the life that they live. I'm assuming, you know, by listening to others and by reading, that there are people in the world who have made sense.

It doesn't necessarily make sense to us. But it makes sense to them. And therefore, we're going to ask the question, why? Why does it make sense?

[5 : 15] If life without God doesn't make sense, and we know that to be true, then how come people out there without God can make sense of their life and are quite happy with the sense that it makes?

How can both be true? I think it's a question worth pondering because it's a question that will help us in understanding the culture and the people groups that we share the gospel with.

I think the best illustration or the best book to go to is the book of Ecclesiastes. And Solomon takes the time, with all the wisdom that God has given him, to do a little thought experiment or even practical experiment on the world.

And imagines what life would be like under the sun. And that's just another way of saying, what would life be like? What would it look like? What conclusions would you come to if you just lived under the sun?

That there is no God above us, only sky. To quote John Lennon, which I'd never imagined that I would because I hate that song. But, so what would happen?

[6 : 28] Well, Solomon does this and he gets to the conclusion fairly quickly of vanities of vanities, all is vanity. Everything is a waste of time.

You live, you die, you work, you leave it to somebody else. You're better off eating and drinking and being merry because that's the sum total of everything.

And tomorrow may not be like that at all. And so he gets to the conclusion fairly quickly through, you could say, several thought experiments, several practical experiments, several real life examples that he witnesses in other people.

But when he gets to the conclusion, it's just vain. It's all vain. And then you have to remind yourself how he came to that conclusion.

And the only way Solomon could come to that conclusion is because he knew God. You see, because the world of people out there who don't know God don't come to that conclusion.

[7 : 34] It is only because Solomon has a relationship with God, even though he pretends to imagine that God doesn't exist and what that would be. But he cannot get away from the fact that he is convicted by the truth.

That the only way he's able to come to that truth, that all is vain without God, is because the truth is in him. That the only way he's able to see that is because he does not live in ignorance, but his mind and heart has already been enlightened by the words of the Father spoken to him, the wisdom that he has received.

So however hard he tries to imagine a world without God, he gets to the conclusion that all is vain because he actually belongs to God. Because he believes in God.

But those in the world who don't know God live in ignorance. They actually try to make sense of their life, and by and large they think that it does make sense.

We're able to look at the world and understand that it doesn't make sense, and we may struggle over the fact that why is the gospel, which is so clear to us, so unclear to somebody else, why is it that the world which is full of vanity is so clear to us, so unclear to those out there?

[8 : 58] And the conclusion we have to come to is the same conclusion we do when we read the book of Ecclesiastes, that the only reason we know it is because God has revealed it to us.

He's opened our eyes. He's opened our heart. We no longer live in ignorance. We know it's, you know, without the knowledge of God and without God telling us things, then we would live in darkness, utter darkness.

We learned last week that Christians do live by sight. Well, we said we don't live by sight, we walk by faith. Well, we do, but we actually live by sight.

But the way that we see is by hearing. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. It's true that we don't live by a physical sight. It's true that we don't follow Jesus physically by looking with our eyes.

But it's not true that we don't see where we're going. It's not true that we don't see all the promises that God has spoken to us. It's not true that we don't see what the future has for us.

[10 : 02] We see it all. So we don't live blindly. It's not a blind faith. It's a faith that sees. But the way that we see is by hearing. And, of course, if you stop yourself from hearing the word of God, then you see less.

Hearing is the way God's people see. Hearing is the way that you understand. And as we saw last week, that if your mind cannot grasp it, if you cannot understand it, you may say something like, I

can't see it.

And there comes the battle of faith. When you can't see it, you can't see it because you perhaps can't understand it.

And so what God has given us is a revelation. What God has given us is a mind and heart that can take these things in and understand them for what they are.

In other words, I want to put a challenge to you in a slightly different way and challenge you with the idea that you don't choose to believe what you think you believe.

[11 : 09] And the reason I know that to be true, one, because the Bible says it, but more important because salvation means that you don't get to boast in the fact that you know Jesus.

You get to boast in the fact that you know him because God has revealed him to you. You get to boast in the fact that God has given you his son, but you don't get to boast in the fact that all by yourselves, you believed in Jesus while the person next to you didn't.

The point that I'm making is that the beliefs that we have, we don't choose to believe. Well, we do choose to believe in one sense, but the way that they get to us is not through our own power of being able to work things out.

The message of the cross is a power of God, and it's that power that causes us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the reason it has to be that way around, because if it wasn't, then we could do it all by ourselves.

What do we need God for? No, the very power of God, the very power in that message, causes us to believe. But I guess we're going to have to come back to that in a moment, because that's really important.

[12 : 23] It's really important for you to understand that, because it's going to be important for you to understand why the world needs to hear the gospel, and not just leave them alone so they can make up their own decision on what they believe and don't believe.

My argument is that nobody in the world chooses to believe from their starting point, that the power of them to believe the things that they do simply reside in them.

Choice does, but something happens before that, and this is what we get to see here. So here's a summary of what Paul was saying. He begins by pointing out to us that the word of the cross, in the world, not to Christians, but in the world is folly to those who are perishing.

But to us who are being saved, we know it to be the power of God. We know it to be the power of God because we see, we understand, we've experienced that power, and that power is given a spiritual sight.

By faith, we see the things of God. We have heard them, we understand them. That's how we know that power to be at work within us. We don't live in ignorance, and that's because the power of God has affected us.

[13 : 33] It's made a change in us. And then God goes on to say, or Paul quotes God in saying, that his wisdom will destroy the wisdom of the wise, that his weakness is stronger than their strength, that the world is full of beliefs and views and values and ideas, but it is actually the message of the cross, which is the power of God unto salvation.

Nothing else will do. And not only that, the power of the cross, or rather the message of the cross, is a challenge that cannot be defeated. That when you come up against it, the defeat is always going to be on your side, rather than the side of the cross.

Now the world will look at the message of the cross, and consider it utter foolishness. That it makes no sense at all. But the moment a person is saved by the power of the cross, then suddenly everything that they first thought was ridiculous, now makes sense.

In other words, the gospel makes sense. And the gospel is the only thing that can make a person make sense, and bring a person to their true senses, as they are created anew in Christ Jesus.

This faith that is given to them, this wisdom that is given to them, is given to them through the message of the cross, which is the power of God at work in them. They're taken from darkness into light, they're taken out of ignorance into knowing.

[15 : 12] And because God has done this, Paul goes on to say, this is why no one can boast. No one can go home and say, I got there before you. I figured it out before you figured it out.

No, they know it, because the power of God has gone to work in their life, and that is how they have come to believe in the Lord. The point here is to recognize that God's word is creative, not just descriptive.

That as we proclaim the message of the gospel, though we're describing what God has done, though we are declaring what God has actually accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ, that is God's power going to work in the world.

It's a creative power, even though we're describing what's happened. But we don't get to harness that power. Just as we speak those words, God's power is at work through those words.

We're describing, but God is creating anew, because his words are with power. Now, I want to illustrate this in perhaps a couple of different ways.

[16:22] I want to begin by saying that if I stood here this evening like I am, and looked at one of you and said, you're under arrest, and what a joy that would be, to pick on one of you.

You would probably laugh at me. And you would laugh at me for good reason, because I'm a pastor. I don't get to arrest anybody. Now, you recognize that I can say the words you're under arrest, but you know that I can't actually arrest you.

And so you just laugh them off. But imagine for a moment, it was a police officer who said those words to you. Well, now all of a sudden, the freedom that you perhaps were enjoying is now cut short.

The decisions that you're going to do later this evening are now out of the question, because those few words out of a police officer's mouth come with authority and come with a power that can actually change your freedom, can actually change what you do next.

Think of an umpire in a tennis tournament after all the challenges have been made, and it's towards the last games, and he says, out. The ball's out. It could change the whole game.

[17:43] I guess he'd better get it right. But the few words spoken by the right person can change the outcome of something, or can make something happen that wasn't previously happening, simply by being spoken.

And so on a human level, we have a real experience of what it means to be affected by the words and the power of words of other people. Certain people's words carry power because of the authority that they have.

the umpire in a tennis tournament, the policeman or policewoman. They have authoritative power.

They are spoken, and they create a change on a human level. We get to understand that.

But now we come to hear the words of the creator God. Why is the gospel so powerful? Well, because it's God who's speaking.

And God is speaking into the world a message that not only arrests people spiritually, but actually transforms them spiritually from death to life.

[18:53] That's why it's so important that his words are heard in the world. Because they're not merely descriptive. They are completely authoritative. And they are the words spoken by the creator God, through us, of course, but spoken by him that come with his power that can change a person who listens to them.

Now, if the umpire, for instance, said, you're under arrest, everyone would laugh at him. Or if the police officer said, the ball is out, no one would pay attention.

Because we understand that the position of authority and power go together. And so what do you do when you have to deal with the creator God who says, your sins are forgiven in Christ Jesus?

Or unless you repent and believe, you face the judgment. It's not merely a descriptive word. It is a word of power. Because it comes from the one who has the authority to speak those words.

The words have power because they're attached to the authority of God. Or God who has all authority. And so as God's wisdom is spoken into this world, as God's power is spoken into this world, it nullifies everything else.

[20:16] The wisdom of the wise in this world come to absolutely nothing. The discernment of the people in this world come to nothing. God speaks. Because God speaks. God speaks.

Now imagine it this way. If I asked you this evening, right now, to believe that in this room was a green giraffe, no matter how hard you tried, you couldn't actually do it.

That's just an indication or a simple illustration to point out that you can't choose to believe what you like. We tend to think that people in the world choose to believe what they like.

That's not true. In the same way, it's not true that you can believe, that you can choose to believe this evening that there's a green giraffe in this room. You just can't do it. No matter how hard you try, you cannot get yourself there.

It doesn't matter how hard you try, you cannot conjure up the ability or the power to make yourself believe that. Convincingly, you just can't do it.

[21 : 25] But if, for instance, unbelievably, a green giraffe did just enter the room, then immediately, so too would the belief.

As soon as that happened, the belief would be there. People in the world don't choose what they believe. They believe what they believe because of the things that surround them.

And they come to conclusions, rightly or wrongly, about those things. We think, well, they just, same with you. You don't choose to believe what you want.

You have been affected by something else. The things in the world can cause you to worry, can cause you to believe something other because of how they're affecting you.

That they're having a power over you that's causing you to believe something and that belief is a worry. What's going to happen? Well, in the same way, the power of the cross, the message of the cross, is the power of God which changes a person's life from death to life.

[22 : 31] That's why it's so important for those words to be spoken. Because it is as that comes into the room, it is as that comes into somebody's life, suddenly, so does the belief in it begin.

And without that, you can't get there. You can't get to belief in God before the gospel comes to you. You just cannot get there. Because it's that happening which creates the belief.

Just like the green giraffe walking into this room can make you believe that there's a green giraffe in this room. But you cannot believe in it now, even if you try, because there isn't one.

And so the message of the cross is the power of God which comes into people's life and so too does the belief in that message, in the person of Jesus Christ.

And this is the point that Paul is making. This is why none of us can boast. I can't boast that I'm a Christian over my brothers who aren't other than the fact that I can boast in God for the gospel coming to me, for that power arresting me in causing that belief and spiritual transformation.

[23 : 50] I give thanks to God for it, not thanks to me for being smarter than my brothers of being able to figure it out. So Paul then concentrates very much on the content of the gospel message.

And Paul states in chapter 2 verse 2 that I've decided to know nothing among you except Christ Jesus and him crucified. If I'm going to speak to you, this is going to be the content of what I'm going to say.

Christ Jesus and him crucified. Well the Jews, back in chapter 1 verse 22, they want more. Paul knows that they want more miraculous signs. They want to see more.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, verse 22, seem to have a bit of a dismissive attitude. It's a bit like someone saying, well everything can be explained because not everything can be explained.

You say, well that kind of makes sense that not everything can be explained. Even Christians believe that the secret things belong to the Lord our God. Well, what we're saying is that everything can be explained, not everything can be known by us.

[24 : 55] But those out in the world who go, well not everything can be explained, that's a dismissive attitude. It's a way of saying, because I know that not everything can be explained, I must know everything to know that everything cannot be explained.

Bit of an odd one. It's a way of just dismissing anything that comes towards them that challenges that view. like the Lord Jesus Christ dying for them.

God sending his son to reconcile men and women, boys and girls to him. Well that can be explained, that's foolishness. That's unexplainable.

It's just not true. What's happening is they don't want anything to challenge what they believe. And so they dismiss it by saying it can't be explained or it doesn't exist or it's foolishness.

But in both cases, whether you're a Jew or a Greek like people today, people are not short of coming up with ways of dismissing the gospel. People are not short of coming up with ways of evaluating Jesus and then stipulating on what terms a relationship with God can begin.

[26 : 10] I will believe in God if God does this. Or I will enter into a relationship with God if God shows me that. And what you're dealing with is people who are stipulating the terms of relationship.

I'll believe when this happens. Well, who's in charge here? Who actually has the authority here? Who is the one who actually gets to stipulate the terms and the conditions?

Christians. This is what Paul is getting to when he speaks about the Jews and the Greeks. They think that they can stipulate the terms of relationship between them and God.

It's a bit like someone today saying I'm a good person. What they're actually saying is I stipulated the term on which a relationship between me and God can exist.

I'll go to heaven because I'm a good person. Are they really the terms and conditions of relationship with God? But that's what's happening.

[27 : 17] Now the reason why people do this is a very simple reason. That if people can make sense of their life they feel in control. When people are confused, when people don't understand and when things go wrong, they very quickly feel out of control.

They go and try all kinds of things like yoga, mindfulness, all these kind of things that will help them solve these problems. But at the end of the day, being in control is to recognize that God is in control.

And what we're to recognize this evening as we sit here and as we listen to the word is simply just how important it is for us to hear God so that the power of God can be transformed in our lives or take effect in our lives in order to transform it.

And so people have to make sense of their life. People have to make sense of the world that they live in by and large to a pretty good degree in order to feel in control because there's almost absolutely nothing more frightening than feeling out of control.

So it has to make sense to them. What happens when you proclaim the gospel to them is this. You're not in charge. God is. Ultimately, you're not in control of anything.

[28 : 51] God is. ultimately, you're at the mercy and grace of God. Ultimately, your powers, your decisions, your values, your views come to nothing as you come before God.

So what God does here, or rather what Paul shows us that God does, is that his wisdom challenges the people who think that they can make sense of their life without God.

God's wisdom challenges the decisions they make, the choices they make, the values that they have, the priorities that they place on different things. God wisdom comes in and challenges every single one of those and says they're all nothing unless they are something in Christ Jesus.

Because like Solomon pointed out, at the end of the day, it's all in vain. all in vain. And so it pleases God through the message of the cross, which is folly to a world who listens to it, to open the eyes of those who believe, verse 21.

And those people in the world who think that they are ahead because they have somehow achieved worldly standards, or they just so happen to be born into the right family at the right time, the right circumstances, people in the right world.

[30 : 21] But they're not ahead of God or his people. God doesn't use that measuring stick for bringing people into his kingdom.

God is what Paul is saying to us here is this, that the world will always consider the gospel message as folly, but you ought to know that it makes absolute sense.

And it makes absolute sense to proclaim this word to a world that thinks that it is foolishness. God is and the reason why it makes sense is because it is the power of God unto salvation.

It is the very thing that can transform the mind, the heart, the whole person making them like Christ. And yes, it is going to alter their priorities, their life, everything about them, their values, their even sense of comfort.

Because ultimately all of that is going to be brought to nothing because of the message of the cross. The gospel, as Paul says, is folly to those who are perishing.

[31 : 31] In other words, to those who live in high rebellion to God. What God is saying is this, that I put Jesus in control of the world. Matthew says that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus.

And what people are ultimately rebelling against is the right for Jesus to run their life. And the message of the cross is a message that says Jesus has the right to run your life.

He'll make a better job of it than you. But it's his right to run your life. Here's the exhortation then as we close. As a church, as Christians, individually and together, we ought to feel the call to speak these words.

those who think that they can make sense of their life without God are always going to feel uncomfortable the moment God is introduced to them through the message of the cross.

But then they're encountering the power of God that can actually draw them out of the lies that they live in, out of the ignorance that they're swarming around in, to the truth, that finally they'll be able to see.

[32 : 49] But I guess one of the difficulties for why the church perhaps, perhaps isn't that good at evangelism or sharing the faith is this idea of foolishness.

Because I guess it's a fairly easy one to put together that if the world considers the message of the cross foolish, then I guess the world also considers all of its messengers foolish.

It's not a nice thought, is it, perhaps, to think that even close members of your family and your friends and your next door neighbors, brothers and sisters, whether they say it to you audibly out loud, to your face, or whether they say it secretly to themselves or to other people, at the end of the day they consider you foolish.

Because you believe in this message, a message that is foolish, they consider you to be foolish.

They may not say it to your face, but that's what they're thinking.

And perhaps it's their knowledge of that, that I feel foolish saying this, that I feel silly speaking this to them, that perhaps that's the very thing that we're trying to avoid.

[34 : 09] Perhaps the very barrier to evangelism is actually the fact that we don't want to feel foolish. foolish. And yet what I'm trying to convince you, or rather hopefully what God has convinced you through his word, is that the gospel is not foolishness.

It's the only thing that makes sense. It's the only message that makes sense. It's the world that considers it folly.

Here's a conclusion then as we close. the message of the cross is not only sensible, it is powerful. It is both sensible and powerful.

And that's the reason we are confident. The power does not reside in us, or even in our ability to be able to speak it. The power resides in the words that God has given us to speak to those who haven't heard.

And the message is a fairly simple one. That God has fulfilled all the promises in Christ Jesus. And those promises include reconciliation, the forgiveness of sins, and how he is dealt with the judgment to come.

[35 : 28] And so on hearing that, we speak. Amen. Amen. Amen.