

1Co03 – The Message of the Cross– 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message this morning, “The Message of the Cross.” We’re back in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.

In the first century, the cross was not a symbol of anything like we see it today. It was a symbol only of horror and disgust and torture and vile death. It was nothing like we see it today. It was the most inhumane “death tool” the Romans could come up with and they were very good at coming up with “death tools.”

And so, how foolish, how ridiculous would it be to use this inhumane, disgusting tool of torture and death as the *very center* of the message of God’s free gift of salvation? *Who* would do that? Doesn’t God understand what the cross means? It is vileness. You turn your face from it; you don’t want to look at it. It’s the most agonizing death you could ever imagine. If you see somebody die on it you’ll never forget it. How foolish it would be for him to use that as the center of his message of salvation.

The message of the cross separates the wisdom of the world and the intelligence of the philosophers from those who have received and embraced the “eternally life changing truth” of the cross. The message of the cross is the “fork in the road” and it’s the dividing truth between the philosophies of the world, (the wisdom of the wise) and the power of God to change lives. Today Paul is going to make that very clear.

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus, would you take this Living Word and would you pierce us with it? God, you have already rocked us in worship, and now we pray you would pierce us with your Word. We pray that you would speak to us in a way that we can’t escape. That we would see the foolishness (so called) of the message of the cross compared to the true foolishness of the world, and that we would learn to turn from the wisdom of the wise and embrace the message of the cross. Show us that, reveal it to us this morning, please, in your name Jesus, amen.*

The message of the cross is not a man made philosophy and it’s definitely not a man made religion because man would’ve never made a religion centered around the cross. The message of the cross is actually about us being *united as one* with the Son of God – Jesus Christ – through our faith, not because of anything we’ve done but because of everything he has done for us and in our place.

Since verse 9 we’ve been focused on the fact that we have been made one with Jesus Christ through our faith in him. In fact, we have been made his body on the earth.

And as Paul developed that truth, when he got to verse 17 last week he said, *Christ sent me to preach the Good News – but not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.*

And that (verse 17) is a transition verse because it causes Paul to transition into a focus on the message of the cross of Jesus Christ. And so we pick it up in 1 Corinthians 1:18.

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NLT)

18The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.

Paul begins with two clear perspectives on the message of the cross.

One perspective of those who are “headed for destruction”

One perspective of those who are “being saved”

And Paul makes it clear how we view the message of the cross is determined by one of two roads we are on. From God’s perspective every one of us today is headed in one of only two directions. We are either “headed for destruction” or “headed for salvation and eternal life.”

And one of the most incredible miracles in the Bible is this; if you are headed for destruction today and no matter how close to the end of that road you are, God will allow you – at any moment – to make a u-turn and jump on to the road to salvation and eternal life. Not based on what you’ve done, but based on what Jesus Christ has done for you and for those who get on the “road to salvation and eternal life” (being saved).

The message of the cross is the very power of God!! It saves us, forgives us, adopts us into God’s family, transforms us, leads and guides us, protects us, makes us part of God’s eternal plan and purpose. And one day it is the message of the cross that will glorify us and place us living with God in heaven for eternity.

But the message of the cross is not just foolishness to those in love with this world and buried in the sin of this world. The message of the cross is also foolishness to the supposedly “wise” of this world, and the supposedly “most intelligent.” Those who through their higher intellect say how could the message of the cross be *right*? Why would God use the message of the cross to “save” people and who says we *need “saving”* anyway? I’ve put my mind to it and I’ve come up with my own philosophy on life and my own philosophy makes perfect sense to me.

And Paul addresses the wise and intellect right away by quoting the Prophet Isaiah.

1 Corinthians 1:19 (NLT)

19 As the Scriptures say, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.”

This is the same text in Isaiah where Jesus get the famous verses he used in Mark 7:6-7.

Mark 7:6–7 (NLT)

6(when) Jesus replied(to the Pharisees), “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

7 Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.’

Those words quoted by Jesus, are the two verses immediately preceding the verse Paul is quoting here in 1 Corinthians 1:19.

1 Corinthians 1:19 (NLT)

19. . . “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.”

If God will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent then the message of the cross is *not* about wisdom and intelligence.

God was trying to get this point across in *Isaiah*.

Jesus was trying to get this point across in *Mark*.

Paul is trying to get this point across to the *Corinthians*.

The message of the cross is not about the wisdom of the wise or the intelligence of the intelligent.

The message of the cross is about the power of God to bring the dead back to life and to redeem all of creation that is currently dying under the curse of sin. If the message of the cross was about the wisdom of the wise or the intelligence of the intelligent, then we could compare it to all of man’s philosophical, intellectual, human-based theories. But it’s *not* – so we *can’t*.

When I started Bible college in 1980 I had someone in my family say to me, *Why don’t you go to a school where you can study ALL the religions - because they all have something GOOD to offer . . . Why do you want to study just this ONE religion?*

Why? Because there is no religion in the world that carries the life transforming, eternity changing power of the message of the cross. Why seek out the best of man-made religion when it will always be *just* another *man-made religion*?

This is exactly what Paul was getting at in the next verse.

1 Corinthians 1:20 (NLT)

20 So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? (well . . .) God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.

How? How has God made the wisdom of this world look foolish? Continuing in 1 Corinthians 1:21,

1 Corinthians 1:21 (NLT)

21(NLT really helps here) Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.

God “saw to it” that the world would never know him through human wisdom... *why?* Because the message of the cross is *not* human wisdom. It is not a philosophy that can be compared to other philosophies because the message of the cross is something so much more radical than just another religious philosophy. It is a miraculous union (through faith) with the Son of God where we become *so identified* with Jesus that *his victory* over sin and death becomes *our victory* over sin and death.

But still the message of the cross is *foolishness* to the *wise and intelligent* of the world. Continuing in 1 Corinthians 1:22-23.

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 (NLT)

22 It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom.

23 So when we preach that Christ (The Messiah) was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

You see, the Jews were seeking (from the Messiah) a *different sign* from heaven. They were looking for a great military and political leader who would give them their kingdom on earth back and put them back in charge. And so when Paul said to them Your Messiah who you were looking for to do all that was just crucified on a disgusting horrifying cross... that was a huge stumbling block to them.

And when Paul told the Greeks who thought very highly of themselves (and their wisdom) that the Son of God just died a disgusting, horrifying death on the cross to pay for their sins they said that was a *bunch of nonsense*.

And isn't it just the same today? Some say if the God of the Bible was the true God he would do things different. He would come down here and make things the way *we think*

they should be (that's like the Jews) and some say how can Jesus be the only way to heaven? Because, really, *any intelligent person* knows all roads lead to heaven (that's like the Greeks).

But regardless, of all the world's wisdom and intelligence 1 Corinthians 1:24 says,

1 Corinthians 1:24 (NLT)

24 But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Sometimes people ask me what does that mean – “those called by God to salvation?” And I always answer with the explanation Chuck Smith used. On the outside of the gate of heaven are the words “*Whoever believes may enter*” because that is God's promise – that “whoever believes in Jesus Christ would not perish but have eternal life.”

So the outside of the gate of heaven says “Whoever believes may enter” but then one day when you do believe and enter that gate of heaven, on the inside you'll see the words “Called by God to salvation.”

It's a matter of perspective.

Our perspective is to believe and receive salvation.

God's perspective is to CALL us to salvation.

And the message of the cross is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (and the wisdom of God).

So in verse 25 Paul continues his contrast between the message of the cross and the wisdom of the world.

1 Corinthians 1:25 (NLT)

25 This (so-called) foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

Why? How can that be? Why is this (so called) foolish plan of God *wiser than the wisest of all human plans*? Why is God's apparent weakness (in the Cross) *stronger than the greatest of human strength*?

Because the cross was the ONLY way that God's holiness and mankind's sinfulness could BOTH be dealt with correctly and completely.

All that was accomplished by Jesus Christ *on the cross* and *in the resurrection* is absolutely the only way that God's holiness and man's sinfulness could both be fully dealt with.

The real miracle of the message of the cross is our identification (union) with Jesus Christ through faith in him. By our identification with Christ (through our faith) what Jesus has accomplished has been credited to us. So when Jesus Christ fully dealt with *both* God's holiness and man's sinfulness *on the cross* it was as if we had done it ourselves. By God's grace and through our faith we get full credit for what Jesus Christ has accomplished and no wisdom of man and no strength of man could ever accomplish that.

Now in Paul's classic "convincing style" he is going to develop this sharp contrast between what the world considers wise and how God actually works and he's going to start by using the Corinthians themselves as the perfect example.

1 Corinthians 1:26 (NLT)

26 Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you (now they're the example) were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.

And then here's the contrast.

1 Corinthians 1:27-28 (NLT)

27 Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.

28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

Paul starts by addressing the Corinthians but then moves to the bigger picture of *the CROSS*.

The message of the cross is despised by the world (verse 28). To the world what happened to Jesus Christ on the cross was counted as nothing at all. But, God is using that message of the cross to bring to nothing the things that the world considers important.

Paul (by the Holy Spirit) is making a radical contrast between the (so called) wisdom of the world and the eternal power of the message of the cross. Because the message of the cross is NOT "of this world" and the world sees the message of the cross as foolishness because they don't understand the eternal consequences of sin or the absolute holiness of God and they don't understand ONLY the cross deals completely with BOTH.

We cannot compare the *wisdom of the world* to the heavenly message of the cross. And so Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:29,

1 Corinthians 1:29 (NLT)

29 As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

No one can ever boast in the presence of God. The message of the cross is all about God's power to save and not at all about the world's wisdom and we either humbly *accept* it as a gift or we rebelliously *reject* it to our own demise.

But one thing we can never do... is boast that we somehow have deserved or earned or had any part in the miracle of our own salvation.

And so finally here is the answer to the question... *WHY* is the message of the cross the *ONLY* answer to making us "*right with God.*"

1 Corinthians 1:30 (NLT)

30(because) God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.

Through your faith God has united you with Jesus Christ. "By God's work you are IN Christ." This is the miracle of identification with Jesus Christ through our faith in him and this is what makes it possible for what Christ has done to be put to our account.

Verse 30 says ***For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself.*** What Jesus Christ became in his life and death and resurrection he became for our benefit.

And then verse 30 says ***Christ made us right with God - he made us pure and holy- and he freed us from sin.*** How exactly did Jesus do that? He did it by making the greatest exchange in all of eternity.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

21 For [God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Jesus Christ took our sin upon himself and he paid the full and complete judgment required by a perfectly holy God and then *IN HIM* (meaning IN our identification with him) we become the righteousness of God.

Jesus became our sin and paid the full penalty for it so that we could be so united with him that in him we would become righteous before God.

THAT is *WHY* it had to be the cross and *THAT* is *WHY* there is no other way to heaven!! Because no man-made philosophy or idea or religion can deal completely with both God's requirement to remain perfectly holy and our need to have our sins fully paid for.

And when we get to the place where we truly embrace The Message of the Cross, we will fully agree with our final verse today.

1 Corinthians 1:31 (NLT)

31 Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord."

If we will grasp even a small portion of the immeasurable grace and power of God that is wrapped up in the message of the cross, we will boast only, *only, only* in the Lord. We will sing his praises and we will glorify his name all our days on this earth until we meet him face to face and begin our eternity with him because of what he has done for us.

THAT is the message of the cross.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, would you drive that home, please. Make it clear in our hearts and in our minds, the message of the cross. Lord, just stir it up in us.*

If you're here today and you've never heard that depth of what the message of the cross really is about, if you've never embraced that, received it fully to yourself, how can today not be the day? How can we continue to puff out our chest and say I have my own ideas about heaven? If that's you, I would just plead with you, beg you, be identified with Christ because there is a day coming when this temporal life ends and Hebrew says after that the judgment comes. And the judgment either falls on Christ in your place or falls on you. That identification with Christ is done through faith. Jesus has done the work. God has already called you to salvation and your part is to believe and receive. And so right now, I pray you would make a firm stance to believe and receive what Christ has done on your behalf. You can do it right where you are, but it has to change your life. It has to change your life. How can Jesus Christ come to live inside you and not have your life change?

So, if you're ready to turn from your old life and walk in the new life, turn off the road to destruction and walk, rest on the road to being saved, the road to eternal life, then cry out to God right now. Cry out to God to save you. Cry out that you believe and that you desire to receive what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf.

There is no magic prayer of salvation in the Bible. Right now your heart's cry can be something like this. *"Jesus, I never thought of it like this. I never saw my sin so vile and disgusting that you would have to die in such a horrible way for me. I desire to turn from*

my sin and to turn towards you. To repent and to walk in new life. I desire to be identified with you. I put my faith in you, my full and complete faith and trust. I trust the work that you've done on the cross on my behalf. Please come into my life, fill me with your Spirit. Adopt me into the family of God, and put me solidly on the road to salvation. Please do that work in me Lord. And make it real, Lord. Thank you Jesus."

I want to give you a minute to finish your prayer. I don't want you to just repeat my prayer. I want you to really cry out to God, understanding the destruction, the judgment that has to come upon your sin and understanding that Jesus is the only way out.

Lord, we believe. We receive. May we walk in the light. May we be filled with your Spirit. For your glory Jesus, and in your name, amen.