

The Humiliated, Powerless, and Defeated Hero

A story like no other

The Foolishness of the Cross

The symbol of the cross vs. other ancient symbols

Ancient religious symbols – If you approached an ancient temple, you would find images and symbols on the outside. A basket of fruit, stalks of grain, murals and sculptures of military victories, eagles, a cornucopia, or other symbols like that. All indicating prosperity, health, or happiness.

The cross – a tool of shameful humiliation. A symbol of disastrous defeat and powerlessness. A symbol for someone who has been shunned and condemned.

The foolishness of the cross

Greeks demand wisdom – “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears.” ... “To proclaim a crucified Jew from some backwater empire as a divine being sent on earth, God’s son, Lord of all and coming judge of the world, must have been thought by any educated man to be utter madness and presumptuousness.” – David Garland

In other words, they wanted something that sounded *smart*.

Jews demand signs – Compare to their history: a parted Red Sea, fire from heaven falling on Elijah’s enemies, manna from heaven, a cloud of glory falling on the temple and leading them through the wilderness.

“The message of the Gospel is exactly the opposite of what people expect, and yet that very fact persuades them to accept it in the end.” – John Chrysostom, circa 400 AD

The Power of Christ Crucified

What does Paul mean by “power?”

The power to make God known to mankind, to accomplish salvation, to defeat evil, to transform lives and values.

A sovereign message

Greek rhetoric in five steps – 1. Attention 2. Comprehension 3. Persuasion 4. Retention 5. Action

Paul’s rhetoric stresses point 2, making sure they comprehend the message, as opposed to point 3, making them believe. This “dethrones the audience as the ultimate [decider] of what is true or persuasive.” – David Garland “The Spirit reveals the message’s truth... and the message becomes sovereign with the power to save or condemn.”

Avoiding Gospel Traps (From Pastor Larry Osborne)

1. Politics
2. Morality
3. Theology
4. Science
5. End time speculation
6. Pressure tactics

So stay on message! The message is sovereign and powerful. Say what is true, and rely on the Spirit’s power to work through the presented Gospel.

Questions for Study and Reflection

1. How is the Gospel the message of the cross?
2. How is the cross absolute foolishness to someone who does not yet believe?
3. What biggest distractions do you find to be your temptation? Why is it hard to stay on message?
4. Who is your “one?” Did you pray for that person regularly over the course of this last week?