

A Church in Crisis Part 1

The Foolishness of the Cross

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18–26

The cross challenges our human wisdom and expectations.

As followers of Christ, we must keep the cross at the center of our message, our decisions, and our lives.

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. ¹⁹ For it is written,

**“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”**

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach^[a] to save those who believe.

²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Introduction

Every generation believes it has finally figured life out.

We trust education.

We trust technology.

We trust politics.

We trust psychology.

We trust self-help.

We trust social media influencers.

Never in history has mankind possessed so much information yet experienced so much confusion.

We know more...

...yet marriages are failing.

...anxiety is rising.

...families are divided.

...churches are struggling.

Information has increased.

Wisdom has not.

The church in Corinth faced the same temptation.

Instead of measuring everything by the cross, they measured everything by human success.

Paul writes to remind them:

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

The answer to a church in crisis wasn't a better strategy.

It wasn't a more polished preacher.

It wasn't better marketing.

It was returning to the cross.

I. The Cross Confronts Human Wisdom

(1 Corinthians 1:18-21)

Paul begins with a startling statement.

There are only two groups of people.

Those who are perishing.

Those who are being saved.

The dividing line isn't politics.

It isn't race.

It isn't wealth.

It isn't education.

The dividing line is Jesus Christ.

Notice Paul says the cross is foolishness.

Why?

Because the cross offends human pride.

The Jews wanted miraculous signs.

The Greeks wanted philosophical brilliance.

Instead...

God offered a crucified Savior.

That made absolutely no sense.

To Jewish people...

A Messiah should conquer.

To Greeks...

A god should demonstrate power.

Instead...

God died.

Imagine announcing to the Roman Empire:

"Our King was executed on a cross."

It sounded ridiculous.

Yet Paul says...

That "ridiculous" message changed the world.

Illustration

Imagine someone trying to rescue a drowning person.

The drowning individual refuses help because the rescue doesn't look the way they expected.

That's humanity.

We reject God's rescue because we expected something different.

The cross doesn't fit human expectations.

It destroys them.

II. The Cross Reveals God's Wisdom

(1 Corinthians 1:22-25)

Paul contrasts two expectations.

The Jews demanded signs.

The Greeks searched for wisdom.

Both missed Jesus.

The cross isn't simply one event in history.

It is God's wisdom on display.

God defeated sin...

without an army.

God defeated Satan...

without a sword.

God defeated death... by dying.

Who would have imagined that?

No military victory.

No political revolution.

No earthly kingdom.

Just a rugged cross.

The very symbol Rome used for shame became God's symbol of victory.

As Warren Wiersbe writes, **Christ crucified is God's wisdom and God's power.**

Not Christ in the manger.

Not Christ performing miracles.

Not Christ teaching crowds.

But Christ on the cross.

The cross forever changes how we define strength.

Our culture says:

Win.

God says:

Surrender.

Culture says:

Promote yourself.

Jesus says:

Deny yourself.

Culture says:

Take revenge.

Jesus says:

Forgive.

Culture says:

Power wins.

God says:

Love wins.

The cross flips every worldly value upside down.

III. The Cross Calls Us to a Different Way of Living

(1 Corinthians 1:26)

Paul reminds the Corinthians:

"Look at yourselves."

Most of them weren't wealthy.

They weren't influential.

They weren't famous.

Yet God chose them.

Why?

Because God delights in receiving glory that no human can claim.

The cross leaves no room for pride.

None.

We don't boast about finding Jesus.

We boast that Jesus found us.

We don't celebrate our goodness.

We celebrate His grace.

Churches get into trouble whenever they replace the cross with something else.

Programs.

Personalities.

Politics.

Preferences.

Performance.

Popularity.

If we're not careful...

We can begin measuring success by attendance instead of transformation.

By applause instead of obedience.

By influence instead of holiness.

Paul says...

Never move beyond the cross.

IV. The Church Must Always Keep the Cross at the Center

Corinth had forgotten what mattered most.

Instead of talking about Jesus...

they argued over personalities.

Instead of celebrating grace...

they promoted division.

Instead of serving one another...

they elevated themselves.

Sound familiar?

Churches today can argue over music styles.

Building projects.

Politics.

Traditions.

Methods.

Meanwhile...

the world desperately needs Jesus.

If we remove the cross from the center...

we lose our identity.

The cross is where:

Mercy meets justice.

Love meets holiness.

Grace meets truth.

Heaven touches earth.

Everything we believe flows from Calvary.

John Stott said,

"The cross is not just one chapter of Christianity; it stamps its form upon all of theology."

The cross shapes:

How we worship.

How we forgive.

How we love.

How we serve.

How we give.

How we lead.

How we treat people.

Everything begins at the cross.

Practical Application

Ask yourself these questions:

- Is the cross still the center of my faith?
- Have I become more impressed with human wisdom than God's Word?
- Am I trusting Jesus—or simply trusting my own ability?
- Does my life point people toward Christ or toward myself?

The cross still changes lives.

It still saves sinners.

It still restores marriages.

It still heals hearts.

It still forgives failures.

It still breaks chains.

It still has the final word.

Conclusion

The world still laughs at the cross.

Some see it as outdated.

Others see it as offensive.

Many ignore it completely.

But heaven sees something different.

Heaven sees victory.

Heaven sees redemption.

Heaven sees hope.

Paul never apologized for preaching Christ crucified.

Neither should we.

If Stigler First Assembly is going to impact our community...

it won't be because we have the nicest building.

It won't be because we have the best programs.

It won't be because we have the best music.

It will be because we refuse to move away from the message that changed the world:

Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again.

The cross looked like defeat on Friday.

It became victory on Sunday.

Never underestimate what God can do through what the world calls foolish.

Because **the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.**

Invitation

Maybe today you've been trusting your own wisdom.

Your own strength.

Your own plans.

The cross invites you to lay those things down.

Jesus isn't asking you to figure life out.

He's asking you to surrender.

Come back to the cross.

Find forgiveness.

Find grace.

Find hope.

Because what looked like foolishness to the world became the greatest demonstration of God's love.

And that same cross still has the power to save today.