

THE CROSS: GOD'S WISDOM AND POWER

What does the cross mean to you this morning? The cross is one of the most controversial symbols in history. For centuries it's either been misused, abused or worshiped. The cross has brought fear into the lives of those being sought out by the KKK and also Christian crusaders. It's been used in the killing of Jews and even used by slave traders in the pursuit of killing American Indians in America. It's even been used in today's world as Catholics and Protestants are fighting religious wars. Some of the greatest tragedies have happened in front of the cross. Yet, today we see the cross on top of church steeples, as elaborate tattoos printed on people's bodies, as earrings and necklaces adorning our latest outfit and even Christmas ornaments hanging on our tree..

History shows the cross being gory and filled with terror. Death being the only thing that comes from the cross. While today, the cross is all shined up, made beautiful. No blood, no nails, no smell of death. Over 2000 years ago, when the cross was on display, people would walk down roads and see the dead; now we walk in the stores and buy whichever one goes with our outfits. We ask each other "how much did that cost?" and we hope we can say we caught it on a deal. When one could ask God how much the cross cost Him, He could respond and say His Son...what about you?

Welcome to **Wk 4 of Spirit & Truth!** Over the last couple of weeks we have been talking about how God's plan for taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world is the church. In **Week 1** we talked about how God has empowered us through the pouring out of His Holy Spirit which enables us to be used by God as witnesses calling others to trust in Jesus. But any time God is at work we can rest assured that Satan is trying to hinder whatever it is that God is doing. **Last Week** we talked about one of the ways Satan tries to hinder the mission of the church is through the weakness of our flesh. We gave you 4 mindsets that are a powerful strategy for overcoming the desires of your flesh in order to experience the victory that is available to you when you choose to walk by the Spirit.

This week we are going to take a look at another way Satan tries to hinder the work of the church and that is through different responses to the cross. Today, the goal is to help you discover the ways people respond to the cross and help you evaluate where you stand. So if you will turn with me to **1 Corinthians** I am going to **PRAY** for us and we are going to get started.

Corinthians is a letter written by Paul to the church at Corinth. He wrote this letter from the city of Ephesus. Corinth was a place that was growing and known for its business, but also its party lifestyle. Paul helped establish the church at Corinth after leaving Athens. After leaving the city, Paul then received some reports on the sexual immorality and division that was happening in the church. He also received some reports on misrepresentation of spiritual gifts that were taking place along with misunderstanding of spiritual doctrines. Paul wrote this letter with the intention to help restore this church back to its foundation which is Jesus Christ. While reading through this letter you can see that the CHURCH still suffers with these same issues, and this

letter could have been written to the present age church as well. Paul understood that division could have no place in God's church and as long as division exists the church will suffer.

1 Corinthians 1:10 (NIV) "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

As Paul attempts to restore this church back to its foundation, Jesus; that is not possible without the mentioning of the cross. You see, at the cross everyone is equal. Everyone is guilty. Everyone is on the same playing field, there is no division regarding our sin; we're all sinners. Yet, the church at Corinth allowed themselves to be sidetracked with division over who they were supposed to be following. **1 Corinthians 1:12-21 (NIV)** "**12** What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.'" **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Cliques among believers are not Godly by any means and we see four different cliques or four different groups think they are the true followers of God and everyone else needs to get on board. We have the Paul clique, the Apollos clique, The Cephas (Peter) clique, and the Jesus clique; and what Paul is about to emphasize is that there is only one team and one person we are following, and that's Jesus!

He goes on to say **14** I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. **16** (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) **17** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. It is here that Paul makes the distinction between Jesus and the other 3 supposedly leaders (Himself, Applos, Cephas) and it's the **cross**. He reminds them of his calling in a statement that is geared around not preaching in human wisdom, but allowing the cross to be filled with the power that it has. In other words, it is possible to preach in such a way that the cross is emptied of its power. Church, the cross is unmistakably clear. The cross is the fulfilled promise of John 3:16 and yet so many people know the verse but miss the cross...

It's here that Paul makes a wild statement about the cross that I believe brought conviction on some and went through one ear and out the other for others. **1 Corinthians 1:18-19**, "**18** For 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. Paul gives the idea that the cross if preached with human wisdom could be made powerless, and here's how; to those who reject the cross, they believe that a man dying on a cross for their sins is foolish. Yet, for those who believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, we believe in the power of the cross! Paul then quotes Isaiah 29:14 where God is basically saying that He will not bow down to the intelligence of man, and that the intelligence of man is no match to what Jesus did on the cross. **19** For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.'" **20** Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? **21** For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to

save those who believe. The message of the cross is that Jesus died a death we deserve by dying on a cross for our sins and to give us eternal salvation for those who believe. It is this message that is considered foolish by those who disagree with God and His decision of Jesus' death on the cross and prefer human wisdom over God's truth.

If you haven't noticed, not everyone agrees with God's decision of Jesus and the cross. It's not just a 2022 thing, the spirit of human understanding over God's truth has been in play by Satan since the beginning. When it comes to the Cross there are basically two responses. Let's take a look at what Paul has to say about these two responses.

Response #1: Some will outright REJECT the TRUTH

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 (NIV) "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles..."

When it comes to the rejection of the truth we see two different reasons for doing so highlighted for us by two distinct groups. One were the JEWS who based their rejection of the cross on RELIGION while the other were the GREEKS who based their rejection of the cross on LOGIC and REASON.

First we have the Jews who rejected the truth because of their love for Religious Traditions

In Paul's day, the Jews were looking for a sign, the sign of a messianic deliverer. What they received instead was not what they were hoping for. They wanted a militant minded savior who would come and shake everything up by delivering them from Roman control and ultimately promoting and championing their exclusive Jewish traditions. They did get a savior who shook everything up, but He came as a lamb who willingly submitted to the Roman authorities in place for the greater cause, the redemption of ALL mankind. They stumbled because Jesus didn't meet their religious expectations. They expected Jesus to defeat their enemies and establish an earthly kingdom where they would rule, and when Jesus did the opposite they allowed their religious traditions and expectations to become more important than the actual truth. That's why the crowds went from praising Him as a conquering King, **Matthew 21:9 (NIV)** The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ... to eventually sending Him to the cross, **Matthew 27:22 (NIV)** "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" The Jews were looking for a sign and some are still looking for it. You ever wondered how much more does Jesus have to do for people to believe, or what else does He have to do for you to believe? Signs and wonders have their place, but our faith cannot be reduced to God performing like He's the main act at the circus. There is a time for God to give signs and wonders for people to believe, but it's His timing. **John 2:23 (NIV)** " Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name."

However, there comes a time when enough miracles have been performed, the truth has been proved, and we have to exercise faith. Instead of looking for another miracle, which God can do if He wants, I believe He is more pleased with an act of simple faith rather than depending on a dazzling performance from Him. The Jews were looking for deliverance which wasn't wrong; the problem was they didn't agree with the way God wanted to deliver them; the cross! The Jews knew the prophecies that foretold Jesus would surrender and be killed (Isaiah 53 & Psalm 22) but yet they focused on the prophecies that spoke of glorious victories as well as the temporary religious provisions God had given them to address their sin and not on His crucifixion. Do not miss out on what God wants to do in your life because of religious traditions that keep you from seeing what God actually wants to do! Salvation for us does not come through our ability to follow religious rules and regulations, but through the cross and what Jesus did to provide for our salvation. We cannot earn our way into Heaven. We have to be willing to accept that the only way our salvation could be secured was by God Himself providing for us the perfect sacrifice. Are you willing to accept that your salvation doesn't depend on you? Don't miss the truth of what Jesus did because you are too focused on religious traditions or have let religion become defined by your expectations. Instead let God's word define for you the truth.

Secondly, we have the Greeks who Rejected the truth because of their love of Human Wisdom

Where the Jews placed a high value on religious tradition the Greeks placed a high value on human intellect and reason. Wisdom is the ability to discern or judge what is true, right or lasting. The Greeks believed that WISDOM was accomplished through logic and reason. The idea that a God who would serve humans and send His Son to be crucified seemed weak and foolish to them. From a pagan perspective only the weakest of Gods would serve humanity in any way, especially to the point of death; and in the culture that we are living in right now both of these ideas are still very prevalent. There is godly wisdom and worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom is not concerned with honoring God and has no intentions of living a holy life. It is saturated with pleasing yourself and focuses on how to just get by while here on earth. **1 Corinthians 3:19 (NIV) For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"** Godly wisdom of course is us saturating our hearts and minds on things above and beyond just the here and now. It's a wisdom that has the perspective of being a citizen of Heaven and just passengers here. It's a life that is pursuing holiness. Godly wisdom inclines us to go against our natural tendencies as we looked at last week. It is not focused on self promotion but about furthering the Kingdom and it's found through seeking God, not man made theories. **James 1:5 (NIV) "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him"** The Greeks were looking for human wisdom to deliver them, not Godly wisdom. The wisdom of the cross seemed foolish and they missed it. Does worldly wisdom saturate your thinking to the point where Godly wisdom seems foolish? Here's what God desires: **Proverbs 2:3-6 (NIV) "indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, 4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, 5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding."**

When we expect God to act or deliver in a specific way, and He doesn't; that does not diminish His love and understanding of our circumstances. That's why **Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)** states, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. **9** "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." The moment God moves in a way opposite of what we are expecting, that is not a moment we should doubt His goodness and ultimately laugh at His motives, but seek what He's doing by surrendering. Paul solidifies this point eventually when he says in **1 Corinthians 1:27 (NIV)** "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." Salvation for us does not come through reason, but through the cross. We cannot THINK our way into Heaven. Wisdom is the application of what we can reason and the Greeks could not reason Jesus dying for them. Can you? We must first believe by faith before the cross makes any sense. Faith unlocks our relationship with God and it isn't until we begin to understand God and our sin that we are in a position to understand the logic and reason of the cross. **Response #1: Some will outright REJECT the TRUTH**

Response #2: Some BELIEVE and Experience God's DELIVERANCE

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 (NIV) "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

For those of us who have believed in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus we have experienced God's deliverance in our lives. That inward transformation! For people to not reject the cross, they have to come understand it. They have to understand that "they" are the reason Jesus went to the cross, because we could not pay for our sins on our own. **Church, until you see your own depravity, you won't understand the cross.** In other words, it's when you recognize that your heart is wicked and that there is no help for you outside of Jesus. You've tried the things of the world and it did not satisfy that longing. It's where you also let go of the traditional rituals trying to make yourself right with God. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that we could not do it on our own when he says this about Jesus and the cross, **Hebrews 10:11-14 (NIV)** **11** Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. **14** For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

To believe in the message of the cross also means to participate in the power of the cross! You see, believing in the cross and getting your "get out of hell free card" is one thing, but Jesus didn't die for you to not experience all that the cross has to offer. Yes, the cross symbolizes death, but three days later, it represented VICTORY! **Colossians 2:11-14 (NIV)** **11** Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same

sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. **14** For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. And this victory is only possible through faith! Faith in God! Faith in Jesus! Faith in the cross that it brings victory and deliverance! Do you have faith in the cross this morning? Participating in the power of the cross is you picking up your own cross, denying yourself, and truly relying on the work of Jesus in your life. Victory does not come without sacrifice. Deliverance doesn't come without obedience.

Invitation:

Maybe you're here and know Jesus as your personal savior, but you're just not feeling victorious because life has just been tough..let me give you some promises of victory because of the cross that you can pray over yourself right now!

1 John 2:16: We are victorious over the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life!

Hebrews 4:15: We are victorious over the temptations and the sin of this life

Ephesians 1:20-23: We are victorious over all powers and dominions

Romans 8:38-39: We are victorious over death

Here's the thing; we are not victorious by trying to be a better Christian or trying to be perfect. Jesus didn't call us to "try" anything. He told us to have faith and keep our eyes on Him. Our eyes cannot see Jesus without also clinging to the cross! We will not experience deliverance without the cross! He delivers...He sustains...by the cross.

Maybe you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus but you need the cross. You know you need something more than what the world is offering. The world can offer a lot, but it cannot and never will offer a Savior who died on your behalf! Faith in Jesus is more than just an acknowledgement of who He is, but a life changing reliance on who He is and what He did on the cross. The Holy Spirit may be drawing you to take that step of trusting Jesus...will you?