



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture
Date: February 25, 2024
1:18-31

Title: A Foolish Message
Passage: 1 Corinthians

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 and 2:1-5

We are in a teaching series walking through 1 Corinthians. One of the powerful things about this book is how relevant it still remains for us today. With all the progress humanity has made, we really aren't all that different now than we were 2000 years ago! We face a lot of the same issues and struggle with the same base sinful desires.

In chapters 1-4 Paul is addressing the first major issue the church in Corinth was facing: divisions in the church.

The First Issue: Divisions in the church

Paul has to write back to the church and say, "This isn't a popularity contest!" The people were divided between leaders like Paul, Apollos and Cephas. Then you had the super spiritual people who said they followed Christ, but even they were not pointed to as the example to follow- they were acting in a puffed up state of superiority like they were the only true Christians in the church.

Paul responds with the Gospel:

The Church is a community of people centered around Jesus.

We are all equal at the foot of the cross.

Leaders and teachers are servants, not celebrities to be elevated over Jesus.

That's really where we pick back up this morning as Paul continues to point to the gospel as the thing that unifies us. But here's what's interesting:

What unifies the Church separates us from the rest of the world.

The question then is: What is the thing that Paul focuses on that unites all Christian people in all parts of the world at all times? The answer is: The Cross of Jesus! But that is also the very thing that many people in our world have a difficult time believing in for salvation. So let's look at how Paul addresses that.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

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.

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.

22 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.

25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Our salvation comes through the death of Jesus. That's the message of the cross. But to some in our world that's the same as saying, "The message of the electric chair is what brings salvation." Remember what the cross was- it was an instrument of brutal death. We have received that message and trust and believe in the power of Jesus's death on the cross and resurrection from the grave to save us. But to others that sounds ridiculous.

- An instrument of death is supposed to bring life? Foolishness!

And then let's not forget who is dying on the cross: We believe Jesus is God in human flesh. In Colossians 1 Paul says this:

:: Colossians 1:15-20

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

So, we may be able to understand when the world struggles to believe this:

- **God, in the form of a man, died on a cross? Foolishness!**

What comes across as foolish to the world is power to us who believe! Those are two responses Paul leaves us with:

- 1. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.**
- 2. The message of the cross is the power of God to us who are being saved.**

Really, to become a follower of God we have to come to Him in a place of faith because the message is so crazy at first glance. That doesn't mean we have to check our brains at the door and that our faith isn't founded in fact and reality. But it does mean we trust in things that the world looks at and laughs at.

On the other hand, through the gospel of the cross, there are things we look at in our culture and recognize how foolish their ideas are, even though they are promoted as being the wise way to live.

Look at how Paul talks about this difference between God's wisdom and human wisdom:

:: 1 Corinthians 1:19-21

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.

Paul begins by quoting Isaiah 29. Here's what you need to know and understand any time you see a quote of a passage from the Hebrew Scriptures- what we call the Old Testament: The New Testament writers will quote a small section of Scripture with the understanding that their audience, especially Jewish people, would know the full context of the passage being quoted. Any time you see a quote like this, go read the full section of that passage because Paul's audience would have known the rest of the passage and understood he is trying to make a bigger point. So let's read the section around Isaiah 29 together that Paul is referencing.

:: Isaiah 29:13-16

¹³ The Lord says:

**“These people come near to me with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
Their worship of me
is based on merely human rules they have been taught.
14 Therefore once more I will astound these people
with wonder upon wonder;
the wisdom of the wise will perish,
the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”
15 Woe to those who go to great depths
to hide their plans from the Lord,
who do their work in darkness and think,
“Who sees us? Who will know?”
16 You turn things upside down,
as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!
Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it,
“You did not make me”?
Can the pot say to the potter,
“You know nothing”?**

The first thing Isaiah points out is that we tend to say one thing and do another. We come near God with our lips and use words that seem to honor God, but our hearts are far from Him. In other words, we have no desire to move beyond knowing what God says to doing what God says. There is no obedience of God motivated by love of God. Not only that, but our worship of God is based on human rules that we've been taught.

What's God's response? He's going to make the wisdom of the wise perish and the intelligence of the intelligent vanish. All the false worship is going to go away.

Then we see one more area where human wisdom doesn't align with God. We think we are just like God...or we think we are God.

**16 You turn things upside down,
as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!
Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it,
“You did not make me”?
Can the pot say to the potter,
“You know nothing”?**

We tend to think that we know better than God. Our wisdom stands up to His. But it doesn't. We were formed from dirt and yet we say to the One who formed us, “You didn't make me... in fact, You know nothing!”

How arrogant! The reality is, humans call a lot of things “wisdom” that stand in direct opposition to the teachings of God.

Think about our culture right now and the things our peers see wisdom in:

- Wealth, possessions and material success is the highest good.
- My personal well being, independence and autonomy is more important than the society’s well being.
- Life is only valued if it is contributing. We can kill babies in the womb for any and every reason and until they are fully born they don’t have rights. We can also kill the elderly because they are not contributing to society, especially those with crippling diseases.
- We can change gender. Gender is a construct and how you feel has more to do with your reality than how you were born. Not only that, but there is an unlimited amount of genders!
- Sexual intimacy is just something to do for fun and has no lasting relational implications.
- Masculinity is toxic and femininity is oppressive.

For all of these things and so many more, our world stands up and applauds all that they celebrate as wisdom. But none of these things will save a person from eternal destruction.

Go back and look at 1 Corinthians 1 again.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:21

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.

Man’s wisdom tends to pull us away from God because we think we can save ourselves through our own personal morality or good works or knowledge or power. But we need to remember that when it comes to our wisdom and God’s wisdom, we don’t think the same way.

:: Isaiah 55:8-9

**8 “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.**

One of the stories that always comes to my mind when I think about this is when David was anointed as King of Israel. The Prophet Samuel had been sent to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse in order to crown the next King. When he saw Jesse’s oldest son he thought, “This has to be him! He’s tall and handsome!” But

the Spirit of God said, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

God simply doesn't operate the way we operate! He proudly uses things that appear weak to us to accomplish His mighty purposes. After Samuel had gone through seven of Jesse's sons and didn't get confirmation from God that any of them would be King, he asked if Jesse had any more sons. There was one more, but he was the youngest and was out in the field watching sheep! But Samuel had them call him to come in from the fields and as soon as he saw the boy, God confirmed he would be the next King of the people of Israel.

As Paul writes to the church in Corinth he gives us some insight into the prevailing thoughts that kept people in his time from embracing the death of Jesus as sufficient for salvation.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

²² 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.

²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

When the Jewish people heard about Jesus as their Messiah it was a stumbling block to them. The Messiah wasn't supposed to die on a cross- He was supposed to bring freedom in a military sense and establish a physical, Jewish kingdom. So when the apostles preach about salvation for the Jewish people coming through a Messiah who died at the hands of their captors, they couldn't embrace Him.

Then the Greeks struggle to embrace Jesus because it seems foolish to them that God would live among us as a man and then die for us. The Greek gods were impersonal and selfish. They didn't love the things they created- they played games with their creation. But this God Paul is talking about is personal. He came to live among us as one of us. He died to pay for our sins. He came back to life and ascended to heaven.

Paul says what was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks is the power and wisdom of God- Jesus Christ crucified.

The cross holds divine- not worldly- power and wisdom.

Then to close his thoughts on this topic Paul is going to point to those in the church who have accepted Jesus and he's going to remind them that when they

came to Jesus it wasn't because there was anything special about them- it was just the pleasure of God to save all who would place their faith and trust in Him.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5

²⁶ Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,

²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

2 And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

³ I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.

⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,

⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

This is going to sound a little condescending, but you need to hear it like the people in Corinth when Paul wrote it: God didn't choose you because of how awesome you are! He chose you because you're weak and pathetic and He looked at you and said, "That's the kind of person I can use! Me choosing them will confuse the heck out of everyone!" Paul says, think of what you were when you were called...you weren't noble or influential or wise...you were weak and lowly and pathetic! And God loved you anyway! And it's people like us that God uses to influence the world for His Kingdom!

We are going to look at this again next week, but Paul wraps this thought up by saying when he came to Corinth that he didn't come spouting the wisdom of the day or speaking with great eloquence. His message wasn't filled with philosophical wisdom. He didn't have a message of political wisdom. He came resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

In other words...

Paul wanted the people of Corinth to first know who Jesus is. Second, he wanted them to know what Jesus did.

This is still our calling today as we hold Jesus up to the world as the hope of the world. We are supposed to help people know who Jesus is and we are meant to help people know what Jesus did for us on the cross. As we become more and more convicted by the lostness we see around us and begin to share our faith more frequently, these are the foundational elements you need to know. Can you tell someone who Jesus is? Can you tell them what Jesus has done to save us?

If you can't do those two things with any confidence, spend some time this week sitting down with your Bible and write down answers to those two questions.

Today if you are listening and all of this seems like foolishness to you, either because I did a poor job presenting it, or you simply think Christianity is ridiculous, I pray that you will take time to search out the claims of Jesus and to ask God to open your eyes to the power of the cross. If you want to talk to me or one of our staff or elders, we would love to sit down and have a conversation with you about why we believe the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the only place to find life and hope.