

The Rev. Billy Cerveny:

Warmed up a little bit, didn't it? Feels good. We got. I think we have more tonight than we had in both services combined is not true. But the people here did not want to get out of bed this morning. Which I don't blame them. It was a little chilly.

A little chilly as pipes freeze. You did. So I will pray over those later. I hope they didn't burst. He fixed. And there you go. That's awesome. Well, hey, let me tell you, I love stories, you guys. You've come here any number of weeks. You know that? I love to tell stories and I love to read stories. I love to watch stories.

I love to tell stories. And the reason I love stories is not just because they're entertaining. Because they are. But we need stories. You need stories, I need stories. Stories are the way that we feel connected to this world. It's true. Stories are the ways that we bring and extract meaning from life. There is no such thing as just an isolated fact.

Everything that we see and we understand, it's is, it's because we understand it in the context of a story. It's how we contextualize everything. And there's a reason for this. The reason it's this way is because you and me, we are in storied people. In storied people. What does that mean? That we are in storied? It means that in the beginning, God created the heavens in the earth and he knocked over this narrative.

Domino. And as they began to spread and they became layered and multifaceted, we were we sprung into being and we were carried along. The wave of this story, this story that carried us along, but a story that we also have a hand in helping to write. But the bottom line is we're prisoners of the story. We are. It's not a question if you're living inside of this story.

The question is, what's the story you're serving? You can't escape it. It's how we find meaning. And because of that, because I love stories so much. Of course, I've spent a lot of time, probably a weird amount of time thinking about what stories are, what goes into a story and what makes a story good. And I'll tell you as many stories as there are in this world.

I think we've talked about this before, probably in a year or so, but as many stories as there are in this world, there's really is only one storyline. If you think about it, when you look at all the stories that you've read or just take the movies, for example, this every there's as many stories as there are.

There really is one storyline, whether it's whether it's Star Wars, whether it's Tommy Boy, whether it's Lord of the rings, it's all the same story. Let me tell you, this is what it is. There's a character, there's a character, and they have this equilibrium in life that all of a sudden this problem comes in and knocks things off kilter, and things are not the way they're supposed to be.

Luke Skywalker was just this little farm boy on this little planet, but the but the Imperial, the evil empire rules the galaxy. Lord of the rings. We got this just peaceful hobbit lives there. But this Sauron is this rise of evil in the distance. And things are not the way it's supposed to be. Tommy Boy, great movie, Tommy boy.

Tommy boy. He's just this kid stuck in college, but his dad's getting ready to lose the factory. All the same story, all of a sudden. Then this. Once the character encounters something's not the way it's supposed to be. Enter in a wise sage of some sort. This is a person that steps in that tells them the deeper, truer story that they can't see.

They tell him what's really going on, and they also say, this is where you fit in the story. And they tell them how they're going to overcome this problem, and that involves inevitably sending them on a journey. This is Luke. This isn't Star Wars, it's Obi-Wan Kenobi telling Luke Skywalker that he's really a Jedi, and then he's got to go on this journey to destroy the Death Star.

Lord of the rings. This is where Gandalf steps in. And he says to Frodo, you. You're on now, being set on this journey to destroy the Ring of Power and to establish all that is right and good in the world. So this character goes on this journey, and it is this costly journey. And not only is their goal realized, but here's what happens.

They're transformed in the process. This deeper, truer identity that they were that was hardwired into them for the beginning that they couldn't see. They are sanctified into this new reality. Luke Skywalker becomes the Jedi when he destroys. When he destroys the Death Star, Frodo destroys the Ring of Power, and he goes from being this humble hobbit to a hero.

Tommy Boy saves the factory. He realizes he's just as much like his dad as he thought he was. And see those story lines? You can't escape it. I give you that lens. Pick any of your movies and you will find the fingerprints of that storyline. And that's just the way it goes, because our hearts and our minds demand those elements in the story, and they're hard wired for those things for a reason.

Let me tell you why. Because that is the gospel story and that is your story. It's the gospel story that was woven into the fabric of creation. All stories reflected, including your own. And the first part, all Christians and non-Christians agree things are not the way they're supposed to be. Life hurts. My body is not working the way I should be, where it should be.

My identity has been shattered by something. I have been robbed of some reality that is supposed to be mine. There's no real meaning in the story that I'm living. Something needs fixing. But what? What needs fixing? And what happened to make this things so crazy? See, this is where Christians and non-Christians. This is where we part company.

Do you hear music?

Is that outside? Oh, okay. Making sure I wasn't losing it. All right. My story just got a little weird. So, some things aren't the way they're supposed to be. So. Yes. This is where Christians and non-Christians, part company. And that's what I want to talk about today. Who do we let be that? Why is voice that comes in and says, this is the larger story that you serve?

Who do we let be that wise voice that steps in and says, this is who you are and how you fit in the story. This is the journey that set out before you. Who do we let do that? Because so often what we do is it's not Jesus that we allow to do it. So often it's our Instagram account.

So often it's our politicians. So often it's the voices of people that told us what we were, what we should be when we were children. So often is what Paul would say is the wisdom of this world, not the wisdom of God. And we read first Corinthians one. We just read before the gospel. It's powerful.

And let me tell you what Paul is bringing the wood in this passage, and I want to take a minute and unpack it and talk about the difference between the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God. Before I do that, I want to ask this question like, what is wisdom like? That's a word we always talk about, isn't it?

It's a word we throw around. Oh, he's wise, that's wisdom. But what does that word mean? Because wisdom is different than knowledge, isn't it? Knowledge is just information. Information. It's just facts. It doesn't assign meaning. Knowledge doesn't synthesize anything. Knowledge doesn't tell you how things fit together. It doesn't tell you how to use information and move it forward.

It's just cold binary info that we download. It has no meaning, no understanding of how things fit together. Wisdom, on the other hand, it's not just cold facts. It discerns the reality of the larger story from which that information was taken. Wisdom synthesizes that together to figure out how it fits together, and figure out what it means to figure out what it means to you and to us, and how it drives us forward to solve this issue in our story, it discerns how information should be used.

Another simple way of the difference between understanding knowledge and wisdom is this knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing that it doesn't belong in a fruit salad.

You get it. I know it's a fruit, but when I consider the larger story and I put it in context, I got no business being in a fruit salad. There's somebody in here that puts it in a fruit salad. I bet that's all right. Jesus takes all types.

In our passage, what Paul is doing is he's stepping in. He's talking to the Corinthians. And this is about in the 50 A.D, the year 50. Okay. So Christ is clearly died. He's risen. And Paul is the great apostle to the Gentiles. He goes to Corinth, which is this little it's an isthmus, which is a fun word.

And Izmit is a little piece of land that connects an island to a mainland. Right. And it's right off of Greece. And there's this town called Corinth, and Corinth is because it's this little isthmus. It's a major port city. And so you got people from all over the world that are coming into Port Portland. They're coming into Corinth.

It's kind of like Portland, actually. They're coming into Corinth. You got people that are the Greek philosophers. You got every representation of every religion you can imagine. You have professional orators that are coming in there, how they make their living, and they just give speeches. This is vibrant community. It's this vibrant opportunity where people are asking questions and having conversations.

And Paul steps in and he plants this booming church in Corinth, and he gets it going and he gets them rocking and rolling. And he says, okay, I'm out of here. And he leaves and he goes to Ephesus. And he realizes that while he's away, that the church begins to absorb the surrounding culture. The forces weren't just around them.

They began to infiltrate the churches, and there's certain ideas of theirs. But they began to they began to absorb. They began to embrace wholeheartedly what he calls the wisdom of this world. And that bear bore fruit in their, the life of their church, a tongue of sexual immorality. This idea that because of grace we can do whatever we want.

They were coming to the to the Lord's table for communion. This was back when they would share it as a meal and people were getting drunk and they were being irreverent. They had really disordered worship. And there was this general sense of arrogance where people were elevating themselves above the others in the church. And Paul writes this letter.

Let me tell you, when I read this letter, he nails my heart. He, as a pastor, is this pastoral letter. He nails my heart. Because if you want to know what drives me, this is it. Because this is what Paul's doing. Paul is going to war for the hearts of his people. And I read that and I'm like, yes, because he sees something and he is.

He's going to the war, going to war for the hearts of his people, not just because he's trying to be right, because he knows what's at stake. He knows what's at stake. He knows that there are wolves out there. There are wolves that would seek to devour them in the name of Jesus. They would use the gospel to, to push their own agenda and to devour them in the name of Jesus, that their teeth and their claws, they use the wisdom of this world.

They lead you to a cheap grace that denies that the truth for which we need grace from the first place, the truth that we fall short of this cheap grace it denies. Scripture the authority of God's Word as he spoke and poured it out through the prophets.

LED them away from all these things. And Paul is stepping in, and he's going to war from there. And I hope that sounds familiar to you, because we are living in a modern day version of that right now. We are living a model. You can go to so many churches and they will devour you with a false gospel and it breaks my heart.

And like Paul, I step in and I'm like, don't, please listen. Don't let us let us ascend to the God inspired Word of God. Let us, let us kneel before the throne of God and absorb his truth, not the wisdom of the world. And what Paul is asking them because he had just left them a number a couple of years earlier.

And he's looking at him. He said, what are you doing? What are you doing? Who are you listening to? Because what you're believing and what you're what I'm hearing has no resemblance of what we talked about. It has no resemblance of the scriptures. I'm writing to you. It has no resemblance to the Jesus, the Christ that I proclaim crucified before you.

It is the wisdom of the world. And let me tell you what Paul is telling them, and I'm telling it to you. The wisdom of the world, the wisdom of the world, the people that they hate you, they

hate you. Verse 18 he says, for the word of the cross, that is the Christ, the very thing that defines you.

It is folly to those who are perishing. It is folly to those is the Greek word for folly. Here is Moros. It's where we get the word moron from. And what he's saying is they think what you believe is moronic. They think you are a moron, and they're trying to consume you and devour you. What were they embracing?

What was this wisdom that they were pushing? What was this wisdom that these people were drinking or eating hook, line and sinker? On the surface, it was the sexual ethic of the day. They were they were caving in to the influence of fertility cults and practices. And they were like, oh, we could do this within the well, they were they were we could do this within the walls of the church.

They were caving in to drunkenness, and they were intermarrying and doing all kinds of they were dishonoring Scripture. But all those things were symptoms of a far deeper issue. And we see this in verse 22. Paul says this. He goes for the he says, what was going on? He says, the Jews demanded signs and the Greeks seek wisdom.

And what does he mean there? Paul is not just being critical of to target demographic what he's graphics. He's putting his crosshairs. He's putting his crosshairs on what lies at the heart of the wisdom in the world. And it's this the Jews demand signs. What he's saying is, I will trust God when things are unfolding according to how I think they should unfold.

I know I'm called to faith, but there are certain things that I need to see before I will trust God. I need evidence upon evidence. Give me signs. Give me the display of power that I need. I need a messiah that's dressed in victory that comes with a crown of gold, not a messiah that comes with a crown of thorns.

I need signs I, I seek proof. And then you have the Greeks that seek, seek wisdom, wisdom, this intellect. These were the philosophers. They said, I will trust in my own intellect and my own intellectual integrity. I will reason my way to resolution. I will reason my way to enlightenment. I

am in charge of revelation. And where there is revelation, I am the one who gets to evaluate it in those moments.

There he is. We are, they were, we are and we do. We enthrone our own intellect. We have thrown our own demand to see Jesus revealed and manifested the way that I think it should be manifest. And both of these scenarios, from first to last, are rooted in this sinful need for control, for self-control. I decide what's proof of a Savior and I get to accept it.

I set the bar. I am the standard that God has to meet. I am the far final arbiter of what salvation is and how we get there and who gets there and why it matters what Paul's saying here. It's again, I, I love these images. He's taken their face in his hands and he said, no, don't do this.

Don't you see those people? He said, they're perishing. They're perishing, and they can't even see it. They think the problem with their situation is the world around it. They point to everyone and everyone, everything else as the issue. That's the problem. Here's the pro tip when everyone and everything around you is the problem, guess what? You're the problem when everything and everyone around you is the problem.

You're the problem. You got to own your own hearts, is what Paul's saying. They want to say, give me more signs, give you more satisfying. To thine own heart be true. I want to be careful. Here's not what I'm not saying. This is Christians. We don't check our intellect in our minds at the door. If we did that, I wouldn't be standing up here talking to you like this, right?

We want to enter. We want to engage. We want to think. We want to wrestle with ideas. We need that. That's how we grind things into our heart. But we need to do it from a heart posture that kneels before a throne saying, you are God. And as I grind on these things, as I wrestle these things, I do so.

So the I, in my humble state, pray that you would reveal what's true to me. Not all right. God, you got about five minutes. You better. You better show me what you got. You better prove me that this whole stuff about salvation and you and Jesus and redemption and heaven. It's all worth my time. I'm what Paul says.

We can't be the final arbiter. If we are, we have a problem. If we are the final arbiter of what's true and what's not true, then we empty the cross of its power. But the cross is not empty of its power, is it not. He's high and lifted up. The gospel, the wisdom of God, Jesus the creator, God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the Great.

I am the Ancient of Days. Yahweh. God shattered the wisdom of this world. Paul writes by choosing the foolish things of this world he chose the foolish. Things were to prove a point. A Savior who died bleeding on a cross, not sitting on a golden throne, a Savior whose only criteria to follow him is not a pristine résumé.

It's a willingness to admit our brokenness, our failure, our need. To paraphrase Brennan Manning, to serve in the Lord's army, only the broken can apply. Are you willing to admit it? Are you willing to see it? Because the wisdom of the world seeks the strong, it seeks the mighty it seeks to accomplish. It seeks the finished. That's not what we are, thank God, because we're all broken.

We're all in need. And we have a Savior that takes a knee and comes for us. The Savior that ushers in an upside down kingdom where we go down to go up, where we die, to live, where we give, to receive.

So the words that Stuart Townsend wrote in that song, how deep the father's love for us if you heard this, how deep the father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure that he should give his only son to make a wretch, wretch his treasure. You were the joy set before him. He calls vile sinners holy, unclean things, clean.

Now, before you take pride in saying, yeah, man, we get it, I get it. They don't. Oh, wisdom of the world, people. Y'all don't get it. I get it.

Yeah. Be careful. Don't forget what he says in verse 27. God chose you. He chose me. Thank you Lord, but God chose what is foolish in the world. God chose. What is foolish in the world is

shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world so that no human being.

Why? So that no human being? Why? So that no human being can boast and said I did it, I did it! Oh, you didn't, you didn't need it, okay, neither did I, I just didn't, and I still don't. God is crushes me. It's beautiful. The only reason we get this.

And we get to understand is because God is trying to make a point that he chooses the foolish things of this world, and he reveals it to us. How do I know it's true? I just know it's true. His Holy Spirit came, and he revealed it to me in the same way that I point this and say, hey, this is read, write.

How do you know this is read? You look at it's self authenticating. It's redness presents itself to you and you just we would never argue that's red. And the same way when the Holy Spirit comes in he pulls back the curtain. And we stand before the readiness of God, the truth of Jesus, the holiness of God, it's self authenticating.

How do you know it's true? I just know it's truth. I can see it. Deep calls into deep. It peels back the scales from my eye. And I know you are holy. And by your grace in your mercy I am not. You invited me into this. Why does this matter to us? What's our take home pay with this?

What do we stick in our pocket to walk around with few things. Remember that storyline we were talking about? The cross. It rewrites it all. Because here's what's knocked off kilter is what all the Christians and non-Christians all agree. Here's what's off kilter that I have this problem. The sense of a lack of self-worth. I have this damaged identity.

I have no sense of meaning, no sense of purpose. I have this longing, foundational longing to be loved and with the wisdom in this world would say, all right, you Mark, get set. Go. You have to the rest of your life to make those things true. The cross rewrites the story. What Jesus does is he steps in in the very beginning of the story and he says, hey, I've got you, and I've always had you.

And when I'm telling you before the foundations of the world, I'm revealing to you and I'm pulling this back, the self authenticating truth. You are loved. You are a planting with the display of my splendor. You are my child. You are an heir. You belong to me. You are loved in ways that you have no reference point. And you're journey from here until you pass through the shadow of death and step into glory is not to make that true.

Your glory, your journey is to walk in the realities of those truths. You're not going to make that more true. God is not going to love you any more than he does in this exact moment. Your journey now is what do I is? We say this all the time about coming here. We are an imperfect, clear may, learning what it means to be loved by Jesus.

Learning what it means to love like Jesus, and to impact the world. I'm not trying to win some prize at the end. Yes, I am trying to be consistent and to cross the line in faithfulness. But I'm not trying to become love. I do this because I am loved. I do this because I have my identity.

And the other blessing of this is and let me tell you this and we'll wrap it up. If you didn't do anything to earn the salvation of Jesus, what makes you think you can do something to lose it? If you didn't do anything to be sitting where you are right now, for him to peel back, if you didn't earn that right, if we didn't earn it, what makes you think that you can do something for him to be like, oof, I'm going to scrape you off my shoe now I got you.

I kind of didn't see all that was coming my way. No, the Lord holds you in the palm of his hand. And that store you live is insecure as it might feel at times. Is lost as we might feel at times. He'll never let you go in the way that we grow in that truth. It's not to live in a licentious way.

We live with gratitude and obedience, but we follow the example of Jesus. We go down to go up. We lay down our lives so that we can live. We pick up our cross so that we can understand what it means to be resurrected. We love our enemies. Oh, we forgive when it's so much easier to resent. We walk in freedom, in love and peace, and we stand in the realities of truth.

These are not those two things demand each other right? We walk in grace and we walk in truth, and we walk in humility, and we walk ultimately in gratitude. Because guess what, Lord,

thank you that I'm foolish. Thank you that I am one of those broken Happy Meal toys of this world that you chose in some weird, paradoxical sense of humor to declare your glory through.

Because otherwise I'd be one of those who are perishing. And I thank you, Lord, that you did not do that and you've not left us to rot, but you have breathed life into us, and call us your own. Amen. Amen.