

## **“The Scandalous Power of the Cross”** **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

**Intro:** I’m still waiting on my check. I wrote that for him. Propaganda just gave us the G.O.S.P.E.L. gospel. The greatest story of ever told, that’s hardly ever told. God. Our. Sins. Paying. Everyone. Life. We could say the gospel the greatest story we could ever understand, that’s often misunderstood. Or perhaps, it is the greatest story ever heard, that so few want to hear. The gospel. The word means good news. It is not just any story. It is the story of all stories. It is the story by which all of our other little story begin to make sense. BUT, this story of stories is a scandalous story. It is a shocking story. It is a powerful story and a polarizing story. This was true in the first century, and it is true in the twenty-first century. The gospel. Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1:18.

Here’s my prayer for us this morning, that the Holy Spirit would help each person...

### **The Point: Receive the scandalous power of the cross of Christ.**

Context: Paul had problems within & problems without. On the inside, Paul had to deal with divisions in the church.. I follow.. I follow.. I follow.. Christ! On the outside, he had to deal with the misguided expectations of the Corinthian Greek culture [who were seeking wisdom that expressed itself in a flowery rhetoric even if it was insincere. This is why he moves on to say just before our passage in v. 17: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” Make no mistake, Paul preaches with great wisdom and persuasive power. (2 cor 5:11). Our passage will prove that point quite adequately...

### **I. The cross will either be a scandal to you or the power of God (1:18-25).**

We’re going to see several things in this passage. First, what is Paul referring to when he says the “word of the cross”?

- “The word of the cross” is the simple message of the gospel. It is what Paul refers to in verse 23 by saying “we preach Christ crucified.”
- The cross is the epicenter of God’s story of redemption. We talk about this all the time at RHC – creation, fall, redemption, restoration...C: Goodness & beauty; F: tragedy, distortion & death = hopelessness; R: enter Jesus, born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, died a cruel death that he might bring us back to God, that he might overturn the tragic effects of the fall and the distortion and hopelessness that has plagued our lives, he died that he might redeem us. R: one day, all things new
- Crucifixion narrative Sketch... Garden. Cup. Betrayed. Arrested. Forsaken by his friends. Unjustly tried. Pilate. Crown of Thorns. Mocked. Beaten. Flogged. Crowds cry “Crucify Him!” Carries his cross, until he can’t anymore. Pierced Feet. Pierced Hands. Breathing in Agony. Cries out “Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.” Breathing in Agony, he cries out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And just before his final breaths, he cries out “It is finished.” German theologian, F.W. Krummacher called these final words, “the greatest and most momentous words that were ever spoke upon earth since the beginning of the world.”
- What was finished? The atoning work of Christ. He accomplished our salvation. Theologians call this penal substitutionary atonement. Christ bore the penalty of our sin by bearing the wrath of God when he died in our place as our substitute. We deserved to die (he was our sacrifice). We deserved to bear God’s wrath (he was the propitiation for our sin). We were justly separated from God, in bondage to our sin and the kingdom of Satan, but Jesus took our place. (that we might be reconciled and experience redemption). **“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...” (1 Peter 3:18).** There’s your crash course on the atonement, the saving work of Christ on the cross.
- In explaining the atonement, **Anselm said, “The debt was so great, that while man alone owed it, only God could pay it.”**

Trans: That's what God was doing on the cross. That's why what happened on that hill outside of Jerusalem 2000 years ago is of the utmost importance! The question for us today is: what will we do with what happened there. What is our response to the cross? Paul cuts right to the chase and says...

- There are two great responses to the cross of Christ: reception or rejection. **Verse 18**
- The cross perfectly divides humanity. Isn't amazing how two different people can respond to a movie, or work of art, or a speech? One person sees something coherent, and beautiful, and awe-producing and life-giving, and the other person sees something confusing, and ugly and appalling, This is what happens when people look at the cross of Christ. One person sees Christ crucified and they are filled with joy, forever changed. Another person sees Christ crucified and they are filled with apathy, and walk away unmoved.
- This is how it has always been. 2 Corinthians: aroma from death to death to others, from life to life...

### Why the cross is foolishness to the perishing?

- The perishing refer to those who will experience more than death. They will experience eternal loss because they never truly embraced the word of the cross. Why is the cross foolishness? "Our English translations have a hard time keeping up with this." (Mohler) Martin Hengel says "foolishness" would be better translated in our day as "madness or insanity." In other words, the Christian message is not simply a little off kilter, or in need of a little polishing, it's sheer madness. It's hard for those of us who have been in the inside for a while to understand this, but the claims of Christianity are often absolutely insane to unbelievers. Virgin Birth! Sinless Life! I'm sinful?!? They killed God. And then he rose from the dead?
- Why is the cross so offensive, so incredible (literally) for so many? Verse 21 says that the cross is a "stumbling block." The Greek word there is *skandalon*. Paul says, "this is scandalous news. It is shocking.
- Why would so many look to the cross and say, "No thank you."? Here are a few reasons to consider. Perhaps you can identify with some of these thoughts whether they used to describe you or even describe you now...

#### 1) *The cross was a shocking instrument of salvation.*

- Jews would have never expected a crucified Messiah. As Galatians 3 reminds us, "Everyone who was hung on a tree was considered 'cursed.'" Which was the whole point by the way...he became a curse for us. The Greco-Roman world did not look any more favorably.
- **"Wretched is the loss of one's good name in the public courts, wretched, too, a monetary fine exacted from one's property, and wretched is exile. But, still, in each calamity there is retained some trace of liberty. Even if death is set before us, we may die in freedom. But the executioner, the veiling of heads, and the very word 'cross,' let them all be far removed from not only the bodies of Roman citizens but even from their thoughts, their eyes, and their ears." (Cicero, 106-43BC, *Pro Rabirio Postump* 16)**
- No one could have imagined that God would come to us, much less die for us, & if he died for us it would *never* be on a Roman cross, the place reserved for the lowest and most despicable of criminals. That's one of the stumbling blocks of the cross. Let me give you two more from Paul's thoughts that are summarized in verse 22. Check out **verse 22**
- D.A. Carson says, "These two groups represent the fundamental idolatries of his age, and of every age." What is does he mean? Why do these summarize two of the major offenses of the cross?

#### 2) *The cross undercuts our pride and puts God back on the throne.*

- "Jews Demand signs." In other words, they were demanding that God overcome their skepticism by giving them evidence. This is God on *our terms!* This is God submitting his credentials to us for our approval. (Pic: We're Donald Trump. God is an apprentice...) We want God to create a profile on LinkedIn or Monster and submit his resume so that we can evaluate and critique his credentials. We want to call the shots. We want God to prove himself. You ask, "
- Experientially, God must pass the test. God, I'm down with you as long as you don't get in the way of my plans. God, I'll be in with you if you will provide that job. God, I'm on your team if you heal that family member, if you will straighten out this problem in my life, only if you eradicate all injustice

and human suffering *now*. And all of the sudden, who is calling the shots? who is sitting on the throne here? Not God. Us!

- We are control freaks. We want to be god. The cross puts God back on the throne and we don't like it.

3) *The cross undercuts our wisdom and places God's plan front and center.*

- Paul says in **verse 20**. "Where???" He then clearly tells us in **Verse 22** that "Greeks seek wisdom" They wanted to be able to explain everything with a perfect system...We want to reason our way to God, and we want something to do with it. We want all semblances of mystery removed as if we could perfectly understand the ways of God with our finite minds.
- This is a great temptation for those who dwell in Greater Boston. This is the "Athens of America." Our colleges & universities are not just good, they are the best in the country and the best in the world.
- We produce Presidents and the best in the fields of biomedicine, technology, and engineering, you name it. Listen, I did not come close to scoring over 30 on my ACT, but I can identify with those of you who love hitting the books. My education spanned the distance of 24 years. No, I didn't flunk the first and 15<sup>th</sup> grades five times.
- BUT, let's get real for a minute. There is a great danger in being numbered among the intellectually elite. Not only is there great danger in being prideful in relation to others (where we have this sense of superiority). There is a greater danger in carrying our intellectual arrogance before God. Our apparent wisdom or attempts at wisdom can keep us from God.
- Jesus said that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom in Luke 18. This surely has an application to those richly blessed with a great intellect.
- Here's the problem with human wisdom. We are just not wise enough. The foolishness of God is wiser than our wisdom as verse 25 tells us. All of our attempts, all of our systems, all of our best, most creative efforts to get: to God simply don't measure up.
  - *We want to be good enough...but we could never be good enough. (UK/UofL fans)*
  - *We want to have something to do with our salvation. We are so self-reliant and self-sufficient.*
  - *We want the cross to be more sophisticated, but ...*
- Isn't there a surprising and shocking simplicity to the cross of Christ? But God planned it this way from the beginning. This is what Paul points out in **verse 19**. God has to destroy our wisdom in order to bring us true wisdom. He has to expose our cleverness as not being clever at all.
- Think about this: on the surface many of us are Greeks, leaning on our rational powers to work our way to God, to devise our own plan to get to God, but hang on! Though many may be Greekish on the outside, on the inside, at the level of our experience, we're very Jewish... God does not work on our terms...

Trans: That's why the cross is folly to so many people, but Paul is arguing that God makes our wisdom absolutely foolish in the cross of Christ. How?

### **How does God make our wisdom foolish? (REWORK)**

- Answer: through a totally unexpected means... "through the folly of what we preached"
- Back up to **Verse 21**. Paul says, quite eloquently... Three types of wisdom: Proverbial "wisdom"; our "wisdom" and God's "wisdom":
- The wisdom of God was to send his Son to die on the cross to "save those who believe."
- "The preaching of the gospel" is God's ordained means of salvation and it is his pleasure for people to hear and believe. Since God has made declaring the gospel his means of salvation, we must live with a twofold conviction. 1) Every person must hear these truths and contend with these realities. 2) We must share this message.
- This is message is worth sharing. We must lovingly, wisely, and boldly share the message of Christ crucified with our neighbors, friends, and co-workers. Anything less would actually be unloving.
- Now look at **Verse 24**: Calling: General call. To everyone. Special, effectual call. To those who believe. To those who say, "That's me! I need that. I can't be good enough, wise enough, impressive enough."
- And for those who are called, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Trans: Is the cross of Christ a scandal to you or have you received it as the power and wisdom of God?

## II. Get over the scandal of the cross to the scandalous power of the cross (1:26-31)

If you think the message of the cross is shocking, then you will be equally surprised by what God does through the cross. **Verse 26**

### God's grace can reach anyone (26-28).

- The gospel and God's gift of salvation is for everyone. The gospel changes the young & old, the ugly & the beautiful (not that the former would apply to anyone here), the rich & the poor, the educated & the uneducated... Intellectually elite, the culturally elite, the \_\_\_ elite...
- \*Go back to Ecclesiastes here...
- And why does God choose the foolish, weak, low and despised? So that no one may boast before him.
- He delights to give salvation to those not highly esteemed to make the point that this is his deal. Salvation is by grace.
- Jeremiah 9:23-24: **"Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."(Jeremiah 9:23-24)**

### Implications for Receiving the Gospel (29).

- Some here today may have never apprehended the true meaning of the cross and consequently, may have never truly seen your need for Christ and the intensely personal sacrifice he made for all who would believe in him.
- What are these verses teaching us about how we are to receive Christ?
- We must possess humility before God. Humility says: "I don't have it together. You have it together. It's not in me. It's in you. I'm not good enough. You are good enough. I don't have what I need. You are everything I need. " No boasting (Ephesians 2:8-9)

### Implications for Living the Gospel (30-31) This is the scandalous power of the cross!!!

- Christ is our wisdom,
- Righteousness,
- Sanctification
- Redemption
- & Christ is more than this. He is our confidence, our \_\_\_\_, our \_\_\_\_, our life

**The Gospel for all of Life. The cross meets our needs in comprehensive fashion. In light of this, boast in the cross!! We boast in the Lord, in the cross....**

### Conclusion:

- The cross – every week. The cross – every day! The reality of the cross should touch every detail of our lives. Nothing is exempt from its influence!
- "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14 ESV)
- Gospel... Clear invitation... Pray... Lord's Supper...