

## ***A Fool's Errand***

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

**FOCUS:** The cross is as scandalous to human wisdom today as it was in Paul's day.

**FUNCTION:** To show the difference between human and godly wisdom as we share the Gospel with others

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### **Prayer for Illumination**

#### **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

*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.***

*For it is written:*

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."*

*Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?*

*Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*

*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.***

***Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,***

***but we preach Christ crucified:***

*a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,*

*but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks,*

***Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

*For the **foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom,** and*

*the **weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.***

## Sermon

*Throughout the entire history of God's people is the belief that we have a message to share.*

Most often, we call it the “**gospel** of Jesus Christ”.

We even call this message “**good news**”

(which is the literal translation of the Greek for “gospel”).

**And what is this message exactly?**

**What is it that we have to tell our poor, hurting world?**

What “good news” do we have to offer?

The knowledge that **Jesus loves you.**

That **there is a God**, who created the universe,  
and **that God is interested in a relationship** with you.

That **the world, broken by sin,**  
**is not what it was created to be.**

That **Jesus died to pay the penalty of sin**  
and to repair the brokenness.

That **Jesus was raised to life** so that we too might know life  
now and for eternity.

Yup, sounds like good news to me.

But for some reason, **this message does not seem to be getting many people's attention; not breaking through**

Or maybe, **we've forgotten** how to share that message.

*I read an article earlier this week that really was not that surprising but no less disheartening.*

[Note CNN Article about decline of Christians in America]

Other parts of the article suggest that

the decline is found in traditionally “mainline” denominations (Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, etc.) but that “mega-church” or non-denominational churches continue to see growth.

It even says that the decline might slow since one commentator said that the economic woes might drive people back to religion.

But these **threads of silver lining** cannot hide the truth:

**The message isn't getting out there.**

***But let's face it, the message we have to share is not easy.***

Good, definitely. **But not easy.**

And Paul lays it out for us well:

*...the message of the **cross** is foolishness...*

Again, we find ourselves **confronted with an image** we have, perhaps, grown a little too comfortable with.

**Think about all the places you see crosses these days.**

Bedazzled on **jewelry** (I wear one, myself!).

On **bumper stickers** and the backs of cars.

Used in **commercials and advertisement** to try to attract fellow Christian consumers.

For non-believers, it is but **the insignia of the Christian religion.**

**Indeed, compared to Paul's day, the cross has lost most of its power.**

We're far **too removed** from the graphic, agonizing, humiliating tool of execution that is the cross.

I think it is safe to say that **none of us have actually witnessed a crucifixion.**

But the Corinthian believers that Paul is writing to almost certainly would have:

Criminals shamefully strung up outside of town,  
for all the world to see,

Slowly dying from suffocation as their lungs collapse  
and the pressure on their heart slowly mounts.

And **maybe that's why our message makes less impact than it once did.**

because **we've forgotten what the cross really is.**

***But that is our message:***

**A tool of death as the rallying point** of our faith.

The moment we point to as **the pinnacle of God's love.**

It is no wonder that ancient citizens of Paul's day would have thought his message was foolishness.

**The cross was reserved for the lowest scum of society:**

Traitors, slaves, the worst of the worst.

They didn't nail folks up for just anything.

And so we, along with Paul,

**point to a publically condemned man,**

**and ask people to put their trust in him.**

Foolishness indeed.

*But let's look at the flip side: at wisdom.*

**Has the wisdom and intellect of man brought it any closer to God?**

We might argue that the advancements in science has made us *like* gods,

Able to create and/or manipulate life.

But acting like something we're not and meeting the true living God are not the same thing.

For all our **modern discoveries**,

For all our **social advancements**

and all that we've **learned to empower and liberate the individual**,

Has any of that really brought us closer to God?

Or to the purpose of our existence?

*Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?*

As Mr. Donahue says in the article, **most people aren't interested in being told what to do with their lives.**

So as we **bolster this rugged individualism**,

Where we can **make our own destiny**,

→ Has it done anything to help us to know God?

Only if our foray into such individualism reveals what individualism ultimately has to offer:

Loneliness. Isolation.  
The myth that we're all alone in the universe  
The selfish notion that our relationships are only meaningful for what they can do to benefit ourselves.

*So either trust a condemned traitor to the state on one side or the dead-end wisdom of humanity.*

This isn't a new dilemma, as Paul spells out for us.

**A crucified god was scandalous to his Jewish and Greek hearers.**

*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,*

**The Jewish listeners had trouble swallowing a messiah that wasn't strong enough to resist arrest;**

God would not fall victim to human hands.

Their skepticism was not entirely unfounded as there were many **"wonder workers"** who claimed to be the anointed one of God.

**So they had a checklist of "proofs" (or "miraculous signs") whenever a so-called messiah came by; and being crucified a criminals death, at the hand of your sworn enemy (the Romans), was surely a sign that you were not the all powerful God.**

Deuteronomy even says you should despise those who are under the "curse of the tree." [Deut. 21:23]

It was an abomination to God.

Not to mention Jesus was far too humble, far too interested in outcasts and sinners for their tastes.

**No, according to their years of study and wisdom, Jesus just did act like what they thought a messiah should act like, and therefore, was to be despised and rejected as a fraud.**

***It wasn't too different for the Greeks, who treasured wisdom and reason above all virtues.***

To them, a God that was capable of feeling (i.e., loving, hurting, etc.), was not to be trusted.

**Emotions were considered a human weakness** and a god would be above such a flaw.

In fact, **having a god mettle in human affairs** would be an insult to the God's divinity, since he was above such petty problems of the world.

On top of that, the **Greeks prized rhetoric** and well-crafted turn of phrases, almost more than the wisdom itself.

If you could make it sound pretty, it didn't really matter what you talked about.

We know that Paul never minced words,

Speaking directly to the heart of the matter.

And that **direct speech would** have come across as **crude or uneducated** and therefore, not worth listening to.

**No, Jesus could not be much of a god, spending so much time with humans, without flowery speech or turn of phrases, especially to end up crucified the way he did.**

***Funny how the arguments have not changed all that much.***

We are a people less interested in God because, like the Jews, that God doesn't look or act like we think he should.

"There's too much suffering for there to be a loving God."

And the moment that God starts to tell us how to live our lives,

Well, we just employ our power of choice and find another God that tells us what we want to hear.

Maybe if God came to us in entertaining commercials that made us laugh, or a flashy website that captivated our attention maybe then we'd like what we hear better.

St. Augustine, a pastor and writer from the earliest days of the church, said:

*"If you believe what you like in the gospel and reject what you don't, it is not the gospel you believe in but yourself."*

***Our message is just as crazy and foolish as it ever was.***

*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,  
but we preach Christ crucified:  
a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,*

That's our message. **"Christ crucified"**.

"Come, let your life be guided by a dead man!" we say.

***Of course, we know there is much more to it than that.***

That Christ models for us a sacrificial love that is not of this world but can only be from God.

**The fact that God operates by a different set of rules** than the rules of our world should be **a hopeful sign** that what he has to offer is much greater than anything our world can hope to give.

We've come to distrust the empty promises of our human world. But God's foolishness,

The overpowering love of God found in Jesus' sacrifice for us, is greater than even the most well-reasoned human wisdom.

***For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.***

***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.***

Because the power of God is not simply in knowledge or some kind of secret understanding.

It is in the overwhelming love of a God willing to go to such profound lengths to rescue us from ourselves.

***but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks,  
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

We have a message to share

Christ crucified

it is the power of God