



The Inverted Wisdom of the Gospel

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Open your Bibles or swipe open your devices and go to 1 Corinthians 1:18

There was a billboard in Orange County promoting the SoCal Harvest Crusade – an event that is expected to draw 100,000 people -- and on the Billboard was a picture of the founder, Greg Laurie, holding a black book in his hand, with the demeanor of someone speaking to a crowd. This billboard, which was in a public mall in Irvine, legally paid for by SoCal Harvest, displayed in a public mall, was abruptly taken down. The reason? The picture contained “offensive images” – so offensive that the owners of the billboard not only received complaints, but even death threats.

The same image that draws 100k will also draw the threat of murder. This is the result of very different convictions that shape the way we see the world. And both can't be right.

In our passage this morning, God is addressing our worldview: What we should think and how it should shape our view of the world. A worldview is the way you see and make sense of the world, it's the set of beliefs and convictions that help your heart and mind organize and assess what's happening around you. To put it in a picture, it's the shape and color of the glasses that you look through to see the world. If you have rose-colored glasses, everything you see is viewed with a hopeful spin.

And God doesn't give the three best options with pros and cons. He tells us what to believe and think.

Here's the radical assertion of our passage this morning: The only correct worldview is the one that has the foolishness of the gospel at its core.

If the cross of Jesus Christ is not understood and is not at the center of what you believe and treasure -- and is not increasingly shaping you and the way you live your life -- if the joy of Jesus is not at the heart of what you are about as a human being, then our passage asserts that you are blind to God's wisdom – AND you might be in some serious danger.

But to those who treasure Christ in all of life (that's a worldview): power, salvation, and joy are yours. That's what hangs in the balance. Who do you trust? Your wisdom? God's wisdom?

Here's where we are going this morning:

1. The **wisdom of a foolish cross** (v18-25)
2. The **wisdom of a foolish calling** (v26-29)
3. The **wisdom of a foolish salvation** (v30-31)

Let's pray that God will give us ears to hear this morning.

PRAYER

I. THE WISDOM OF A FOOLISH CROSS (V18-25)

The first thing Paul does is draw a dividing line in the sand:

¹⁸For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

There can be no mistaking his point: The cross is the dividing line in all humanity. This coming after a passage on divisions in the church where he's saying brothers – be of one mind, don't have factions within the church – now he's saying “But there IS one line to be drawn in the sand, and God has already drawn it. it's the word of the cross.”

This is short hand for the entirety of the gospel or good news of Jesus – his sinless birth, perfect life of obedience, his actual death on the cross where God punished our sins, his powerful resurrection and ascension and ultimate return – Paul is saying all of that centers on the cross – and the word of that cross lands on the ears and hearts of its listeners in two very different ways:

To those who are perishing, folly

To us who are being saved, the power of God.

This is sobering news – because it means that this whole conversation about worldview doesn't begin with what you believe, it begins with the state of your soul. While crowds cheer "I'm of Paul" "I'm of Apollos" "I'm of Cephas" – *The cross renders all of those divisions worthless.* There is one true line of division down all of humanity – there are those are in the process of perishing and those who are in the process of being saved.

You are either one or the other. Both are written in the present tense – those that are in the STATE OF PERISHING or the STATE of being saved.

And how do you get into the STATE of being saved? That's later in the message. For now, we see that there are two groups, everyone is in one or the other, and when these two groups hear the news of the gospel they respond with total opposites:

The perishing group hears it and thinks: Folly – foolishness. Stupidity. Ridiculous. Who would believe that????? **Lame.**

The being saved group hears it and thinks: Power – Action, Truthfulness, All of Life depends on it.

But now Paul goes a step further – **The message of the cross not only reveals a stark contrast between the souls of men, but it stands as judgment against and God's wisdom, but is a statement of God's allegiance to His way.** Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 where the prophet wrote:

"I will **destroy** the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will **thwart.**"

Lest there was any confusion, God has no rivals. There is no competition. There will be no playoffs to determine the winner. There is no second place.

There is God's way of the cross and every other worldview and philosophy that puts itself on par with the gospel will be disqualified in the end.

V19 Where is the wise, scribe, debator? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

This is an inverted kind of wisdom – its seems backwards and upside down, but it's all by design. It PLEASED GOD to do it this way.

Paul taunts the wisdom of the world: The wise man was not someone who had mastered the art of skillful living like in proverbs. The wise man was the person who embraced an order to the way the world worked – Epicureans, Stoics, Platonists could all have been considered wise men. Scribes were the expert in the law – masterful at understanding the law but unable to master its demands. The debators were the public orators – they gave winsome speeches and influenced people. These were the power people that everyone in Corinth looked up to and wanted to be like.

Paul says that whatever merits of worldly philosophies and wisdom, none of them can reconcile sinful men and women to the true and living God – and if that is missing, you have no true wisdom at all. All of the world's philosophies of navigating the rapids of life are worthless if they all end up taking you over the falls. (pause)

And here's the crazy part: This was no accident. God designed it this way. For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

In God's wisdom....it PLEASED God.... to chose the way of foolishness – the preaching of a criminal's cross for the King of the World for our salvation.....because FAITH IN THIS MESSAGE highlights the power of the message of the cross.

So to a money hungry, fame obsessed, pleasure pursuing, inclusive loving, independent, success drive culture like the one we live in, the cross is absolute stupidity. It makes no sense. Every week on college campuses and in news rooms across the country, people with high degrees and stature in the eyes of men get up and speak about their philosophies of life.

They preach Secularism – there is no God allowed in the public square, so keep your religion out of your vocational life.

They preach Materialism -- that matter is the only thing that exists.

They preach naturalism – a worldview that everything that seems supernatural can be explained with science.

The TV evangelists preach the prosperity Gospel – that financial blessing and prosperity is always the will of God.

Even in the church, we can preach Morality – be a good Christian kid, do good Christian kid things, fit in and you will ok.

The cross says no to all of these sermons. Jesus wasn't given a personal yacht for his faith in the Father, he was crucified. Because you can't be good enough. And there is a heaven and a hell that are real and exist and you can't explain a resurrection with science. And our call as Christians is to live that out in all of life so that the joy of Jesus spreads like fire in our city and many come to know the Lord.

See we preach Christ CRUCIFIED -- because that's the message that saves. That's the message that God uses to move those who are in the state of perishing into the state of being saved.

Paul calls out both the Jews and Gentiles in v22-24 for missing it:

²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Read the gospel of John and you'll see that the Jews often asked for a sign to validate Jesus' authority. And Jesus gives them many signs throughout his ministry, but they still don't believe. That's because they are assessing Jesus instead of letting Jesus assess them. DA Carson writes:

“Thus the demand for signs becomes the prototype to every condition human beings raise as a barrier to being open to God. I will devote myself to this God *if* he heals my child. I will follow this Jesus *if* God proves himself to me. I am assessing him, he is not assessing me. I am not coming to him on his terms; rather, I am stipulating terms that he must accept if he wants the privilege of my company.” Thus the Jews stumbled over the cross, the ultimate sign of our need for salvation and God's love for sinners.

The Greeks missed it too. They seek wisdom, a way to explain their world and make it ordered, a philosophy that fits into their high and lofty ideals for life. A bloody cross is folly to those who seek after this kind of wisdom. seek wisdom.

What's getting in your way this morning from believing this truth?

What's tripping you up? What conditions are you seeking and putting on God in order to follow Him, His way? What are not willing to let go of? There is wisdom in the foolishness of the cross.

Now Paul pivots – Paul clearly centers in on those who HAVE seen, those who have come to believe that Jesus is God's wisdom and God's power.

God's wisdom is not only seen in the foolishness of the cross– but also in who comes to know Christ!

II. THE WISDOM OF A FOOLISH CALLING (V26-29)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Football season has started and you may have noticed that the Chicago Bears are doing really well this season. We traded for a guy, can't remember his name, Khalil Mack?!? Anyhow he's only the front runner for the defensive player of the year, not a big deal.

We might intuitively think that's the kind of person God is looking to add to His team – someone who has credentials, someone who will be productive and contribute right away. Someone who will. Like God is running a fantasy football draft and he's like, "Ok I'm going doctor, doctor, lawyer, teacher, and medical sales first 5 rounds." Even the sleeper picks are justified by their potential. Like "I really think that young mom with those two small kids who thinks she's going to lose her mind is really going to blossom and turn into a great catch – she's in."

Paul says that's backwards. Paul says, consider your calling. God must call you. Only those who are CALLED experience Christ as Power and Wisdom. God must choose you. But your calling is not based on your status or potential.

-- not many wise, not many powerful, not many noble.

In other words, God doesn't just save Kings and Queens, noble men or those in high places....he doesn't just save those with potential -- he saves those whom He calls.

V27 God chose what is foolish. **God chose** what is weak in the world, **V28 God chose** what is low and despised in the world.

That's who God choose. To a Corinthian church that loved the superstar, the celebrity, the famous orator, Paul reminds them of who they are were: Lowly, foolish, weak, low and despised people to receive the foolishness of the cross.

And if you've received Christ, brothers and sisters, CONSIDER YOUR CALLING. It wasn't because you were godly that God called you, it was because God was going to make a demonstration of foolishness through the work of the cross in your life.

Only God's intervention can change the state of those who are perishing:
"this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

I was on a path headed toward hell, throwing rocks at God from a distance, not daring to get near when God drew me to Him. He gave me a heart that went from hard to not angry to intrigued to passionate. He took a kid who was least likely to be a Christian, let alone pastor and he gave me faith to believe that Jesus died for me. And God has never let me go from the first day until now. Friends, that wasn't done to exalt me, it was done to humble me in the presence of God. Who am I?? that I would get to participate in the inheritance of the saints that JESUS CHRIST himself purchased with his blood?

But here's the good news:

ANYONE can get in through Christ. NO one is excluded! You don't have to have wealth, you don't have to be famous, you don't have to be attractive, you don't have to fit in, you don't have to be smart or hard working or virtuous in any way to be saved – all you have to do is BELIEVE -- THAT GOD

WILL SAVE YOU FROM YOUR SINS THROUGH THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS -- AND YOU WILL BE DECLARED RIGHT WITH GOD TO ENJOY HIM FOREVER. That's the good news of the gospel.

Consider your calling. It seems pretty foolish that ANY of us would get to be a part of this. And Paul implies that for every person who is saved through the cross, God is making a statement to the wisdom of this world that looks to the pretty people, the powerful people, the movers and the shakers. He's shaming the wise, He's shaming the strong.

How? Cause apart from Christ, they are lost! Apart from Christ, their wisdom will be brought to nothing. Their strength will be reduced to nothing. They will all die and stand before the judgment seat of the God and find that their wisdom and strength amount to ZERO when asked to give an account for their sins.

But with Christ, the lost are saved! The weak find strength! The low are lifted high!

V29 ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

That's how you know that you've got the gospel at the core of your worldview – when the foolishness of the cross and the foolishness of your calling come together in such a way that you stop all your foolish boasting. What do you have that GOD DID NOT GIVE YOU? WHAT DO YOU HAVE THAT GOD COULD NOT TAKE AWAY IN AN INSTANT?

The whole plan of God's calling requires that you come with nothing in your hands to contribute – you come lowly and weak and powerless.

And yet -- it's the very same foolish cross and calling that results in our salvation.

III. THE WISDOM OF A FOOLISH SALVATION (V30-31)

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Paul closes this section with an encouragement – we may be low, but we have everything we need for salvation in Christ. This foolish cross and calling gives us all of God’s wisdom in Jesus – and then he defines it for us:

- a) Righteousness – right standing before God in the death of Jesus Christ
- b) Sanctification – setting us apart for holy use in the service of the King
- c) Redemption – trading in His life to purchase us for Himself

Friends I hope through this passage that you see how much you need the cross. The only correct worldview is the one that has the foolishness of the gospel at its core.

APPLICATION

Implication 1: Get on the right side of the dividing line

Which side of the line are you on? The bridge is Christ.

Implication 2: Test every philosophy by the gospel

The maturing Christian increasingly tests and discerns all philosophies of life against the gospel. As you go to school or raise your kids or work in the marketplace, you will find every philosophy under the sun in your face. Test them by the gospel.

The “You only live once – just have fun!” philosophy of youth? No, there is another life to come and what we do in this life matters to that one. Judgment is real but salvation is also real.

The “power of positive thinking” philosophy of the world? Christians should have more hope for the future than anyone alive, but the power for change is from God, not our brainpower or will.

The “Jesus on Sunday – My Way every other day” philosophy? That’s not a calling to the cross. That’s using Jesus.

(orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy)

Implication 3: Make Jesus your boast

This whole passage climaxes to verse 31, quoting Jeremiah 9:

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

See it’s the wisdom of God to take a foolish cross and combine a foolish calling to produce a foolish salvation that bears much fruit. The church empowered by God cannot be stopped. God’s mighty power is working through His people – and for every grace, and every mercy, and every fruitful outworking of the gospel, the praise belongs to the Lord.