

Foolishness

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

INTRO:

I don't know about you, but I don't love feeling foolish.

But I often do feel foolish.

Just think about technology.

It can make me feel like a fool.

When **simple things** that should work . . . don't work.

And forget about calling the Geek Squad or Applecare, I just ask a teenager how it works.

They'll have me up and running in minutes!

And that my friends, makes me feel foolish!

Gratefully foolish, yes, but foolish still.

PAUSE

Foolishness.

The message of the cross is knowledge about God that only God can give.

This message that God is crucified, that the powerlessness of God is God's great victory, that's a message that sounds pretty foolish to the world.

But to those of us are being saved it is the power of God.

PAUSE

WE:

We all feel foolish at times, **don't we?**

We all have to use technology to some degree.

Maybe it takes us kicking and screaming, but it's part of our lives.

Does the idea of God's victory being in His powerlessness seem foolish to you?

Yes?

No?

Well, a crucified God does seem a little strange at first.

Let's pray together and listen to God's Word to us about this foolishness through Paul...

PAUSE

GOD:

1 Corinthians 1:18 The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved.

19 It is written in scripture: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent.

20 Where are the wise? Where are the legal experts? Where are today's debaters? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish?

21 In God's wisdom, he determined that the world wouldn't come to know him through its wisdom. Instead, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching.

22 Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom,

23 but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

24 But to those who are called—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's power and God's wisdom.

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

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PAUSE

This sets the tone for *Paul's theology of the cross* in which he contrasts the **powerful** message of the cross with the **foolishness** of human "**wisdom.**"

If we set this next to Jesus' beatitudes in the sermon on the mount,

Paul gives the church the opportunity to reflect upon the wisdom of that which the world considers foolish,

which is, the cross of Christ.

In Corinth some said they had special, "**wisdom**" that gave them the key to knowing what Jesus **really** meant.

Paul doesn't like our trying to limit the Christian message to our own reasoning.

This is what Martin Luther called "**ladder theology.**"

It is using our **cleverness** to try to climb up to God by the **ladder of reason.**

A crucified Messiah makes no sense to us.

Paul thinks it is arrogant to think we can put God in the witness stand and cross examine Him through the use of our reason.

- Paul says that the cross tends to divide us into two groups:
- Those on the way to **destruction**
- and those on the way of **salvation**.

To "**understand**" the cross we must **experience** it as our saving event.

Somehow we must subjectively engage the strange idea of the cross, or even better, we need to be found by the cross.

When we are found by the cross it transforms the way we think about everything.

The cross is foolishness to those of us who think we have at last discovered **human knowledge that gives us a handle on God**.

God's wisdom makes a mockery of human wisdom.

The cross becomes a "**stumbling block**" when we attempt to understand Jesus by our wisdom.

The powerlessness of God in Christ offends our understanding of God and our desire to be powerful.

So Paul tells the church at Corinth that the "**foolishness**" of the cross is a challenge to worldly wisdom.

The cross of Christ, says Paul, looks foolish to the world's idea of smart.

- As someone who is supposed to stand up every week and deliver a message to you, I take notice.

I want to present the Gospel to you, to speak about Christ in way that you will accept its truth and be persuaded that it is a message that you really want to receive.

But Paul says that's where the difficulty begins.

We try to make the Gospel meaningful to people, to make Christ understandable, but we do so in a way that makes sense to the world.

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The Gospel requires a kind of thinking that the world may consider to be downright foolish.

How does one speak about God Almighty coming to us as a crucified Christ?

A God on a cross?

It's . . . foolish.

Again, there were people in Paul's day who thought they had special wisdom and knowledge.

Through this special revelation they thought they could receive from God by way of their own minds and thinking.

All these assume that humans are on a noble quest to find God.

- Read the right book or
- think the right thoughts and
- that will enable us to discover the truth.

That may be flattering to us, but it's not the Gospel way.

The truth that Paul lived was not that he was on a desperate search for God . . .

*but that God had **searched for and found him!***

Seems like many people who brag about their serious "**spirituality**" stress their search, they stress their quest.

There are many spiritual practices we might learn in order to find the peace of God, but they sometimes seem only to create spiritual snobs.

It also overlooks the God who comes to us on the cross of Jesus Christ.

It over-stresses that salvation is mostly something we are **to do, to think, or to experience.**

They imagine an **all loving** but **inactive** God who is the object of our religious search rather than the God who has in Jesus Christ searched for us.

And so they urge us to "**deepen our spiritual awareness.**"

We are to think in a more enlightened way.

We are not told the strange news that because we couldn't come to God, God came to us in a form that we didn't expect — *on a cross!*

One of the things that the cross tells us . . . is that we are sinners.

God came to us in Jesus Christ and we responded *not* with,

"Here is what I've been searching for!" but rather . . . **"Crucify him!"**

So many of our **religious ideas and spiritual practices**—the cross also suggests—are just clever ways of putting ourselves in the place of God.

Imagining God on our terms rather than as God came to us—as the crucified Savior.

Given the cultural realities of our time,

the story of highly spiritualized faith that one gets through knowledge and that puts one in direct communion with God . . .

is so appealing to many intelligent people...

but this impulse is a cosmic shift away from the Gospel.

So as we march closer and closer to Lent,

the season of the cross,

let Paul call each of us back toward a bold embrace of the theology of the Cross—

the strangest,

The most healing,

The most life-giving truth about God we have been given to tell a dying world.

Do we understand this about the cross?

This story might help:

Nicholas Wolterstorff,

a Christian philosopher,

in grieving the death of his son, reached a profound understanding of Paul's theology of the cross as well as Jesus' "**blessed are those who mourn.**"

In [Lament for a Son](#), he grieves his loss and yet also ponders the meaning of the beatitudes:

*God is not only the God of the sufferers,
but the God who suffers.*

*The pain and fallenness of humanity have entered into
His heart.*

Through the prism of my tears I have seen a suffering God...

God is love.

That is why He suffers.

To love our suffering sinful world is . . . to suffer.

God so suffered for the world that he gave up His only Son to suffering.

The one who does not see God suffering does not see His love.

God is suffering love . . .

To believe in Christ rising from the grave is to accept it as a sign of our own rising from the graves . . .

So I shall struggle to live the reality of Christ rising and death's dying.

In my living, my son's dying will not be the last word.

That is the way the cross affects the world!

Once it finds us . . . it changes the way we see everything.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

The foolishness of the cross is the wisdom of God's love to those who have been found by the cross.

YOU:

Here are the ways you can put this to work in your lives.

Here are your action steps for today and this week:

- **Think about the wisdom of the cross.**

Spend time **today** thinking about the wisdom of the cross.

See it not as foolishness,

but as the wisdom of God's love.

If it seems like foolishness to you,

that's ok.

That's why I want you to spend some time thinking about it today.

Let God's wisdom find you.

- **Think about suffering love.**

Spend time this week really trying to understand how God suffers for us in

His love for us.

It may just turn the foolishness of the cross into saving wisdom for you...

WE:

Have we been found by the cross?

Has it changed the way we see everything?

If you haven't experienced the cross like this, imagine how great it would be. . .

Do you look with suffering love on everyone?

God does.

Imagine if you tried . . .

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Let's pray together now to see everything through the suffering love of God . . .