

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Paradoxology | Truth in Contradiction

TITLE: The Paradoxes of the Cross

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

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Following Jesus is not always easy. Most Christians want their faith journey to be simple and clear—either/or, black/white, yes/no. However, life with God is often found in both/and tensions or paradoxes. The essence of a paradox is bringing together two seemingly contradictory statements, and the Bible is full of them. God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. And following Jesus into tensions like these is where faith is meant to flourish. Embracing seeming contradictions like these leads to doxology—a life of intentional worship.

In our culture today, we tend to be logo kind of people. Some of the most iconic logos are like the swoosh of Nike, or the big “M” of McDonald’s, or Apple’s bitten apple. Companies spend huge amounts of money to craft these logos to enhance their brands and to create a certain image. And, we tend to self-identify with the logos and brands we like most—*OR NOT*—your distinctive brand could be that you pride yourself on being brand-less!

The distinctive symbol—the distinctive logo—of the Christian faith, of course, is the cross. However, I think we’ve lost the sense of the horror of the cross because wearing a cross or displaying a cross is like having a symbol of a gas chamber or a hangman’s noose or a guillotine as your main logo. *And yet, this instrument of death stands at the center of the Christian faith as a symbol of life.* The fact that the Cross is a symbol of both death and life is just one of the many paradoxes of the cross.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 —*Why is the message of the cross a stumbling block to some and foolishness to others?* The apostle Paul tells us here that the “word of the cross” is a paradox. Basically, he tells us that in the cross, we see the *foolish wisdom* of God put on display. We see the *power* of God displayed in *weakness*. *How so?* In the paradox of a Crucified Messiah. For both Jews and Greeks, the idea of a crucified Messiah or a crucified King was a contradiction in terms. But God purposely, intentionally “chose” (1:19-31) to offer his salvation through the absurd notion of Christ dying on a cross. It is in the apparent weakness and foolishness of the cross that the power of God’s salvation is revealed.

So, in Paul’s day, the cross of Christ had its critics and detractors and the same thing is true today, which leads us to the next question: *How can a loving God devise a plan that would lead to the cruel death of his own Son? Is this not “divine child abuse?”*

First, the charge of ‘divine child abuse’ undervalues the dual nature of Christ. Jesus was with God before time began, working out this plan of salvation. He freely, voluntarily chose to go to the cross and die for our sins (see John 10:11, 17-18). Second, the charge of ‘divine child abuse’ underestimates the problem of human sin and injustice.

Paul says, “To those of us who believe, the cross is the power of God for salvation. And the Bible claims that it is only through the cross of Christ that anyone can be saved? But what about other religions? Isn’t that too narrow-minded and intolerant? ...No, if Christianity is true if the cross is the only way to know God, it’s not intolerant to say that it’s the only way no more than saying Paris is the capital of France. Something can be

true, but it's not intolerant to hold to that truth. However, we should not be arrogant or intolerant in how we hold to Gospel truth. Jesus knew the truth, but he was also full of grace.)

So why did God—and by God, I mean, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—why did the Godhead, three-in-one, come up with a worldwide rescue plan that rests on a cross? (see 1:28-31)? ...To destroy the pride that will keep us from God. To come to God, to live with God, you must come to him on his terms, not yours.

For Discussion —

1. What are your favorite logos or brands? ...Why do you think you are attracted to those brands? How do you self-identify with those brands?
 2. Have someone read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. What are some of the paradoxical statements that are made about the cross in these verses? ...
 3. Why was the idea of a Messiah or King on a cross an almost impossible thing for people to embrace? Why was it hard for Jews? ...Why was it hard for Greeks and Romans?
 4. How is the power of God for salvation found in this absurd message of a Crucified Messiah?
 5. How are we sometimes like the Jews seeking for signs and the Greeks looking for wisdom in our relationship with God today?
 6. How would you answer a critic who says that the God of the Christian faith is guilty of divine child abuse?
 7. Why would God "choose" (see 1:19-31) Christ crucified as the way of salvation for all people? Why did God—and by God, I mean, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—why did the Godhead, three-in-one come up with a worldwide rescue plan that rests on a cross? (see 1:28-31)? ...What is it about a cross that destroys boasting?
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