LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

The message of the cross

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

We're back with the third installment of our study through 1 Corinthians 1. We're picking it up in verse 18. Let's start reading there. For 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. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.

Where 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? 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.

For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ, crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 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. 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. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of Him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. As we finish out the verses of this chapter, you need to remember that the Apostle Paul is speaking to a church that was beginning to act in a very worldly way. We saw in the last study that they were beginning to separate, divide into sectarian groups that centered themselves around individual personalities. Some of them saying, I follow Paul. Some saying, I follow Apollo.

Some saying, well, I'm a fan of Peter, and so on and so on. Paul is going to get very specific with them in the coming chapters about what he thinks of that kind of worldly thinking. But for right now, he's simply giving a very important insight into the ways of the world versus the ways of the kingdom of God. And you'll notice that there's a lot of comparing that he's doing here, particularly wisdom and power, as the world sees it and as the kingdom of God displays it. And that's really kind of what he's dealing with in this passage.

He begins by talking about the fact that the word of the cross or the message of the cross, as he says it, is foolishness. He uses the word folly to those who are perishing. In other words, those who have rejected the wisdom of God and the word of God, they hear the message of the cross, and it's stupid to them. It makes absolutely no sense. But he says, to we who are being saved, the message of the cross is the very power of God.

When he says power of God, what exactly does he mean? What's he talking about? What kind of power? Well, he's talking about the power to transform a life. That's the power he's referring to, because it is through the cross of Jesus that our lives are changed.

It's not through religion. It's not through philosophy. It's not through worldly wisdom or worldly power. Our lives are changed when we put our faith in Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross. That is the power of the cross, to transform a life.

Paul knew all about that transformation. He was a man who hated Christians, wanted to bring them to an end, wanted to arrest or kill as many as he possibly could to stop this, what he considered to be false religion. And then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, and he embraced the cross, the message of the cross, and his life was absolutely transformed. I mean, there was nothing the same about this man, really. He changed, and we think about our own lives at a time like this, and, you know, that's your testimony.

It's how much God has changed your life, and you may not even be as aware of those changes as other people who see you from the outside. Sometimes they can see the changes better than we can. But that is, in fact, the power of God that he's referring to. He then goes on to quote Isaiah chapter 29, when he quotes the Lord as saying, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning. In other words, the wisdom of the wise men.

And he says, I will thwart. And then Paul begins to ask some rhetorical questions, you know. Where is the wise man of this world? Where is the scribe? Scribes were at that time considered to be teachers of the law and that sort of thing.

Where is the debater of this age? And then he asks this question, has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Why does he say that? Obviously, it's a rhetorical question that demands a yes answer. But why a yes answer?

How has God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Well, he goes on to explain that it is through the wisdom of the world that people have rejected the cross of Christ. In other words, through man's wisdom, he rejects God's wisdom. And that's what he goes on to say. And then he makes reference to Jews and Greeks.

And by the way, that's Paul's way of saying Jews and Gentiles. Because as far as the Bible is concerned, the whole world is separated into just two groups, Jew and Gentile. And in verse 22, he says, Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. We see this played out even in the Bible. During the ministry of Jesus on the earth, they constantly asked him for a sign.

Show us a sign so that we can see that you are who you say you are and so forth. You'll remember how Jesus responded. He said, a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. In fact, he went on to say, no sign will be given to this generation except the sign of Jonah. Well, that's the way Jews are.

They wanted to see that as a validating aspect of whatever claims a person happened to be making. And he said, Greeks seek wisdom. Paul found this out when he went to Athens. And he actually went to the gathering of the wise, I guess is what you would call it. And he came to a place where the Greeks would come together in typical Grecian form.

And they would discuss all of the latest ideas. This was in the Areopagus. And that's all they would do all day long is just come together to talk about the latest ideas. Well, Paul got up and began to speak to them about the gospel. And for a while, they were interested.

But then, of course, when he got to the resurrection, they decided, that's stupid, that's foolish, that's not in keeping with wisdom, right? And that's why Paul goes on to say in verse 23, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly, foolishness, to them. Gentiles. All right, we've already discussed why the idea of Christ crucified is foolishness to the Gentiles, because it was Christ crucified who went on to be dead, buried, and then raised from the dead. Again, they thought that was ridiculously foolish.

But why is it a stumbling block to Jews? Why do the Jews consider Christ crucified a stumbling block? Here's why. The Jews were raised with the understanding that Messiah would come and he would liberate them from their enemies. They also knew that his name, or his title rather, Messiah, meant anointed one.

So understanding as they do that Messiah is the anointed one, they start hearing about this gospel message where Messiah gets nailed on a cross. That's a huge problem for the Jews, because you see, a cross is made out of wood, and wood comes from trees. And in the book of Deuteronomy, God made a statement about anyone who is hung on a tree. He said this, cursed is anyone hung on a tree. To the Jews, that was, well, it created a contradiction, because the typical Jew would say something like, okay, you're trying to tell me that the anointed one is also cursed of God.

He's the cursed one. Well, that's ridiculous. There's no way. The anointed one, the blessed of God, cannot at the same time be the cursed of God. And so it became a stumbling block to Jews to hear the gospel in light of what they knew and believed about Messiah.

But they forgot their own scriptures. Isaiah chapter 53, the suffering servant. He was cursed, right? He was cursed for us. They left that out.

They somehow forgot that, and they wanted to just hang on to the Messiah as the anointed one who would come to their rescue. Well, Jesus did come to their rescue, but in a way they weren't expecting. And it became a stumbling block issue for them. And that's what Paul is saying in this passage. He says in verse 24, but to those who are called, whether they be Jews or whether they be Gentiles, it's all about Jesus Christ, the very power of God, and the very wisdom of God.

And then he goes on to make the statement in verse 25 that God's foolishness, and he's talking about the message of the cross, is wiser than the best men can come up with. And God's weakness, which is Christ on the cross, is stronger than the greatest strength that men can come up with. He goes on in verse 26 and following to continue now to bring comparison to worldliness alongside the kingdom of God, or things that are important in the world versus things that are important in the kingdom of God. He says in verse 26, for consider your calling, brothers. You know, not many of you were wise by worldly standards.

Not many of you exercised any sort of power or authority by worldly standards, and very few of you had any sort of claim to nobility or noble birth. But then he went on to say this, and this is so good. He said that's exactly who God chooses. God chose the things that are foolish in the eyes of the world so that he might shame the worldly wise. And God chose the things that are weak in the eyes of the world so that he might shame those who are strong in a worldly sense.

And in verse 28, he says God chose the things that are lowly and despised in this world so that he might bring things to naught of the world. This is a fascinating statement where we see these comparisons that the Apostle Paul makes between the things that are important in the world and the things that God

chooses to use in the kingdom of God, like you and me. You know, we kind of fit the description, don't we? Foolish, maybe, in the eyes of the world. Maybe even weak.

You know, I've heard a lot of people say, you know, you Christians, Christianity is just a crutch to you guys. And of course what they're saying is you guys are weak. And God chose those of us who are lowly and despised by the people of the world so that he might use us in such a way as to shame the people of this world. He says in verse 29, all these things were done by God so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. You know, God doesn't like boasting.

You'll remember in the Old Testament when God called a man named Gideon to come against a vast army. First of all, Gideon had a huge army, but God whittled that army down to a very small number so that when the victory was given, the people would know. There's no way that Gideon's small army could overcome this other vast army of thousands and thousands of soldiers. There's no way. God created a situation where he would receive the praise, where he would receive the glory and the honor.

And that's why he uses you and me so that he might receive the glory. It doesn't go to us, the glory, nor the boasting. You and I, we can't boast because we know it's God who works in us, right? Constantly. Again, verse 29, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And that's why he says in verse 30, because of him, you're in Christ Jesus. It's not because of you. It's because of him, because of his goodness, his mercy, his grace. That's why we're in Christ Jesus, who is for us and who has become for us wisdom from God. He has become for us righteousness, as Paul says here.

He is our righteousness. He has imputed to you and me his righteousness. Did you know that? When you stand before God, you stand righteous in God's sight. That means in right standing with God, because when God the Father looks at you, he sees the righteousness of his Son.

Isn't that incredible? He says that Jesus is also for us our sanctification. That word sanctification speaks of this ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to change us, to transform us, and to form us into the image of Christ. And he says that Jesus is for us our redemption. Think of something being redeemed.

You know, when you buy something at the store, technically you're redeeming that for the like value of it, and that's why you give money for that item. It's a way of redeeming it. You and I have been redeemed, but as the Bible says, not with currency or silver or gold, but we have been redeemed through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Isn't that amazing? So he is to us our redemption, so that as it is written, final verse of the chapter, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

Boy, you know, there's a lot of boasting we can do in what God has done, and there's no boasting in what we've done. Because what we've done, we've done through the power of God. We've done through the calling of God. We've done through the grace of God, the mercy of God, the goodness of God. It's all done through him.

So let him who boasts, you're going to boast, boast in God. Talk about what he has done, you know. Talk about how he has saved people, how he has redeemed us. us from the curse of the law. Well, that's where we close out this section, this study in 1 Corinthians.

We finished chapter one. We'll carry on with chapter two next time. So let's pray. Heavenly father, we thank you for the things that we've seen tonight here in this passage. Lord, help us not to get caught up in the things of this world, but help us to understand the difference between worldly things and the things that are truly important, that are part of your kingdom.

And Lord, help us to remember, it's not about us. It's not about what we can do or what we have done. It's what you've done and what you are doing in our lives to bring about a true Christ-like transformation. So father, as we boast, may we boast in you and all that you've done for us. We thank you.

We praise you. We worship you in the authority that is ours through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.