

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 Nothing But Christ Crucified Falls Ch. AM 1/21/2024

Today we talk about wisdom and power.

In Corinth, the wise ones they called them the wise, the nobles, the scribes, the debaters, the professors. Today, we call them cultural leaders or influencers. People who give out supposed wisdom in order to change how others think. People want to be seen as thoughtful, knowledgeable, and intelligent.

Why do so many people have a phobia of speaking in public? Not because we lack the ability. Rather, we are afraid to be mistakenly perceived as less thoughtful or less articulate than we actually are. We are scared of being viewed as unintelligent or uninformed.

Corinth ranked people according to standards of worldly wisdom and power. Who was the greatest? Who is 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>? Who was a somebody? Who was a nobody? One way that Corinth showed ranking of people through the ancient Roman gladiator games. The important people attended the games as spectators, and the unimportant people became slaves who were bought and sold and forced to participate in these deadly events. The only hope for a slave was to fight and win. The culture was ruthless. You must achieve. You must win.

Today we rank people just as ruthlessly. You must achieve. Who is the greatest? Who is the greatest of all time – the G.O.A.T – goat? The culture has moved away from ranking people according to race in our generation. Instead, we rank people according to achievement, wealth, influence, power, wisdom. Does this person have our respect? Has this person performed well enough to merit our approval? This reveals our culture's definition of wisdom and power.

God has a very different view of reality. God has a very different view of wisdom and power than the city of Corinth, or than modern American culture.

Think about the cross. To the mindset of a person in ancient Corinth or to a person in modern America, there is nothing particularly wise or powerful about the facts of the cross. The cross itself is not philosophically compelling within the reigning outlook of thought. The world things that if Jesus were truly wise and if Jesus were truly powerful, then He would not have ended up on a cross, to die there! Right?

Right. Your unbelieving neighbor would say the cross is preposterous to have as central to your motivation, at the base of your outlook on reality. The cross is too humiliating for a god that we can respect. To the secular mind, when he looks at the cross, it seems to prove that Christ Jesus had no power and no wisdom! How can it be that God's best plan to redeem sinful people was for God's own Son to die a cruel, bloody, painful death for them? A crucified hero? That was God's best move? Your neighbor will say – if a building is on fire, the fireman does not rescue people from a burning building by dying in the inferno himself! It might be a heroic effort, but he is not wise or powerful fireman or hero!

To the mind of the world, there is no power in being crucified. In fact, being crucified is the ultimate display of weakness, vulnerability, and frailty.

But God looks at it differently. God turns it upside down.

For God, it is giving up power that becomes powerful!

For God the Father, it was when His Son Jesus gave up the power of heaven, and submitted to the death on the cross, that He accomplished the most. The key is the resurrection! Christ arose!

Now to the mind of the unbeliever, this is ridiculous.

God the Father chose to give His Son who willingly gave up all the power of heaven and died for the weak. Similarly, God calls all of us to humble ourselves of our abilities and our intellect, and to bow to God. We must believe the things that God says are backwards and reverse from what our culture says.

The most holy people are those who see their own sin and run to Christ crucified.

The most wise people are those who are aware of how much they don't know.

The most powerful people are those who sacrifice themselves for the weak.

God says that in His kingdom, everything is upside down.

What is God's message to the people of Corinth, to the people of America?

1) Christ came, died, and rose to turn power and wisdom upside down.

2) The preaching of Christ crucified is power and wisdom.

Jesus the powerful one became the weak one.

Jesus re-define power.

The apostles in their preaching, and the subsequent Spirit-filled preachers of God's Word provide truth by which we understand the world as it really is. We understand the world as God defines it.

We look at preaching. What is preaching? It makes us think and evaluate some famous preachers in America. There were men like Jonathan Edwards, whose preaching was very intellectual, some would say it was almost dull in delivery, but very rich and full of logical content and a quiet and real passion. Then, there were George Whitfield and Billy Sunday, who drew huge crowds because they spoke emotionally and with great feeling, and got the attention of audiences, and yet thankfully the content of their messages were faithfully focused on Christ and the cross. We also know of Dwight Moody and Billy Graham who were not known to impress audiences with deep and intellectual messages, but rather, they presented to sinners the cross, and their need to trust in Christ for conversion, which was their goal as evangelists. So, we come back to the Bible with our question – what is preaching?

**Our faith is in the power of God, through Christ crucified.**

**1. Paul's proclaiming. (v.1-2)**

"*when I came to you, brothers*" = We go back to the start of the church in Corinth. Paul started it. The word speech is a reference to the verbal skills of delivering a message to an audience. The word "Wisdom" is a reference to the mental acumen of the public speaker. Not lofty speech. Not superiority. Not elevated speech, or prominent speech. Not the kind of speech that draws attention to the excellence of the speech itself, but rather, the kind of speech that becomes invisible and non-distracting, so that the listeners may focus on the content of the speech. Right. Well, isn't that always what Paul would do? Well, Paul's desire was to become all things to all people. Paul will go on to write in chapter nine that he desired, "*I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some...*"

Okay, this explains why Paul preached differently in the previous town of Athens. The town previous to Corinth where Paul went to start up a new church was the town named Athens. There in Athens, Paul had debated with the professors and scholars. That method did not seem to have much of an impact. So, it seems in verse 2 that Paul was revealing that Paul had come to a conclusion and decision. Paul resolved not to take that approach anymore of lofty speech.

Verse 2 - "*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*"

Why was the lofty speech form of preaching to be avoided in Corinth?

It was not that Paul lacked the ability. Paul was able to be eloquent in his speaking and his writing. Paul had lengthy and extensive training in schools of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Paul knew that the Greeks were philosophers who love to discuss big ideas. Paul also knew that the Jews demand signs. (we saw that in verse 22 of chapter one.)

Paul's motive was not a lack of skills or knowledge. Rather, Paul's motive was fulfillment of Paul's grand task. Paul knew what is revealed in Acts 9:15, that Paul was "*...a chosen instrument of [God's] to carry God's name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*"

Rather, Paul was avoiding this method because the practices of the world were not how Paul would present to sinners the message of heaven.

Paul will draw the methods for His proclaiming, from the same source that Paul will take the content of His proclaiming - from God. How did Paul refer to his content? Verse 1 says, "*the testimony of God*" OR "*The mystery of God.*"

Actually, Paul was not preaching a content, a doctrine, or a teaching.

*\*Paul was preaching a person. Verse 2 shows Paul was preaching Christ.*

No other task was part of Paul's appointment by Jesus. Not even to baptize. Baptism was done by Paul, but it was not part of the essential calling as an apostle. Preaching Christ was Paul's essential calling as an apostle.

When Paul preached Christ, the Jews were given a stumbling block.

When Paul preached Christ, the Gentiles concluded that it was foolishness.

For this reason, Paul had to go beyond just revealing the historical facts about the crucifixion, and Paul had to teach his audience the crucifixion's meaning for the cleansing of our souls. It was not enough to announce the fact of the arrival of the long-awaited Christ. Paul must also announce the need for a redeemer, the arrival of that redeemer, and the accomplishment of that redeemer's work for us at Calvary.

Paul taught and proclaimed the REASON for Christ's death on the cross.

Paul stated publicly the eternal benefits from the cross for every believer - Paul would proclaim forgiveness of sins. Paul would celebrate the truth of eternal life for all believers. Paul would logically proceed to explain the resurrection of the body of Jesus, followed by the resurrection of the bodies of all of us Christians.

This was Paul's preaching. Nothing else.

## **2. Paul's presence. (v.3-4)**

*Verses 3-4, "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, <sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,..."*

The phrase "plausible words" of wisdom, or which means persuasive words, seems to be a term that Paul coined. Paul seems to have invented this adjective exclusive use for this verse of eternal Scripture, because it is found nowhere else in all of Greek literature.

Human persuasion! Some people call it pulpit presence. No matter how good Paul's speaking was, Paul could not persuade sinners to be saved – that takes the Spirit of God. So, how much authority did the preacher seem to have up there in front of people? Public speaking has three aspects:

- 1) The logos, or logic or content. We consider the rationality of the reasoning.
- 2) the ethos, or the credibility of the speaker. The audience considers the reliability and authority of the author or speaker.
- 3) pathos, the passion or emotion of the speech itself. We use our imaginations and experience sympathy for the author or speaker. Each of these three is a mode of persuasion. Paul was saying that he did not have what it takes to advance the kingdom of God with his own pulpit presence. Paul could not persuade souls to be saved!

Paul was honest here. Weakness. Paul was admitting weakness. Paul gives no details, but we can see two directions from his phrase "I was with you." That is a relationship - I - you. How did Paul see the relationship? Two directions. How Paul felt toward the Corinthians. and second, How the Corinthians felt toward Paul. The word weakness is used to describe both directions. Paul was admitting how he felt weakness before them. Again, no details. Secondly, Paul was also

showing how Paul was perceived by them. To them, when Paul arrived, Paul seemed weak. The Corinthians were influential people. It was a bigger city, a cosmopolitan area. Paul was sent there to begin a church. What did Paul do for a living? Bringing shiploads of wonderful new merchandise from around the world? No. Paul put stitching into tents to hold them together. Paul made tents. That was seen as the job of a servant. Paul was seen as weak. But since we are talking in this paragraph about preaching, Paul seemed to see himself as weak, and Paul seemed to be received as weak - in preaching! Why? Because of Paul's presence **WITH THEM**. VERSE 3, "I WAS WITH YOU IN WEAKNESS AND IN FEAR, AND IN MUCH TREMBLING, AND MY SPEECH AND MY MESSAGE WERE NOT IN PLAUSIBLE WORDS OF WISDOM..."

Paul would need to turn where for strength?

Paul would need to go to whom with his fear?

Paul, when he was trembling not a little, but experiencing *much trembling*, would need to be placing his trust in whom?

In the Christian religion, having a preacher who has to rely on God for every message, is a good thing. In the church of Christ Jesus, having an overconfident, strong speaker, who is poised, is to have a preacher who doesn't need God every moment!

Where was Paul's faith grounded? In himself? NO!

Paul showed three things. 1) he was called by Christ to speak for Christ 2) the Spirit of Christ was demonstrated or shown in Paul's speaking. 3) the power of Christ was demonstrated in Paul's messages. Why? ... to our 3rd point.

### **3. Paul's purpose. (v.5)**

Verse 5, "*...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*"

Why did the Corinthians initially place their trust in this gospel message brought by this new preacher Paul? Was it because Paul was snazzy and winsome in his presentation? Was it based on the magnetism and personal draw of the man Paul? No.

The only reason that anyone in Corinth ever placed their trust in this missionary Paul when he arrived, was that in that missionary, in his shaking and trembling person, and in his simple message, simply stated, God was working! God was in the man's message, God's Spirit. God worked through the man's speaking. It was the power of God that impacted the listeners. Paul was invisible.

The apostle Peter agreed with the apostle Paul. 1 Peter 1:4-5, Peter wrote it encourage us that we have "*an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith...*"

**Conclusion:** Stay focused on Christ crucified. Paul was saying Paul was a nobody. Paul was invisible. Paul was saying - every sermon is too much for me. Paul was saying, "I'm always shaking in my boots." Paul was humble.

Missionary work cannot be done without God.

Vacuuming cannot be done without electricity. But some people, if you unplug their vacuum, they will still roll the vacuum cleaner across the floor, accomplishing nothing, and almost make you think that they are cleaning up the place.

Some missionaries, if you unplug them from daily dependence on God, will still move around the mission field, accomplishing nothing, and almost make us think that they are cleaning up the place.

Paul was saying - don't you dare trust in this missionary named Paul. Don't you dare look to this preacher named Paul. Please, please, don't say - well, if Paul says it then it must be true.

Listen for the voice of Christ.

Watch for the Spirit of Christ speaking to you in the preaching.

Stay alert for the power of God in your life, as you hear again and again about Christ Jesus, and Him crucified, to give us forgiveness of all of our dark deeds, and to give us eternal life and welcome.

Do you know what we all have in common with the ancient people of sin city in Corinth? We each deserve to be cast aside to eternal death. But instead, the Spirit of Christ gives us the ability to make the needed changes in our lives, when we just cannot summon the energy to care or the strength to follow through.

Listen past the preacher, and listen for He who is being preached by His Spirit and from His Word, because of His cross!

It is all about Jesus. Let every preacher in every pulpit in every mission field station, and in every church in every country, all be invisible, so that the people can see only Jesus. May every preacher get out of the way, so that we needy and hurting people can come running not to preachers and pastors, but that we may come running past the preacher to Jesus Himself. May we all set down the roots of our faith in the power of God's Son who was crucified, and rose again for you. Let every worshipper put trust in the Risen Lord Jesus. May all our hopes be in Him.

If you cannot be caught putting your faith in the wisdom of Paul, then you cannot be caught putting your faith in the wisdom of any other clergy anywhere.

They are weak, and Christ is strong.

They are silly, and Christ is filled with wisdom and dignity.

The best of the preachers make it easy to understand, but all you hear is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, saying to your soul - I love you, there is grace for you.

Was it Paul your preacher that was crucified for you?

No. Well, then let's stay focused in all the messages, on nothing but Christ

Crucified.

Let me close with what Paul wrote back in, chapter 1, verse 18, "*...the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are beings saved it is the power of God.*"