

Brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know anyone who is arrogant, full of pride and self-assurance? In their arrogance they always know better, they think that they have all the answers. The world is full of arrogant people and you likely don't need to look much further than at yourself. In fact arrogance and pride stands at the heart of all fallen humanity. By nature we are arrogant, for we think that we know better than God knows. That lay at the heart of the first sin of Adam and Eve. God warned them not to eat of the forbidden fruit, but in their arrogance, they rebelled against God and did not take God's warning seriously for they thought they knew better. Their arrogance led to their miserable downfall and the fall of all humanity.

Mankind has not learned from the fall. They have only doubled down on their rebellious attitude, thinking that all God's ways are foolish and silly and that as human beings we know better. The result is that mankind continues to make a mess of his own life, so the world is a place filled with great suffering and misery.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul is confronting an attitude of arrogance and pride. He immediately addresses the divisions that have developed in the congregation. There is a rivalry between different factions as if one is better than another. How is that possible in the church? It is the result of the arrogance in the heart of the believers. Paul a number of times addresses the sinful boasting in life of this congregation. He writes 3:1, there should be no more boasting about human leaders and warns in 5:6 that your boasting is not good for you tolerant a man who lives in incest.

So why is it that people resist the gospel message of salvation through the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross? It is because of the arrogance and pride that lives in a person's heart. Mankind thinks that they know better than God. People mock and ridicule the cross of Christ; they refuse to accept that a man who died on the cross can save anyone. That seems the height of foolishness to most people and yet the cross reveals the infinite wisdom and power of God. God works in a way that seems foolish to the proud and the arrogant.

Beloved, we should not think that we are immune to this arrogance. Each time you resist the will of God you act as if you know better than God. Whenever you listen to our own sinful desires rather than what God teaches us, we act out of pride. We often think that we know better and therefore we act in a way that we think is better and wiser than the way of God. Such arrogance leads us down the path of our eternal destruction. Therefore we ask the Lord for a spirit of humility in which we do not boast in our own abilities, but we lean on the wisdom and power of God. We will listen to God's Word under this theme:

Boast in the Lord, for the cross is the power of God.

- 1) The cross reveals the wisdom of God.
- 2) The cross exposes the foolishness of the world.
- 3) The cross is the basis for our boasting.

Paul addresses the arrogance and pride within the church of Corinth. There are factions and divisions among the believers, and it is the result of some people thinking they are wiser and smarter than others. They argue among themselves as the philosophers in the city of Corinth about who is the wisest and who they should follow. So how does Paul tackle this problem in Corinth? He reminds them about what he did when he first came to them with the gospel. He says in v17 that when he preached the gospel to them, he did not do so literally, "with the wisdom of words" but he did so he says in v18, with the "word (or message) of the cross."

Some weeks ago Pastor Eric talked about the philosophers in Corinth. They made their living with words and they boasted about their wisdom and intelligence, boasting that they had answers to the meaning of life. Paul says, I did not come to you speaking like that, I didn't come with words of wisdom and great eloquence, but I came with the simple message of the cross of Christ.

I know that the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, I know that they wonder what kind of wisdom is that? They say about Paul, "he is not a very smart man, how can he be so dumb to tell everyone the story about a man who died on the cross? How can this message be the solution to the problems of life?" These wise men think they have better answers

and better solutions to life. But Paul says, do you notice that this message about the cross is the power of God to us who are being saved?

What is actually happening in the city of Corinth? Those who are perishing and reject the message of the cross continue to live in their sins while the effect of the gospel on those who are being saved is radically changing their lives. Why is that? Because the message of the cross is the power of God by which he changes the life of the believer. When Paul proclaims the message about the death of Christ on the cross, it has the power to turn the heart of the people to Christ. That seems foolish to the unbeliever, but it is a source of joy for all those who receive it in faith.

The Corinthians cannot deny the power of God that is displayed through the preaching of the cross. They see how this message has the power to raise the sinner from his or her spiritual death, it has the power to raise us up from a life of hopelessness and despair to a life of great hope and much joy. The power of the message of the cross is clearly displayed in the life of everyone whom the Lord renews and changes into new people. This power of God cannot be denied.

Paul says, this should be clear from what was already written by God long ago. He quotes from Isaiah 29:14 where God says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Isaiah writes in a situation where the people of Israel claim to serve God and yet God says their heart is far from me. They worship God according to their own human rules, they think they are wiser and smarter than God. God says about their arrogance, "I will destroy their wisdom, their intelligence I will frustrate."

This is true still today in our society, who think that they are wiser than God. They know better what people should think and how they should live than God does. People reject the wisdom God gives in his word, they overthrow the gospel message for their own wisdom, but the result is that God will destroy their wisdom and it will ultimately only lead to their utter frustration, for things will not go well for our society.

Paul drives that point home with a series of questions in v20. Where is the wise person, the teacher of the law, the philosopher of this age? What Paul says makes sense when you understand he is picking-up on questions God already raised in the OT. Here are a couple of examples: God asks in Isa. 19:12, "Where are your wise men now?" He is speaking about the wise men of Egypt, those who opposed Moses thinking him to be a fool. The foolishness of the wise men of Egypt became clear when God made their work nothing by destroyed Egypt but through Moses, saving Israel. Another example is Isa. 33:18, God asks, "Where is that chief officer?" referring to the leader of the arrogant enemy who boasted about their ability to destroy Israel. God says v19, "You will see those arrogant people no more."

Paul says in effect, where are all those wise people, those smart and intelligent people who think they know better than God. The past makes clear that they all perished and so it will not be any different today. "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Think about all those great nations and empires, they boasted about their achievements, but none exist anymore today. It will be no different today, those who build nations and societies on the basis of their own wisdom will all be destroyed and frustrated just as all those before them.

2) Therefore the cross exposes the foolishness of the world. At the conclusion of vv21-25 Paul writes, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." Paul does not mean that God is foolish or that he is weak but he says, imagine if you can that there is any foolishness in God, his foolishness would be wiser than the greatest of human wisdom and understanding and if you could find any weakness in God, his weakness would be more powerful than any human strength. In other words, as human beings we are nothing compared to God but bumbling ignoramuses and weaklings.

That is why he says in v21 that the world through its wisdom did not know God. Think about all the great scientists in the world today and the philosophers. The philosophers tell us that with their human logic they cannot prove the existence of God, therefore they say God cannot exist. Here we discover the arrogance of mankind, if we cannot prove it with our intelligence, then God does not exist. And scientists insist that through their wisdom and knowledge they can prove that the world did not come into existence through the creating power of God, but the world just magically appeared all on its own. The fact that all these intelligent people cannot discover God is not an accident. Paul says in v21 it was the wisdom of God that they should not be able to discover him by their own wisdom.

God can only be known through what people consider to be the foolishness of what was preached. Through the preaching of the cross, through the message of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, God was pleased to save those who believe. Salvation does not come to us through human logic and wisdom but through the simple message of a man who died on the cross, who is Jesus Christ. Those who are perishing say it is absurd, but those who are being saved by God rejoice, for it reveals the great wisdom of God.

He expands on that though in vv22-24. He says, the Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom. Those Jewish teachers of the law (v20), who boasted in their great knowledge of God's law demanded signs from Jesus. On many occasions they said, give us a sign that we may know that you really are who you say you are, but he refused because of their unbelief. If they truly knew the law of God, they would have understood who Jesus was.

And the Greeks look for wisdom. Greek was the universal language in the Roman Empire and therefore Paul is speaking about the culture of the Roman Empire. The Greeks looked up to the Philosophers to use their reason and logic to answer the basic questions about life. For them, the cross was a silly story. They needed to be shown with logic what the truth was.

And so Paul says, we preach Christ crucified. I didn't come with signs for the Jews and I didn't come with logic and reason to show what life is about, but I came preaching the simple story about Jesus Christ crucified on the cross to pay for the sins of his people. It was a stumbling block to the Jews, for the law of God says that all those who are hanged on a tree are cursed by God. Such a person is offensive to God, so how can he save us from the wrath of God. They refused to accept that Jesus had to die on the cross and be cursed by God to pay for our sins.

For the Greeks Christ crucified is foolishness. In the Roman world, those who were crucified were usually slaves who were criminals. A Roman citizen could not be crucified and therefore this Jesus has no value in their eyes. How foolish to serve a man who is criminal and is beneath the dignity of the Greeks. I think you can understand what Paul is up against, all of society, both Jews and Greeks are hostile to the message he preaches.

You can say there is nothing new under the sun, today we face the same hostility in our society. Christians are ridiculed as people who have no wisdom or intelligence, as people who are anti-science and still live in the dark ages. We know that none of that is true, but it is the lie that is promoted in our society because we believe the gospel message of salvation through the death of Christ on the cross.

But all those God has called, from both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. The message of the cross is God's call to mankind to come to Christ and to find their salvation in Christ. What you hear this morning through this message is God calling you to salvation in Jesus Christ. Whether you are a Christian or perhaps just beginning to understand the Bible, God through this message calls you to believe and trust in Jesus Christ as the great Saviour of the world.

Paul understands and ministers today need to understand that through the gospel message the Lord God himself is speaking to you and he is calling you to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Even as Christians, the Lord reminds us of his call every Sunday through message of the cross. But there is more to understand about this call. When God calls us, his message comes with great power. If it did not come with the power of God, none of us would believe, none of our lives would be changed. God's call has the power to change the hearts and lives of all those whom he calls.

Paul also says the message of the cross is the wisdom of God. This message is so powerful that it makes us wise over against the foolishness of this world. People may boast about all their knowledge and intellect, but they do not know God and they cannot know God, for they are foolish. On the other hand, those who are called by God, even if they may not be wise by human standards, are wise. We become wise because we see God and we see his great work of salvation, we see God's wisdom in the cross, for we see that Jesus Christ died to pay for all my sins. I see God's grace, I see his mercy, I see his love, his compassion, his kindness to me in Christ Jesus. That beloved is the great wisdom you receive in Christ Jesus.

3) Therefore we have no reason to boast in ourselves but only in the Lord. Christ's work on the cross for us, is the basis for our boasting. Verses 26-31 makes clear that the believers in Corinth have no reason to boast in themselves. They only need to look at what God has done for them. Paul commands them to think about when they were called by God to believe in Jesus Christ crucified. Think back to the time when God brought you to faith? What were you at that time?

He says, "not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth." They were not the elite in society, they were not philosophers with the ability to reason and speak in lofty terms, they did not come from the influential part of society, they did not come from the ruling class. On the whole, they were simple people, not highly educated nor rich. There were some in the church who were well off, who owned their own home but not most.

Paul says in v27 that what God did was to "chose the foolish things of the world (those who were lowly by the standards of society) to shame the wise (those who were considered the upper class of society); God chose the weak things of the world (the slaves and the poor) to shame the strong (the rich and powerful). God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised (those who were looked down upon and outcasts) and the things that are not (those who are of no consequence and considered to have no value in society) to nullify the things that are (the powerful in society).

Jesus laid out this principle in the beatitudes saying, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, blessed are the meek for they will inherit the kingdom of God." The meek and poor are despised but God will lift them up and those who think they are great and powerful will be destroyed in the judgement of God. Jesus also said, those who will be first will be last, and those who are last will be first. In other words, the Lord God sets human standards upside down. Therefore also when we consider mission work, don't despise the week and the poor and those who struggle.

When a guest comes into the church, and they come with torn and worn clothing, perhaps they are smelly because they have no home to bath, what is our reaction? In contrast, a guest comes who is well dressed, well-spoken, has a fancy car and seems well off materially. What will your reaction be; I would suggest we will despise the poor man and welcome the rich man. It is our sinful human nature to despise the weak and lowly and to look up to the strong and wealthy. But that is not God's standard. Imagine if that was God's standard, how many of you would fit into that high standard? We would all be rejected by God for none reach that high standard.

Therefore praise be to God that he has called the foolish, the week and lowly things of this world. Praise God that he shows love and mercy to those who are lowly and that in Christ he gives us the glorious hope of life in his kingdom. We have no right to boast in ourselves, God did not call me because I was better than others, but in his grace, in his undeserving love and mercy he called me, a sinner, to be his child. It is only because God is merciful to us that we are now in Christ Jesus, Paul says (v30).

Christ Jesus has now become for us, wisdom from God. Through Jesus, we now begin to see the foolishness of this world and our society, because we have experienced the power of the gospel in our lives. We have experienced the power of the gospel to make us into new people, different people, people who no longer run after the values of our society but who know the value of being known by God, the value of knowing that our sins are forgiven and that Christ has made our life right with God again. We have experienced the power of God when he changes our life so that we are being made holy. It is only through the power of God that I now hate sin and evil, that I now put away the arrogance and pride in my heart and I learn to humble myself before God.

Our righteousness and holiness are summed up in the word redemption. Christ has redeemed us; he has delivered us from our sins by paying for every single one of them on the cross. Therefore I no longer need to fear the Lord Almighty, but I look up to him in love. I no longer boast in myself, I no longer think that I am better than the lowly person, than the homeless one who wears rags for clothing. If I was not for Christ, I would be eternally lost, but in him I have been lifted up to a new and glorious life. I no longer boast in myself, but I boast in the Lord. O Lord to you we give all thanks and praise. And all God's people say: Amen.