

THE GOSPEL: FOOLISHNESS OR WISDOM?

(Sermon Summary)

Sunday Morning, 31st July 2022

Chris Hand

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31. (vv23-24)

Paul found himself embroiled in a conflict in the church. It was a battle between Christianity and aspects of Corinthian culture. Parts of any culture will, to a greater or lesser extent, conflict with Christian ethics and the Christian world view. The culture of the world might allow for some religion but only as much as it does not interfere with its principles and wider world view.

So religion has to fit in with what the world approves of in terms of wealth, status, achievements, and honour. These are regarded as important and form the basis for the judgments that are made about what is good and worthwhile, valuable, or worthless. The culture in Corinth was notoriously debased. It was given over to sexual immorality and was comfortable with covetousness and false religions. It had its own philosophy and regarded the style of speech as importance. People had to come across as impressive personalities.

This was the context of where Paul preached the gospel.

1. What is the gospel?

This is what Paul preached in Corinth (v18). It is the message of the cross (vv18-21). It speaks of Christ and Him crucified (1:23-2:2). It was excellence of the speech that was valued in Corinth (2:1). Against this the gospel was accounted foolishness.

The gospel is good news. That good news has a context in which it is to be understood. It includes, as basic, the thought that there is a God who is eternal and does not have the passions of man. It takes it as a given that man is sinful and is morally and spiritually unable to do works that are pleasing to God. Nothing we will or think can come near to the perfection of God and satisfy Him that it is a true reflection of Himself.

The gospel includes the truth about the life of Christ (1 Corinthians 15: 1-8). It includes the things that are recorded about Him in the gospel accounts. It especially deals with His death and regards it as a debt paid to God on our behalf for all the ways that we have failed to love and obey God. It also includes the resurrection. Through Christ, the gospel teaches us, we have peace with God and can come into a good relationship with Him where He looks on us with favour and love.

We look at ourselves in the light of the gospel and are moved to repent. We look to Christ by faith, and we are saved from our sins. We trust Him and have hope.

2. The gospel rubbished.

The gospel was a stumbling block to the Jews. They could not believe that someone dying on a cross could be the way of salvation. To them, this curse of dying on a cross could not bring people to God.

The Greeks looked on this as foolishness. It was beneath them to believe in such things. They had, in their own native religion, re-invented God and made Him visible through the buildings and idols they made (See Acts 17: 24-25, 29). They had re-made the divinity of God as a work of art. So the belief today that God is one with all He has made is a re-invention of God to suit modern tastes. Similarly, we have re-invented who we are so that we are not sinners in need of salvation. Instead, we think that we are essentially ok in the sight of God, that we are not ruined and lost. We think that by certain disciplines and self-effort we can find God and please Him. We are looking to feel good so as to boost self-esteem. In our modern thinking, as in Athens (Acts 17:30-32), people sneer at the resurrection. Instead, people re-invent death and the after-life to make it more comfortable to their way of thinking. The idea of penalty and punishment is wished away and Christ's cross is emptied of its meaning and its power. People regard it all as foolishness.

3. True wisdom.

We have to choose. For the people then it was to choose between Corinth or Christ. We too have to make that choice between the world of our day and Christ.

It is wisdom to have God as the organizing principle of all that we think, not ourselves. We are to have the revelation that God has given about Himself as the centre of all that we believe. The world is in a state of collapse and has no answers to the big questions, such as 'Why am I here?' The response of the world to COVID showed that it had no answers to the matter of death. With God as the foundation of what we believe and what we are, we are building on the One who is unchanging. We are building on rock and have Him as our fortress. He is the basis to all reality including the reality of what and who we are.

We have peace in the conscience and know that we are pardoned through His Son. We have true self-knowledge and can escape from the control of sin. We can be taken up with bigger things and not be consumed with lesser worries and anxieties. We are able to discern more clearly and be more in touch with who we are and who we should be becoming. We can understand our feelings better, and why we feel what we feel. We are able to understand what we are thinking in the depth of our soul. We learn what is distorting how we think and can repent and learn a better way.

At times the church tries to undo this wisdom and claims the authority of God to teach what is contrary to the will of God. We must be wiser than this through Christ.