

Text: I Corinthians 1:26-31

Title: “The Way of the Cross” Pt.3

INTRODUCTION

We’ve been talking these weeks about “The Way of the Cross.” And why do we make such a big deal about the Cross? It is because God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus said, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” And that’s what God did for us in Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – Just over a year ago there was a terrible train wreck in Los Angeles that killed 11 and injured several others. Hours after the rescue began, hope for finding other survivors was diminishing. Then one passenger said that another man was trapped under the debris. Using the Jaws of Life, rescuers were able to rescue a man named John from the wreckage. And the rescue workers saw something that touched them. While John was pinned under a train seat and other debris from the crash, he wrote a message to his wife and children using his own blood. John was having trouble breathing and feared he would die. With the little energy he could muster, he scrawled a farewell with his own blood on the seat. “I ♥ my kids. I ♥ Leslie.”

At the Cross, God’s love and holiness meet. And this is a powerful combination. He wrote with His own blood, “I love you.”

Let me remind you of where we started and where we’re going with this. God’s desire and design is to bring about deep spiritual change in our lives through His power.

1. THIS POWER IS LOCATED IN THE GOSPEL.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

There’s unbelievable power in the Word of God.

2. THIS POWER IS ACTIVATED IN THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.

“God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21b).

Now look with me to the last verses of the chapter, where we see...

3. THIS POWER IS DEMONSTRATED IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIVES (vv.26-31).

Read I Corinthians 1:26-31.

Now Paul ends this section with a quote from the OT, Jeremiah 9:23-24. It’s actually a powerful passage of Scripture that applies in many different ways. But let’s just look at it together. Read Jeremiah 9:23-24.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 - This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

You see, humans of every age are prone to boast and put our trust in the basically the same things. And sadly, the Lord is rebuking His own people, Israel, for thinking that they don't have to know or trust God, that they can find their own way. Look at what the Lord says here.

- **“Let not the wise boast of his wisdom...”** He's talking about brains. Now don't get me wrong. Education is important. But there are many brainy people who miss God's wisdom, which from an eternal perspective is the only wisdom that counts.

ILLUSTRATION – A lady by the name of Cathleen Falsani has written a book entitled “The God Factor: Inside the Spiritual Lives of Public People.” The book contains a number of interviews with what we might call “famous people,” whom, I suppose, she thinks really know what's what, and because they're famous, we should listen to them. One of the famous people she interviewed was Studs Terkel, who is an author and journalist. Here's what Studs said, “Me, I have my own way. Do I believe in God? Sure. I can't define him. I believe in God in you and God in me. I suppose you could say I'm a transcendentalist of sorts. I think we're capable of extraordinary things, human beings. I call that God-like.”

And there you have someone who is boasting in human wisdom. But it goes on.

- **“Let not the strong man boast of his strength...”** And there you have the next obsession ... bodies.

One thing's for sure in our culture today, people are more obsessed with physical strength and health. And, again, that's not a bad thing at all. It's important to get exercise and eat healthy. But that's the body. What about your soul. Are we as diligent about healthy souls, strong souls, beautiful souls?

But it goes on.

- **“Let not the rich man boast of his riches...”** And there's the next obsession ... bucks.

Oh Americans! We spend money we don't have, to buy things we don't need, to impress people we really don't even like. We're financially rich, and spiritually poor.

Again, is it wrong to be wise, strong or rich? No it's not. There are all kinds of people in the church. It's not wrong to be wise, strong and rich. It's wrong when you boast about it. When you think that those things are really what makes life work. Because I could line up testimony after testimony to tell you that those things don't make life work. So don't boast in those things, but boast in what really makes life work ...

Jeremiah 9:24 - but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

The Lord says, “It’s not your intelligent brains, your beautiful bodies, your wealthy bucks that will make life work. The only thing that makes life really work is knowing Me ... depending on My kindness, justice and righteousness.”

Now Paul has this in mind as he writes to the Corinthians. Let’s go back to I Corinthians 1:26 to see how this applies to the church in Corinth and in Fort Worth.

1 Corinthians 1:26 - Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

Paul says, “Just look at yourself, as an example.” Did you get in the family of God because of your brains, your bodies or your bucks? No.”

v.26a - “Think of what you were when you were called.”

People aren’t saved because they just decide to get saved. There is the element of the human choice, but there is also the element of divine calling. So you can see something of the saving power of God in the makeup of the church.

God speaks through His Word and He calls people to a new life.

Now what is the basis of God’s calling? Not where you live, or where you were educated, or your income, or your intelligence, or your physique. In fact, God disregarded all of that.

v.26b - Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

Stop to think about how Jesus set about to build His church. He started it with some common people, fishermen, tax collectors and the like.

And, in fact, at the beginning the Gospel made its greatest impact on common people.

Note: We prayed earlier for India. And this is happening in India today. Part of the reason there’s so much persecution taking place by Hindu radicals is that the “untouchables,” the lowest of the lowest caste of people, are responding to Christ. And the Hindus are losing their grip on them. Glory to God!

In the early days of the church, the affluent, educated and politically powerful were not the primary ones responding to the Gospel. And God purposefully chose to work that way. It wasn’t that God started out wanting to get some big names on his team, but just couldn’t pull it off, so He settled for common people.

No, there’s the wisdom of God in this. See vv.27-28.

1 Corinthians 1:27-28 - But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,

Why? So that the world would see that it was God’s power that saved. Read v.29.

1 Corinthians 1:29 - so that no one may boast before him.

Now what am I to think about this? I'm a relatively well-to-do, person, as are many of us here. I'm not rich, but I think we would agree that most of live to a higher standard of living than most people in the world. What are we to think about this?

It should humble us to our very core. That when it comes to getting into God's family ...

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

You see, God wants us all to live with this sense of awe. "I don't know how I got here. I sure didn't deserve this. I'm nobody that God would pick. Praise God for His mercy."

Do you think God was giving us a signal of His plans when Jesus was born into a carpenter's family ... in the stall of a barn? When Jesus lived a basically simple life? And when He chose to draw around Him, not the celebrities, but simple, common guys. It wasn't Herod or Pilate that He started with.

In this day and time, we think that God needs the endorsement of the big shots to make Him acceptable to the rest. That's not the way God started His church. He didn't start with the influencers and work down from there. He started with the powerless.

The Romans and the Greeks were basically a class-oriented society. They hated the thought of being part of a movement that basically says everyone is equal in any way. And our society is the same today.

But God leveled everything at the Cross. At the Cross the ground is level. There are no luxury boxes at the Cross. We're all in the cheap seats.

Culturally, educationally, socially the church is made of people from all different kinds of backgrounds. But when we're together our unity is in Jesus.

God has chosen to do this so that no one may boast before Him. God is jealous for His own glory. Why? Because He's petty? Absolutely not. It's because He in His infinite knowledge knows in truth that there is no one who is righteous ... not one. No one has the right to boast but God.

And that's what v.30 says...

1 Corinthians 1:30a - It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus

God and God alone made it possible for me to have the privilege of being in Christ, and everything that goes with that.

ILLUSTRATION – Several years ago, one of my daughters and I were invited to attend a golf tournament in another city with a pro golfer and his family. We were each given a badge that said, "Player Family" on it. And we could go just about anywhere the players went ... the dining room, the locker room, etc.

I remember the first time we walked into the player's dining room, there was a security guard at the door, and as we walked in, I felt a little out of place. Here were some of the best and most successful athletes in the world. As my daughter and I walked through the door we showed our badges and said, "We're with him."

So how did I end up in the family of God? It is because there is Savior who came to seek and to the lost. One day when I was a teenager, after hearing the Gospel proclaimed by the pastor of the church we attended occasionally, I suddenly was gripped with the realization that I was lost. I cried out to God and He saved me.

So...

1 Corinthians 1:30 - It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

It is because of God the Father that you are in Christ. And Christ has become for us what we could never be for ourselves.

- Our righteousness – our standing, we have none apart from Him.
- Our holiness – our sanctification, we have none apart from Him.
- Our redemption – our freedom from slavery to sin, we have none apart from Him.

I could never do any of that for myself. Now He has become that for me.

So we come back to v.31.

1 Corinthians 1:31 - Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

CONCLUSION

Fast forward to that inevitable day when you and I will stand before God in heaven. Do you think God will be impressed with your intelligence, your degrees? Do you think God will be impressed with your physique, your good looks, your fashion? Do you think God will be impressed with your portfolio, your bank account? I think most of us here know enough to know that won't cut it.

What may we “boast about”? That we're with Him. That we have an intimate relationship with the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, and delights in these things.