

Text: I Corinthians 1:20-25

Title: “The Way of the Cross” Pt.2

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to I Corinthians 1. Now just see if you can put yourself in another place and another time.

It's the Lord's Day about 20 years after Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead. Somewhere in the city of Corinth (about 50 miles from Athens), a group of Christians gathered for their church time. They're likely in a house, maybe in the house of a man named Titius Justus, a God-worshipping Gentile who opened his home to Paul about 5 years before. You see Paul's practice as a missionary/apostle, who was saved out of Jewish background, was to go to a synagogue and explain the message of Christ. (We read this in Acts 18.) But they didn't want to listen to this message and they resisted. Next door was the home of Titius Justus, who made his house available to Paul to meet with those who wanted to hear what he had to say. So Paul planted a church, a house church. It became the gathering place of the church in Corinth. Some amazing things began to happen. The ruler of the Jewish synagogue, Crispus, heard the Gospel and believed in Christ, along with his family and servants, and they were all baptized. Now there was a faithful church meeting in the home of Titius Justus. Along the way a man by the name of Stephanas, came to Christ, along with his family. And it is likely that on this particular Lord's Day Stephanas is standing at the place of prominence in the room. He may have begun his remarks like this: “Brothers and sisters, as you all know, we've had some challenging days as a church. We're a divided church in the heart of an arrogantly pagan city. Well, I have good news. I have here in my hand a letter that has just been delivered from Paul who is over in Ephesus now. Let's listen to what God has to say through him to our situation. And as the church sat attentively, Stephanas began to read what we have before us today ... the NT book we call I Corinthians.

Isn't it amazing that we are here today reading from the same Spirit-inspired letter. And the same Lord who ministered it to the hearts of those first recipients nearly 2000 years ago is here with us today.

Follow along as I read I Corinthians 1:20-25.

The church in Corinth needed an urgent reminder of this. There were some serious threats to the health and unity of the church; it was because they had abandoned the "the way of the Cross." They had stopped trusting in the power of the message of the Gospel, and were instead trusting the creativity and the ingenuity of humans rather than the power of God to bring about change.

God's way to bring about deep spiritual change is through the Cross of Jesus Christ. The wisdom of God revealed in way of the Cross is ...

1. UNATTAINABLE THROUGH HUMAN LOGIC (vv.20-21)

We spend a huge chunk of our lives gaining knowledge. Many of our students are on Spring Break this week, but in a week they'll be back at school with their teachers trying to cram some knowledge into their brains.

Knowledge is the discovery of truth, and God always encourages it. He gave us minds to use. God is not anti-intellectual. He created our intellect. Why? So that we would use it to explore truth. So we're naturally inquisitive. God has set us on a search to unravel and discover the millions of secrets he has hidden in the universe. We are given the gift of reason to search these out ... to investigate the realm of knowledge ... to give discover the laws of physics ... to investigate the wonders of the human body and of medicine ... to discover the secrets of the stars in astronomy ... to study the workings of the human mind and the psyche in psychology.

Now God has put all this out there for us to explore because His fingerprints are all over it, and by Creation, God reveals something of His character and His power.

But much of the time, intelligent people take that knowledge and go the other direction. They don't see God behind it all, instead they begin to think, now that we have all this knowledge, we can solve all of our problems.

Well, we all know that doesn't work, does it? For centuries man has concluded that with better education, better medicine, better technology, we can solve all of our problems. No, no, no!

Human knowledge is not the same as God's wisdom. Human knowledge goes astray when it takes you down a road away from God's revealed truth and wisdom.

That's what Paul is talking about in vv.20-21. We read it earlier in the NIV. Let me read it from The Message, a paraphrase:

1 Corinthians 1:20-21 (The Message) – “So where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? 21 Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb-preaching, of all things!-to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation.”

The wisdom of man looks at the complex problems humans face and they say that the solution must be more education, or better technology, or better laws, or better medicine. The wisdom of God looks at the complex problems and says, "All those solutions just put Band-Aids on the problem. The real problem lies in the human heart, which can only be changed through "the way of the Cross." This means accepting God's verdict that we are all sinners ... and accepting God's solution that our sins can only be forgiven through Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – Last year Dan Rather interviewed Jack Welch on 60 Minutes. Jack Welch is the former CEO of General Electric and author of a bestselling book called *Winning*. At the end of the interview, Rather asked Welch, "What's the toughest question you have ever been asked?" Welch thought for a moment, then he responded: "Do you think you'll go to heaven?" Rather asked,

"How did you answer the question?" Welch replied: "It's a long answer but I said that if caring about people, if giving it your all, if being a great friend counts-despite the fact that I've been divorced a couple of times, and no one's proud of that. I haven't done everything right all the time. I think I got a shot. I'm in no hurry to get there and to find out any time soon."

1 Corinthians 1:21 - For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

The wisdom to live in a way that really works is not found within us. God has revealed it through what many call foolishness ... the proclamation of God's word.

2. UNFASHIONABLE TO HUMAN TASTE (vv.22-23)

There's never been a time when there have been more differing opinions as to what a church should or should not do in this day in this culture. There are conferences and seminars that tell you this and tell you that. Most of the time they're telling you what will work and what will not work today. And a year later, it's all changed, so you have to go to another seminar, another conference, to get it straight.

What God has called us to, loved ones, is not to be necessarily culturally relevant. He's calling us in many respects to be "counter-culture."

We must go where people are, love them the way they are, tell them what God wants them to hear (not just what we think they will like to hear), and let the power of God work in their lives.

Romans 1:16 - I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Church, we must never grow weary in that assignment. Through every possible means we must take this message to our culture.

Interestingly the church faced the same challenge 2000 years ago. Again, we read vv.22-23 earlier from the NIV. Here's a paraphrase of that from The Message:

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 (The Message) – "While Jews clamor for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, 23 we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified. Jews treat this like an anti-miracle--and Greeks pass it off as absurd."

According to their tastes, their demands, the two main groups of people in Corinth demanded different things. Jews wanted the phenomenal and the spectacular. Greeks wanted the philosophical and the rational. What did Paul give them? He gave them what he knew God wanted them to hear.

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 - Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...

Two different responses:

- And to the Jews this is a stumbling block, because they looked for something more spectacular.

The word in v.23 for “stumbling block” is the word from which we get our word “scandal” or “scandalous.” It’s an insult to people.

The Jews wanted to see the spectacular. And many in our culture demand the same thing. But church we must not cave in to that pressure. Because we can easily fall into the trap of relying on something other than God’s power to reach people.

- The Greeks dismissed it as foolishness because it didn’t square with their human reasoning.

Note: And it isn’t just people who have rejected Christ that commit this error. Even Christians tend to want to soften the offensiveness of the Cross.

EXAMPLE: When Jesus told His disciples of His impending death, Peter pulled Jesus aside and said, “No way. We’re not letting that happen to You.” Do you remember how Jesus responded? He didn’t just say “Peter, stop talking like that.” No, Jesus replied, “Get behind me Satan. You’re a stumbling block, because you only have in mind the ways of man, not the ways of the God ... the way of the Cross.

Let me just say that the way of the Cross may be unfashionable to human taste, but it is also ...

3. UNEQUALED BY HUMAN POWER (vv.24-25)

I think that anyone who seriously and honestly looks at the situation in most of our churches today would have to say that there is a power crisis. Where is the power that transforms entire families, neighborhoods, cities, even nations? Where is the power that brings about deep spiritual change in the lives of people?

Now Paul says, it may be unfashionable to believe that God’s Word works with that kind of power, but we believe otherwise. Look again at vv.24-25 in The Message:

1 Corinthians 1:24-25 (The Message) – “But to us who are personally called by God himself--both Jews and Greeks--Christ is God's ultimate miracle and wisdom all wrapped up in one. 25 Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's ‘weakness.’”

CONCLUSION

Across the street is a neighbor who, as far as you know, never goes to church, never has expressed much interest in spiritual things. Does God want you to bake some cookies to take over to them, just to be friendly? Sure, why not? Does God want you to offer to baby-sit their kids while they go to a doctor’s appointment? Sure. But sooner or later, you’ve got to let them hear about “the way of the Cross.” That’s where the power to change comes from.

Down the hall from you at the office is a secretary who is going through a nasty divorce. Does God want you to be a friend to her and listen as she pours out her broken heart? Absolutely. But sooner

or later, you've got to let them hear about "the way of the Cross." That's where the power to change comes from.

Your business partner is an alcoholic. Their life is a mess. Do you help them get into a 12-step program? Sure you do. But sooner or later, you've got to let them hear about "the way of the Cross." That's where the power to change comes from.

You become acquainted with a family from the poorest part of the city. Their needs are almost overwhelming. Do you help them find a job? Do you get them groceries? Do you help the kids with their homework? Sure you do. But sooner or later, you've got to let them hear about "the way of the Cross." That's where the power to change comes from.

Your golfing buddy has it all ... money, nice house, sweet car, etc. But their life is empty; you know it and they do too. Do you build a relationship? Do you try to become friends? Certainly. But sooner or later, you've got to let them hear about "the way of the Cross." That's where the power to change comes from.