

1Corinthians 1:26-31 "The Glory of The Cross"

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 ²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

"Although the time of death is approaching me, I am not afraid of dying and going to Hell or (what would be considerably worse) going to the popularized version of Heaven. I expect death to be nothingness and, for removing me from all possible fears of death, I am thankful to atheism." [Isaac Asimov, "On Religiosity", Free Inquiry]

"Faith is a cop-out. It is intellectual bankruptcy. If the only way you can accept an assertion is by faith, then you are conceding that it can't be taken on its own merits." [Dan Barker Former evangelist, author, critic]

"Everything that is doddering, squint-eyed, infamous, sullyng, and grotesque is contained for me in this single word: God." [Andre Breton (1896-1966)]

A lot of very intelligent people would contend that anything to do with the God of the bible is utter foolishness. They would suggest that there is no wisdom in trusting the God who created this world and then sent His Son to redeem us from the penalty of our sins that we might have eternal life with Him.

And the reason they make such assertions is that they put more stock in what they can see, and feel and taste and prove under a microscope, and that if they cannot see it with their own eyes then it must necessarily not exist.

For the rest of us who are evidently weak-minded and misled, we need the kind of crutch that relieves us of personal responsibility as we look to an invisible God who supposedly exists and will finally deliver us from this world.

How foolish we are. How unwise we are to bank on the eternal when the "now" is what we should be concerned with.

Those who are banking on this world as their only hope, and those who have no eternal future, as they reject the only true God, find the "now" as the only place where "real people" live.

But, we shouldn't be surprised by this attitude because the God who has proved Himself in His very creation has told us that, "... 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. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." (1CO 1:18-19)

People can make fists and shake them at God all they want. They can write what they believe to be intelligent sounding phrases on the absurdity of a God, but like the dog who howls at the moon, it doesn't change reality.

God tells us that ultimately everyone will have to stand before Him and finally agree that they were wrong.

ROM 14:11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" (Isaiah 45:23)

And so, this is what we have to deal with in this world; people who believe us to be foolish because of our faith in Christ. And yet, as we ended last week in verse 25 we saw that it doesn't really make any difference in the long run. The wisdom of man is but nothing when he tries to outsmart his creator.

1CO 1:25 "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

As we mentioned last week, if it were possible for God to be foolish, or if it were possible for God to be weak, then His foolishness and weakness would be infinitely greater than the best man has to offer.

And yet, there is a sense in which God is foolish and weak, at least as far as the world is concerned. And it's all found in one person and at one place: Jesus Christ and Calvary.

You see, there are those who say that if Jesus Christ were really the King of kings and Lord of lords He would never have humbled

Himself to become a mere mortal, and worse yet, to have died the death of a common criminal.

This was the problem the Jews of Christ's day had with Jesus. They expected this Messiah to ride in on a white horse and deliver them from Roman bondage and set up the kingdom of David in Jerusalem and rule the world from there.

Instead, He rides in on a donkey and then proceeds to find Himself hanging on a cross just a few days later. Some Messiah He turns out to be, at least as far as the Jews in that day were concerned.

What they didn't realize is that it had to be this way. The Son of God had to become a man and subject Himself to a life just as ours that He might be our substitute for the penalty of sin we deserved to pay, as He then took our penalty and went to the cross suffering the wrath of God on our behalf.

What looked like a feeble plan to redeem mankind, from the world's point of view, turns out to be a plan of wisdom and sheer genius on God's part, as only it could be. And so, as we come to our text this morning our Lord reminds us that He doesn't do things the world's way, or with wisdom that man would devise, or that He would choose to do anything according to our plans.

1CO 1:26-29 "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. 27 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, 29 so that no one may boast before him."

Notice that Paul begins by calling these Corinthian believers brothers, a term which endears Paul to them as those who are in the same family. This would include both men and women in the church. He wants them to know that they are not of the world, they are of and in Christ.

This sets them apart as those who are children of the Most High God, who were called to be part of this forever family. Imagine being personally called by your Creator to come into fellowship with Him. This is what our Lord has done. He has effectually turned our hearts from seeking self and destruction to seeking the only One who could redeem us.

It is a call which, when the Holy Spirit opens our minds and hearts, we hear loud and clear and the only thing we can do is repent and turn to our Lord in faith. But this call is a call to live to His glory out of gratitude and thankfulness. This is why we read such passages:

1TH 4:7 "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."

EPH 4:1 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."

1PE 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

To be called by God and yet continue to go our own way is not why God called us. If we've responded to His call through faith in His Son then we must walk in that high calling. This is why we are here. This is exactly what Paul shares when writing to the Ephesians.

EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

This is the calling from God, to represent Him in this world. And yet, it is this very calling from God which the world scoffs at because it doesn't appear to be wise and wonderful to them. And yet, this is where the irony is.

The world argues that if anybody deserves anything it is those who are wise and intelligent and have enough sense to see such wisdom if it is worthy of their attention. And this is why Paul continues in our text.

1CO 1:26 "..... Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."

What Paul is saying here is that most of the Corinthian believers were not of the class of people who would be considered worthy of special attention from God. To the contrary, they were just regular people who were doing regular things trying to earn a living in a regular world.

Most of them were not wise by human standards. And of course, the human standard was that you went to the finest schools and had the best professors. Everyone knew that that's where you gain wisdom. God says, that's not why I chose you.

Not many were influential. Power breeds influence. Only those leaders who accomplished great things are considered influential and worthy of the esteem of the world. They are the wise ones who we should be bowing to; the ones who deserve the special attention of the gods or the One true God, as they perceive it. God says, that's obviously not why I called you.

Not many were of noble birth. How many blue bloods do we have here this morning? How many people can claim some sort of special inheritance simply because of the influence of a particular family line? Look at the blue bloods today in the British Empire, for example.

How many times do we see them involved in some sort of scandal? How many times are they shown to be mere mortals by their behavior? And yet, they claim special genetics as being the only true test of what makes a man greater than others. God shows us the only test that makes a man greater than others: the perfection of His only begotten Son born into this world of a virgin.

Evidently none of these worldly standards in our text are used by God to determine who will be part of His kingdom and family. This doesn't mean, of course, that those who are blue-bloods or educated or wise, according to the flesh, are exempted from the kingdom of God. It simply means that most people don't fall into that category and therefore all of the world is eligible to receive the grace of God, not just a select few.

In fact, Paul uses the phrase by saying that, "not many of you" fall into these categories. We do know that Crispus fell into that category. He was the former chief ruler of the Synagogue (Acts 18:8). Stephanus and his household were also well known among the Corinthians, along with Chloe, all of whom were probably wealthy, and being part of this church in Corinth.

Simply because these people were wealthy or influential didn't disqualify them from fellowship with God. But, Paul's point is not that such people are disqualified as much as such people, by-and-large, put their faith in the things of the world rather than in a God they can't see.

MAT 19:23-24 "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The rich have a tendency to place their faith in their wealth. The wise of this world have a tendency to place their faith in themselves, and the influential have a tendency to trust in themselves and their own power. This is just the nature of such people. And yet, praise God, there are always exceptions to that.

But the bottom line is that most people in the kingdom of God are just your average run of the mill people who have trusted in an extraordinary Savior and God. I like the way John MacArthur puts it.

"A simple, uneducated, untalented, and clumsy believer who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and who faithfully and humbly follows His Lord is immeasurably wiser than the brilliant Ph.D. who scoffs at the gospel.....

..... The simple believer knows forgiveness, love, grace, life, hope, God's word -- God Himself. He can see eternity. The unbelieving Ph.D., on the other hand, knows nothing beyond his books, his own mind, and his own experience. He sees nothing beyond this life, and he cannot be considered anything but foolish."

And yet, it was the plan of God to show the world that His way may seem foolish, but it is actually a wisdom which only God could give.

1CO 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,...."

What the world would have chosen to be the qualification for God's choice, God chose the opposite. This, by the way, is why the world has such a hard time with the things of God. It just doesn't make good sense to trust in a Savior who would have to die on a cross. Of course, they forget that He rose bodily from the dead three days later.

To the world it is utter foolishness to suggest that the meek will inherit the earth, and yet Christ has promised it. And ultimately we will see the fulfillment of it when our Lord returns and sets up His kingdom on the new earth as we rule and reign with Him forever.

They have a hard time with simple faith in Jesus Christ when much more complicated plans of salvation make more sense and involve the good works of men to earn their way to heaven.

But of course, it is God who does the choosing. He chooses the One who will save and the means by which men may be saved; namely the death of a perfect sacrifice, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

God is Sovereign and no one will dictate to Him as to what He must do or how He will do it, and that includes you and me. This is why we live by faith. This is why we must trust God even when it appears to make no earthly sense. His ways are beyond our ways and His understanding is infinitely above ours, and yet His ways are perfect and full of love.

In choosing the weak things of the world God shames the wise. He chooses the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are. In other words, what the world considers as nothing and without value, God deems valuable.

And what the world thinks as something turns out to be nothing. And as they consider the gospel as nothing, God says it is everything. This is why we should hold our heads up high when we have the opportunity to stand up for Christ and represent Him. We have nothing to be ashamed about.

So what if the world scoffs. That doesn't change the reality that, 'if Christ is for us who can be against us?' So what if the world thinks we're foolish. I praise God that He chooses the foolish and weak things of this world to confound the wise, because I fall into that category. And so did the apostle Paul.

1CO 3:18 "Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise."

The real fool is the one who says there is no God. The fool is also the one who says there is a God, but then attempts to conform God into his own image or chooses to approach God on his own terms.

Jesus put it well when quoting the one who would place his confidence in himself.

LUK 12:19-21 "And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

And why has God chosen the weak things of the world and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise? Paul gives us the answer in our text.

1CO 1:29 "so that no one may boast before [God]."

Can you imagine anyone boasting before God that he has accomplished something which would endear him before the Lord in his own righteousness? I'm here to tell you that that's where most of the world is. They may not put it in those terms, but when it comes right down to it, they have something to offer to God for their salvation in their own good works. And if that isn't boasting I don't what is.

Or what about the unbeliever who says he doesn't need God and boasts in his wisdom or strength or riches?

JER 9:23 "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,..."

God has a plan for our redemption and it is non-negotiable. But it's a plan based on the very wisdom of God. Who could add anything to that?

ROM 3:27-28 "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."

Even for the believer it is excluded. No one can boast before God that he did something to earn any favor with God. No one can say that in God's foreknowledge that He saw something in us that would have attracted us to Him. No one can say that we had the intestinal fortitude to go against the flow of popular opinion and choose Christ.

Paul says that no one seeks after God, no not one. The faith we've placed in Christ is a gift. That's exactly what we say every time we quote Eph.2:8-9.

EPH 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."

Salvation is by grace from first to last. None of us can take credit for our ability to see our spiritual need for salvation when we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Paul speaks of this as well in that same letter to the Ephesians.

<P>

EPH 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

The Greek word for dead in this passage is *nekros* and it means a corpse. Spiritually speaking we were all corpses. But guess who can raise us from the dead? Guess who can give life where there was death? Guess who can open the eyes of the blind and command the dead to come out of the tomb?

Only God can do such a work. Can we boast in what only God can do? Yes and no. No, we cannot boast in the sense that we had something to do with giving ourselves life any more than we can boast of our birth into this world. Someone else made that choice for us. But we can boast in the One who gave us life as we embraced Him by faith.

This is the wisdom of God which is found in righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It is Christ's righteousness. It is the working of the Spirit of God who conforms us into the image of Christ through sanctification and it is the redemption as God purchases us through the shed blood of Christ.

It is all of God. God knows what we need. God's infinite wisdom and love has accomplished all of the wisdom we will ever need to rely on as Christ is the One chosen to accomplish what we couldn't do on our own. This is why we can't boast in any aspect of our salvation.

ROM 3:22-24 "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all

have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

But you know what? There is a sense in which we must boast.

1CO 1:31 "Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (Jer. 9:24)

I find in the world today among many Christians that they are not willing to boast in their Savior. They will accept His free gift. They will not deny Him when confronted, but to boast is something which many are not willing to do.

The Greek word for boast here in our text implies to glory in something or someone. Our whole being should glory in the fact that we belong to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Our very lives should boast in that sense that we are not ashamed of the gospel or the one who gave it to us, our Lord and Savior.

We boast because we're not ashamed of the gospel. We boast because His love has been poured out in our lives. We boast that we serve the risen Christ. We boast because we belong to the God and creator of this world who has chosen to give us life eternal.

When Paul exhorts us to boast in the Lord he is quoting Jeremiah and here's what it says.

JER 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."

We ought to be proud to boast of our God. We ought to be proud to boast in our Creator who desires for us to live with Him forever. And we ought to be proud to boast and glory in Christ who has given us eternal life. David was a man who boasted and gloried in the Lord. May we follow His lead.

PSA 105:3-7 "Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. 4 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. 5 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, 6 O descendants of

Abraham his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones. 7 He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.”