

Text: I Corinthians 1:22-25 (Lent 2, Series B, February 25, 2018)

Theme: Our Content is Christ Crucified!

Virtue (basic truth): God's power and wisdom are magnified in "Christ Crucified."

Malady (our problem): Offended by simplicity, sinners dismiss the power of "Christ crucified."

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon the Holy Spirit refreshes us with the gospel certainty of the Savior's cross and leads us to boldly proclaim that message in our lives.

Propositional Statement (aim): Being a Christian isn't always easy and frequently we're challenged to question God's perceived weakness and foolishness. But *our content is Christ crucified* as we see proof of God's power, wisdom and love.

Specific Law in text: "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom" (I Cor. 1:22) – in what ways do we do similar?

Specific Gospel in text: "Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24).

Doctrinal thought: Despite their perceived weakness and foolishness, the LORD binds himself to operate for our eternal good through the message of "Christ crucified."

Sanctification thought: *"Lord of heaven and earth, as the cross of Christ stands in my life, be glorified! Though seemingly weak and foolish, you have worked through that message to assure me of your love, your faithfulness, and your forgiveness. Teach me to be bold in the message of the gospel. Help me cherish the "weak thing" by which you saved me. Grant me strength, patience and endurance to boldly proclaim the "foolish thing" that conquers on. Through faith in my Savior and in his name I ask it. Amen."*

I Corinthians 1:22-25

"²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

Paul refreshes weary hearts gathered in a spiritually confused town with this promise: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 1:3). Amen!

It's the uncomfortable moment the conversational climate changes . . . drastically. Dialogue starts as any other: semi-cordial introduction leads to "*where you from*" and "*what do you do?*" You know yourself well, so answers are confident. Intro over, the chat seamlessly flows into one of three categories: politics, weather and sports. Thankfully you've learned the phrase "*sure not like last year!*" suffices any question in those categories, so the talk rambles on. So far so good.

But as allegiances, athletics, and atmospheric actions breeze past, the fourth category changes the pressure: religion. Suddenly, at the topic of your Christianity, the once-cordial conversation bleeds into a strange blend of Trivial Pursuit and a police interrogation. No matter what illustrations you use, pictures you paint, your religious stance is labeled outdated, narrow-minded, weak and foolish by a world that doesn't judge. Case closed. Conversation over.

Been there? Me too. In fact, no matter vocation in life, we know the familiar frustration that comes with a defense of the cross we lift high. Seen only through physical eyes, those beams of wood are more meager than magnificent, more tenuous than triumphant. Seen only through physical eyes, Jesus' death is an unnecessary travesty, not a display of unyielding love. But right there, where Divine love and justice collide, we get to stand in wonder at the power and the wisdom of God. So foolish and weak to the world; and yet, that foolish thing and weak thing is still our content and content; still the happy message on our hearts and the heart of our message.

In relentless clarity and gospel-driven conviction, that's the truth Paul proclaims to Christians who gather in the spiritually confused town of Corinth. Happily, it's our confidence, too, as we celebrate the changeless truth that our *content is Christ crucified*. Heaven help see and keep it!

Before we glance at Paul's quick words, realize he dealt with real people in a real world. Oddly, we assume things were different then; as if closer to Jesus death-day, people were more prone to listen to the Gospel and less likely to rationalize arguments against it. Not the case. Sinners and skeptics then. Sinners and skeptics now. But, the Good News then is still the Good News now.

Sounds simple, but struggling sinners need clarity on it. And Paul tells us why: "*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom*" (I Cor. 1:22). In and around Corinth the cross was viewed as absurdly weak and/or obscurely foolish. But, as *off* as it is, they had reasons:

Descendants of Abraham were insulted at a mangled Messiah. Their *Savior* summoned God's dynamic power on earth. Minds retreated to Gibeon where God hurled hail from heaven and stopped the world from spinning (Joshua 10). Hearts spent the night outside Jerusalem when the LORD wiped out 185,000 Assyrians (Isaiah 37). Histories summoned plagues and the path God ripped through the Sea (Exodus 7-14). That was their God. Their Messiah was supposed to flex his muscles; not have them pinned to a cross. Their Christ should do to Rome what he did to Assyria and Egypt! "Christ" crucified? Weak, offensive to a culture that needed proof of power.

And, to struggling hearts in a spiritually unstable atmosphere, it still is. We don't like to admit it, but we still perceive the cross as weak every time we demand God fix the situation for us right now; every time we call him to prove his sovereignty by flexing his power, or every time we demand he prove his love as if he exists to grant us our three wishes. Sinners then, sinners still.

But it wasn't just hearts bound by Jewish histories obstructed by a cross. Greek influence in Corinth pushed the agenda that, if any religion was *worthy*, it'd challenge intelligence with a love of wisdom – a *phila sophia* – that convinced with scholastics, reason, and argument. Let the cross align with Socrates and Xenophon, Plato and Cicero, and our educated ear will entertain it. Reason be our guide; logic direct our decision; but dead deity meshes with neither. Foolishness.

And it still is to struggling hearts in a spiritually unsteady environment. Don't we consider it foolish every time we challenge the way God makes his will known? Every time we label what his Word still says as outdated and other-cultural – at least in our personal lives? Every time we leave God's "foolish things" out of our "educated" conversations? Sinners then, sinners still.

See what happened? The cross was subjected to the ways one group had ways thought and the ways others thought all should think. Emphatic contrast to the Jewish demands and Greek seekings, so by obvious extension, a crucified Christ was a weak word and foolish philosophy. Maybe they talked about it – certainly had history on its side – maybe they gleaned a spiritual insight from it, but the ***content of Christ crucified*** had no place in their religion, thought, or experience, so they chalked it up as a sad story silhouetted by a Friday afternoon sunset.

I hope you're angry with me for saying that; I hope even that concept disturbs you. Because, if it does, then it means the message of the gospel still resonates in your heart. It means, by grace, Scripture remains Scripture and the pulse of our message reflects the beating heart of the gospel, ***our content is Christ crucified!*** *"We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."* Why? *"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."* (I Cor. 1:23-25).

Set aside all worldly thought, and see the cross! The *foolish thing* God did to forgive us is beyond anything we could conceive, any dream we could devise. The "*weak thing*" God did to save us is sufficient. In the Savior see the heart God flexed to save. See the Christ crucified to pay for your sins. All of them! Gone! Commandments you've shattered? Forgiven. Lack of "zeal for God's house?" Taken away. Failure to confess him faithfully? Not held against you. That's the truth of Christ crucified; the selfless love of the eternal God displayed for you and for your eternal comfort in cross and Communication. "Worldly weak?" No. Perfect power! "Frail and foolish?" Never. Wisdom of God. The Christ who hung with criminals displays the most glorious power of God; and in our hearts rejoice because ***our content is "Christ crucified!"***

You know me enough to know I don't work miracles; so let me point you to him who does:

Here at Peace (*Our Savior's*), we *lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, till all the world adore his saving name* (CW 579). But do you know what it means and for whom it was raised? Sure, *Christus pro nobis*; God for us! We raise it high because there we see our every sin, every slip paid in full. There we see God himself stretching his arms to save and assure us. Foolish thing and weak thing, where we enjoy peace unparalleled, love undeserved, mercy unyielding!

Christian, that you see and know and experience that, is a working of grace, it's faith. It means the Holy Spirit has broken you hard heart with the "weak thing God did" in Christ crucified. It means the Holy Spirit has created a faith with the "foolish thing God did" in Christ crucified. It means that every time you see that cross – whether on that wall or not – or hear its message, your heart can be happy because *our content* (happiness) *is "Christ crucified."* Period.

Three last thoughts.

- 1) Directly from I Corinthians 1:23: "*we preach Christ crucified.*" Doesn't change. Even in a spiritually confused culture that ponders power, touts tradition, and raises reason, *we preach Christ crucified.* Why? Because the "weak thing" God did is the power by which sinners are saved; and the "foolish thing" God did is the wisdom that brings us to himself. That's why *our content* – our word, our worship, our way of life – *is Christ crucified!*
- 2) It's not just a Sunday topic. Instead, our hearts' delight, *our content* – happiness – *is Christ crucified.* So it's the message that lives in our hearts every time his Word brings our souls to the tranquil waters; every time his Word remains a lamp to our feet and a light for our path; every time we gather here in his name and leave here with his blessing.
- 3) Sometimes, when the conversation climate changes we walk away let down, like we failed God. Don't. Spirit promises to work through the *content of Christ crucified*, and he will. Let him do so. Even when you think you've failed in a conversation, rejoice he drove you back to the Firm Foundation; rejoice that he enabled you to stand firm on it. Daily, friends, God grant you happiness and boldness to proclaim the "weak thing" and "foolish thing," to know and adore and acclaim and hold to the eternal and everlasting truth that *our content is Christ Crucified.* Great News then. Great News still.

Amen.