

“THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE CROSS.”

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April 1, 2018, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: I Corinthians 1:18-25

Introduction.

What if Easter is really just the world’s biggest April Fool’s Day joke?

What if it is all just a big lie? What if the really smart people in the world are right? What if Stephen Hawking and Carl Sagan and Bill Nye the Science Guy are all right and there is no one out there and there is nothing after death?

What if John Lennon was right and there is no heaven above us, but only sky?

What if Karl Marx was right, that religion is just the opiate of the people, something dreamed up to make us feel better and take away the fear of death? What if the opioid crisis in American is Christianity?

Paul raises that question in I Corinthians 15:12-19 and says if Christ is not raised from the dead then we are all fools and our faith is in vain.

I Corinthians 1:18-25.

If we are going to understand this morning’s text we have to hear it from the perspective of a culture that really believed the crucifixion and resurrection were a joke. No, worse than that, utterly madness, like people on serious drugs.

This text is a bit hard for us in the 21st century, because for us the cross has been a symbol of our faith for as long as we can remember. Everyone wears crosses around their necks. We proudly put them on prominent display.

We can’t feel the depth of the offense of the scandal of the cross in the first century. Paul was writing the Corinthians who were feeling the heat and were moving away from the cross to something more sensible, more culturally correct.

Why is the cross folly to the world?

1:18, 23 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, ... 23 a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

The cross was a stumbling block and an offense to the Jews for two reasons.

First, according to Deuteronomy anyone hung on a cross was cursed and could not be the Chosen One of God. Despite Isaiah 53 the Jews had no category for a suffering Messiah.

This explains why the pre-Damascus Road Paul was so enraged against Christians and Christ. How in the world could his fellow Jews honor as God someone who was obviously cursed by God? It was blasphemous to him.

Second, because they had one expectation of their Messiah, that He would come and destroy the Romans and usher in a great kingdom. God had acted in great power and in great signs in the past for the Jews. He delivered the Jews through the Red Sea and destroyed the Egyptians, He brought down the walls of Jericho and delivered the land of Canaan into their hands, He won their wars, He killed Goliath. Certainly the Messiah would restore Israel to her former glory by acting powerfully on her behalf.

Jesus failed to live up to their preconceived notions, a Messiah would never die in weakness and failure on a Roman cross.

The cross was folly and an offense to the Greeks for two reasons.

First, God must be above feelings. It was an insult for any God to get mixed up in human affairs, let alone any idea of an incarnation and a God who suffered was incomprehensible. And why would anyone want to be resurrected? The body to them was like a prison for the soul, and death meant freedom.

For the Greeks crucifixion was reserved only for the very worst criminals. It was a horrible death, there was no way such a person could be the Savior of the world. No blood from no cross could ever remove sin and secure salvation.

Second, Greeks were intoxicated with the pursuit of wisdom. The Greeks were more advanced in learning than any other civilization. They loved their philosophers, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Paul made no sense, he was uttering pure folly.

The Jews sought a supernatural sign as proof or evidence.

The Greeks sought special wisdom as proof or evidence.

The cross failed on both counts. A ***crucified Christ*** was a contradiction in terms, a scandal, a lie, a joke. It didn't satisfy the preconceived expectations of the Jews or the requirements of the Greeks. To the Jews Jesus was an embarrassing stumbling block and to the Greeks sheer nonsense.

Where does the world say we will find salvation today?

In the same places. Power and wisdom are just as strong of idols in our times as theirs.

The secular world says salvation and hope lies in a *power politics*. Governments have the power to fix our problems. That is what is so sad about this student movement and uprising over gun control. Imagine their disillusionment when they find out political solutions to spiritual problems won't work. Salvation is not going to arrive on Air Force One or in a Supreme Court ruling or in new legislation.

The secular world says salvation lies in *wisdom*, in better information and education; in better science, in greater discoveries, greater technology.

The wisdom of the world cannot save us. Salvation is not going to arrive with better research, scientific breakthroughs, or from Google, Apple, Microsoft or Amazon.

We have the same preconceived notions as the Jews and the Greeks. God must act according to our expectations and interests. God must prove Himself to our liking and standards. We get upset when God doesn't answer our prayers or make things turn out the way we want. If God doesn't behave the way we think He should then He isn't trustworthy.

But our ways are not God's ways and our thoughts are not God's thoughts.

For four thousand years God tested our ways and our thoughts. *God tested human wisdom* to see if it could come up with anything truly helpful that would solve the human condition. He let man try their best.

He waited for the Egyptians do their best with striving for immortality, making great advancements in medicine and science, building great pyramids. He listened to all the great wisdom of the Greek philosophers and the Roman orators like Cicero.

Has human wisdom been able to save anyone? Has wisdom every achieved victory over death and eternal life? Has wisdom been able to forgive sins and remove guilt and shame?

God tested human power. First, there came the Assyrians, they were powerful. Then the Babylonians, even bigger. Then the Persians stretching from India to Egypt. Invincible until the Greeks and Alexander the Great. Who could be greater or more powerful? But he died at only 33. Then the Romans the greatest of all empires ever. But where are they?

Has human power been able to solve the deepest problems of the human soul? Has power been able to secure true and lasting peace and hope in the human heart?

After four thousand years God exposed all human wisdom and human power and human self-sufficiency for the true folly it really is.

Paul asks:

1:20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

The Cross, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The Jews wanted power and the Greeks wanted wisdom, but they miss that the cross gives both. The all-wise and all-powerful God gives them both in a crucified Messiah. What seems weak and foolish to man is strong and wise to God.

God has made Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Consider the power of Christ.

Remember the joy and celebration of the Israelites after they crossed the Red Sea and saw the Egyptians dead on the sea shore?

Exodus 14:31 Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Exodus 15:1-2 Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

2 The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.

How much greater joy should the Jews have had at the resurrection when all of Christ's enemies lay crushed in the dust? He conquered sin and death and Satan. He trampled the powers of darkness, triumphed over evil, stole the keys of hell, paid all our debt, satisfied the righteous and just wrath of God. Satan's empire is overthrown and his throne cast down.

In the cross God overpowered all His enemies and rendered their power powerless. It is right that we sing, He has triumphed gloriously.

Colossians 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him [in Christ on the cross].

Consider the wisdom of Christ.

Take the example of Paul. He was considered by many scholars to have been a genius. Paul was trained by Gamaliel one of the greatest teachers of this day (Acts 5:34, 22:3-4). Paul had the equivalence of two PhDs by the time he was 21. He was fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and possibly Latin. As a Pharisee he would have memorized the Torah, the first five books of Moses. He wrote half of the books in the NT.

But what did Paul say about all of that?

Philippians 3:7-8 Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

I Corinthians 2:2, 5 I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ... 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul would rather be thought a fool than a genius. The foolishness of God is wiser than all the wisdom of man.

In the cross God outsmarted all human wisdom and in doing so, render human wisdom as folly.

The reason the wisdom of the world is so dangerous is because it leads us away from Christ and the cross. To know Christ is to know God and to know God is the beginning of wisdom.

Implications and application.

In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son to die on a cross and offer to all mankind the hope and promise of eternal life through the blood and forgiveness and reconciliation of Christ.

There is no other grace available than the grace offered at the cross.

Our salvation was secured for us by the death and resurrection of a first-century man. Christ is risen and a risen Christ is a game changer. He has changed history. He has drawn a line in the sand. The cross stands over all history.

The cross is the power center of the universe. Here the principalities and powers in the cosmic realm are confronted and defeated.

The cross is the intellectual center of the universe. Here the wisdom of God solves the world's most pressing problems.

Do not trust the wisdom of man and do not trust the power of man, but trust alone in God. And don't trust any preacher who offers you a life without a cross, a life without suffering and sacrifice, a life in which pride and self-sufficiency are not crushed, a life in which His power is not made perfect in our weakness (II Corinthians 12:9).

There is held out two choices to the world, and we will all do one or the other. Either we will mock the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ the Son of God; or we will marvel at it. We live in a post-Christian time, an age of mockery, and if we are not careful we can be pulled into that vortex of our culture. What we must do above all is develop a capacity to marvel, to have an exceedingly great awe for what God has done for us in Christ, to glory in the cross.

In a moment we will sing Crown Him with Many Crowns. We exult the suffering servant and the crucified Christ.

Do you know Him? Is He your savior? Has He suffered for you and paid for your sins? Surrender to Him this morning, this is the perfect morning to make Christ your Savior. Talk to me afterwards, call me this week. Don't trust your wisdom and your power.

Jesus rose from the dead to be for us the power and wisdom of God.

Galatians 6:14 Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, *for it is the power of God for salvation* to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

I Corinthians 15:56-57 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ is risen!

Prayer: Holy Father, you have destroyed the last enemy death, you have defeated Satan, you have vanquished hell, you have raised to life your Son whom you crucified. Reorder and reorient our lives around this one center, around this one central truth, the reality of Jesus' final and decisive triumph over death. Make this reality practical in all our daily lives, in all our daily interactions and relationships, to the glory of Jesus Christ, in whose mighty name we pray, Amen.