

August 10, 2014
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.

1. Why does God not call the wise, powerful, and noble born people to salvation?
2. Why do we like to be acceptable to the kind of people God does not call?
3. Since it seems psychologically unhealthy to dwell on the fact that we are nobodies, what can be the ultimate outcome of such thinking?
4. What are the positive ramifications of this text?

REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE
1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Some time ago I attended the memorial service for a well known matriarch who was considered part of the Greenville social scene even if she didn't prefer that inclusion. Among other friends and family members, one of her grandsons spoke at the service. I will never forget what he said. Chris told how Grandmother was very concerned about the way her family lived. She would say to Chris or her children before they went out, "Now don't forget who you are, and don't do anything that you would be ashamed to see plastered on the front page of the Greenville News."

That is good advice for us children of God also. It's easy for us to forget who we are. We rejoice in the truth that because we

have trusted the finished work of Christ, God gave us the right to become His children. He adopted us and made us His own. But we don't live in the Father's house yet. We live with the enemy. We live every day surrounded by the family we belonged to in the past before we were born again. They don't trust God's promises and in reality neither do they like God.

To compound the problem, we live in a flesh that responds easily to the impulses of our former condition. There is something in us that wants to be liked by our old family. We naturally want to fit in. No one wants to be thought of as weird. Therefore, if we do not watch ourselves carefully, if we do not guard our hearts, we will try to talk, look, and act like all the "normal" people so that we don't feel odd.

Against that backdrop, God taught us through the Apostle Paul that "*God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are*" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). Ummmmmm! On the one hand, I really do take comfort in the certainty that God has chosen me to be His child. On the other hand, I guess that means I must also be considered foolish, weak, low, despised, and not living by the politically correct standards of the world.

That doesn't do much for my self-esteem. No, but when God does His work through the unlikely, unexpected, non-promising kind of people in this world, it brings much glory to Him. And is not reflecting God's glory the purpose of my life now? Then we should rejoice that God is praised for the amazing results of His odd plan. Let's be encouraged by what God says He does according to this text.

God's Plan Looks Like Foolishness (vv.18-19).

This text reminds us that there are people who might wonder if the gospel is foolish or powerful? The perishing people think the word of the cross is folly (v.18a). The "word" of the cross, as Paul calls it here, is the whole story of the gospel. It is more than the event of the crucifixion. The word encompasses everything from

the eternality of the Son to His perfect life as a man, to His death, burial, and resurrection, culminating in eternal judgment or salvation.

This whole wonderful story seems like foolishness to the perishing ones. That is no doubt partly because it is impossible to reconcile the word of the cross with human reason. For example, human wisdom wonders how God can become man. We naturally wonder why we can't do works sufficient to merit salvation? Since proud humans are the measure of all things, whatever does not pass our approval is foolish— not to be considered worthy of acceptance.

The title or phrase “perishing ones” can be a two-fold reference. First, it describes those people who are in the process of perishing but one day will be saved through faith. This is the most obvious meaning from the verb tenses. Is it not true then that the “perishing ones” includes everyone until we are born again through God's grace? Second, the term has to include those people who are destined to perish forever.

Standing in contrast to the perishing ones are the saved people who know the word of the cross is power. That contrast is stated, *But to us who are being saved it is the power of God (v.18b)*. The phrase, *us who are being saved* refers to a unique group of people. We are separated out from among the mass of the ones who are daily in the process of being destroyed. Standing in vivid contrast to the people who are headed for destruction, we are in the process of being saved. It is okay to think of salvation in the present tense, as an ongoing process. The contract is complete. The promise is certain. But every day we are experiencing God's saving grace as He is delivering us from sin now. He will ultimately deliver us for eternity.

To people who are experiencing that deliverance, the word of the cross is the most wonderful story. It is more than facts, more than a story, more than a creed. The word is power. God's plan of salvation that centers on the cross is the revelation of His power, strength, and ability to do what He desires to do. A sinner who is saved by grace simply by trusting Christ's work on the cross is an eternal expression of God's power. He has power to convict, power to draw, power to regenerate, power to change a life, and power to

keep that life for eternity.

People who God is saving know that the word of the cross is power, not foolishness. In fact, saved people realize that God's “foolishness” is destroying human wisdom (vv.18b). This is because it is impossible to know God through human wisdom (vv.19-21). God has destroyed the possibility of human wisdom to comprehend Him. And this is no secret because God has revealed His plan. *For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart” (v.19)*. When and where was it written? God previously revealed that His plan of salvation would destroy human wisdom. In Job we read, *He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end (Job 5:13)*. Isaiah wrote, *Therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden (Isaiah 29:14)*. It is not that God has something against wise people. Rather because the wisdom of man is rooted in his pride and rebellion against His Creator, the rebel's pride must be shattered if he will ever be right with God.

Has God's plan worked? *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? (v.20)*. The wise, the writers, the debaters of this world system think they are alive and well. They are quite certain that they have the answers to all the difficult questions, even questions like, “Where did we come from.” But they live in a world of make-believe. In the real world, God's wisdom revealed in the word of the cross leaves the most brilliant human thinkers completely out of the picture. The eternal plan of the eternal God has no representation from the men and women of this world who place their confidence in their own wisdom.

We, on the other hand, know God only through faith. *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe (v.21)*. Wisdom hatched in rebellion against the Creator cannot possibly come to know the Creator. It can dispute facts about God and God's work. It can even acknowledge the

superior literary forms of the Bible. But rebellious wisdom will never know God intimately. By human wisdom no eternal relationship will ever be established with God. That is because human wisdom dismisses the preaching of the cross. But that same preaching is the means by which we are delivered from the power and penalty of sin.

Paul gave the Corinthians an explanation of God's work with Jews and Greeks (vv.22-25). Jews demand miracles, Greeks seek wisdom. *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom (v.22)*. No, that preaching of the cross will never satisfy the person who draws conclusions based on signs and miracles. The Jews were notorious for this. Maybe their penchant was because their nation was founded on the miracles of the exodus and established in the Promised land. How ironic that the nation as a whole rejected Messiah who did many miracles among them. Neither will the Gentiles, who pride themselves in seeking wisdom, accept the plan of the cross. The Greeks in particular boasted in the great philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and such heroes of thought. Still Gentiles in the vein of Christopher Hitchens or Richard Dawkins follow in the same path of destruction taken by the renowned atheists who blazed the various trails to the lake of fire in every generation.

We are not like that. We do not need signs nor do we seek human wisdom. We preach Christ. *But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles (v.23)*. We don't need miracles or the affirmation of human wisdom to convince us of the truth of the gospel. We simply preach Christ, God in the flesh, having been crucified, as an innocent man to pay the penalty for our sins. The simple message of the cross is still a source of offense for the unsaved of every race. And yet, Christ alone is sufficient to those who God calls. Christ is the demonstration of God's wisdom and power. *To those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (v.24)*. The call of God separates people out of the mass of unbelievers in every race. Unless God grants the miraculous call to salvation, the sinner has no hope. No sinner comes to deliverance from sin on his or her own terms or according to preferred timing. When God graciously sends conviction, it is the day of salvation.

Don't expect human wisdom to ever figure it out. *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (v.25)*.

What Does God's Plan Make Us (vv.26-31)?

Since God's wonderful story is about the cross and not miracles and wisdom, what does that say about us who believe it? God chooses losers to become winners (vv.26-28). Paul taught us that not many movers and shakers end up in God's family. Notice the kind of folks God does not call very often. *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth (v.26)*. While we do not look to miracles to confirm God's truth, at the same time we do know that the *calling* is the miraculous expression of God's grace, not a matter of our own choice or wisdom.

Those of us who receive God's grace unto salvation are not generally from the wise, powerful, or blue-bloods of the world's system. Why doesn't God call those people? Sometimes He does. There are some great examples of God saving people like that in the Bible and in human history. It reveals the odd tension between human will and God's grace that comes to play in this. People who are self-sufficient do not think they need God's grace, and so they reject it. And yet if God chooses to save such a person, they will be saved.

Then who are the typical recipients of God's grace? We definitely are not from the world's class of wise, mighty, and noble. *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are (vv.27-28)*. We who God calls to salvation are among the people considered foolish (v.27). This trait is not to be confused with the person described in the Proverbs who is proud, unteachable, and destined for destruction. This is a person who is deemed by the world as dull, sluggish, or even stupid. The world thinks that anyone who embraces Christianity is a backwards, non-thinking neanderthal.

Examples of that opinion are abundant. Compare the way the mainstream media and the wise of this world treat people like Sarah Palin or Tim Tebow.

We are from among the weak (v.27). The weak might be people who are helpless but also includes those who are powerless. Compared to the movers and shakers of this world, all of us are weak, powerless, and unable to impact the world much. Or at least that is the opinion the world holds of us. This certainly was the opinion the world in Jesus' day held of His followers. What impact could a handful of ignorant fishermen, a former tax collector, and zealots have on the world?

God calls us from among the despised (v.28). This word literally means "*the having been despised.*" These are people who don't fit into the world system, people who have little influence. We who were despised before we were saved are certainly despised afterwards.

In fact, we who God calls to salvation are the "not" (v.28). The not? This word actually means "unborn." It refers to people who are so unimportant, so obscure, so insignificant that it is like they were never born. It was the deepest of unkind things to say about a person. To the Greeks, having being was most important. Consider the famous line, "I think, therefore I am." That was a very important reality. But God calls those who the rest of the world view as "non-being." And God delights to give eternal life to people like us. How weird is it that we try to become the very kind of people who God does not generally save. Why can we not be content with being nobodies, insignificant, and as important as a baby not born?

The world counts such people as unimportant or even fools. But God is using the despised people to confound the worldly-wise people. According to the text, God's plan is to use us to *shame the wise (v.27), shame the strong (v.27), and bring to nothing the things that are (v.28).* That does happen. In this life we cause confusion through a changed life, a life so dedicated to Christ that we die for Him. The strong people, the wise people, and the people in charge cannot even persecute us into denying Christ. And they are baffled at such conviction. But ultimately, the shame will be sensed most at the judgment seat of Christ where they will discover

that we are saved and they are not.

God works this amazing plan because God loves His glory (vv.29-31). He has determined that He forever remains the source of real life. *He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (v.30).* Everything that is good, right, and excellent comes from God. The perfect God is the source of your life in Christ. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit made the Son to be our wisdom. We do not have the wisdom of the world, and so they call us foolish. But we have the wisdom of God through Jesus Christ. God has made Christ to be our righteousness. We have no righteousness to offer God like the religious people of the world who try to buy off God with their religious dedication. But we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. God has made Christ to be our sanctification. We can lay no claim to perfection or sinlessness. But we are wholly sanctified in standing and being conformed more and more to that standard through Christ. God has made Christ to be our redemption. We have nothing to offer the taskmaster sin to buy our release. But God has made Jesus the sufficient price to buy us out of sin.

Because God alone is perfectly righteous, He must glory in Himself. Everything about us that leads to good and righteous and holy is from God. We, the weak and despised of this world, give all glory to God who saves us. When we exalt God's glory, we are affirming His passion. God alone is the standard of right and majesty.

It is only proper then that we should boast **in** Him. No one can boast in God's presence (v.29). That was Satan's sin. Boasting in self is the most natural sin of humanity. God's glory in His plan of salvation eliminates all such boasting. Therefore, we do well to boast about God. *Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (v.31).* Paul quoted Jeremiah here. *"But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:24).* This conclusion is like a no-brainer. Since we are nothing to begin with, and since we are delivered from sin only through God's grace, and since God does this for His

own glory, . . . why would we not boast in the Lord alone?

When I forget who I am, where I came from, what I was when God saved me, I tend to boast in the wrong things. We who are saved because God calls us to Himself should reflect glory to Him even in the lives that we live.