

1 Corinthians 1:18-21 *For the word 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, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*

Just this week our sweet high school freshman, Kaylee, came over to our home to have a time in the spa with one of her friends. We asked her to enter the back yard by the new gate we had just built. I was on the inside, and she on the outside, and at first try she was puzzled as to how to open the gate to enter. She asked through the opening, “Will you let me in if I give you the correct password?” I was puzzled as to what she meant but waited as she searched for something she had saved on her phone’s message feature. Finally, she found what she was looking for and recited confidently:

“Wise Minds Found Scummy Immoral Laws Wedding Idols to Oxen Tempting Communion.”

I laughed and let her in! I was so pleased and proud of her for wanting to retain and learn the memory aid I had given for the first eleven chapters of 1 Corinthians. The first word of “Wise” corresponds to the key theme of WISDOM in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1. And we embark upon a consideration of that theme today.

[And may Kaylee’s password compel *you* to memorize my silly sentence and learn the key themes of the opening eleven chapters of 1 Corinthians.]

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

1 Corinthians 1:18 begins with *“the word of the cross.”* What is the *word* of the cross? It certainly is the subject of the passage, and thus needs clear definition. It isn’t simply the word “cross,” of course. Rather it refers to the *message*, or *story* or *communication* of the cross of Calvary on which Jesus died. Paul is asking in essence, “What is that cross saying to the world?” – and especially what is it saying to me?

I like to think of the word “word” as meaning the *narrative* that the cross brings for us to consider. Let us use the following outline to guide our consideration of the critical “word of the cross.”

OUR OUTLINE

1. The HISTORICAL narrative of the cross
2. The SPIRITUAL narrative of the cross
3. The PERSONAL narrative of the cross

THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE CROSS

1. Jesus dying on the cross of Calvary, c. 33 B.C. is the single most important event in the history of the world. Period. The wise before anticipated it as their coming redemption by God’s promised Messiah. The wise after embracing it as their redemption, now completed

in Christ Jesus.

1. Paul tells us that this cross narrative divides all humanity into two groups: (1) those who are in the process of perishing and (2) those who are in the process of being saved. The first group finds the narrative of the cross to be foolishness, or of “no sense” (nonsense). And the second group finds the narrative of the cross to be the “power of God” or true wisdom of great sense. Therefore, the narrative of the cross is of utmost importance in charting both spiritual course and true wise thinking.
2. Multiple amazing signs accompanied this historical event, marking its monumental significance.
 - The sky turned black – in ominous reminder of the solemn significance of the event
 - The temple veil into the most Holy Place was torn – to mark the now free access to God by all
 - There was a major earthquake – symbolizing the earth-shaking event of the death of Christ
 - Tombs were opened and there were formerly dead men now walking alive in Jerusalem – symbolizing the life-giving properties of this death on a cross
 - A blood moon rose on the evening of the event – an ominous sign in the sky of God’s somber intervention into the affairs of mankind

The historical significance of the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary cannot be overstated. It has fulfilled the Old Covenant turning it into the New Covenant. It has turned the anticipation of B.C. (before Christ) into the realization of A.D. (after death). It has ushered in the “Age of Grace” and the “Church Age” when the Jewish people are not the only recognized people of God, but now all who call upon the death and name of Jesus.

THE SPIRITUAL NARRATIVE OF THE CROSS

1. God has come to earth and died in the flesh. Wow!
2 Corinthians 5:21 He [the Father] made Him [the Son] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
2. The sinless One became the bearer of all sin. Wow!
3. Righteousness in the sight of God was made possible. Wow!
4. God’s plan of redemption was completed (“It is finished” = “paid in full” = mankind’s debt removed)
5. The devil was defeated (his head “crushed” – Gen. 3:15) – though final punishment awaits
6. Sin is conquered – I can choose not to sin for the first time (“no longer a slave to sin”)

The spiritual narrative of the cross of Calvary cannot be overstated. God won the victory over the power (spiritual grip) and penalty (spiritual death) of sin, with removal of the presence of sin to follow in time.

THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF THE CROSS

1. The cross is where the heart of God’s love is revealed
a. (This is what the song “Lead Me to The Cross” spoke of today)
2. The cross is where I lay down my burdens and find relief
a. (This is what the song “At the Foot of the Cross” spoke of today)

3. My hope for the yet lost is found in the cross
 - a. *(This is what the song “Still the Cross” spoke of today)*
4. The cross is my “ticket” for a crown in heaven
 - a. *(This is what the song “The Old Rugged Cross” spoke of today)*
5. The cross is my spiritual “power source” (“it is the power of God”)
 - a. Spiritual revelation - for love and forgiveness to others
 - b. Spiritual restoration - for healing of any dysfunction
 - c. Spiritual reassignment - for a clean slate and fresh start

The personal narrative of the cross of Calvary cannot be overstated. I am a “new creature” in Christ with all things new because of His voluntary, substitutionary and atoning death for me. (2 Cor. 5:17).

VERSES 19-21

Verse 19 is a free translation of Isaiah 29:14.

Isaiah 29:14 *Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed.*

Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised to someday do a marvelous work of confounding the wisdom of the worldly wise and hiding the discernment of those who thought themselves pompously clever. This he did in the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

Deuteronomy 21:23 had taught that “cursed is he who hangs on a tree” (of crucifixion). And so, the “wise” men of Israel determined that Jesus Christ could not be the Messiah because he hung on a tree of crucifixion. But the apostle Paul corrected that misunderstanding in Galatians 3:13.

Galatians 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”*

Paul teaches that Jesus was not cursed, but became a curse for us (that is, bore our status of being cursed) so that we might be redeemed. Thus, all the wise men of Israel who reject Jesus as able to be the Christ (Messiah) have their wisdom “destroyed” and their cleverness “set aside.”

Verse 20 has Paul calling for the wise man, the scribe and the debater to defend their dismissal of the cross. In today’s language we might call the wise man the PHILOSOPHER – the one who thinks up all kinds of theories about the meaning of life. And the scribe would be the SCHOLAR who studies all books and articles he can find in attempt to know as much about a subject as can be known. And the debater would be the ORATOR or PREACHER who expounds and teaches with eloquence and persuasion his many points to convince an audience. And yet Paul calls the philosophers, scholars and orators who dismiss the cross as inconsequential as spouting foolishness – not wisdom at all. Why?

Because in **Verse 21** he says that they “*did not come to know God.*” Here is the grand determining factor of wisdom – knowing God. If you don’t have a relationship with the God of the universe and all wisdom, how can you suppose to be wise at all, says Paul.

Proverbs 9:10 *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Both Paul and wise old Solomon agree that a personal relationship with the God of the universe, founded on Holy fear is the first step to true wisdom. Have you made the first step to wisdom?

Paul goes on to say the *“God was well-pleased through the ‘foolishness’ of the message preached to save those who believe.”* What we’re doing here – right now – me “preaching” and you listening – is considered by most as foolishness and a waste of time. (And even some of you might think it so, though I hope not.) And yet it is by this strange vehicle of preaching the message of Jesus and His cross that men and women have been saved through the ages. Preachers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, George Whitefield, John Wesley, William Booth (of the Salvation Army), Billy Sunday, Billy Graham and hundreds of other faithful men and women have brought the message of the gospel of the cross through the vehicle of preaching. Preaching is God’s “foolish” way of reaching the lost.

And so, at Oaks Bible Church we do the same – as best as we can – by myself and pastor David and elders Bruce and Dan. And by extension, so do all our wonderful teachers of youth and children.

Listen again to the second verse of the song “The Mind of Christ” which we sang earlier. It comes directly from our text of the morning.

Tell me, who is the one who thinks himself clever?

Who is wise in the world, but not in our God?

The cross to him is foolishness; to us it is God’s power

And the wisdom of God for this hour.

May the historical, spiritual and personal narrative of the cross of Calvary lead each of us to true godly wisdom and to a deeper relationship to God through Jesus Christ every day.

The cross is not foolishness – it is the power of God – and the Christ who hung on it for you is your source of all spiritual blessing and hope. Reach out and make Him your Savior and Lord – today.