

TOPIC: THE FOOLISHNESS OF CALVARY

We are saved by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which—according to human wisdom—is total foolishness.

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Paul wrote I Corinthians to a world-wise, intellectually savvy bunch, steeped in human philosophy. It is a powerful exposition covering some incredibly important topics.
- ▶ Based on his background and training, he could have tried to impress them with new insights or revelations from the Word of God. However, Paul begins the book with the very central theme of the gospel—the cross of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Using the cross as the centerpiece of his message ... it's the most foolish thing Paul could possibly have done!
- ▶ But this message was not Paul's invention. God chose 'the old rugged cross' to bring His divine plan for human salvation into view.
- ▶ The gospel is bound up in the cross.
- ▶ The word "gospel" simply means "good news". But how could the cross possibly have been "good news"?
- ▶ In fact, it was a stumbling block to the Jews and utter foolishness to the Greeks!
- ▶ The Jews wanted a sign, but Jesus failed their test. They said, "Come down from the cross and we will believe You are the Son of God" (see Matthew 27:39-43).
- ▶ Their statements weren't pulled out of thin air. They were quoting from a famous song in their hymnbook (see Psalm 22:4-8).
- ▶ To the Jews, the fact that Jesus did not or could not come down from the cross was proof positive that He was not the Son of God (as He claimed to be), but instead the accursed of God! They knew their scriptures: "...he who is hanged is accursed of God" (Deuteronomy 21:23b NKJV).
- ▶ About three hours after Psalm 22 was quoted to Jesus, He quoted from it Himself. In the abject weakness of His flesh, with the weight of sin crushing down upon Him, He asked, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1).
- ▶ As to the Greeks, they had many legends and myths about 'god fights' and the vying for supremacy. Here is an example: The goddess Gaia created Uranus. Then they married each other and overthrew the primeval gods that had preceded them. They then had 12 children (the Titans) who were so huge that their parents were totally scared of them. So, from their birth, Uranus chained them all in a place below the underworld called Tartarus. Eventually however, Gaia got tired of Uranus and with her youngest son Cronus, defeated her husband and sentenced him to the chains of Tartarus. Uranus (as one would predict) cursed Cronus and prophesied that his own children would rise up and overthrow him. And so the "Battle of the Titans" was under way. (The story continues beyond the space available here, and there are many other such stories.)
- ▶ So the thought of a god willingly giving himself up to be killed by a rival without a struggle was complete foolishness to the Greeks.
- ▶ Over time, man devised all manner of ways to please and appease their gods, but the gods didn't seem interested. Babylonian, Akkadian and Sumerian cultures of the Ancient Near East spoke of mankind as having been created to be slaves to the gods.

KEY SCRIPTURES:

1 Corinthians 1:18-30; Matthew 27:39-43; Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Psalm 22:1-8

- ▶ Paul was presenting a gospel that said the only one, true and living God had come to Earth as a human being to deliver humanity from the slavery of sin, through His own death – nonsense to the Greeks.
- ▶ We may wonder why so many rejected the gospel in Paul's day, even entire cities rising up against him (Ephesus – Acts 19:23-29; Jerusalem – Acts 21:27-30).
- ▶ But the question may not be why so few people got saved in the 1st Century, but, as New Testament scholar Richard Carlson asks: "... why would any first century person have been converted to Christian faith through the preaching of Paul?"
- ▶ Paul said, "I am not coming to you with man's wisdom. I am talking to you about God's wisdom, which makes man's wisdom utter foolishness."
- ▶ Today, we preach the very same message: "Come to the cross". The cross is God's divine answer to all that is wrong with humanity.
- ▶ Why is it that we continue to preach and to witness? Because Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15-16). And as Paul said: "[the gospel] is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16).
- ▶ So we continue preaching about the foolishness of the cross! We preach the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ; that He did this to pay the penalty for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- ▶ The cross places all of humanity on common ground where there is no elitism, sexism, racism or division of any kind. We all need the cross and thank God we all have access to the cross!
- ▶ Let us never stop preaching about "The Foolishness of Calvary"!

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION TOOLS

1. Think back to when you first remember hearing the message of the cross. Share with the group.
2. What was your first reaction to this message? Has that reaction changed? If so, how?
3. How have others responded when you shared the message of the Cross with them?
4. Discuss ways that we can share this message with "the whole world" in obedience to the command of Jesus to His followers.
5. Self-reflection: Can you think of someone with whom you can share this message? Do you have a plan for how you will share the message with others? Will you follow through?




Prayer Time



Lord, help me to remember that You are "beyond intelligent". I will not be ashamed of Your gospel, as foolish as it may seem to me and/or others.

WEEK OF SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2017

NOTES

Meditate as you read through/listen to this week's message. If it helps, use symbols for your notes.

 (Reminds me/Confirms)
  (New idea)
  (Think about)

 (Do this)
  (Speaks to my heart)
 (Must share)

L.G. Ice-Breaker: What item or activity do you least like to share with others? Why?

PRAYER NEEDS/THANKSGIVINGS
