

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabible.org.

Date: March 8, 2009

Title: The Wisdom of the Cross

Series: The Way of His Cross

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 (key verses 1:18; 2:2)

Theme: In weakness, strength; in death, life.

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

The Way of His Cross

Date: March 8, 2009
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Text: 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 (key verses 1:18; 2:2)
Theme: In weakness, strength; in death, life.

Introduction:

“A basic truth easily confirmed by looking at human history is that God’s ways are not our ways. How could it be that God would allow His own creatures to nail Him to a cross?” http://www.pilgrimcenterofhope.org/publication_index/pu_tc_2005_03.pdf Why is the cross considered foolish by those who reject it? Why did God use the cross as the means of delivering His people from their sin? How is it possible for life to come from death? In First Corinthians, Paul wrote to a church divided. They were consumed and distracted by the shadow. They had failed to look beyond the veil to see Him who alone is worthy. In the very first chapters, Paul sets forth what is most important. It is not an idea that competes with other ideas as to value or worth. It is not our solar system inside of the Milky Way or one galaxy among multitudes of galaxies. It is the only idea that matters. It is the only Sun around which all other celestial bodies revolve.

Paul’s argument establishes the intrinsic value of the cross by noting that plainness of speech is incapable of making it void (1:17). Tragically so, those who are perishing consider it foolishness, yet for “us who are being saved it is the power of God” (v. 18). It is by means of the cross that God destroys the wisdom of the wise and sets aside the cleverness of the clever (v. 19). There is a base or vulgar character to the cross. It is both crude and violent. The worldly wise and culturally clever ignore its visibility and brilliance (v. 22). “The cross did not make sense to the Jews who wanted signs, wonders, a superman, a triumphant messiah. The cross didn't make sense to the Gentiles whose philosophers and sophists could not understand the wisdom of Christ's sacrifice.” <http://www.st.ignatius.net/03-19-06.html> They stumble over the cross as if it were but some earthly object without any meaningful worth.

It is only those who are foolish who find the cross wise; it is only those who are weak who find the cross strong; it is only those who are base who find the cross attractive; it is only those who are despised who find the cross welcoming; it is only those who are not who find the cross everything (1:26-28). The cross is so effective as an instrument of death that it categorically and conclusively destroys the self-deception of the rebels so that their only boast becomes the cross (1:29-31). The work of the cross is so efficient that the only thing left standing after an encounter is the cross. Thus Paul’s preaching was simply and simple, “Christ crucified” (2:1-5). No matter what the issue or concern raised by the Corinthian fellowship, there was only and always but one response, “Christ crucified.”

What does this mean, “Christ crucified?” The power of the cross cuts through the destructive delusion we have embraced as it relates to the multiplicity of shadows. In weakness there is found strength and in death, life. The cross pronounces peace in war, clarity in confusion, and rest in turmoil. The cross speaks of equality in the face of blatant bigotry and justice when crime appears to prevail. The wisdom of the cross brings us back to reality. It tells us what is true. Its power severs us, perhaps violently, from the attachments we have to all things good and leaves us only with what is best.

THE BIG PICTURE:

- March 1 - The Relationship of the Cross to the Hero’s Work
- March 8 - The Wisdom of the Cross
- March 15 - The Work of the Cross
- March 22 - The Way of the Cross
- March 29 - The Word of the Cross
- April 5 - The Weight of the Cross
- April 12 - The Wonder of the Cross

Its Eternal Value:

It is through the cross that resurrection comes. Life is birthed through death, wisdom is produced by foolishness and strength comes in weakness. **This is its foolishness, and this is its fame.**

The Problem:

Our shame, fear, and guilt are so consuming and so great that we refuse to come. We would rather die than admit we can’t and only Jesus can. Yet this is the way of His cross. Until and only until we say, “I can’t, only Jesus can,” will we be saved.

The Storyline:

The story of God is marked by four large ideas: creation, transgression, condemnation, and redemption. The means whereby God redeems those He loves is by becoming what He creates in order to die for those who rebel against Him. The path He chooses is marked by foolishness and noted as weak. Yet it is the way of His cross that celebrates the wisdom of God and the power of God. Wisdom in foolishness, strength in weakness, death in life; this is the way of His cross. The cross calls us to all who hear in order that they might believe in His wisdom, His strength, His life.

Questions:

1. Why was Paul sent by God?
2. Is Paul saying baptism is not important?
3. Is it possible through cleverness of speech to make void the message of the cross?
4. What is the word of the cross to those who are (currently) perishing?
5. What is the word of the cross to those who are saved?
6. How does the cross destroy the wisdom of the wise?
7. How does God make foolish the wisdom of the world?
8. Who does the cross call out to?
9. Why does God call the unlikely?

10. What was the one thing Paul wanted to know?
11. Why did Paul come with humility?
12. How does this change the way we might currently think about the cross and life?
13. What impact does this have on the way we might be “doing” life?
14. Where should our focus be when we read the Bible or study the Scripture?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the wisdom of the cross.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose the cross of God over the wisdom of man.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in His way rather than the ways and wisdom of man.

In focusing our thoughts to the cross, I would like us to consider five simple contrasts between the wisdom of the cross and the way of man.

Outline:

- I. The wisdom of the cross is contrary to what we think is “brilliant” (1:19-22).

Verses 19 and 20 use such words as, “Wisdom, clever, wise man, scribe, the debater of this age” to describe those who oppose the cross. The cross runs contrary to what we would normally think is brilliant or smart. We do not think the cross produces life, but death. The cross does not promote, but destroys.

The cross is considered foolishness and weak (v. 25). Yet it is through the instrument of shame and death that God brings glory and life.

When we come to Christ through the cross we must change the way we think about humanity, ourselves and God.

- II. The wisdom of the cross is contrary to who we choose or recognize as acceptable or valuable (1:24-31).

Think about whom the world values: athletes, movie stars, and politicians. Inevitably it is some talk show host or TV commentator that we rally around. I am not saying or implying that they are all contrary to God or that they all lack any common sense, but I am saying the world has a very different standard than God has for who is or is not wise.

Let us remember our days of play ground games when sides would be picked, or a gym class when two captains were called for and the group was divided up. One of the most embarrassing moments came when you were picked last. **It was a slow and painful death.** No one first picks the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, and those who are of no earthly consequence. Yet those are the very one’s God picks first.

He picks the unlikely to do the impossible. His choice demonstrates the power of God and levels the field so that no one can boast in His presence.

When we come to Christ through the cross we must change whom we recognize as valuable.

III. The wisdom of the cross is contrary to how we speak the truth (1:17; 2:1-5).

Let us not kid ourselves, we enjoy those who are easy to listen to. Our present President is a far better communicator than George Bush or John McCain ever was. He is easy to listen to. Smooth speech is not a vice. Being clever is not a sin. All of these things, however, can become sins when they block the cross. Such things can negate the power of the cross.

I find this thought intriguing. Our passage is not saying sloppy speech is better than well articulated and thought through presentation. Speaking well is for the purpose of clear and open proclamation. But none of this is the power behind the cross. It is the work of Christ on the cross that has inherent power. I praise the Lord that my attempts are not the means or the end of God's power. It pleases Him to use my stumbling attempts at crafting a study that will communicate well, but clearly the message is of Christ alone and only.

When we come to Christ through the cross, we must change how we evaluate what is important. It is not the cleverness of the speaker, but the content of what is spoken that carries the weight of truth.

IV. The wisdom of the cross is contrary to where we go for help in our times of need.

Think about what the cross really says. If you wanted to learn victory, would you go to the guy the government identified as a terrorist and the religious establishment branded a heretic? When you want an answer to life's questions would you run into the **burning building** or pitch yourself over the **cliff's edge** in order to find your answer? The **hangmen's noose** does not communicate a happy life. It is not the **electric chair** that grants us the peace we crave. No one runs to the **guillotine** for the answers on parenting. And yet the cross calls out to us. **It is the last thing we want but the one thing we need.** Do we not see its folly, but also the wisdom of God?

Liberal theologian and pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick said the doctrine of the blood atonement was a slaughterhouse religion,¹ and he said it was "precivilized barbarity."² (1. Horton, *Church History and Things to Come*, (Pensacola: A Beka Books), p. 156. 2. Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Dear Mr. Brown*, (Harper & Row, 1961), p. 136.) <http://www.lighthouse-trails-research.com/slaughterhouse-religion.htm>

Edward Santella, Amazon.com book reviewer: "...what sort of god requires his son to die to redeem others' guilt? What sort of son would submit? What sort of

human being feels redeemed by such a death? Does this theology twist god into being an abuser? When a woman is sent back to her abusing husband who then kills her, how many murderers are there?" <http://www.religioustolerance.org/quotes0.htm>

Julie M. Hopkins: "It is morally abhorrent to claim that God the Father demanded the self-sacrifice of his only Son to balance the scales of justice...A god who punished through pain, despair and violent death is not a god of love, but a sadist and despot." <http://www.religioustolerance.org/quotes0.htm>

John Shelby Spong, retired Episcopal bishop: "I don't want a God that would go around killing people's little girls. Neither do I want a God who would kill his own son."

"Seldom did Christians pause to recognize the ogre into which they had turned God. A human father who would nail his son to a cross for any purpose would be arrested for child abuse. Yet that continued to be said of God as if it made God more holy and more worthy of worship." <http://www.religioustolerance.org/quotes0.htm>

See also *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith Is Dying and How a New Faith Is Being Born*.

When we come to Christ through the cross we must change where we go for help in our times of need.

V. The wisdom of the cross is contrary to when we come to Christ.

The natural man says, "I'll come when I'm ready." They believe when they've done their part, then they will tap the resource made available to them in the cross. But God will have none of this. We come to the cross when we have come to the end of ourselves. We do not come with our arms folded and our fists clenched. We come with arms outstretched and our hands open. We do not come with our head held high, but our knees bent low and our gaze at the ground. **We come to the cross through the cross.** There is no other way.

When we come to Christ through the cross we must change when we come. **We do not come when we are better, but when we are broken.**

In the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, God became man. Without diminishing who He is as God, He willfully took upon Himself the nature of man. By so doing, He voluntarily limited the spontaneous manifestation of His glorious self. He was hidden from human eye. He cloaked Himself in created flesh. He became what He created. The created became tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He who knew no sin was made to be sin (2 Cor. 5:21). He bore our sins in His body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). Romans 5:6-10 tells us that He did the inconceivable and unimaginable. He died in the place of sinners. He became their substitute. Why would one lay down their life for those who hate Him? Why would one be willing to lay down the life of the one dearest loved for those who stand in rebellion against him?

Reason and logic cannot answer the question, even our finite understanding of sacrificial love pales when we consider the enormity of the sacrifice, but this is what God did . . . and He did it for you and me.

This, then, is the word of the cross. God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). For those who are perishing in their unbelief, it is folly. But for those who are being saved, it is the power of God. There is nothing more for us to do. He has done it all. **The cross speaks of our spiritual ruin and His excessive resource.**

Can we believe this? Can you believe this? The cross calls us to stop trying and to start resting. To the proud and self-deceived such truth is folly. To the unloved and despised it would appear too wonderful, but there it is for all to see.

How will we view the cross? The cross-work was uniquely our Lord's. Yet those who came to it are equally identified by it. It is the cross that made us what we are, and it is the cross that shows us who we are. We are the fellowship of the crucified.

Paul provides for us the bottom line in ministry. Our present Evangelical culture has become intoxicated in its usage of current cultural methodology. Churches are often reflecting the current "fade" or "gimmick" as it relates to Church growth and ministry direction. Do you think what we are presently experiencing as the body of Christ is something unique or new to this generation? Perhaps we can argue because of modern technology and global communication the options are greater, but could we not argue that there has always been a pull away from the simplicity of ministry? I believe the first century Church was no less enticed by seductive voices calling out to abandon the straightforwardness of ministry for a more "fashionable" approach to reaching its current generation.

Paul endeavored to keep the main things, the main thing. When he came to the Corinthian audience he "Decided to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (v. 2)." This is not to say Paul did not know anything else, but it is to say that everything else known, bowed before this center-piece of truth. He says as much in Philippians 3:7 and 8.

⁷"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:7, 8).

Paul wanted nothing, not even the delivery of the message, to distract him from ministering in "Demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (v. 4). And why was this so? "In order that their faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (v. 5). It is perhaps because of a wrong emphasis that certain individuals within the

Corinthian fellowship began to align themselves to certain personalities. As a result of this, the fellowship became splintered (1:10-16). How does a fellowship guard itself against this kind of division, by keeping the main thing, the main thing.

The American Church has become a slave to the American culture. We have become religious consumers who shop around for the best financial deal that delivers the best returns on money invested, the most palatable tasting worship, and the most convenient self-serving ministry. And there is perhaps an element of necessity in each of the aforementioned areas, but it is possible and highly probable that in the midst of our consumerism, we have missed the bottom line.

We as individual believers must “Decided to know nothing [while in this body of flesh] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” If we choose not to pursue Him, we will become like Demas, who “Having loved this present world, has deserted [the Lord] and gone [back] (Second Timothy 4:10).”

“The word of the cross, the very substance of the Christian gospel, is absolute madness to those who are perishing. It is irrationality. It is insanity. It makes no sense whatsoever. It is not just that this message is a little off balance; it is not simply that it is in need of a bit of polishing. **It is sheer madness. Yet this message of the cross, for all its foolishness, is the very essence of our identity. This is who we are.** It may be foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved; it is the power of God.” http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-04-24 It is the cross that forces us to cry out, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner!” It is this fundamental element that shapes the gathered community of the believing. This is what calls and compels the gathering.

Hearers of the word come to church not in order to be entertained, much less to be lectured or scolded, but rather hoping to hear a word that will enable them to enter more deeply into the paschal mystery that is already there in their daily lives, hoping to believe again the promise that is almost too good to be true: that death is not the end, that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible, that work for justice and peace is not in vain, that the power of love really is the mystery at the heart of the universe. “Preaching the Folly of the Cross,” Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Word & World*, Volume XIX, Number, Winter 1999.

http://www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/19-1_Preaching/19-1_Hilkert.pdf

May the Church of Jesus Christ embrace with joy the wisdom of the cross as she seeks to be His body locally, nationally, and globally.

Shepherding the Sheep (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

1. Turn yourself toward the cross. Face it. Learn to be identified by it.
2. Let us redeem it from being a mere trinket, and let us wear it as the one thing that truly identifies who we are. We are a community of faith, called together by the cross.

3. How does this change the way we might currently think about the cross and life?
4. What impact does this have on the way we might be “doing” life?
5. Where should our focus be when we read the Bible or study the Scripture?
6. THINK, CHOOSE, AND FEEL.