

## “Called:Be Wise”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Graphics: phone, world, calling, baptism, cross

Big Truth: The grace of God was poured out into the first century church through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The early church was called by God to receive that grace and live as holy saints because of Jesus. God’s grace and a life of holiness leads the church to be steadfast when struggle comes, to be unified when division seeks to tear it apart, to be wise when the world’s wisdom seeks to confuse, to be Spirit-filled when the supernatural is dismissed, and to be ready for Jesus to move in new ways. We are called to be the Church for today and always by God’s grace given to us through Jesus and the presence of His Holy Spirit.

Focus Phrase: I am saved only in God’s wisdom and power.

### 1. Introduction

- A. Here is a very short list of some things that I think **make no sense**:
  - i. The **human appendix**. It seems to have no function, yet causes us an incredible amount of pain, and even death, if it gets infected.
  - ii. The fact that Hawaii has an INTERstate. Makes no sense.
  - iii. The platypus. Craziest looking animal ever. Makes no sense.
  - iv. The fact that people say, “Heads Up!” when you should really duck!
  - v. Or, my favorite, why my dental hygienist wants to ask me questions with her entire hand in my mouth! Makes no sense!
- B. There are just some things in this life that don’t make any sense. And even the wisest person in the world, while they may be able to explain some of the things on MY list, would have a list of their own.
- C. I sometimes think that God made certain things that are fairly simple and normal in life, yet make no sense to us, to remind us, every day, that we don’t have it all figured out. In fact, I think God did that SO THAT we would concede that we are not God.
- D. As we dive a little deeper into Paul’s letter to the first-century church of Corinth today, Paul took time in his letter to help the church understand human nature and God’s nature. In our human nature, we tend toward sinful things like quarreling and division and boasting - things that were happening in the Corinthian church. And yet, we humans are created in God’s image and we have been gifted with the characteristics of God. What’s the deal?
- E. There are things that we just will never fully understand about the ways of God: atonement of our sin on the cross of Christ is one. The resurrection of Jesus is another (or Lazarus or anyone else). The presence of the Holy Spirit IN US. We will never fully understand forgiveness, salvation, or everlasting

life. Yet, all of those things have been given to us, through Jesus, in God's wisdom and power.

- F. We can do none of those things on our own...only GOD can do those. And, to the world, they make no sense.
- G. This third message in this series we've entitled: CALLED to BE WISE. The church, in the first century, and today, is CALLED - saved and set apart for God's holy purposes. We are called to BE STEADFAST by God's grace. Called to BE UNIFIED around the Cross of Christ. Called to BE WISE in God's wisdom and power. Called to BE SPIRIT-FILLED. And Called to BE READY.
- H. This message is about being **wise**. And it may seem like being wise, while having so many things in our lives that don't make sense, would be a contradiction. That may be, but what WE think is weak, God knows is strong. And what we think is foolish, God knows is wise.
- I. Apparently, some people in the Church of Corinth thought they were wise AND strong by human standards. And, to keep the thread from the first two messages going here, there were some in the church that were causing division because they thought they were wise and strong by human standards.
- J. What we'll find is that God's standards are much MUCH different than our human standards...and if we choose to rely on our human standards for our salvation, God is pretty clear that we are foolish and weak.
- K. Here's where we're heading (for your notes): **I am saved only in God's wisdom and power.**
- L. And, actually what Paul tells the church is that if we think we are strong and wise, and even try to **boast or brag** in our human strength or wisdom, we will end up weak and foolish...and perishing. Yet, if we trust in God's power and wisdom, we are saved. And THAT will look foolish and weak to the world. It just doesn't make sense...like the platypus!
- M. **Let's Pray! (Jesus you are Lord...)**
- N. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1, starting where we left off last week, in verse 18. Ready? Let me hear those pages turning... :)

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

- i. In the first 17 verses of this letter, Paul wrote that the church was to be steadfast in all of their struggles, because God's grace - God's undeserved favor - was upon those who believe. And, yet, even in that state of grace, people in the church were lining up in certain camps, led by humans - Paul, Apollos, and Peter. And by aligning themselves to one of those men -

flawed and sinful human men - there were cliques forming, dividing the church into factions. Not good! Paul said, "Stop it!"

- ii. Paul called them, then, to align themselves together, around the Cross...to be unified in the very basic truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus. All other thoughts that divide are secondary when the church rallies around the cross together...as we saw last week at the end of worship!
- iii. But, Paul wrote, THAT - rallying around the Cross - is going to cost you, Church. Dearly. It will certainly unify you as a church. But, when you stop using worldly wisdom and power to convince yourselves that you should follow one of these men more than Jesus, the world (maybe even some in the church) will say, "That makes no sense."
- iv. Paul said it like this, in verse 18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."
- v. Being saved by God, and given everlasting life with Him, by simply believing that the man who hung on a Roman cross had the power to forgive your sins - which are sending you to hell - makes no sense!
- vi. Not only is it foolish, but it's weak, by human standards. Anyone who was present with Jesus in the last few days of his life were mostly convinced that they got it all wrong. They'd followed the wrong path. They'd put their eggs in the wrong basket. It didn't make any sense. He was dead and buried. How foolish! How weak!
- vii. And YET, we can safely say that God did exactly what He did - and Jesus willingly went to that cross to die - so that the power and wisdom of God would be shown in ways that the early believers never imagined in their own wisdom and worldview.
- viii. In the church in Corinth, just like churches today, there are people from different backgrounds. In the case of the Corinthians, some in the church were Jews, with a Jewish worldview. Others were Greeks or Gentiles, with a gentile worldview. Apparently, though, some of the Jews and the Greeks were boasting in the fact that they had a worldview that they thought would save them...or at least give them answers to their questions about God.
  - a. The Jewish worldview, as it related to God, included a primary emphasis on signs and wonders, indicating God's POWER. That's why Jesus, when interacting with Jewish people, was inclined to perform miracles of healing and casting out demons. Signs and wonders were indications of God's STRENGTH...God's POWER.

- b. The worldview of the gentiles in the church, on the other hand, was more focused on logical arguments and wisdom. They were expert debaters and they spent lots of time talking and convincing each other.
- c. You can see the tension in these two worldview, right? But they were all part of this body of Christ - this church - in this place. One view was about what you couldn't see or prove, except with experience - power. And the other was focused on that which you could logically prove - with your mind.
- d. The Cross - *listen now* - the CROSS was foolishness to the Gentiles...it made no sense because it seemed like there was no wisdom in it. Why would God use this implement of torture and death to give life? Illogical, as Mr. Spock would say.
- e. AND, the CROSS was weak to the Jews...it made no sense that God would strip all power away by killing Jesus on the cross. An act of utter weakness would prove his power to save? Pathetic, they would say.
- ix. And YET, God called both Jew and Greek, to the CROSS to be saved. That wasn't what Paul ultimately said divided people, even though, IN THE CHURCH, they were arguing about power and weakness, foolishness and wisdom. No, Paul said the thing that would ACTUALLY divide people - all people - was their RESPONSE to the gospel as GOD presented it to them. Either they were in the category of "those who are perishing" OR, they were "those who are being saved (those who are being called)". There was no Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slaves nor free, Paul would later write.
- x. There was only those being saved by God's grace through faith in this thing that SEEMED foolish and weak, OR they were perishing because they couldn't get passed the fact that it didn't make sense.
- xi. The Cross is both foolish and weak by human standards, but it is both wise and strong but God's standards. So wise and so strong, in fact, that by faith in God's plan, we are saved for everlasting life! That was Paul's point. The CROSS of Christ (which, you'll recall is, for Paul, one word that meant the whole tamale - Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension) IS the full POWER of God and the full WISDOM of God.
- xii. And the power and the wisdom are salvation for ALL who believe that.
- xiii. I am saved only in God's wisdom and power, not mine.**
- xiv. Paul then turned to face the Corinthians...look 'em in the eye...verse 26.

**B. READ 1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

- i. I love the way Paul wrote this section.
- ii. He turned the spotlight onto the church and its members. What about you? Consider your own CALL. The Greek word for CALL he uses is klesis,

which is a status as those who are saved by grace through faith and who are being used for God's holy purposes.

- iii. He then said (this is my paraphrase), "Look, y'all are not wise, as you gentiles think of wise. Y'all aren't powerful, from the worldview of you Jews. In fact, you're low-born...from the sticks."
- iv. Eugene Peterson said it better, "Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies"?"
- v. I'm a nobody. You're a nobody. We're nobodies! How's THAT for pastoral encouragement?!?!?
- vi. Paul KNEW that the church in Corinth wasn't going to change the world in human power or wise in human wisdom - or lack thereof! If they tried to use their strength and wisdom, the world would never be moved. Why would that even work? We're talking about ETERNAL SALVATION!
- vii. God had the church RIGHT where He wanted them. Weak and foolish... and **YET SAVED!**
- viii. God will use **one weak fool who is saved** before He uses 100 wise and strong person who is not...although he can and does do both, for His glory.
- ix. The difference is that when God uses the saved foolish and weak one to show His glory, it shames the strong and wise one. When God uses a saved someone who is lowly and despised, for His glory, the things of this world are reduced to nothing and the things of God's kingdom are revealed as everything.
- x. And God did it this way, because we are so tempted to boast in our own strength and wisdom. Just take a minute (not now) to scroll any social media feed. Or listen to any debate in Congress. Or listen to any talk show.
- xi. If we KNOW that we're nothing, but that God does it all, the church is growing in humility and grace and invitation to have other join us at the Cross of Christ.
- xii. HE is our source of real life. HE became the fullness of God's wisdom and strength. HE is how the church is in right relationship with God. Jesus is our example and who we want to be like. Jesus is the one who redeems us so that we can be saved.
- xiii. I am saved only in God's wisdom and power, not mine.

### 3. Application

- A. So how does this apply to us...to you and to me? Paul called the early church to be wise...in God's wisdom and in God's power.
- B. What about you and me?
- C. First, we need to agree that wisdom, itself, is not useless. Paul does not say wisdom is useless...he said that our human wisdom cannot explain God or save us...only God's wisdom in the cross of Jesus can do that.
- i. Your education is not bad, it's just not the way to be saved.
  - ii. Your status can be used for God's glory if you are known by God and know God.
  - iii. Wisdom is not useless because you and I must take time to understand the culture in which we live and understand the church in our culture.
  - iv. And the thing we quickly realize is that the culture has ONE message - one worldview. And the church has a very different worldview - a kingdom view. We are called to be wise as we speak into our culture with a message that seems foolish and weak to those who are perishing.
  - v. The church's wisdom and understanding and education and plans and programs and church growth models may bring people to the church building, but NONE of those will not save anyone.
  - vi. The only thing that will save anyone - you and me included, every day - is the fact that **God's weakness is far greater than our strongest strength.** And God's **foolishness is far wiser than our keenest wisdom.** There's no overlap there...but there is a gap between what we know and our human abilities and even the weakest and foolish things of God.
- D. Divine wisdom and power are revealed through the weak and foolish things according our our standards.
- E. Jeremiah 9:23-24 gives us very good counsel for our lives: "Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom; do not let the mighty boast in their might; do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord."
- F. The Cross is weak and foolish to the world, but God is using it to change everything from death to life until Jesus returns. **Are you being changed from death to life because of your faith in the Cross of Christ?**
- G. God used the Corinthian church, low-born, weak, foolish, without status or influence, to change the lives of COUNTLESS people because they were willing to be called by God. **Are you, right now, in your weakness, lack of wisdom, and low-status being used by God to influence someone's life for Christ?**

- H. God used Paul's preaching about Jesus - not eloquent in speech or logic - to spread the gospel to the world! **Even though you may not be a "professional" preacher, are you praying that God give you the words to say about Him and then praying that God would open your mouth?**
- I. If your answer was no...or Sometimes...or maybe or yes or I don't know... when we're honest in our weakness, foolishness, and status before the Lord, He will surely use us. We are called, church! Together!
  - i. Called to be steadfast when the going gets tough.
  - ii. Called to be unified when quarreling seeks to divide us.
  - iii. Called to be WISE in God's wisdom and STRONG in God's strength...not the worlds...not our own.
- J. And this is a process...a lifetime process...righteousness is a process of aligning every thought and deed with God's standard. Sanctification is a process of becoming more like Jesus every day as you study and pray. Redemption is a process of turning every part of your life over to Christ so that He can use it for His holy purposes.
- K. Be Wise...even though the world will think it strange.

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. Let me leave us with this. When God calls us to be a church that follows him in 2023, we KNOW that it means we will be misunderstood, maligned, ignored, and otherwise marginalized by those who think it's foolish and weak to give our lives to love and serve a man who died on a cross 2000 years ago halfway around the world. We do things like give away our money and use our time to serve others and pray to and worship a God we can't see. It's foolish and weak to have faith. Yes...yes it is.
- B. But God is calling us to be steadfast, unified, and wise. And as we give up on our own wisdom and strength and yield our wills to the One who IS wisdom and strength, it will NOT be able to be explained. This is exactly where God wants us to be in this season of growth, change, and discernment.
- C. Here's a profound thought from Pastor Mark Sorenson. He said, **"Live a life that cannot be explained."** (repeat)
- D. When we live a life, in the church, that cannot be explained by the world, then we KNOW that we are living in God's wisdom and power and not our own.
- E. We are called and saved to BE WISE in Him alone. Live a life that cannot be explained, because of Jesus.
- F. **Let's pray...**