

## Sermon Notes

*Wisdom of the World; Wisdom for the World*

[*The Unlikely Glory of the Cross*]

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

February 1, 2015

### Introduction: Our Message

What kind of responses or reactions have you experienced when speaking of Jesus? How about when you become specific and speak of some of the basics of the faith we confess? Paul steps on to the turf of those who “don’t get it” and admits that this good news looks crazy, absurd, and like a load of madness. “For the message of the cross is madness (foolishness) to those who are perishing/being destroyed, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1:18).

### Standard Operating Procedure

The Lord does things this way. Others hear or see and think it impossible. Abraham and Sarah were “as good as dead” before the Lord gave the promised son. Paul reminds us of the tendency to trust our own strength (power) and understanding (wisdom), and by quoting the prophet Isaiah. At the time, Judah (Southern Kingdom) was threatened by Assyria, the very nation that had swept Israel (Northern Kingdom) into captivity some 150 years prior. Instead of trusting the Lord, they attempted to enlist Egypt as allies. This made good political sense...except that the Lord had promised to help them, protect them, and deliver them. The Lord’s deliverance was an unlikely salvation, and the message of the cross—and especially a crucified Deliverer!—sounds crazy. According to the wisdom of the world, this just doesn’t make sense.

### An Invitation About Your Identity (1:20-22)

Paul turns the opinions and expectations on their heads. He crafts a shrewd response; he both asks questions and offers invitations: Bring in the best, the counselors and the advisors, those who give advice for a living, who have their own shows and those who are published. Where are they? Bring them in. Paul knows that according to the way they think, and the way others look at the world, this crucified God message sounds lame, weak, and foolish...as if it cannot accomplish anything. The Jews are requesting a sign and the Greeks seek wisdom. These pursuits are the heart-beats of their national stories. The Jews are about a sign (of power/strength) and the Greeks are about wisdom (knowledge). These “serve as representatives of the two most common human idolatries” (Gordon Fee).

Requesting a sign (of power)—they were looking for God’s deliverance, or, at least a sign of it. Their national story is about Passover, when God “showed up” and did so with a whole pack of signs, and the last sign was about the Lord’s own *passing over*. For them, *that* was about power and deliverance! That’s what we’re looking for.

Seeking wisdom (against foolishness)—this is the high value of words, messages, and especially knowledge and wisdom. This makes this whole dying on the cross thing a bit hard to swallow. According to culture and sophistication, such an idea was rather crude, barbaric, and “lacked all which was fit for proper society.” Further, this was the land of many gods, and these gods were all known for their power.

### What then, do we do? (1:23-25)

In the face of this society, in the land of these demands, what does Paul do? What should the Christian do? The answer: “...but we preach Christ crucified” (1:23). For the Jews, this is a scandal (σκάνδαλον), a stumbling block, an offense. This simply reeks of weakness and does not show a God who will do unto them (the Romans) as they have been doing unto us. To the Greeks, this is raw foolishness; it is moronic (μωρία). It is a waste of time and not worth the breath to argue about.

“The Christian good news is all about God dying on a rubbish-heap at the wrong end of the Empire. It’s all about God babbling nonsense to a room full of philosophers. It’s all about the true God confronting the world of posturing, power, and prestige, and overthrowing it in order to set up his own kingdom, a kingdom in which the weak and the foolish find themselves just as welcome as the strong and the wise, if not more so” (N. T. Wright).

However, to those who are “the called” (whether you are Jewish or Greek), Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1:24). The cross was God in human flesh, putting Himself in our place; giving His life for His glory and for us. He received His own wrath, and this is an astonishing demonstration of the power and wisdom of God.

### Christ—Crucified (both!)

The message is not only: “Christ.” The message is: “Christ *crucified*.” This is specific and this is important, and this is where the scandal is found. Among the scholars or the societal elites, and even among those who are religious, we must ask if their god is *the* crucified God?

### The Shape of the Cross

The cross is to mark us in all that we do. This is part of the distinctiveness of the Church. The glory of the cross is an unlikely glory; it is not something that we would have invented.

How does the cross shape you in your every relationship and in your every duty?

Note how the power and wisdom of God overturns our pride.

First Corinthians & significant doctrine: from crucifixion to resurrection.

