

Sermon Notes

Further Down & Further Back

1 Corinthians 2:1-9

February 22, 2015

Introduction & Review

The title of this sermon may sound a little like something out of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, and it's supposed to, although modified. "Further Down" refers to the humble reality of preaching and the message preached, and "Further Back" refers to history, an ancient history.

Paul has addressed the Corinthian Church by giving thanks for them and speaking of the Lord's gifting of them. He also addresses some problems that surfaced there: their pride and their squabbles, and their groups. Paul knows that there are some there in that Roman society who were "deeply religious" and were looking for signs of power. He also knew that there were others who were filled the pride of some kind of sophisticated *sophia* (wisdom). This stuff was in Corinth and it had crept into the church. Paul deals with it by pointing to the unlikely glory of the cross and the unlikely glory of their calling.

Preaching & Preachers

Paul speaks of the beginning of his ministry in Corinth, and he refers to his message and his preaching as that which possesses an "unlikeliness" as well. As with the calling of the Corinthians—not many wise, mighty, or noble—so too with the preacher and his message. Paul's message was about something that was widely considered worthy of mockery. His message & his ministry was summarized as being about "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (2:2). Then and now, this message does not strike the ears as that which was majestic, or powerful, or wise.

The Jews were looking for signs of power & deliverance that were shaped like the Lord's overturning of Egypt; plagues and all, and this crucified Messiah looked like the precise opposite.

The Greeks who were looking for wisdom were not too ready to acknowledge this crucified "Rabbi" as any kind of "wisdom" that would be of any benefit, even if "it" could still speak from the grave.

Just to be clear (2:2)

When Paul wrote that he was determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified, he did not mean that he would not speak of any other subject. What he means is that Christ and His crucifixion inform and shape everything he was about...it even shaped him *as a minister*. Paul's ministry was itself in the shape of the cross.

Paul: Feeble with Power (2:3)

Paul speaks of being with the Corinthians in weakness, fear, and in much trembling.
Why?

In all of this we know that the Lord is pleased to enlist such to declare His unlikely ways, and as they do so, they are also *demonstrating* the Lord's ways. We know that Paul had some kind of ailment, and we also know that there seemed to be an increasingly low view of Paul among the Corinthians. Paul spoke of his "thorn in the flesh" and through this, the Lord's grace was shown to be sufficient, and the power of Christ was made visible (2 Cor. 12:7-9). In this, Paul was both feeble and given power. The ministers themselves are visible representations of the message they preach.

Paul's Ministry & the Faith of Others (2:4-6)

Paul said that his words and his message were not of the commonly expected shining wisdom of the day. Sadly, some of this can still be present today. The reality is, preaching is odd, and some think that "preaching has had its day" and it just cannot compete in this fast-paced, data-saturated age. Preaching is seen as "low" or "weak." It is "lacking" and "looks like it needs help." The further reality is, preaching is humble. It's basic. The Lord speaks and we are to listen...even through those fallible, yet appointed, messengers. This is part of the demonstration of the Spirit and power, and this also ensures that those who are called are not to place their faith in the speaker.

Just to be clear, again...

Paul is not against skilled communication. He is not arguing for preachers to be fusty mumblers. There is nothing in what Paul is saying that argues against a preacher being informed, skilled, winsome, or creative.

This is all part of the "Further Down." It's now time to see the "Further Back."

This is an Ancient Mystery...but it is now Revealed! (2:7-9)

Many of the speakers in Corinth would speak of hidden mysteries, and many still do today. Paul also speaks of mystery; it's one which goes *way* back. It is one ordained by the Lord long ago. He predestined it. All of this messes with the rulers and this is a mystery which had everything to do with the cross...and that messes with the rulers too!

The Message & Shape of the Cross

All of this is designed for the Lord to receive the glory; not us. Admittedly, the cross and the message of the cross stands rather uncomfortably with modern sentiment...and sometimes with our own.

What is a congregation shaped by the cross?

