

## “The Message of the Cross”

### 1 Corinthians 1:18–31

Pastor John Eom

#### Personal Introduction

- TGR: *[skip to Scripture Introduction]*
- JKT: Hello, church, friends, family and guests. I personally welcome to HMCC’s Good Friday service. My name is John and I am glad that you are joining us today. Especially if you are new and joining us for the first time today, I invite you to stick around a little bit after our service so that we can connect with you, share contact information and arrange future times to share a meal or a coffee together with others in the church. But for now, let’s get into God’s Word together. Please turn your bibles to today’s text in 1 Corinthians 1.

#### Scripture Introduction

Today is Good Friday, and as God’s people, we especially want to set aside the time and space to be together like this to clearly understand what happened at the cross of Jesus Christ. All the more we want to make sure we are truly moved by what Jesus Christ has done for us. This is the same purpose of the Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian church. There was a significant problem in the church that needed a supernatural solution. And that solution, according to Paul, is the message of the cross. So, please follow along as I read this text of scripture to see what this message is:

#### Scripture Reading

##### 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (ESV)

[Slide 1]

<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

[Slide 2]

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

[Slide 3]

<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

This is the Word of God. Amen.

#### Sermon Introduction

- I don’t know how many of us have had a moment to sit down and wonder, what a strange time it is that we are living in right now. Like events in history that we learned about in school, that I thought would only remain in those history books, are happening right now. And we’re living in an era of a global pandemic

that's taking the lives of loved ones. We're living in an age where actual war is going on in Ukraine, adding thousands of lives to the growing refugee crisis. Political tensions and riots seem to be spiking around the world right now in greater ways than what we have read about in the past.

- But if we think about it, the truth is that the world has always been broken. Things didn't just start to fall apart 2 years ago when COVID happened. But life in this broken world, in our broken bodies, has always been hopeless and helpless. Our hopelessness and helplessness becomes even more clear when we look at our problems with a spiritual lens: We are sinners, living in a sinful world, hurting and suffering. On a micro level, we are hurting and suffering because of our own sin, sin against others, and their sins against us. We are also hurting and suffering on a macro level because of the compounding effect of all the consequences of sin and the curse of sin in our world. And we were destined to remain in hopelessness and helplessness.
- But everything would change because of one event. And it happened 2000 years ago, on a hill, a place called Golgotha just outside the city of Jerusalem. It was where Jesus Christ was crucified. The Son of God, the Messiah. Innocent but hanging on a cross among criminals. And this one event at the cross of Christ was so powerful that even the message of the cross has power to address any issues that we face on our own and as a church. And we need to understand, especially today, especially in this season, that the cross of Christ is more than just a symbol of affiliation we have as Christians, more than a symbol that we wear around our neck or hang on our walls or stick on the back of our cars. The cross of Christ is a message. A powerful message. And this message not only explains the solution for our hopelessness, but the message of the cross offers all people a powerful solution, a powerful hope, that the church must internalize deeply in order to proclaim confidently to one another here and to the world...

### The One Thing

So the One Thing for us today is this:

*Make the message of the cross our only boast  
for Christ was crucified for our salvation as our only hope.*

### Overview

So, in order to see how we can make the message of the cross our only boast, we'll cover today's text by looking at two parts / four layers of the message of the cross from 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 that Paul explains. What is the message of the cross?

1. A humbling message (with two layers) of God's wisdom and power (vv.18-25)
2. A personal message (with two layers) of God's choice and glory (vv.26-31)

### Prayer for the Preaching of the Word

Not by man's eloquence or limited wisdom but by your wisdom and your power, speak to us. May your word and message of the cross cut deep to our hearts and souls. Expose us of our sin, gently lead us to repentance, grant unto us understanding and fill us again with your hope that we may continue walking in faith, and boasting about you alone to those you have placed in our lives.

So let's get to the first part of the message of the cross.

### Sermon Outline

#### I. A humbling message of God's wisdom and power (vv.18-25)

- Let's cover some context here to understand why Paul is writing this out to the Corinthians:
  - Paul was responding to the problem of divisions in the Corinthian church. Paul had heard that members from this church that he helped plant were quarreling and "choosing sides" according to their favorite leader in the church. They were making fan clubs for the church leader who was the wisest, the most eloquent, the most influential, the most charismatic, etc. And members were boasting about the leader who had baptized them. Our text picks up from where Paul was explaining that he was faithfully preaching in order to point people to Christ and his cross, not to

have the biggest fan club that was going to praise Paul over the other leaders. So there was the Paul-club and the Peter-club and the Apollos-club and some others who thought they were slick were saying, well I'm in the Jesus-club. So in this petty, childish fan-club battle, Paul steps in and confronts this church saying, "Was I crucified for you? Is there any power in me or in any human being that you have a reason to be arguing like this?" And in verse 17, he explains that the gospel that he preached was powerful not because of anything he had to offer as a mere messenger—it wasn't powerful because of his intelligence or his fancy vocabulary or speaking ability. The message of the cross is powerful because it is the message of Jesus Christ.

- To further his point, and to make sure the Corinthians understand, Paul says in verse 18:

#### 1 Corinthians 1:18-19 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

- This word that Paul keeps using here, folly or foolishness comes from the Greek word *moros*, which is where the English word, moron, comes from. I hope you never had to use this word on someone and that you never were called a moron before, but it's quite an insulting word to offend someone's intelligence. (I just need to make an important note here, especially for our teenagers, just because a word is in the Bible, it doesn't give you automatic permission to say this to your friends, ok?)
  - So Paul is saying to the Corinthians, why are you quarreling about man's eloquence and man's wisdom in the church? Don't you realize that to the world—everyone outside the church, everyone who does not believe in Jesus—don't you know that they all think we are morons and fools for believing this gospel? This gospel message that we believe says Jesus our Savior, was crucified, helplessly hanging and bleeding on a wooden cross. So if they think we're fools for believing this, why are you so caught up who you think is the wisest leader in the church?
- Paul continues his argument by quoting/citing scripture, so you know he is getting serious. In verse 19, Paul is giving his interpretation of the prophecy in Isaiah 29:13-14. It is a prophecy spoken against God's people, Israel, who externally look like they fear and obey God because they just try to follow all the rules and religious traditions, and they say all the right things. But internally, their hearts were far from God. And God hated such empty religious activity. To them God said:

#### Isaiah 29:14 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup>therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden."

- So by Paul bringing up this verse in Isaiah, he is making the connection for the Corinthians that they are guilty of empty hearts getting caught up in quarreling over the lesser things. Their wonder was in human eloquence and human wisdom. Their wonder was not solely in God's wisdom in his plan of salvation that he could save any sinner from their sins. They were caught up in their own human wisdom, which judges people by their skills and abilities and outward appearances. And so, what the Corinthians valued was exactly what the world valued.
  - All of us here who believe in Jesus Christ, who believe that he died in our place for our sins, we must understand this: That we are not supposed to look like, think like, or act like those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus said in his prayer just before he went to the cross (John 17:14-15) that his disciples are in the world but not of the world. This means there is a fundamental difference between the reason and purpose for our lives compared to the lives of those who do not believe. Our values cannot be the same because our entire lives were changed when we came to believe the gospel message that Christ was crucified. We were once walking in our own limited wisdom, but now by faith, we are walking in God's wisdom.
  - So, my dear Brother and Sister in Christ, if a non-Christian was told how you make decisions and what you value most in life and what end goal you are pursuing, they should not be able to understand you on the core level. Especially if you have non-believers in your biological family. Because the message of the cross is folly and foolishness to them while the cross is God's wisdom for us. How could they ever understand the reason why we love and pray for our enemies is because a Jewish man who died on the cross taught us we should? How could they

agree with our reasoning that we generously give away our wealth and possessions, sacrificing ourselves for the benefit of serving others because of this Messiah who died for treason and blasphemy?

- Of course, we should try our best to explain and with great patience and love, but if they do not have faith in Christ, this gospel message is foolishness to their eyes and we are fools in their eyes for believing this. And what Paul is saying here is that we absolutely must be fools in their eyes because without faith they are unable to understand the message of the cross.
- Because of our faith in Jesus, our values and purpose in life should not be in complete sync with the wisdom, values and purposes of non-believers. If we are aligned with the world's wisdom, then it means we are not aligned with God's wisdom, and that means something is seriously wrong. And as long as we live in these bodies in this broken world, we will struggle with this.
- So, what should we do? We should make a clear distinct line between our wisdom and God's wisdom. This is an act of humility, a humility that understands and accepts the limits of our wisdom and worships God in awe of the greatness of his wisdom. This is why Paul continues to argue in v.20, And I needed to paraphrase this for myself so that I don't get confused. But Paul is simply arguing that no human being is wise before God.

### 1 Corinthians 1:20-21 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup>Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

- Before God, "who is actually wise? Is it the Jewish religious scribe who has memorized all of scripture? No. Or how about the greatest thinker, philosopher and debater of this age? Also, no." While such people would be considered wise in the eyes of the world, before God, no one is wise.
  - God is so wise that he can take the cross—what looks like complete foolishness—and use it to save foolish sinners. God is so wise that he can use the foolish sinners he saved to save other foolish sinners through preaching this foolish message of the cross. God is so wise, that even when everything looks foolish to us, he is working out His wisdom according to his pleasure for our salvation.
    - So there is this tension that we feel, where we feel the limits of our wisdom in trying to understand God's wisdom. This tension is expressed through our questions, when we ask God, "Why, God? How could this be, God? How long, God?". And we're trying to wrestle with the truths of God we understand in our minds along with the pain and suffering we feel in our hearts. And I know many of us have been asking more questions like this during this season of our lives. I want to encourage you from God's Word that this tension can be resolved (not fully answered but resolved) when we look to the cross of Christ with eyes of faith.
    - And when we do, we realize we can trust in God's wisdom because God's wisdom is always accompanied with God's power. And we see both his wisdom and power in the message of the cross.

### 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

- Paul says in verse 22, Jews demand signs as evidence of true power because God has to prove himself, prove his wisdom. But we know from history that even if the Red Sea parted into two, even if bread fell from heaven, even if water came flowing from a rock in the desert, no miracle will satisfy the faithless demands for a sign from God.
  - Greeks seek wisdom because they pursue knowledge to gather deep understanding of our world. And we know that this pursuit is driven by the desire to be like God himself. We see in Genesis 3 that matter how much Adam and Eve were given, they still wanted what they should not have. And for the desire of knowledge and to be wise like God by their own means, ignorantly independent from God, they ate of the forbidden fruit and were cast out of God's presence.

- This isn't just about the Jews and Greeks. Isn't this a proper description of us? Don't we often find ourselves faithlessly demanding of God? Especially when we are hurting and when we feel that God has abandoned us? ("God, I want this, I want that, without trusting that God knows our every need.)
- Also, don't we find ourselves often ignorantly independent from God? Especially when we think our lives are going well, we feel that we have everything we need? Don't we fail to remember God when we feel like we can handle aspects of our lives on our own? When we feel like we have everything under control?
- Still, even to such a faithlessly demanding, ignorantly independent people, God has graciously given a great miracle and a great means of knowing God's wisdom. How loving and how merciful is God? Instead of simply destroying people—which he could rightly do in his wisdom and in his power—instead of casting us further away from his presence completely, God still sent Jesus Christ to be crucified and to die for the penalty of our sins in our place! And for anyone who believes this message, it is because God has given the gift of faith, according to his wisdom and his power. He has given us faith to believe what looks like a scandalous stumbling block and sounds like complete foolishness. But we are able to say, "to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1:18). And to the world that still thinks this message is scandalous and ridiculous, even still, we are not ashamed of this message, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).
- To those who are called, we see with faith how the message of the cross is a message of God's wisdom and his power. And we can see the horror of the cross with great humility. So, yes it is true. Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross as a criminal, because he chose to die for our sins. Yes, Jesus our Lord and Savior, helplessly hung on there bleeding so that we could be saved. We had no other solution for our sins. And by faith, God has invited us to understand and trust God's wisdom, and believe in his power. I pray you are encouraged by this, especially in your pain and suffering. Because even in our foolishness, if by faith we can come to understand God's wisdom in crucifying Christ on the cross, then we can receive anything else God does in our lives that we just can't seem to understand yet. And our hope remains in God's wisdom and God's power. I hope you can truly understand this because I have no other encouragement for you—this is what God teaches us in his Word. If by faith we can come to understand God's wisdom in crucifying Christ on the cross, then we can receive anything else God does in our lives that we just can't seem to understand yet. May we humble ourselves yet again before the foot of the cross, before God's wisdom and his power.
- For those of us here who have not yet believed in Jesus Christ, I am so glad that you are here. And we want you to know that we humbly extend this invitation to you, to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. And we pray that you can accept this message of the cross by faith and come to learn and understand the depths of God's wisdom and power with us as we continue to study and share God's Word together. This is a lifelong journey of walking in faith with Jesus and we would love to walk with you. I just want to encourage you to keep taking steps to learn and understand this message of the cross.
- So, the message of the cross is a humbling message for all of us as we learn about God's wisdom and power. Let's continue to the second part of this text where Paul explains that through the cross of Christ, God desired us to be in his presence, in a relationship with him. He explains that the message of the cross is also a personal message of God's choice and God's glory.

## II. A personal message of God's choice and glory (vv.26-31)

### 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 (ESV)

<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

- Paul takes a personal turn in his argument against the Corinthians. He says, “consider your calling,” consider how God called you to be with Him. Consider how God chose you to save you from the bondage of sin to become His beloved people and servants in His Kingdom. Consider the state you are in when God called you.
  - Paul gets very real with the Corinthians. Just before, we saw Paul describing how they were nothing before God. Just foolish, faithless, ignorant sinners before a holy, wise, powerful God. Now, starting verse 26, Paul now points out the reality that they were also nothing according to human standards: “not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful/influential, not many were of noble birth and of high status.” While the world would ignore you, because you were foolish, weak, lowly in the eyes of the world, God called you and chose you.
    - We have to consider our calling now as well. Why did God call me? Why did God choose me? Yes, a significant part of that reason is to extend his grace and mercy to us out of his love and compassion—this is true. But there is another significant part of this reason that we often fail to realize. According to verses 27-28, God chose us because he wants to show to the world who He is, and how he works his wisdom and power. He wants to show how he can save foolish and weak people who have nothing and who are nothing in the world and use them to showcase God’s wisdom and power. So do you see what’s going on here?
  - If we were foolish, weak and lowly when God called us, why would we ever have a reason to be so proud of ourselves now? How could we ever possibly think that we had anything to do with God choosing and calling us? We had nothing good to offer God and we had nothing in the eyes of the world. So, if there is any pride in us about ourselves, what would our pride be based on?
    - Do we have time to be proud of our own wisdom and knowledge of the gospel while others have yet to know? Can we possibly be proud of our own salvation while there are millions around us who are perishing? Could we ever be proud about our own heavenly status and citizenship of God’s kingdom while others still remain lowly, outcast, without a place to rest their head with hope in God?
  - God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. Who are the foolish and weak ones Paul is talking about? It’s us. He’s talking about us.
    - This was always God’s wisdom and power throughout history. In the OT, God chose the nation of Israel as his treasured possession who will bless all the nations of the earth. God said he didn’t choose Israel because they were so great (because they weren’t). God chose Israel, even though they were the weakest and small of all nations, because of his steadfast love for them and because of his faithfulness to the covenant God made with Israel (Deut 7:6-10). And just like how Israel would forget their foolish, weak and humble beginnings, the Corinthian church was also forgetting. And sinful pride was entering into their hearts and into their church, ready to break their church apart.
    - Pride comes before a destructive fall (Prov 16:18) and pride can easily break our church apart. If we forget why God called and chose us, we can easily start thinking that maybe God chose me because I had something to offer. Because I have this special gift to bless others. Because I’m not that bad. Because I am better than others. We can imagine the danger of such foolish thoughts. The smallest gram of pride must be confessed and addressed before it takes over our foolish minds. And how should we do this? We quickly go to the presence of God...

### 1 Corinthians 1:29-31 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

- In the presence of God, before his great wisdom and his great power, all pride will be neutralized. If we start comparing ourselves to one another, there might be some ways we convince ourselves that we are better than some people. But once we start comparing ourselves to God, all human pride is void and nullified. Because even if God were foolish, he would still be wiser than the wisest man;

even if God were weak, he would still be stronger than the strongest man (1:25). So we can address our pride quickly and effectively in the presence of God. We mindfully remember and bring to attention our calling and we humble ourselves before him again and again. And every time pride seeps in...

- We remember the message of the cross of Christ. We take in the reality once again that Christ was crucified so that he wouldn't keep the wisdom of God and the power of God for himself, even when he rightfully could as God. As a result, in verse 30, we can trust that "we are in Christ Jesus, who is our wisdom, our righteousness, sanctification, our redemption."
  - We remember Christ was crucified so that our punishment for sin would be placed on him. So that foolish, weak, lowly sinners like us could put on his righteousness. We can be humbled and amazed that we could be called into a personal relationship with God and that he is sanctifying us, taking us away from the power of sin. This is the amazing and glorious message of the cross. It's great news of our redemption as Christ has bought us our freedom from the bondage and penalty of sin. It had nothing to do with us but everything to do with God. So this message of the cross silences any pride in ourselves before God.
- Paul instructs us in verse 31 by quoting once more from the OT prophet, this time, Jeremiah, where he says, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (cf. Jer 9:23-24):
  - We never had anything to boast about before God other than God himself. Even if someone was wise, he could not boast in his wisdom. Even if one was mighty, he could not boast in his might. Even if one was rich, he could not boast in his riches. Because the only boast we can have before God is that we understand God's wisdom and that we know that our God is a God of steadfast love, justice and righteousness.
  - Paul summarizes all this in another way in...

#### Ephesians 2:9 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Church, Jesus Christ is our boasting. All of our pride melts away when we receive the message of the cross. And the only boasting we can have before God is in Christ alone.
  - So we need to really understand this as we close, so hear me out: If we can boast in the presence of God in Christ, should we not all the more boast about Christ crucified in the presence of people in our lives? If we can boast in the presence of God in Christ, should we not all the more boast about Christ crucified in the presence of people in our lives? Our prideful boasting has been redeemed in Christ to be a bold boasting of Christ to the world. God delights in this kind of boasting and so may his delight be our desire. May our goal be God's glory for now and forevermore.
  - Church, I know we are not having Missions Month next month, but we have Missions Good Friday right now. This is God's Word directing us to live for his mission. And God is wisely and powerfully advancing his mission. He has called and chosen each one of us, though we were nothing in the world, Christ became nothing for us on the cross, so that God could display his wisdom, his power, and his glory in our redeemed lives. So may we be comforted today by the message of Christ. And also compelled by the message of Christ. May we declare and herald this message of the cross to our friends, family and neighbors who have yet to hear of God's wisdom and power.
- What if we don't feel confident? What if we still feel weak in our abilities to speak and share about God's wisdom and power in the cross to others? Well, I hope that you can understand now, that we should feel incompetent, we should feel weak and ineffective in our abilities. Paul himself wrestled with this as God made sure to keep Paul humble faithful and dependent on the Lord:

#### 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- We are all broken vessels, we are sinful creatures. So in a strange way, but in God's way, this is how we boast in Christ. We boast in nothing of ourselves, but we boast in our weaknesses. And when the message of the cross is preached from our lips and our humility is felt from our hearts, God receives all the glory for his great wisdom and his great power. Lord God, use our church's boasting in Christ to bring yourself greater glory from all the peoples and nations of Indonesia and the world. Amen.

*Life Application: Next steps to take:*

- Carefully examine the areas of life where you reject God's wisdom and confess your sin and folly.
  - God's wisdom says all the darkness will be exposed by His light. God's wisdom says we all have fallen short of God's standard of holiness. God's wisdom says if we say we don't have sin, we are deceiving ourselves and God's truth is not in us. Our wisdom stands against God's wisdom. Our wisdom says, "It's ok, it's just 1 or 2 or a few times you sinned. Our wisdom says sin is not a big deal. Our wisdom says we can be wiser and stronger if we tried harder. Are there areas where you are rejecting God's wisdom? Are there areas of sin you have kept hidden because you are trusting in your own wisdom and abilities to manage our sin that we don't really have?"
  - May we humble ourselves, come aligned to God's wisdom, and confess our sin and foolishness to God and to one another.
- Completely trust in the power of God throughout the process of your salvation (sanctification).
  - Our calling is God's choice
  - We are being saved, in the process and progress of our salvation.
- Confidently boast in Christ and wisely share the message of the cross to others.
  - If we can boast in God's presence, we can boast in the presence of anyone that Christ was crucified
  - May the values and purpose of our lives sync with our message
  - And as you leave this service today, may you go in confident boasting in Christ alone.

The One Thing:

*Make the message of the cross our only boast  
for Christ was crucified for our salvation as our only hope.*