

# Church is

**a series in 1 Corinthians**

**“Church is ... about the cross.”**

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## INTRODUCTION

Good morning God's church!

Affirm?

Let's get into the message today. As I think most of you know, we are in a new series called "*Church is*" where we are busy going through the book of 1 Corinthians. It's a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in the city of Corinth.

Today we are picking up from where we left off last Sunday – Paul had challenged them... to realize that the Church did not belong to them, it belongs to who? God! That's right!

We also saw that God has given those who believe everything we need to live for Him. He has equipped us with every gift we need to be His holy people. Yes, we are not perfect, yes, we still make mistakes, but if we let Jesus lead, He will help us.

We were also challenged to respect spiritual authority. To hate sin. To love the church! Not to moan about her like we do when a meal is not to our liking at a restaurant, but to do our part and make her better! Because the church is the bride of Christ. We are to love the body and serve the body.

We were also told to be careful of putting our favourite leaders on pedestals above Christ, and to get rid of our little “groupies” in church, and to remember that we are all on the same team! The appeal Paul made was for maturity and for unity.

Today we are going to get into some more meaty stuff. We are going to looking at the cross – and we are going to be encouraged to make a call on what we really believe about the message of the cross... and how much we value the message cross in the church.

So last week – Church is His. This week’s message is...

## **CHURCH IS... ABOUT THE CROSS**

So how do you find out about something now days when you need an answer? I know for many people – they just pull out their phone and they Google it! Right?!

Come on – be honest now! Who of you have done that?! Right! It’s a thing now. If there’s something you don’t know – you ask Google. Or Siri, or Alexa – who all check with Google!

Well, although that works a lot of the time. How many of you know that there are some things that Google just can’t tell you?! I’m sure a lot of you can tell us some funny stories.

For example – If you ask Google what the meaning of life is...

## **(GOOGLE MEANING OF LIFE SLIDE)**

You will get One billion three hundred and eighty million options that you can read on the meaning of life – Wow - That is a lot of different opinions. Right? How many of you know that everyone has a opinion? And Google has One billion of them for us to go through.

So, of all those options – which is right?

## **HOW DO WE KNOW WHOSE WISDOM IS RIGHT?**

I believe that we have access to a lot of knowledge today – but there is a world of different between knowledge and wisdom. For example, the world knows a lot about sex, but the world is not very wise and intelligent when it comes to sex. I’m sure you would agree.

Wisdom is a big issue today, just as it was in the church in Corinth. What is wisdom, how to you get it – whose wisdom is right?

Some theologians have broken this next section in 1 Corinthians into two parts; a theology of worldly wisdom & a theology of the cross. Which is truly wise, and which is foolish?

## **IS BELIEVING IN THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS FOOLISH?**

You will have seen that the world is divided about Christianity – for many of us, it is the only way to salvation – yet so many people in the world look down on it. Some say that it is a crutch for the weak, others say it does not make sense to them. None of those arguments are new – all of them Paul debated in Corinth. So let's have a look what Paul writes to them;

### **1 Corinthians 1:18-19**

**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. <sup>19</sup> For it is written:** and he quotes the old testament **“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”**

Eugene Petersen says it like this; ***“The Message that points to Christ on the Cross... seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction... but for those on the way of salvation... it makes perfect sense.”***

What Paul is saying to the Church in Corinth is this: When it comes to the cross, it is the most important event in all of human history! It is literally the crux of all that we believe. It seems silly to some, but to those who are being saved – it is the power of God! And King of Kings, I want you to understand this as well!

The cross is where God revealed himself!

The cross is where Jesus – the son of God died for our sins!

The cross is where God conquered Satan, sin, death, hell, and demons!

The cross is where eternal life is given and promised.

The theology of the cross is such a major doctrine that it would be worth spending months just looking at the implications of Jesus' death on the cross. And Paul says, when you come to the cross, some people are going to say – *“Hey, that sounds like crazy talk! Surely you don't believe that! No sane individual would accept that stuff?”*

They are going to go – *“What, God was born of a virgin? God spent the 30 years of his life here on earth working a job as a carpenter? Then three years of miracles and then he died to take away the sins of the world because he himself never sinned? That is crazy talk – you people are nuts!”*

But for us, for Christians, we look at it and say, *“No, I can understand why you think it’s crazy, I get that it’s not conventional wisdom, but the cross is not foolish to me. It is the most glorious, wonderful, beautiful event in all of human history. This is where my Jesus, the Son of God showed his great love for me, by humbling himself, by dying in my place, by taking on all my horrible sin, and giving himself. It is glorious, and amazing, and wonderful and good!”*

The cross. Foolish to the world – but the power of God for us who believe.

The Corinthian Church found themselves suddenly in a culture war. They wanted to fit in. They wanted to be cool. They wanted to be like the Corinthians. They wanted to be rich and beautiful. They wanted to hang out at the temple of Amphrodite, with the temple priestesses from time to time. They wanted to be like the other Corinthians, cool, beautiful, successful, but they also wanted to be Christ followers!

And suddenly they started to realize that when you follow Jesus. You don’t always fit in. People think you are a little crazy! Because you know what? Jesus wasn’t always cool. Jesus wasn’t rich. Jesus wasn’t powerful. Jesus was simple, humble; he got executed, he died; he suffered. God didn’t come to us in the way that any of us would’ve expected, and God doesn’t look like the person that we all want to be. And so we’re left with a choice: do we go with the real Jesus, or the one that we want to fit our life and desires?

Are you prepared to be viewed as a fools for Christ by the world? Because the world thinks the message of the cross is foolish, the story of Jesus, is considered craziness.

Paul goes in verse 20...

### **1 Corinthians 1:20-21**

**<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise person?** Who thinks they are really smart? Where’s the person with more degrees than Fahrenheit who thinks that they knows it all? **Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher 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 through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.**

Worldly wisdom will not lead you to Jesus. In all its wisdom – they world did not know him. Even though it seems like foolishness, God has saved those who believe in the message of the cross! Amen?!

Wisdom was a sought after quality in Corinth. At the time, a common saying was – “The wise man is king!” They all wanted to be wise! Not much has changed today.

For many people today, the idea of God sending His son to die for their sins is foolish – they don't think they need salvation, or, they think they are too bad to be saved that way, or, they think they can just live life as a good person. That's worldly wisdom. But it won't save you.

And that is why we need to be very careful in how we share the gospel and tell people about Jesus. Because for a lot of people, until God has worked in their hearts, and taken away their blindness, it seems crazy! So we need to love them, be patient with them, that God would open their eyes, and bring them closer to Jesus. And we also should take it personally when they don't get it! When they think you're totally nuts! I mean, I'll be honest with you – there are times when I am preaching on something – and I'm thinking to myself – wow! This stuff from the bible sounds totally crazy! But it's totally true, and I believe it.

The idea of God on the cross is shocking – it should be to all of us – the lengths that God went to reconcile us to Himself.

We will see in a minute how the different cultures of the day looked at it.

But what does our society say about the cross today? For some it is a sign of weakness that God died, that He didn't bring salvation in a more 'heroic' way. For others, the cross is an offensive sign. I'm not sure if you know that the Chinese government over the past year had been increasingly hard on Christians and one of those crackdowns had been the removal of crosses from public buildings:

Watch this clip...

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pzmd\\_eKsHI4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pzmd_eKsHI4) **crosses removed in China last year**

So why is the cross so offensive to some? And why is it so important?

## **WHY IS THE CROSS SO IMPORTANT?**

### **1 Corinthians 1:22-25**

**Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,<sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has 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 human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.**

For the Jews in Corinth... a crucified Messiah was an oxymoron – They thought; *“How can the saviour of the world be crucified – and by a criminal's death!”*

For the Greeks in Corinth... their view of God was often remote and aloof and heroic – just think of all those Greek hero gods... who displayed their power and might in the Greek mythological stories – They thought, *“How can God suffer?”*

Yet the real foolishness... is rejecting God’s salvation through the cross... because we think we know better than God. It has been said that: *The cross is the divine activity... which both embarrasses and embraces humanity.* On the one hand... the cross embarrasses us because it points out our weaknesses and our need of a saviour... but on the other hand it shows how God embraces us, the lengths that He would go to because of His love for us.

Paul is also saying in these verses that people are stubborn! Some people want to determine the way by which they will come to their conclusions about God, and that’s not right. That’s dangerous.

The Greek problem was that they demanded answers from God that would satisfy them - That was the Greek problem.

The Jewish problem was they demanded power and miracle and signs.

And so if you’re here today... and you say, *“I’m not a convinced Christian because I haven’t seen enough miracles, and my prayers have not been answered,”* or *“I’m not a Christian because my questions have not all been answered to my sufficient liking,”* Paul is saying, *“Then you have started your investigation of Jesus at the wrong place.”*

Don’t start with the speculation of the philosophers and the religious leaders, and human wisdom. Start with the revelation of the cross of Jesus Christ. Start at the cross and you ask, *“What does this tell me about God? What does this tell me about me? What does this tell me about the purpose of life? Maybe it’s not all about my glory. Maybe it’s not about just being rich and powerful and successful and famous if this is the perfect human being. Maybe it’s not about me always getting my way. Maybe it’s not about me getting all my questions answered.”*

But the Christians in Corinth are struggling to come to this place. They still were intrigued by the Greek thinking, and philosophers. So Paul says to them in verse 26:

**1 Corinthians 1:26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called.** How many of you right now if I said, *“Come on up and tell me about what you were like before you became a Christian”* – most of you wouldn’t want to do it. Right? You would say things like, *“Well, I used to struggle with some stuff,”* and that’s as much as we would get out of you, right?

Paul says to them - "Think back when you were not a Christian." Some of us became Christians young in life, so it is not as obvious, but these people in Corinth all became Christians later in life, as I did some of you. Think back to when you were a non-Christian. Paul says;

**Not many of you were wise by human standards;** He says, "No offense, but you guys weren't really smart! right **not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.** You never came from these fancy families.

**<sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,**

**<sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."**

Have you realized that when you boast, God is listening and watching? *"Ha, look what I did! Ha, look who I have become!"* And God's like, *"Wait a second. If you're smart, it's because I gave you that mind. If you're loved, it's because I gave you those people. If you're employed, it's because I gave you that job."*

You see friends, we're not better than anybody. We're sinners. If at any point Christians forget that we are sinners, that we're saved by grace, that it's a gift of God, not in ourselves, so that no one can boast, we lose sight of the cross. We lose sight of Jesus. We lose sight of the point.

So if you overcome something in your life, like some sin, say, "Thank you Jesus!" If you get good marks at school and come top of your class – say, "Thank you Jesus!" If you make the first team at school, or any team for that matter – say, "Thank you Jesus! You graduated from university – "Thank you, Jesus!" If you fall in love and get married, you say; "Thank you, Jesus!" If you become a parent – "Thank you, Jesus!" You get a job – "Thank you, Jesus!" I don't boast – I say, "Thank you, Jesus!"

And I boast in Jesus, and when people come up and they say, "Boy, that was incredible!" I say, "Thank you, but you should've seen me before I met Jesus." It didn't look like this. He has been so good to me. He's been so faithful to me. He's been so gracious to me. He's taken away my sin at the cross. He's taken away my shame and disgrace at the cross. He conquered the devil at the cross. He's given me new life at the cross. I know it sounds crazy, but I'm telling you: apart from Jesus, my life looks nothing like this. And I'm just so glad that he has been so good to me.

Paul says; with God... our IQ or fancy country club membership does not count anything toward salvation. Before God we are all inadequate and weak – yet He calls us and chooses to use us. He equips us with His wisdom.

So what do you boast about in your life? Your skills? Your achievements? The only thing we can truly boast about is what God has done for us.

Sometimes when God starts to do things in our lives... we can think that we're wonderful... and we forget that the only reason that things have changed... is because of Jesus, not because of us.

Paul understands this, and he wants the Corinthian Church to understand it too... So he says... in Chapter 2 vs 5;

**1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**

**<sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.**

Francis Chan says that the Corinthians wanted Paul to preach nicely crafted sermons, like the gifted orators they were familiar with in Corinth. But Paul refused. They wanted a preacher, who would give them the best of human wisdom. But Paul gave them the opposite. He did not want to diminish the cross in anyway. They wanted a Christian celebrity that they could praise! But Paul refused to let it be about him.

He could give them a great sermon – we know that! But rather. He gave them what they needed, rather than what they were demanding. You know friends, there are a lot of pressures on church leadership today to make Christianity more palatable, more popular, and less offensive.

But if its 11pm and your 7 year old asks for a coffee because he is tired, you need to tell him to go to sleep! Sleep is the solution. Not a mugg of coffee. Too often we just give people in church what they ask for, rather than what they really need.

Paul knew that what people needed more than anything else... it was not all the good stuff the Corinthian city had to offer. It was not another fancy smancy sermon. They never needed amazing communicators and skilled philosophical arguments and human wisdom! They needed Jesus Christ and him crucified. Not wise and persuasive words – but the Spirit's power!

So what is our role as a church here in the valley? It would be pretty cool to be the most popular church in the Valley, but that is not why we are here. We, like Paul are here to preach **Jesus Christ and him crucified!** You see without His death on the cross... we are nothing but hot air. No matter how successful, how intelligent, how popular, how on trendy we are, that's not what church is really about.

Church is about preaching the cross.

Church is about Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

So if you are here today, and you know you don't know this Jesus, who died for you on a cross – to save you. He is calling you home today. It's time to make your life right with your maker. You do that by repenting of your sin, and turning to Him. The bible says that the penalty of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus. This is the wonderful message of the cross. Don't put it off. Now is the time of salvation. You may never have another chance. Respond to God today.

**Worship team – please would you come up.**

## **PRAYER**

### **Gospel Call.**

And so Lord Jesus, thank you for being our great God, our Savior, our King, our Lord, our Friend, our Intercessor, our Mediator, and our Helper.

Jesus, it is our prayer that you would work in our lives; that you would save us, that you would open our eyes, that you would change our hearts and minds. And that Jesus, when you do, that we wouldn't brag that we were chosen by grace for any reason that enables us to be proud.

May we have humility to know that it is not because of our power or wisdom or might that things get done in this world – it is by your grace.

## **CONCLUSION – LEAD INTO COMMUNION**

So we want to respond to God today... in humility, and in thanksgiving, as we head into a time of communion. It is our celebration of the cross. We are told in scripture that this is what the early church did! They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to prayer, and to the breaking of bread, and fellowship. to the fellowship. That's why we break bread together – to remember Jesus. To remember the cross.

We do this together as a church family. If you're a visitor, a non-Christian, don't feel under any pressure to participate. This is just one of the ways we

remember the cross and what Jesus did for us. It is part of our response to God.