

Good morning! Let's pray.

I'm thankful for another opportunity to bring a message to my brothers and sisters in Christ on the Lord's day. The title of the sermon this morning is *The Foolishness of God*, and our scripture is 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

When I first believed in the Lord, I remember the unspeakable joy I had knowing that my sins were both removed and forgiven based on Christ's work on the cross. I was relieved to escape God's wrath against the sins I was guilty of. I remember when I heard the gospel for the first time, I was immediately convinced it was true. It was crystal clear to me. There was nothing anyone could say to me that would have made me abandon my newfound faith. I would imagine many of you had a similar experience.

It didn't take long for my joy in the Lord to be joined with intense concern and sadness for my unsaved friends and family. I wanted them to know what I knew. I naively thought that since I had accepted Christ as my Savior that they would soon follow. I thought all they needed was to hear the gospel and they would recognize the truth like I had. That's not what happened. Instead, there were awkward conversations that didn't go the way I hoped.

Despite that, my desire to be used by God in the salvation of my friends and family has not waned over the years. It has only increased.

Listen to the encouragement scripture gives to making yourself useful to God in the salvation of others:

- Proverbs 11:30 - **The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise.**
- Daniel 12:3 - **Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.**

When Jesus began to call his apostles he said, **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** (Matthew 4:19) This pulls at me. I also want to be a fisher of men.

Paul was so eager to see men saved that he was willing to become a servant though he was free. To the Jews he became as a Jew. To those under the law, as under the law. He said, **“to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”** (1 Cor 9:22)

So great was his desire to see his fellow Israelites saved that he would have even traded places with them if it were possible. Romans 9:3 - **For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh...**

I would like to be able to say that there is a long list of people I've helped lead to the Lord, but I cannot. If I'm being honest, to my knowledge, nobody has come to Christ for salvation as a direct result of my preaching the gospel to them, except, perhaps, my children. It hurts to say that.

Why do people reject the gospel? Why do they reject the greatest news - the single greatest act of love that has ever occurred? Why do they reject the Savior to their own eternal harm?

As we begin to think about these questions, let's read through our text this morning together. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25:

**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. 19 For it is written:**

**“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”**

**20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.**

I hesitated to title this message *The Foolishness of God*, because of how sensational it sounds. And I admit that it is quite strange to discuss God's foolishness as if He could be rightly called foolish. Before you get upset with me, please notice that I pulled that phrase directly from verse 25.

Paul is not saying that God is foolish in any legitimate sense. He is saying this: Arrogant, prideful man views God's message to the lost as foolishness. They turn their noses up at it. They reject belief in it as a sign of being simple-minded and weak. But, Paul says that which is considered foolishness from God is ultimately wiser than the wisdom of man. And that which is considered weakness from God is ultimately stronger than the strength of man.

Take a look at verse 18 to see what is being called foolish by those who deem themselves wiser than God. It is "the message of the cross". The message of the cross is synonymous with the gospel.

What is going to become clear from our text is that there are two kinds of people in this world and they have radically different reactions to the message of the cross.

That brings me to Lesson 1 Part 1 on your bulletins.

[Lesson 1: The message of the cross is...](#)  
[Part 1: foolish and weak to the perishing.](#)

Now, I know I am speaking predominantly to Christians who have a deep love for the cross. Consider the hymn we just sang: *The Old Rugged Cross*.

- We sang, “*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, The emblem of suffering and shame, And I love that old cross...*”
- And we sang, “*In the old rugged Cross, stain'd with blood so divine a wondrous beauty I see.*”

There is a giant cross on the wall behind me so that as we worship your eyes might be drawn upwards to reflect on its power and meaning. Christians love the cross, and rightly so.

Let me pull you up out of that thinking for a moment. Look at the first part of verse 18 in our text. **18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...**

Allow me to help you see the gospel the way it appears to a rejecting unbeliever. What if I came to you and announced I have an important message for you. It is the most significant message you will ever hear, and your response to it will have eternal ramifications for your soul. I call it *The Message of the Guillotine*. Or, *The Message of the Electric Chair*. *The Message of the Firing Squad*. *The Message of the Hangman's Noose*.

As Christians, we hardly think of the cross in this way. We've become so accustomed to it, that I fear the reality of it is in danger of being lost to us. Many people wear it as jewelry and may never give thought to what it really is. It is a gruesome implement of death. Not only that, but crucifixion was intended to be public and shameful. It was not merely designed to kill its victims, it was designed to humiliate them and slowly torture them until death.

What saving message can a cruel instrument of death like the cross have?

Not only do we cherish the cross, but we sing about the preciousness of the blood that flowed from Christ's wounds as He hung upon it. Think how this must sound in the ears of an unbeliever.

- We sing, "There's power in the blood."
- In another hymn we ask, "Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"
- We sang this morning, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins; and sinners, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains."

What salvation is there in this? (I'm speaking as an unbeliever.) What salvation is there in the blood of a man who lived two thousand years ago that died a criminal's death? Who talks about washing in someone else's blood? It is foolish and offensive in the ears of the lost.

In verse 18, Paul spoke broadly about all unbelievers saying "...**the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...**" But now, look at verses 22 and 23 with me.

**22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness...**

He narrows our focus down to two people groups - the Jews and the Greeks - because they exemplify why the message of the cross is rejected. Let's look at the Jews first.

Verse 22 says the Jews request a sign. Or they sought to verify the message through signs and miracles. We are familiar with this from the gospels, right?

Listen to how the Jews reacted after Jesus miraculously fed the five thousand.

**John 6:14-15 - 14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 Therefore**

**when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.**

This is exactly the sort of miracle working they were waiting for. They recognized him as “the Prophet” that Moses had spoken of - the one “like him” that would come in the future. They recognized Him as the King that would sit on David’s throne forever. Imagine the excitement.

They recognized Him as the one that would fulfill verses like Jeremiah 23:5-6

**5 “Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord,**

**“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;**

**A King shall reign and prosper,**

**And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.**

**6 In His days Judah will be saved,**

**And Israel will dwell safely;**

**Now this is His name by which He will be called:**

**THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

They thought, surely this is the Promised One who is now going to deliver us from the Roman occupation, and they wanted to take Him and make Him king. These men rightly identified Him as Messiah, but sadly they would have nothing to do with following Him in truth. They wanted Him to be Messiah on their terms, and not according to their true need which was spiritual, not physical.

The Pharisees and Sadducees also refused to see their spiritual need. They would often come to Him demanding that he show them a sign to validate His message, and what was His response to such demands?

Matthew 12:39-40 **“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as**

**Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**

Jesus refused to play along to their demands, pointing them instead to what He had really come to accomplish. Similar to how Jonah was sacrificed to save the sailors and thrown over the side of the ship to be swallowed up by a great fish, Jesus would be sacrificed to save others and buried in the earth. And like Jonah “rose again” after three days when he was spit up onto the beach, Jesus would rise again from the grave after three days.

In other words, He pointed them to His death and resurrection. He gave them Christ crucified as verse 23 says and they stumbled.

Their promised Messiah dying and being buried in the heart of the earth? Impossible. Dying on a tree becoming a curse according to the law? Never! What need did the self righteous Jews have with a dead Messiah? None. Listen to how they mocked Him on the cross: **“He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.** (Matthew 27:42)

Despite what they said, we know they would not have believed. For what is more difficult? To come down from the cross and continue living, or to rise from the dead?

They wanted a powerful Messiah - a miracle worker - a mighty king that would restore Israel to prominence. Instead Jesus was humble and meek. A man who set Himself on a path to die a humiliating and bloody death on a cross. That was not the power of God to them, it was the ultimate weakness.

To them, a dead crucified Messiah was no Messiah at all and they stumbled - largely to this very day.

The ancient Greeks were different. They sought to understand the origin of life, meaning, morality, and the gods (of which they had many) through wisdom. Or I should say, through human wisdom - philosophy. Many of these philosophical

movements were created over time and made popular by their promoters and adherents.

Some of the Greek's preconceived notions made Christianity especially absurd to them.

For instance, they believed that all matter was inherently evil while spiritual things were inherently good. The idea of God choosing to take on human flesh in the incarnation was senseless to them.

The Greek philosopher Celsus wrote, *"God is good and beautiful and happy and is in that which is most beautiful and best. If then 'He descends to men' it involves change for him, and change from good to bad, from beautiful to ugly, from happiness to unhappiness, from what is best to what is worst. Who would choose such a change?"*

Further, they believed that the gods were detached and apathetic - uncaring about matters that pertained to men. The idea of God intervening on behalf of man was completely foreign. The idea of God choosing to suffer on man's behalf was ridiculous.

Philosophy in ancient Greece was not judged purely on its intellectual merits, but also on style. Great orators were highly sought after and commanded big audiences. In addition to that, the people craved something new to hear. They didn't really desire the truth. They wanted to be entertained, and they wanted novelty.

We get a glimpse of Paul's interactions with the Greek people in the account of his time in Athens in Acts 17. If you'll remember, he reasoned with the people daily in the synagogues and the marketplace because he was moved by the city's idolatry. Acts 17:18 says, **"...certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, 'What does this babbling want to say?'"**

I can't help but picture them with their noses in the air when they said that. Despite the fact that they disdained Paul's oratorical skills, the novelty of what he was saying earned him an invitation to speak at the Areopagus.

Paul began his address there this way: Acts 17:22-23 - **“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:**

Their much celebrated wisdom had led them to know many false gods, but in all their wisdom - in all their boastful knowledge - they had not come to know the one true God. When Paul spoke of Jesus' death and resurrection their “great” wisdom led them to mockery.

From the Greeks we learn the message of the cross cannot be apprehended by pursuing earthly wisdom. Indeed it is apparent that the more learned a man becomes, the more he pursues philosophy, the more likely he is to scoff at God's message as utter foolishness.

From the Jews we learn the message of the cross cannot be perceived through signs. Despite the fact that Jesus did many public signs, still more were demanded. When Jesus gave the Jews the greatest sign - His death and resurrection - it did not serve to convince them, it only stumbled them further.

Despite these facts, it is evident that not all people who hear the message of the cross consider it weak and foolish. Some who hear the message have a completely different reaction.

This leads me to Lesson 1 Part 2 on your bulletins.

[Lesson 1: The message of the cross is...](#)

[Part 2: wisdom and power to those who are saved.](#)

Look at verse 18 again. **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.**

And skip down to verses 23 & 24. **23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

No earthly wisdom can be seen in the cross. But I tell you, if you are one who can perceive the wisdom of God in the cross, you will never fully plumb its depths. You will over, and over, and over, again be astounded and left speechless at the wisdom and power of God shown at the cross until you die and are transported to Heaven where you will forever praise Him for it.

You may find yourself doing the most mundane mindless tasks...washing dishes, doing the laundry, mowing the lawn, whatever it is, and your mind drifts to Christ's work on the cross, and some new aspect of His sacrifice occurs to you. Before you know it your eyes well up with tears and you are overwhelmed. Overwhelmed at the power and wisdom of God. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Nobody is able to perceive this power and wisdom unless they first understand their hopeless condition before God.

God is perfectly holy, perfectly righteous, and perfectly good. If you are not in Christ, that should not be comforting to you, it should be terrifying. It should keep you awake at night dreading the day you will stand before Him in judgment.

Why? Because mankind is not holy, in fact we are far, far from it. It's common for people to believe that God will judge them as if on a balance scale - weighing good deeds against bad. This is nowhere in scripture. In fact, we wouldn't tolerate this in an earthly judge. If a murderer went free because they were able to convince the

judge they were really a good person, we would rightly call that judge corrupt. He would be guilty of perverting justice. Good deeds cannot remove the stain of sin.

God is not only perfectly holy, but He is also perfectly just. When you combine these two attributes, it puts all of humanity into one category: condemned. If God gave us what we deserved, we'd all be condemned to an eternity in Hell. There is no amount of good works, no amount of law keeping, no amount of human effort that can change that. We are not good enough to be accepted by God because His standard of righteousness is perfection, and we have all fallen short.

There is then, this great dilemma. There is this great paradox, because God is not only perfectly holy and perfectly just, but He is also merciful and loving. How can God put his mercy and love on display if all of His creation is to be doomed? How can God show mercy and love to people when their sins have brought only condemnation upon them?

### **33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!**

(Romans 11:33)

What seems an impossible puzzle for man, is not impossible in the depths of God's wisdom. Before the foundations of the world He knew what He was going to do. He planned it out from the beginning. From the very first pages of scripture we see hints of the Father's plan. It begins to form slowly with a line here and a line there. We get greater and greater revelation as we progress through the pages of our bibles. God promised a Messiah. A Savior.

Can you see the power and wisdom of God at the cross?

You must understand that Jesus came by God's wise design - for a purpose. Acts 2:23 says that Jesus was delivered to be crucified **“by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God.”**

What this means is: He was not a victim. It wasn't weakness that led Him to the cross, as the Jews supposed, it was strength. He went to the cross willingly, fully knowing what awaited Him there. He was determined to fulfill the Father's plan.

Scripture says that **He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.** (Luke 9:51) In the garden of Gethsemane, when He was being arrested, Peter drew his sword and began to fight, but Jesus rebuked him saying, **"...do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"** (Matthew 26:53)

Think of it, Jesus was instrumental in the plan from the beginning:

- He created the tree from which the cross was hewn.
- He created the metal from which the nails were fashioned.
- He created the child who became the man whose arm held the hammer.
- He laid down and held still while that man pinned Him to the cross.

He possessed infinitely more power than needed to defend Himself, yet He did not, so that the scriptures might be fulfilled and sinners might be saved. That is a different sort of strength. It is the strength of will. It is the power to resolutely walk into great personal suffering, all the while possessing the power to stop it, in order to rescue the people you love.

Can you see the power and wisdom of God at the cross? You must look beyond it. That sounds strange, but you must look beyond the physical nature of Jesus' death on the cross and see the spiritual aspect of it.

Jesus did what was impossible for man to do - He made a way for man to be right with God - to be justified - declared righteous in His eyes. He made a way for sin to be removed from a sinner.

Since God is perfectly just, no sin will go unpunished. Jesus took those sins upon Himself - our idolatries, our thefts, our lies, our hatreds and lusts, our covetousness, all of it... He was innocent of all of it, but He took those sins upon

Himself, and willingly bore the wrath of God for them. He took the punishment from God that our sins deserved. And because He took them, we have been cleansed from them!

That is why we sing about “washing in His blood.” Oh, it may be offensive to the ears of an unbeliever, but to the believer it is the most precious truth imaginable!

Because of His work on the cross, if you are in Christ - God no longer sees a sinner worthy of wrath, He sees a saint - **holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight** as Col 1:22 says. Only the death of Christ is strong enough to remove sin. Next to that, how feeble do your good works appear?

Can you see the power and wisdom of God at the cross?

If you are in Christ - remember now your former life, how you had no power over sin. How it held you in its grip and enticed you to greater and greater depravity. Remember how it was never satisfied. How you could never get away from its temptations. Remember how you loved it and protected it. Remember how you hid it from others lest they discover it. Remember how it left you guilty and full of shame, but like a dog returning to its vomit you returned time and time again.

Those days are over, friends - if you are in Christ. In the wisdom and power of God, when a person believes the message of the cross they are born again. They become a new creation and everything about their former relationship to sin is changed.

1 John 3:9 says, **No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.**

Lest anyone misunderstand, I'm not saying that a person who believes the gospel will never sin again, I'm saying by the power of God they cannot remain in sin continually; hence the words, **“KEEP on sinning.”** In regeneration, God has

released us from the bondage of sin. He has given us a new heart. A heart that hates sin and loves God. He has made it possible even for His Holy Spirit to dwell within us.

From the moment a person comes to Christ for salvation, God's power is on display as He regenerates them and begins the work of conforming them to the image of His Son.

Can you see the power and wisdom of God at the cross?

Perhaps the greatest aspect of God's wisdom and power shown at the cross can be seen if you consider Satan's perspective. That sounds odd, but follow me.

Imagine with me Satan's wicked excitement in Jesus' last days. We know from scripture that he cannot act except with God's permission. So, picture his delight when he was able to enter into Judas - one of the twelve people closest to Jesus. Perhaps he even thought that God had made an oversight, like he was getting away with something.

Immediately after entering Judas, he went to the chief priests and sought to betray Jesus into their hands. Satan knew they wanted to kill Him, but they needed an opportunity while Jesus was away from the crowds and Satan was happy to provide them one.

All of the events leading up to Jesus' death on the cross must have given him more and more certainty of his victory.

- Think about what must have been going through his mind when he was able to lead the soldiers to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane at night and betray Him with a kiss.
- Think about how he saw the disciples scatter, leaving Jesus abandoned and alone.
- Imagine his amazement when he watched the soldiers beat Christ until he was unrecognizable.

- Or what about when the crowds could not be reasoned with when they overcame Pilates reluctance to send Him to the cross shouting, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!”

Isaiah 14:13-14 Gives us a window into Satan’s motivations. It says:

**13 For you have said in your heart:**

**‘I will ascend into heaven,**

**I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;**

**I will also sit on the mount of the congregation**

**On the farthest sides of the north;**

**14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,**

**I will be like the Most High.’**

As the nails pierced Christ’s flesh and the cross was lifted up into place, Satan must have been exultant - triumphing in his victory over the Holy One. Think of how he must have applauded himself in orchestrating the death of the Son of God. For a brief moment, it appeared that Satan had achieved his goal of elevating himself above God.

But it was all an illusion. The sword that Satan intended to wield against God turned in his hand and with it he cut himself down. In the wisdom of God the Father, Satan’s greatest victory became his greatest defeat. Instead of the death of the Savior resulting in an abundance of death, it burst forth in an abundance of life.

Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “**...that through death He (Jesus) might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**”

In the wisdom and power of God, at the cross, Jesus disarmed Satan of his greatest and most terrible weapon against us. He conquered death, and not only did He conquer death for Himself, but He conquered death for all who believe.

Jesus said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”** (John 11:25)

For those being saved, Christ, and Him crucified, is the epitome of the wisdom and power of God:

- This is why we don't tire of hearing the gospel preached. It's why we cling to it and defend it.
- It's why we support ministries that proclaim it.
- It's why missionaries leave their old lives behind and carry it to far away lands.
- It's why we would give up our lives before we would dare deny it.

So what explains the different reactions? Why do some hear the message of the cross and cherish it while others hear the message and despise it? Why do some believe and others reject? Is there something wrong with the message in that it appeals to one group, but not the other? Do we need to change our methods? If we are to be fishers of men, but the fish consider our bait foolishness, should we change it to something that appeals better to them?

These questions lead me to Lesson 2 on your bulletins.

[Lesson 2: It pleases God to save people in a “foolish” way.](#)

Look with me at verses 19-21.

**19 For it is written:**

**“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”**

**20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age?  
Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the**

**wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.**

In Lesson 2, I put the word “foolish” in scare quotes because this is not true foolishness. God’s message of salvation is only foolish in the sense that perishing people consider it so. Similarly, the “wisdom” in verse 19 is only wise to those who are perishing.

God is going to bring their so-called wisdom to nothing. He’s going to do this in a number of ways.

First, their wisdom will be revealed as the ultimate blunder. Whatever it produced for them in this life, whether it be riches, power, or esteem, it will not have produced salvation. Let’s recognize that earthly wisdom can lead to immense gain. People can build great piles of wealth, but they cannot gain eternal riches from wisdom. Everything they gained by it will be brought to nothing in the end.

The second way their wisdom is brought to nothing is that it is indefensible. Paul calls them out. **20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age?** Go ahead, who is going to volunteer to debate God about what is wise and what is foolish? Who is going to show up and declare themselves wiser than God? Who is going to say to Him, you should have done it this way instead? Step right up.

It was never God’s plan for man to gain salvation through wisdom. The first half of verse 21 says, **“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God...”**

And why not? Why didn’t God want people to come to know him through the pursuit of wisdom?

First of all, that would limit who could come to know God. If only the wisest among us could know Him, the simple would be excluded.

Second, think about who that would glorify. Who would be glorified? God or man? If a person had to devote themselves to the study of philosophy in order to know God, wouldn't that glorify man?

That is not the way people come to know God. In His wisdom, God has leveled the field so to speak. He has brought salvation even within the reach of young children.

Look at the last half of verse 21 with me. **"...it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, please hear me. My entire message has been building up to this point. This has tremendous application for us. Verse 21 demands our unwavering trust in God's wisdom.

Is Christ crucified truly **the power of God and the wisdom of God to us?** It was to Paul. I want you to think about Paul's singular focus on the gospel. Look briefly at the next chapter - 1 Corinthians 2:1-2.

**1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**

Friends, all that we have at our disposal to employ in the salvation of the people around us is a simple message - the message of the cross - Christ crucified. That's it. In God's wisdom, we have nothing else. Actually, it pleases God that we have nothing else.

Maybe this is disappointing to some. Perhaps this appears to be a very dull sword that God has handed us to take into battle. I mean, what if we had the power to perform miracles like the apostles had? What if we could heal this sick, or write John 3:16 across the sky? Wouldn't that make our message more believable?

According to the example of the Jews, we know it would not.

If all we have is the spoken message of the gospel, perhaps we should do everything we can to sharpen our swords.

- What if we devote ourselves to polishing the message?
- What if we agonize over every word we will say and how we will say it?
- What if we learn how to counter every objection that could be raised?
- What if we commit ourselves to developing long and deep relationships so the message may be better received?
- What if we become excellent debaters?
- What if we study so that we can tear down all the logical fallacies that a person may make?
- What if we research all the latest scientific evidences so that we can speak with authority about the human eye, or irreducible complexity in nature, or any number of other things that prove the existence of a Creator.

If ALL we have is a simple message, it's up to us to make it powerful and convincing, right? Wrong. As wonderful as many of these things are, they can only strengthen faith that is already established. They are altogether ineffective in the salvation of sinners.

When it comes to evangelism, many Christians act as if they have more faith in a method than they do in the message. If you rely on a method instead of the message, you are making the exact same mistake as the wise whose wisdom is being brought to nothing. You're appealing to man's wisdom rather than submitting to God's wisdom.

Beware! If we, in our great desire to be fishers of men, are tempted to change the bait, what have we gained? If we "win" a person through the wisdom of our words, or the soundness of our argument, they can be lost again the same way!

It pleases God to save people through the message preached. If you arm yourselves with the message of the cross, you have a very sharp sword indeed. You have the wisdom and power of God at your disposal. Don't disdain the sword God has given you! We have a simple message to proclaim and it is powerful to save sinners.

Why is it so powerful? Why can we have ultimate confidence in the gospel's effectiveness to save people despite the fact that most reject belief? Look with me at verse 23 and 24 again. What is the only difference between those who reject and those who accept?

These words: “**...but to those who are called...**”

This is so incredibly freeing when you understand this doctrine. It's not up to us to convince people to put their faith in Christ for salvation. It's not about the method we employ, or the wisdom of our speech, or the effectiveness of our argument.

The reason a “foolish” message can be entrusted to fallible people and still be suitable for something as consequential as the salvation of people is this: God is involved. He is in control. He ordains and orchestrates events so that those He calls will hear the message, and not only hear it, but hear wisdom and power in it.

Scripture gives us a wonderful picture of this. Acts 16:14: **Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.**

Jesus made it clear in his own words that the Father must call a person to salvation. In John 6:44, He said, “**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.**”

Some Christians become dismayed at this doctrine because of its implications. I would encourage you not to be dismayed, but to be encouraged. If God must call a person then we are freed from the guilt that we were insufficiently persuasive in

our methods. In other words, the burden is lifted from our shoulders. We must simply be faithful to deliver the message.

Not only that, but since God is sovereign in salvation, we are armed with yet another weapon in the battle to save the lost. We can go to our Father in prayer. Lift people up to God and say, “God, please save this person. Please give me opportunity to preach your message to them.” As long as they still live, there is hope.

Charles Spurgeon said, *“If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.”*

This is extremely convicting to me. I’m preaching this to myself. I desire to see people saved, yet I often freeze up. Opportunities pass by.

May God give us great boldness to proclaim His message to those who are perishing. May we be willing to accept the ridicule from the worldly wise, so that we can reap the harvest of those God has called.

Now, we are not emotionally detached from this playing out in the lives of our friends, family, and acquaintances. We know that severe, irreversible, terrible judgment is coming upon them. We ache for those who reject the message of salvation. We weep with the knowledge of what they are consigning themselves to, and what they are giving up. We desperately want them to see what we see. We want them to enter an eternity in Heaven with us. It's heart-breaking!

While I was preparing for this message, I happened also to be studying the book of Jeremiah. I couldn’t help but notice some similarities we have with him.

He was known as the weeping prophet because the message God sent him to preach was rejected by the people. Like him, we weep for those who reject the message God has given us.

He was sent to warn Judah of an imminent invasion from Babylon because of their wickedness and idolatry. We have been sent by God to warn people of an imminent judgment for their sin.

He called for people to repent, but nobody responded. We call for repentance, but most do not respond.

From his own words in Jeremiah 6:10:

**To whom shall I speak and give warning,  
That they may hear?  
Indeed their ear is uncircumcised,  
And they cannot give heed.  
Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them;  
They have no delight in it.**

Who can identify with Jeremiah? I can. Nearly every time I have an opportunity to preach the gospel to someone it is met with reproach. There is no delight in it. It is terribly sad for us, but you need to understand that success is not only measured in conversions, it is measured in faithfulness.

Listen to Jeremiah 25:3:

**3 “From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the Lord has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened.**

Jeremiah was committed to the message he was given to preach. He didn't waver. He didn't change it despite the fact that it seemed to be universally rejected. He was resolute. And he was heart-broken because the people wouldn't listen.

When the attackers came and besieged the city, Jeremiah proclaimed their only hope of survival was to turn themselves over to the invading force. To surrender. To willingly put themselves into the hands of the ones sent to judge them.

Jeremiah 21:8-9 says:

**8 “Now you shall say to this people, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. 9 He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes out and defects to the Chaldeans who besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be as a prize to him.**

Surrender? To the invading force? How foolish that must have sounded to those who rejected God's word. Leave the protection of the walls and commit yourselves into the hands of them who came to judge you. It would take a great deal of faith in God's word to do so.

That is not so different from our message today. There is an overwhelming catastrophic judgment coming upon every person who rejects the message of the cross. The wrath of God is coming and your only hope is to abandon all human wisdom and throw yourself upon the Savior's mercy to live. In effect, you must abandon the “walls” of human wisdom and commit yourselves to the wisdom of God.

This is how Paul words it a couple chapters after our text. 1 Cor 3:18-19:

**18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.**

Jeremiah's ministry appears to be entirely fruitless. The people refused to repent and they refused to believe. If I'm being honest, that is how I feel with my efforts to preach to the lost.

As fruitless as Jeremiah's ministry appears, Jeremiah 39:9 gives a small hint that some might have heeded God's warning through Jeremiah after all.

**9 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive to Babylon the remnant of the people who remained in the city and those who defected to him...**

No matter how bleak things may seem.... No matter how many times you've shared the gospel only to have it rejected again and again.... We must resist the temptation to judge the gospel's effectiveness pragmatically. Jeremiah preached to many people, but God spared very few. If our desire is to be used by God in the salvation of others, we must continue to put our trust in His wisdom and hold fast to the message that is considered foolish by the world. Here's why, look at verse 25:

**25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.**

This morning I've spoken at great length ABOUT the gospel, now allow me a moment to proclaim it. If you are an unbeliever here this morning, this is the message that saves those who believe.

The message of the cross is this: Jesus Christ - God the Son - became a man, and walked this earth in righteousness two thousand years ago. In full cooperation with God's sovereign plan to save sinners, He willingly allowed Himself to be crucified. He suffered death on the cross not for any sin that He had done, but for our sins. God imputed our sins to Him and then poured out His wrath upon His Son. He died in our place. He suffered the wrath of God for us. He was buried and on the third

day He rose again - signifying that God had accepted the sacrifice. Because He lives, you might live also if you place your faith in the message of the cross.

If you have any questions about anything I've said this morning, I'll be up front after service and would consider it a joy to speak with you.

Let's pray.