

THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS

TEXT: I COR. 1:18-25

INTRODUCTION:

1. An unsaved lady went to an evangelistic meeting at a church where they had two men preaching.
2. When she came home after the meeting, her grandchildren asked her about the meeting. She said, "I don't understand it. The first preacher said he was speaking primarily to those who were saved. I said to myself, 'I wonder who these people are who are so good that they know already that they are going to heaven when they die!'"
3. "Then the second preacher said he was going to speak to those who were lost, and I thought, 'Who are these lost souls that are so wicked that they are going to spend eternity in hell?' So there were two preachers, but there was no preaching for me!"
4. Many people are just like that lady. They know they are not saved, but they do not realize that they are lost.
5. People are either saved or they are lost. Jesus said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).
6. And here in our text tonight, Paul refers to "them that perish," and "us which are saved" (1:18). The Greek word translated "perish" is sometimes translated "lost" (as in Luke 19:10).
7. Second Corinthians 4:3 says, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost (them that are perishing)."
8. People are either saved or lost.

I. THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS IS TO THEM THAT PERISH FOOLISHNESS (1:18-20).

1. In verse 17, Paul said, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” The message of “the cross of Christ” (1:17) is the heart of the Gospel.
2. To those who are perishing, the preaching of the cross is “foolishness” (1:18). It makes no sense to a lost person.
3. Most sinners think they are “good enough” to get into heaven, and so they consider the preaching of the cross “foolishness” (1:18).
4. Albert Barnes said that to the great mass of the Jews, and to the pagan philosophers, and indeed, to the majority of the people of this world, the cross has ever appeared foolishness, for the following reasons:

(1) The humble origin of the Lord Jesus. They despise him that lived in Nazareth; that was poor; that had no home, and few friends, and no wealth, and little honor among his own countrymen.

(2) they despise him who was put to death, as an impostor, at the instigation of his own countrymen, in a disgraceful manner on the cross – the usual punishment of slaves.

(3) they see not why there should be any particular efficacy in his death. They deem it incredible that he who could not save himself should be able to save them; and that glory should come from the shame of the cross.

(4) they are blind to the true beauty of his personal character; to the true dignity of his nature; to his power over the sick, the lame, the dying, and the dead; they see not the bearing of the work of atonement on the law and government of God; they believe not in his resurrection, and his present state of exalted glory. The world looks only at the fact, that the despised man of Nazareth was put to death on a cross, and smiles at the idea that such a death could have any important influence on the salvation of man. It is worthy of remark, also, that to the ancient philosophers this doctrine would appear still more contemptible than it does to the people of these times. Everything that came from Judea, they looked upon with contempt and scorn; and they would spurn above all things else the doctrine that they were to expect salvation only by the crucifixion of a Jew. Besides, the account of the crucifixion has now lost to us no small part of its reputation of ignominy. Even around the cross there is conceived to be no small amount of honor and glory. There is now a sacredness about it from

religious associations; and a reverence which people in Christian lands can scarcely help feeling when they think of it. But to the ancients it was connected with every idea of ignominy. It was the punishment of slaves, impostors, and vagabonds; and had even a greater degree of disgrace attached to it than the gallows has with us. With them, therefore, the death on the cross was associated with the idea of all that is shameful and dishonorable; and to speak of salvation only by the sufferings and death of a crucified man, was suited to excite in their bosoms only unmingled scorn.

5. Paul goes on to say in verse 19, “For it is written (Isaiah 29:14b), I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”
6. In the context of Isaiah’s message, God was denouncing the worldly-wise in Judah that were seeking an alliance with Egypt, when they were threatened by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria.
7. Paul quotes this Scripture to demonstrate that God delights to accomplish His purposes in ways that seem foolish to men.
8. Oftentimes He uses methods that seem quite foolish to the worldly-wise, such as when He instructed the Israelites to march around the walls of Jericho for six days, and then on the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing their trumpets.
9. The people of Jericho must have thought this was a “foolish” way for an army to attack a city.
10. We must not be concerned with what worldly philosophers and intellectuals think. If they are not saved, then they are lost. They are perishing. They are spiritually blind. They are condemned.
11. The wrath of God abides on them. “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).
12. “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise...” (1:19).
13. “Where is the wise?” (1:20). The Greeks had great philosophers – Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and many others. But their writings do not tell sinners how they can have their sins forgiven, or how they can get to heaven. These great philosophers were spiritually blind.

14. J. Vernon McGee defined worldly philosophy "as a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there."
15. "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1:20). All of the great pagan empires – Babylon, Egypt, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome – were all dragged down deeper and deeper into sin and despair. Where are they now?
16. "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1:21). Wisdom comes from God. Wisdom is given to those who believe. Proverbs 2:6 says, "For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."
17. Exodus 28:3 says, "And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom..."
18. First Kings 4:29 says, "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much..."
19. Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10 both say, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."
20. The word "wisdom" is found 54 times in the book of Proverbs., and the word "wise" is found 66 times.

II. THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS IS TO US WHICH ARE SAVED THE POWER OF GOD (1:18b, 21-23).

1. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1:21). "The foolishness of preaching," not foolish preaching.
2. A number of years ago, a woman (she was sincere but rather mixed-up) advised me to cut back on my Bible preaching, and instead try to get into counseling and psychology. I showed her I Corinthians 1:18 and 21, and her eyes lit up. She then understood the importance of Gospel preaching.
3. Preaching is not "foolish." It is the most serious business in the world. But it seems foolish to worldly people (1:18, 21, 23, 25).

4. Some of our members enjoyed an article that was in the church bulletin last week:

A pastor was preaching in church when a young trouble-maker stood up in the midst of a sermon and said, "What is the difference between preacher and a fool?" The preacher replied, "Stand here beside me a moment and I think the audience will see the difference."

But this trouble-maker and his friends were determined to continue harassing the pastor, and so the next morning as he was walking down the street, one of them stood and took off his hat and bowed and said, "Good morning, Father Abraham." And then a few feet down, another one stood in the same way, and followed the same gesture and said, "Good morning, Father Isaac," and the third one bent over and tipped his head and bowed and spoke and said, "Good morning Father Jacob," and he stopped. Then the preacher said, "I am neither Abraham, Isaac, nor Jacob. I am really Saul the son of Kish; and I am out seeking my father's asses and just found three of them."

5. It is characteristic of the Jews to require a sign (1:22). Jesus said, "This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet" (Luke 11:29).
6. They claimed that they would believe if some miracle were shown to them. This isn't true. Right after God miraculously delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and parted the Red Sea, they began murmuring.
7. The rich man in hell said to Abraham, "If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent," but Abraham said to him, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:30, 31).
8. While the Jews require a sign, "the Greeks seek after wisdom" (1:22).
9. Romans 1:22 says, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."
10. The apostle Paul says, "But we preach Christ crucified..." (1:23).
11. This is a "a stumbling block" to the Jews. Jesus said to the chief priests and Pharisees, "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the

builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" (Matthew 21:42).

12. Romans 9:33 says, "As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."
13. First Peter 2:8 says that to unbelievers, Christ is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence."
14. To the Greeks, a crucified Saviour is "foolishness" (1:23). They could not understand how a man who died in such seeming weakness and failure could ever be of any importance to them.

III. THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS IS THE POWER OF GOD TO US WHICH ARE CALLED (1:24, 25).

1. "But unto them which are called..." (1:24; cf. 1:6, 7).
2. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).
3. When sinners respond to the Gospel call, there is a powerful transformation (1:24). "Power" (cf. 1:18, 24; 2:4, 5).
4. The Greek word translated "power" (1:24) is *dunamis*, which Strong's Concordance defines as "miraculous power." This is where we get our English words "dynamite" and "dynamo."
5. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).
6. The apostle Paul emphasized the fact that his main business was to preach the Gospel. Paul said in I Corinthians 9:16, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"

CONCLUSION:

1. The Gospel draws men from all over the world. Islam is basically an Arab religion. When non-Arabs convert to Islam they adopt new Arab names. The men grow beards and the women cover themselves in burquas. They start looking like Arabs.
2. Hinduism is an Indian religion. Shintoism is a Japanese Religion. Judaism is a Jewish religion, etc.
3. But the Bible says, “For God so loved the world...”
4. Jesus is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
5. I recently read a sermon by W.A. Criswell, and in his sermon he referred to a newspaper report about something that happened in the South Pacific during WWII. Our Air Force, and Marines, and Navy, and Army were fighting the Japanese in the South Pacific, trying to protect the Philippines and our other allies.
6. There was a small island that was inhabited by a chief and his tribe. In order to spare the chief and his tribe the horrors of a devastating attack from the Japanese, word was sent to them that a warship would be dispatched and they all would be evacuated to another island in order to find safety in the hour of battle.
7. So a big battleship was sent, and anchored out in the deep water. Then little boats were sent to the island to gather together the chief and all of his tribe and all the natives, and put them in the boats, and take them out to the big battle ship to be carried away to safety.
8. In compliance with the request of the chief of the natives of the island, they all were to be presented to the captain of the ship. And so they were all brought to the big battleship, and all the American sailors, and marines, and all of the servicemen were lined up on the two sides of the ship, standing at attention.
9. At the far end of the battleship was the captain. The chief of the island, and his prime minister, and the men in his government, and all their

families and their children all marched up the length of the battleship to be presented to the captain.

10. None of this is unusual, but what W.A. Criswell found fascinating was that in the front of the chieftain, and in front of all of his government officials, in front of all of them as they marched the length of the battleship to be presented to the captain, was a native with a big open Bible in his hand.
11. And as they marched up to be presented to the captain of the ship, the man that walked in front was carrying this big open Bible. It was the chieftain's way of saying to the American servicemen and to the captain of the battleship: "We are a people of the Book. We are a Christian people. We're not a heathen tribe. We're not a pagan at all. We're Christians. We worship and adore the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a people of the Book."
12. Criswell said, "I don't know their names. I've forgotten the name of the little island from whence they were taken, but you could do business with that chief. You could do business on that island. They are a people built upon the enduring, unchanging rock of the revelation of Jesus Christ the Son of God. We preach Christ."