

## The Glories of the Gospel – Weakness & Wisdom

1. When we go to church, we like to hear a good sermon. I certainly don't go to church to hear a bad one, do you?
  - a. I want to hear something that will stir my heart to fall deeper in love with Jesus, to more fervently obey Him and to want to serve Him. I want to learn something, to hear a word or a phrase that will stick in my ears all week long. That is what I seek in a sermon.
    - i. The former pastor of 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Dallas, Dr. Criswell gave an admonition to pastors.
      1. *“When a man comes to church, what he is saying to you is this, 'Preacher, I know what the TV commentator has to say; I hear him every day. I know what the editorial writer has to say; I read it every day. I know what the magazines have to say; I read them every week. Preacher, what I want to know is, does God have anything to say? If God has anything to say, tell us what it is.'”*
  - b. The other day I watched the pastor of one of the largest churches in America preach a message. I was spellbound. He never looked at his notes. He elaborated on each point with example after example. He was a great speaker.
    - i. To tell you the truth, when I changed the channel, I had an inferiority complex.
  - c. But in the preparation for this sermon, God changed all of that for me.
    - i. He showed me that it isn't in my abilities, it isn't in my oratorical skill, my reasoning or my illustrations that your life will be touched.
    - ii. He showed me that it is in my very weakness, my inability that He is displayed.
    - iii. That brings us to today's passage about the “glories of the gospel” found in 1 Corinthians chapter 2.
  - d. 1 Cor 2:2-5 *For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*
    - i. In verse two, Paul goes directly to the heart of the gospel.
      1. When he came to the Corinthians, he determined or **made up his mind, to show off his knowledge of nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**
      2. In other words, he constrained himself from all of the fluff that he could demonstrate, from all of his learning (which was great), and made his point to be Christ and Christ crucified.
      3. Why was this so? Why did he do this?
        - a. In verse 4 and 5 he explains that, “my preaching was not in persuasive words of wisdom and but in a demonstration of the Spirit and of power so that your faith would not depend upon the wisdom of men but on the power of God.”
        - b. I think I would have loved to have been there, to see this demonstration of the Spirit and of Power that he was speaking of.
          - i. What do you think that looked like?
            1. Lightening bolts from heaven?
            2. The dead coming out of their tombs?
          - ii. Neither. It would have looked the same as today.
            1. Conviction of sin
            2. Repentance
            3. Brokenness
            4. Tenderness toward God
        - c. We watched these very things happen at our block party a couple of weeks ago at Western Reserve as Jennifer shared the gospel with a sweet woman

there. This woman had been in and out of churches, had a healthy dose of religion, but had never heard the complete gospel shared with her. Instantly, you could see the Spirit of God work within her as her heart broke over sin and her need for forgiveness. You could see her tears of tenderness and joy as she experienced the release of burdens and the encountering of the Holy Spirit.

- d. THAT is the Power of God!
- ii. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 says that there can be no saving faith that rests on the wisdom of men, because the wisdom of men considers salvation through a crucified Christ to be foolishness.
  1. The wisdom of men says to us, “save yourself”
  2. It says, “try harder, do more, be better”
  3. But Jesus and the Cross says something counterintuitive, he says, “I’ve done it for you. It is finished. Rest in what I have accomplished.
- e. In this passage, Paul tells us several key things
  - i. **He tells us his goal:** (v 5) “*that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God*”
    1. Paul did not want their so called faith to depend upon the learnings and wisdom of people.
      - a. If that is all it would take, then you could go to college and learn all there is about God.
    2. Rhetoric and logic will not make you a Christian.
      - a. It may help remove some intellectual barriers to becoming one.
      - b. It may help you become more open, but it will not change your life.
    3. A Christian is a work of God.
    4. **Every Christian is a supernatural miracle.**
    5. A Christian is the evidence of God’s Power and Spirit at work in a human heart.
      - a. Many years ago in St. Louis a Christian man was completing some business with a lawyer. Before leaving the office, the Christian turned to the lawyer and said: "I have often wanted to ask you a question, but I have been a coward." The lawyer replied, "I didn't think you were afraid of anything!" What is the question?" The client asked, "Why aren't you a Christian?" The lawyer hung his head. "You know my weakness," he said. "Isn't there something in the Bible about drunkards having no part in the kingdom of God?" Not to be detoured, the Christian said, "That's not what I am asking you. I want to know why you aren't a Christian." "Well," said the lawyer, "I can't recall that anybody asked me, and I'm sure nobody ever told me how to become a Christian!" Before long, the 2 were praying together, and God moved into that lawyer's life. He saved him and immediately broke the power of alcohol that had bound him. The lawyer was Cyrus L. Scofield - Scofield Reference Bible.
  - ii. It may involve your intellect and emotions, but your conversion to Christ is most of all a spiritual experience, a true “act of God.”
    1. Your faith must be built upon Christ and Christ alone!
    2. Listen to the words of Charles Spurgeon: “*The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls, nor does it lie in the preacher’s learning, otherwise it would consist of the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we would exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word of God to give it the power to convert a soul.*”

- a. **The Word of God, spoken in the power of God, always results in lives changed by God.**
  - i. This was how the tiny band of believers turned the world upside down in the first century.
  - ii. We must pray for God to do that again in our day. The world has no answer to a life radically changed by Jesus Christ.
  - iii. The world may answer our arguments, but it cannot answer the power of God let loose in the human heart.
- iii. **Paul tells us his method:** (v. 3-4) *“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power”*
  - 1. Here is Paul’s evangelistic plan. It’s called “the fear and trembling and the Power of the Spirit plan”
  - 2. I am sure that would go over real good with a pastor search committee
    - a. “Okay Paul, how do you propose we reach the residents of Madison township with the gospel?”
    - b. “I intend to use the “fear and trembling” method of evangelism and watch God’s Power go to work.”
  - c. Hmm...maybe we have become too sophisticated.
  - 3. You might not have connected the dots, but Paul remembers the chilly reception he received when he first came to Corinth (Acts 18:1-11) when he writes this letter. Let’s look at what happened to him.
    - a. *1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, 3 and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. 4 And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. 5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*
    - b. Paul had an educational experience in Corinth.
      - i. He started off “reasoning” in the synagogues, trying to PERSUADE Jews and Greeks.
      - ii. But verse 5 tells us something amazing, and it is the foundation to the passage in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians that we are studying.
      - iii. *Paul began devoting himself COMPLETELY to the word, SOLEMNLY (forcefully) TESTIFYING to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.”*
      - iv. I believe that it was here that Paul learned the lesson that he tells the Corinthians about where their faith must rest.
      - v. He like us, had a learning curve. He like us, was not perfect, he made mistakes and he struggled to understand the power of the gospel.
      - c. And it was likely the result of some fearful experiences.
        - i. At one point he felt so abandoned and alone that the Lord came to him in a vision with these words, *v9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city”* (Acts 18:9-10).

- ii. God doesn't tell you "don't be afraid" unless you are afraid. Paul was fearful, his audience was hostile to the point of wanting to kill him. Yet, once he resolved to forcefully proclaim Christ crucified to the Jews, he observed the POWER of God at work!
    - iii. I believe that this convinced him to he resolve to only proclaim Christ and Christ crucified from then on. He had seen first hand that nothing else, would change lives!
  - iv. Have you ever been nervous while trying to tell someone about Christ and what He has done for you?
    - 1. Have you ever tried to witness to someone only to find that your "tang" gets all "tongueled" up?
      - a. Or have you tried to quote John 3:16 to a lost person only to discover that you've forgotten everything after "For God"?
      - b. Certainly all of us have had experiences where everything we said ended up sounding like nonsense to us.
      - c. It happens. Paul certainly knew what that was like.
    - 2. So if you feel a bit afraid and unqualified to take a stand for Christ, if you sometimes get worried about what others will think, join the club.
      - a. There are plenty of people in that club, and Paul is the president.
      - b. Remember this: **If people are impressed by what you say, they are unlikely to be impressed by Jesus.**
      - c. It's easy to stir people by telling funny stories or sad stories, and using certain kinds of music, but the power of the Holy Spirit is something supernatural!
    - 3. James Denney said: *"No man can give at once the impression that he himself is clever and that Jesus Christ is mighty to save." You can impress people with your cleverness or you can impress them with Jesus, but you can't do both.*
    - 4. When you hear someone say, "What a wonderful sermon!" it means they liked you and what you had to say. That is nice. A pastor I knew in Massachusetts used to have a reply to folks who said, "that was a nice sermon" he would ask, "Thank you, what part spoke to you?" So often they wouldn't be able to tell him.
      - a. When people heard Paul preach, they said, **"What a wonderful Savior!"**
        - i. Paul cared not at all what people thought about him as long as they heard the message of Jesus.
        - ii. His reputation and what people thought of him didn't matter as long as the gospel was preached clearly.
    - 5. *Paul's question was not so much "What good can I do for Christ?" but rather, "What good can Christ do for the world through me?"*
    - 6. *It was not, "How much power can I muster for Jesus?" but, "How much power can Jesus show through my weakness?"*
  - v. Imagine if we had the same mindset?
    - 1. What would happen if we stopped worrying about what others thought of us, what we even thought of ourselves and desired to let God use us?
    - 2. I know some folks like this. If you met them on the street, you would call them "fools for Christ."
      - a. They have abandoned all efforts to make themselves look good to family, friends and strangers.
      - b. Yet, they touch people regularly with the love and power of God. God uses them in divine appointments. \
      - c. God calls them to go places and do things that "sensible people" like us wouldn't dream of doing.

2. Lets look at verses v6-9 *Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."*
  - a. The wisdom of the world always sounds very impressive and very confident.
    - i. We are exposed to it all the time through the media of newspapers, magazines, television, and even our conversations with one another, we are constantly bombarded with the so-called "wisdom of the world."
    - ii. It always speaks to us about very attractive goals.
    - iii. If you watch television you are encouraged to seek after "the good life," to become "beautiful people," to "live life with gusto," and to find the "real thing."
    - iv. Yet God offers those who will follow Jesus something beyond their wildest expectations, something they cannot even imagine (v9) *"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."*
3. v10-16 - *10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. 16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.*
4. **It is in this passage that we learn about the work of the gospel and the plight of something called the "Natural Man:"**
  - a. V14 *"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.."*
    - i. **The natural man is the state that we all enter the world in.**
      1. We are dead/separated from God through sin, and our awareness is limited to the physical world and realm.
    - ii. The natural man does not have the Holy Spirit that a Christian has as a result of the new birth.
      1. He lives as if there is nothing important beyond this present life and this present moment.
      2. The natural man sees "spiritual things" as foolishness because they seem like a waste of time.
      3. What is more, he **cannot** "understand" them (according to the bible) because they are understood only with the help of the Spirit of God.
    - iii. Spiritual things seem foolishness to the natural man. Why waste time on "spiritual" things when you could be making money or having fun?
      1. The natural man doesn't want the things of God because he regards them as foolishness. What is more, he can't understand the things of God (even if he wanted to) because they are spiritually discerned. It would be wrong to expect the

natural man to see and value spiritual things, just as it would be wrong to expect a corpse to see the material world.

- iv. The natural man is enslaved to the principles of this world.
    1. He isn't bad because he sins.
    2. **The natural man sins because that is his nature.**
    3. The natural man is controlled by the sin nature, the flesh.
    4. He cannot not sin.
  - v. This is the state that every one of us enters this world, and in this state of being, none of us can see the kingdom of God.
  - b. The Christian on the other hand is called a "spiritual man" because by virtue of the Holy Spirit indwelling him, is able to understand spiritual things and value the unseen spiritual world that God inhabits.
    - i. A person becomes a Christian when he hears the gospel...the good news that says that he cannot improve himself, he cannot heal his sin, he cannot work his way to God and that God himself has provided a way through Jesus Christ.
    - ii. When he becomes a Christian by believing the Gospel, the Holy Spirit indwells him. He becomes a spiritual man or woman. He becomes aware of the spiritual realities.
      1. I cannot tell you how many times I have had someone after they became a Christian and surrendered their life to Jesus Christ have said, "I read the bible now and it makes sense!"
      2. The bible is understood spiritually. It requires spiritual eyes to see the spiritual truths.
      3. Mere physical eyes cannot see or understand the spiritual realities that it contains.
5. Perhaps the gospel has been hidden from your eyes. You have heard church talked about for years. But it never made any sense. You know **that Jesus was a great moral teacher**. He believe that he **came down from heaven. Many already believe that**.
- a. **It's not even enough to say that he was born of a virgin. We must go all the way and declare that God himself came down to earth in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We must say that when he died on the cross, God laid on him all our sins. He took our place, dying where we should have died, bearing our punishment, standing as our substitute, taking our sin and its punishment upon himself. He died that he might be our Savior and bring us home to God. He was the just dying for the unjust, the good dying for the bad, the righteous dying for the unrighteousness, the holy dying for the sinful. And in his death he won our salvation. Then he rose from the dead on the third day, proving all his claims to be true.**
  - b. **This is the message unbelievers need to hear. What good will it do to say to an unbeliever, "Be nice" or "Try harder" or "Clean yourself up" or even "Give money to the church." That advice is both dangerous and misleading. Unbelievers can never really be nice or try harder or clean themselves up apart from God. And they don't need to give money to the church. They need to be born again.**
  - c. **Here is the message of the gospel in just ten words:**
  - d. **The gospel says, "Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead"**
6. Romans 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
7. **THAT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION!**
- a. That is God's promise to change your life. He is able to change your life if you will respond to his offer today. Your life will be turned rightside up. You will have new desires, new hopes and dreams. He will give you a hope and a future. And you will experience forgiveness and peace like you have never known.

- b. if you are still among those who do not embrace the cross as the very wisdom of God and who do not welcome the things of the Spirit into your life, then the point of the text for you is an urgent warning and invitation:
1. consider this morning what a hopeless condition you are in without Christ,
  2. consider how perfectly suited the gospel is to your need, the Lord of glory dying in the place of sinners,
  3. consider how dangerous it is to be held back by pride,
  4. consider the unimaginably glorious future that God has for those who love him, forsake pride,
  5. drop the props of self-exaltation,
  - c. look to Christ, believe and be saved.

Dr. E. M. Bounds tells a story that had been told to him by a contemporary of his, A. C. Dixon. The story he told is the following: ""A dear friend of mine who was quite a lover of the chase, told me the following story: 'Rising early one morning,' he said, 'I heard the baying of a score of deerhounds in pursuit of their quarry. Looking away to a broad, open field in front of me, I saw a young fawn making its way across, and giving signs, moreover, that its race was well-nigh run. Reaching the rails of the enclosure, it leaped over and crouched within ten feet from where I stood. A moment later two of the hounds came over, when the fawn ran in my direction and pushed its head between my legs. I lifted the little thing to my breast, and, swinging round and round, fought off the dogs. I felt, just then, that all the dogs in the West could not, and should not capture that fawn after its weakness had appealed to my strength.' So is it, when human helplessness appeals to Almighty God. Well do I remember when the hounds of sin were after my soul, until, at last, I ran into the arms of Almighty God."