

The Cross of Jesus Christ

Sunday, November 22nd, 1987

1 Corinthians 1:21-24

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

I'll be taking my reading from the Book of 1 Corinthians, Chapter One, verses 22, 23 and 24. Here is the subject for today; I am going to bring you a message on the subject: “THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST.”

In 1 Corinthians Chapter 1:22, the apostle writes; *“For the Jews (the religious) require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Greeks, foolishness. But unto them who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ (crucified) is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

I want to ask you a question and see if you can answer it from the Scripture that I just read. What do people want from preachers who say that they speak for God? Many men say that they speak for God. They say that they are preachers and are called of God and sent to preach the message of God. What do people want from these men?

What do people want from churches that say they know and worship God? What do the people want? The text tells us; the text says that the religious Jews, the religious people and temple dwellers are the people who followed the ceremonies. They followed the customs of religion. These people want a sign.

Then, it says that the Greeks, the natural man, the man of the world, want wisdom. The religious man wants a sign and the natural man wants wisdom.

What does it mean when you say that the religious man wants a sign? This means that he wants to see miracles. He wants to see excitement, healings, impressive movements and large crowds. He wants to see something that will prove that God is among us.

They say, “Prove to me that you speak for God; prove it by signs, wonders, miracles, healings and impressive moments and things like this. Prove that God is with you.” You see; this is what the people said when our Lord walked the earth in the flesh. They said, *“What sign do you show that we might believe? Show us a sign.”*

Again, when He was on the cross they said; *“If you be the Christ, come down from the cross and we will believe you.”* Our Lord said this, *“Evil and adulteress generation seeketh a sign and no sign shall be given but that of Jonah,”* (or in other words, the Word of God).

Even the rich man in hell said to father Abraham; *“Send Lazareth back from the grave; send him back to the earth. Raise him from the tomb and send him back to the earth and let him preach to my brothers and they will believe; if one rose from the dead, they would believe.”*

So, the religious man wants a sign. He wants miracles, something impressive to prove that God is among you. Listen very carefully to this. This is one of the things that has given rise in this day to so many religious con artists, and that is what they are. They are giving people what they are crying for. They are giving people what they want, signs, wonders and so-called miracles and impressive things like that.

They will close their eyes in prayer and say, “I see a man somewhere out there who has a back problem and God is healing him. I see a man out here that has a headache and God is healing him. I see a woman over here driving a yellow Volkswagen who has some type of cancer and God is healing her.”

People will come down to the front and tell them their doctor’s name and the preacher will put his hands on them and claim to heal them. He will break crutches and canes. He will roll a wheelchair out of the place.

This is what the religious man wants. He wants a sign or some kind of miracle. He wants you to prove that God is with you. That is the very thing that Paul is saying here. He says, *“The religious people want a sign.”*

They demand a sign and they always have. Ever since the day that our Lord walked here on this earth in human flesh, they have said; *“Show us a sign.”* They are saying, “We won’t believe anything until we see some fruit, some action, some miracles or some sign.”

A lot of people followed Him because of those miracles. In fact, one time He said; *“I know why you are following Me; you are following me because you saw the miracles.”* Another group followed Him and He said, *“You are following Me because you ate of the loaves and fishes.”* Those who truly follow Christ follow Him because of His Word. So, the religious people seek a sign.

What do the natural people want? Well, the natural man seeks after wisdom, not the wisdom of God which is Christ Jesus our righteousness and our sacrifice. They seek the wisdom of men.

This church at Corinth to which Paul was writing was in a city of learning. Corinth was a city of learning, philosophy and human wisdom. These Greeks were in love with intellectualism. That is what they were in love with.

They were in love with so-called science. They were in love with intellectualism, philosophy, human wisdom and oratory. They would meet to debate and argue. This is what Paul is saying as he is writing to this church; he is saying, "The religious people want some kind of sign, some kind of proof. They want to see some action. They want to see miracles, healings and wonders and things like that."

The natural man wants wisdom. He wants a clever preacher. He doesn't want a preacher who preaches Christ. He wants a clever preacher, one who can rhyme his points. He wants him to use alliteration and deal with strange and unusual subjects, mysteries and things of this nature. He wants the preacher to show prophecy and set dates for the coming of Christ.

They love that clever, sort of thing. They don't want Christ preachers; they want clever preachers. They don't want their hearts pricked. They want their ears tickled. Paul said, "*They will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears and turn their ears away from the truth.*"

They want to hear of reformation, not regeneration. They want to hear of human rights. You always hear about human rights. That is what the natural man wants to hear. He doesn't want to hear anything about the crown rights of the Lord Jesus Christ. He just wants to hear about human rights.

He wants his preacher to be involved in politics. He wants his preacher to be involved in local, civic, enterprises. He wants his preacher to be involved in amusements and all kinds of movements. I weep for my generation because I see the same thing happening today that happened back there almost 2,000 years ago.

The apostle Paul writing to this church said, "I know what they want; I know exactly what they want. I know what the religious, ceremonialists, temple dweller and the religious traditionalist wants." He wants signs, wonders, miracles, large crowds and impressive movements. He wants proof that you speak for God.

I'll tell you this; the only proof that a man needs to speak for God is the Word of God, the Word of God itself. I'm not talking about some unusual feeling, unusual emotion or an unusual happening like someone being healed. We need the healing of the heart and the healing of the soul.

That is what people want and that is what preachers give them for a price or cost. They will give it to them for a price. Folks keep supporting them. Most of it is as phony as a \$3.00 confederate bill. That's right; it is a phony as it can possibly be.

I wonder how much longer that people in this country will support these con artists, religious phonies and these religious preachers that are taking them for what they have got. I just don't understand. I weep for my generation. They don't want to hear God's Word; they want to see a show and be entertained.

I will tell you this; if you listen to most of the so-called Gospel singing and religious singing, turn the sound off and you can't tell the difference between that and a rock and roll concert. They have the same instruments; they have the same body movements, they have the same look on their faces and the only thing different most of the time is the words that they use. That is exactly right!

We can't rise to worship the living God so we just reach up and pull Him down and put Him on our level. We put worship on our level and put it down into a degraded cesspool. That is what we have done in this day. This is done because the religious people want a sign.

The natural man wants wisdom. I want you to listen to Paul. He says, "*But we preach Christ crucified. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Is this too plain for you? It is what needs to be said and it is not being said.

True preachers, God called, God sent and God anointed preachers are true to the Word of God and they are true to the Gospel of God. They are true to the glory of their God. I will tell you this, you couldn't put the apostle Paul in 99 % of the religious movements, telecasts and broadcasts and services of this day. He wouldn't be identified or associated with any of it.

True preachers do not try to please the temple dwellers and the traditionalists. True preachers do not try to please the people of this world with his so-called science and his demands for human wisdom and intellectualism. True preachers preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They preach the cross.

That is what Paul says, *“God didn’t send me to baptize.”* God didn’t send me to organize. God didn’t send me to promote or entertain. God didn’t send me to please men; God sent me to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I’m to preach the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Here is another statement that I have for you; when Paul declared that he preached the cross, he said that these traditionalists want signs, miracles, wonders and entertainment. The natural man wants wisdom, intellectualism, science, human rights and civil rights and this entire sort of thing. But, he said; *“We preach the cross.”*

When he said, *“We preach the cross of Jesus Christ,”* what did he mean “by the cross?” I will tell you what he didn’t mean. He didn’t mean that he would preach that tree on which Christ died. They even differ on the shape of it. This is immaterial because Paul wasn’t preaching that cross, the cross on which He died, that is just a symbol.

Paul wasn’t preaching the cross of trial and affliction which the believer bears. Our Lord said, *“Take up your cross and follow Me.”* He is saying, take up your cross of death, trial, suffering and whatever is required of you and follow Christ.

The cross that He is talking about here that He preaches is this, *“The preaching of the cross is to them who are perishing, foolishness. To us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”* This cross that Paul is talking about is all that is included and all that is accomplished in the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All that Christ is, all that Christ did, all that Christ does is included in the preaching of the cross. In other words, when I say that I preach the cross of Christ, I don’t mean I talk all the time about “Christ died, Christ died and Christ died.” No!

Christ had to live in order to die. You have to have an incarnate Christ before you can have a crucified Christ. Christ has got to take upon Himself a human body in order to die in a human body; therefore you have the virgin birth. So, there are many things included in the cross. If you have the Christ crucified and buried, you have to have a resurrection.

When we say that we preach the cross and that we are not ashamed of the cross (*“God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”*); we are talking about all that is included and all that is accomplished in our Lord’s death, His resurrection and in His intercession.

In other words, we preach the accomplishment by Jesus Christ, God's Eternal Covenant. When you preach the cross of Christ you go clear back before the foundation of the world. You preach the covenant of God's grace because the Scripture says in Hebrews, *"His blood is the blood of the Everlasting Covenant."*

You read also that Christ, in the Book of Revelation, is the *"Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."* So, when we preach the cross of Christ, we are talking about something that was purposed and something that was planned in the councils of God before the world began. *"He is the surety of an Everlasting Covenant."*

His death is the fulfillment of God's purpose to redeem a people. *"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."* So, when we say that we preach the cross of Christ, we are saying that we preach that Covenant which gave birth to the cross, that purpose of God which decreed that His Son should die for sinners.

Also, watch this; when we preach the cross of Jesus Christ, we preach the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Old Testament promises, the Old Testament prophecies and the Old Testament pictures.

What is Abel's Lamb? It is but a picture of Christ. What is the Passover Lamb in Egypt when Moses and the people of Israel took the blood and put it on the doorposts and the lenti? What is that but Christ crucified? *"Christ is our Passover."* The apostle Paul said that, *"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."*

Christ crucified is the Brazen Serpent lifted up. Our Lord said that Himself, *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

The cross of Christ is the fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Priesthood, sacrifices, and the Day of Atonement because it talks about this, *"Our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have now received the atonement."*

Also, when we preach Christ crucified, we preach the character of God. It was the love of God that sent Him. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."* Christ didn't come down here and get God in the notion of loving us. He came down here because God did love us. For God loved and God gave.

In the cross of Christ, I see the love of God. I see the mercy of God. I see the righteousness of God. *"He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."*

The cross preaches the Holiness of God. *“God has set forth His Son to be the propitiation for our sins that He might declare His Righteousness.” “God spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all.”*

Also, the cross of Jesus Christ shows us the Justice of God. He will punish sin. *“God will by no means clear the guilty. The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die.”* Where do you see all of this? You see it in the cross. The cross reveals and manifests the love of God. The cross reveals the holiness and righteousness of God. The cross reveals God to be a *“Just God and a Saviour.”* Do you see that?

Also, when we preach the cross, the cross reveals the accomplishment of the redemption of all of God’s children and all believers. Jesus Christ was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb. On the third day He arose by the power of God. All the way through the Scriptures the Word of God tells us this, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is full proof and evidence that God accepted what He did.”

If God had not accepted His offering and accepted His sacrifice and accepted His sin offering He would have never brought Him forth from the tomb and from the grave. That resurrection is proof that Almighty God verily did accept Christ and with Christ accepted us in the Beloved.

So, we preach Christ crucified. When I say that we preach Christ crucified, I’m saying that we can go back into the council hall of eternity and talk about the covenant mercy and the purpose of grace. We come down to the fall of Adam when God announced that the *“Seed of woman would bruise the serpent’s head.”*

We come to Abel’s sacrifice and we see the cross. We come to the exodus from Egypt and the Passover to the Smitten Rock. We come to the Manna from Heaven which is Christ, the Bread of Life. We come to the atonement and the tabernacle and the priesthood and come on down to the incarnation of the Lord, for He must become a man in order to die. We come down to the fact that He suffered and was buried and rose again and He ascended to the right hand of God where He ever lives to make intercession for us. All of this is in the cross!

So, Paul says; “Let the religionist seek after his sign, let the natural man seek after his intellectualism and wisdom, but, *‘We preach Christ crucified.’*” We glory in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Now, watch this; this is the third thing: what is your attitude toward the cross of Jesus Christ? There is just one of two attitudes that a man can take towards the cross. Do you see this in the text? I hope you are looking at the text, 1 Corinthians 1: 17 through 24. Paul showed us what the world wants to hear.

He shows us what the true preacher preaches the cross of Christ, the Gospel. Then he shows us the two attitudes that people take toward the cross. He says, "The preaching of the cross." When I say, "*the cross*," I am talking about all that Christ is, all that Christ did and all that Christ does.

"The preaching of the cross is to them who are perishing, foolishness." That means that it is sheer nonsense, just foolishness. *"But to us who are called, (who are being saved), the cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God. The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing."*

I can give you three reasons why the cross (the preaching of the cross) is foolishness. Don't forget what I have said, the cross is just not His death; it is the purpose that gave birth to the death. It is the incarnation when He became identified with us. He was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. It is all things included in the death of Christ and accomplished by the death of Christ.

It is reconciliation, redemption, righteousness, sanctification and all that. So, why do men look on the cross as foolishness? I will tell you three reasons:

First of all, this cross and this Gospel of substitution and satisfaction (the gospel of the blood of Christ) deals with a subject in which they have no interest, which is the forgiveness of sin and salvation from sin. Our Lord said it, *"They that are whole do not need a doctor."*

Who are the people that are interested in doctors out there? Well, it is sick people. Who are the people out there who are not interested in doctors? The answer is "well people." That is what our Lord said, *"The well have no need of the physician but they that are sick: even so, I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

Do you know who is interested in atonement? It is a sinner. Do you know who is interested in forgiveness? Guilty people are interested in forgiveness. Do you know who is interested in mercy? Lost people are interested in mercy. They are the people to whom the cross is wisdom and power. *"Those who are perishing; it is foolishness,"* because they are not sinners.

Our Lord said, *“He came to call sinners to repentance.”* Paul said, *“Our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.”* The reason it is foolishness and nonsense to this world is because they do not see themselves before God, in the sight of God or under the law of God as sinners.

Here is the second reason why the cross, the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish; it does not recognize human merit. The cross does not recognize human goodness or human works. The cross literally, drags our so-called human goodness out into the light of God’s holiness and pronounces it *“filthy rags.”*

A person will acknowledge that the cross, the cross in which the Son of God in human flesh is hanging on, the cross which redeems men, only when he realizes that it took the very death of God Almighty in human flesh on that cross to put away sin.

My sins are so terrible and so vial and so wicked and so evil and impossible to put away, that it takes the death of the Son of God to put them away. When a man admits that, he admits that *“There is none good, no not one. There is none righteous, there is none that understandeth; they are altogether become unprofitable.”*

I will tell you this, the extent of sin is revealed to you by the tremendous cost to redeem our soul. We are bought with a price. How great a price? It took the death of God’s Son.

Here is the third reason why the natural man finds the cost foolishness. It deals with the righteousness of God. God must be Just; God must be Righteous. Have you ever considered that? David did, he said; *“When I consider the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars and the things you’ve made, what is man that Thou art mindful of him?”*

Job said, *“How can man be clean in God’s sight? How can he be clean that is born of a woman? How can a man be just with God? How can God be Just and Justifier?”* Have you ever thought of that? How can a holy God have communion with a sinner like you and me?

I’ll tell you how; only in the cross of Christ. The necessity for the cross, the work accomplished in the cross and the preaching of the cross *“Is to them perishing, nonsense but to those who are called, (called by His Spirit, called by His Gospel, called by His grace to faith in Jesus Christ), it is the very power and wisdom of God.”*