

The Message of the Cross

I Corinthians 1:18-25

March 4, 2018

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. The Apostle Paul is addressing the church at Corinth. Corinth is a city in Greece, just across the bay from Athens, part of the Roman Empire. The Greeks are great philosophers and highly educated. I would say their society would be very similar to Western society today.

What Paul is doing in our scripture reading this morning is contrasting the foolishness of man, which they think is wisdom, and the wisdom of God, which they think is foolishness. The concept of a Jewish man dying on a cross for the things we have done wrong and the things we will do wrong, is just foolishness. It was back then and it still is today too many people. The philosophical view point and the scientific minds see the cross as foolishness and unreasonable. It's unreasonable to think God would come to earth in the form of a human being. It is unreasonable to think God would allow another human to nail him to a cross. It is unreasonable to think someone can be resurrected back to life after they have died. It's foolishness. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

If "power" is the ability to accomplish what you want to accomplish, then what is God wanting to accomplish? What is God's purpose? What is His goal? God's goal is to bring us back into a relationship with Himself. His goal is to save us. God's goal is to express His love in such a vivid way that it can bring all the people of the world together into a family. Red and yellow, black and white, men and women, old and young. Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life." John 6:38-40 That's God's purpose. He wants to put His arms around all of us and make us part of His family. He does that through the cross.

So what is the message of the cross? What does it teach us?

1. The seriousness of our sins. Crucifixion was the cruelest form of punishment in the Roman Empire. It was reserved for society's worst criminal. Jesus was crucified along with two other criminals. They received 39 lashes. Jesus wore a crown of thorns. Deuteronomy 21:23 says, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse by becoming a curse for us."

2. It shows the love of God. As he hung on the cross the crowd mocked him. "He saved others, but he can't save himself." One of the thieves who was crucified beside him said "If you are the Son of God save yourself and us." Jesus had the power to do just that. Earlier he said he could have had ten legions of angels rescue him, all he had to do was give the word. But had he done that, had he come down for the cross, you and I would not have been saved. He loved us enough to stay on the cross.

3. It's the only way of salvation. There is a popular notion today that there are many ways to heaven. The Bible says "There is a way which seems right to man. But its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 16:25) Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) If that sounds exclusive or narrow, so be it. If there was any other way to heaven, the cross would have not been necessary. Peter told the religious leaders, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to me by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

4. It gives us a new dynamic to life. The Bible said, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has passed away, the new has come." (II Corinthians 5:17) John said, "To all who received him, to all who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12) Our relationship with God has been restored because of the cross.

5. It motivates us for service. We want to feed the hungry, we want to cloth the naked, and we want to provide shelter for the homeless because of what Christ did for us.

6. Guarantees eternal life. Jesus death on the cross was followed by the resurrection. Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, and behold I am alive forever more.” (Revelation 22:13) Because He lives we too shall live. What a glorious future we have because of the cross.

For the believer, the grave does not have say. “Where, o death is your victory? Where, o death, is your sting? (I Corinthians 15:55)

We look back at the crowd that day of the cross and we see several attitudes.

1. Apathy – indifferent
2. Skeptic – you once said, “You would destroy the temple and in three days raise it up again.
3. Saved – believers. The Centurion watched Jesus die and said, surely this man was the Son of God.