

The Cross of Christ and the Foolishness of God

I Cor. 1:17-31

Introduction:

1. Refer to sermon *"What Shall I do With Jesus,"* Matthew 27:22.
 - a. We mentioned the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus.
 - b. We took note of what different individuals did with Jesus – Judas who betrayed Him, Peter who denied Him, the disciples who forsook Him, the Sanhedrin court which sentenced Him to die, Herod who mocked Him, Pilate who washed his hands of Him, the soldiers who crucified Him, and the crowd which mocked Him.
2. As demanded by the crowd, Matt. 27:22, Jesus was crucified, John 19:16-23.
3. Events which followed:
 - a. Jesus died, John 19:33.
 - b. Jesus was buried in Joseph's new tomb, John 19:38-42.
 - c. Jesus was raised on the first day of the week as He had foretold, John 2:19; Mark 16:9.
 - d. Jesus appeared to His apostles, told them to wait for the power from on High, Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4.
 - e. Jesus commanded them to preach the gospel, Mark 16:15-16.
 - f. The church was established on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:41-47.
 - g. The world began to be evangelized as was commanded, Acts 1:8.
4. Eventually the gospel was carried to Corinth, Acts 18:8.
5. Later Paul wrote his first epistle to the church at Corinth, in which he sought to correct some of their errors. Among the things he wrote about was "the cross of Christ and the foolishness of God," I Cor. 1:17-31. This serves as the title of our lesson. In these verses he joined together two terms which, on the surface, sounds contradictory, but it is not.
 - a. *"The cross,"* vs. 17,18,23.
 - b. *"The foolishness of God,"* vs. 23,25.

Discussion:

I. Facts Concerning The Cross of Christ.

- A. It may be made of No Effect, I Cor. 1:17.
 1. Because many people consider it foolishness, v. 18,23.
 - a. Not the mere preaching of the fact of the cross, but the **why** of the cross, John 8:34; Matt. 26:28.
 - b. To the Greek mind the first characteristic of God was *apatheia* – not just apathy, but the total inability to feel. For God to feel joy or sorrow, anger or grief, meant that man has influenced God, and is therefore greater than God. To them, a God Who suffered was a contradiction of terms. Cf. John 1:14; I Peter 2:21; 3:18.
 2. Because it is made a *"stumblingblock,"* v. 23.
 - a. To them it was incredible that the One Who had ended His life upon a cross, could be God's chosen one. Cf. Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:13.
 - b. Then, too, His humble birth, Mark 6:2-3, and His tendency to avoid the spectacular, Matt. 16:1, did not harmonize with their preconceived ideas about the coming Messiah and the nature of the kingdom which they had in mind.
- B. The Cross and Salvation are Inseparable, I Cor. 1:18,21,23.
 1. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, I Cor. 15:3.
 2. Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb which God sent, John 1:29.
 3. The gospel is the message of the cross, I Cor. 15:1-4.
- C. The cross stands between the two testaments, Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:15-17.
- D. The church centers around the cross, Acts 20:28; I Cor. 2:2.

II. The Foolishness of God, vs. 18,21.

Note: Paul in these verses did not affirm that God is foolish; rather His plan of salvation appears foolish unto many.

- A. **Fact:** There is not always a logical connection between God's commands and God's promises.
 1. Exodus 12:22,23.
 2. Joshua 6:1-5.
 3. Number 21:8,9.
 4. 2 Kings 5:10.

5. John 9:6-7.
6. Acts 2:38.
- B. God's foolishness is greater than the wisdom of the world, I Cor. 1:20,25
 1. The failure of worldly statesmanship in the presence of the Assyrian invasion, I Cor. 1:19; Isa. 29:14.
 2. The world by wisdom knew not God, I Cor. 1:21.
 - a. The Greeks had their noted philosophers such as: Socrates, Herodotus, Aristotle, Plato, Demosthenes, Pythagorus, etc. Yet all their boasted intellect could not bring them closer to God! Cf. Acts 17:16,22-23.
 - b. What about today? There is a greater storehouse of knowledge now than ever before, but are men closer to God because of such?
 - c. Isaiah 55:8-9.
- C. Is Designed to benefit the common man, or the person of humble origin.
 1. Not many "*wise*," "*mighty*," or "*noble*" are called, I Cor. 1:26.
 - a. Does not contradict Acts 10:34-35.
 - b. Some noteworthy exceptions, Acts 17:34: 13:6-12; 17:4,12; Rom. 16:23.
 - c. But the "*wise*," the "*mighty*," the "*noble*" are often beset with peculiar temptations, usually satisfied with rank, wealth, surrounded with objects that flatter their vanity, often too proud to acknowledge dependence on God.
 - d. Note the attack of Celsus (second century Philosopher) against Christianity: "Let no cultured person draw near, none wise, none sensible; for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any is wanting in sense and culture, if any is a fool let him come boldly." Of the Christians he wrote: "We see them in their own houses, wool dressers, cobblers and fullers, the most uneducated and vulgar persons." He said that the Christians were "like a swarm of bats – or ants creeping out of their nests – or frogs holding a symposium around a swamp – or worse in conventicler in a corner of mud."
 - e. The world generally has its values turned upside down. Matt. 11:25-26.
 2. Paul gloried in the fact that for the most part the church was composed of the simplest and humblest of people.
 - a. Slavery was very widespread in the Roman Empire. They were not highly regarded by the "cultured" and the "elite" of society.
 - b. But they meant a lot to God, Acts 10:34-35; Heb. 2:9.

Conclusion:

1. Why you need Christ, I Cor. 1:30. He is:
 - a. Wisdom, v. 24; Col. 2:3.
 - b. Righteousness – the means of our being made righteous.
 - c. Sanctification, meaning set apart, made holy.
 - d. Redemption, or deliverance from bondage.
2. Result – We should glory in the Lord, I Cor. 1:31; cf. Jer. 9:23-24.
3. To be able to "*glory in the Lord*" in this life enables us to rejoice eternally with God in the life to come.

--Bobby Witherington, July 18, 2015