

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.”

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*One Lord, One Faith, One
Baptism – Paul’s First Epistle to
the Corinthians*

*Part 6 – We Preach Christ
Crucified*

March 24, 2024 (Palm Sunday)

Sermon Text: 1 Cor 1:17-31

Scripture Reading: Matthew
21:1-11

The Old Testament backdrop to our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem seated on a colt, is to be found in the prophet Zechariah:

Zec 9:9-17 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold,

your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

(10) I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and **he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.**

(11) As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. (12) Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. (13) For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have

made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.

(14) Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. (15) The LORD of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones, and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar.

(16) On that day the LORD their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. (17) For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

Very strange indeed! A conquering King, the Messiah, come to liberate His people and destroy their enemies, ushering in His reign of peace. Yet, when He comes, He

will be riding a little colt, humble, mounted not on a powerful stallion with great pageantry, but in a shocking statement of humility. Weakness. How is it possible that this could be the Lord's king who would reign over the world?

This is something that the Corinthians had not yet understood. A King who is humble and lowly. A King riding a colt. The thing is foolishness to man.

And so it is:

1Co 1:18-25 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

(19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." (20) Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

(21) For since, in the wisdom of

God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

(22) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, (23) but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, (24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

(25) For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

As we have been seeing in our study of this first letter of Paul (actually his second) to the Corinthians, this terrible, sinful business of *pride* was at the root of things. And it is this pride of man which must be destroyed in us if we are to be saved.

The Lord will not share His glory with another. He will never empower any message which leaves room for man to boast, giving himself even partial credit

for his gaining a right standing before God.

We must always be on guard against this boasting, this wicked pride which always wants to raise man up and bring Christ down.

Rom 10:6-9 But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) (7) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). (8) But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); (9) because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

This is why salvation is all through faith alone. It is why the Bible says that salvation is of the Lord. It is why Zechariah wrote:

Zec 4:6 Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by

power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

As you know, I have been reading for a second time through the great biography of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and he understood the foolishness of the Cross, and how this message must never be altered, no must we use man's schemes and methods in order to see people saved:

“We seem to have a real horror of being different. Hence all our attempts and endeavours to popularize the church and make it appeal to people. We seem to be trying to tell people that their joining a church will not make them so very different after all. ‘We are no longer Puritans,’ we say, ‘we believe that they over-did things and made Christianity too difficult for people. They frightened people with their strictness and their unnecessarily high standards. We are not so foolish as to do that.’

Instead, however, we provide so called ‘sporting parsons’, men of whom the world can say that they

are ‘good sports’ – whatever that may mean. And what it does so often mean is that they are men who believe that you can get men to come to church by playing football and other games with them. ‘I shall fraternize with these men,’ says such a minister. ‘I will get them to like me and to see that I am not so different from them after all, and then they will come to listen to my sermons.’

And he tries it, but thank God, he almost invariably fails, as he richly deserves [Note: in our day, for appearances, these kind can look like they are succeeding, but really no one is truly saved].

The man who only comes to church because he likes the minister as a man is of no value at all, and the minister who attempts to get men there by means of that subterfuge is for the time being guilty of lowering the standard of truth which he claims to believe.”

[Lloyd-Jones biography, Iain Murray, Banner of Truth]

The Corinthians’ error was much

the same. They wanted to be popular with their world. They wanted a gospel that would be regarded as wise according to the world's standards. They were still far too much like the Greek philosophical culture which valued man's wisdom, man's oratory, man's philosophical systems.

But God does not work according to the world's mind. The Almighty, Omnipotent, Creator of the universe whose Word is spoken and the thing *is*, chooses to work through a King mounted on a donkey and even more shocking, *through a King hanging on a Roman cross!*

1Co 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Rom 1:16-18 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. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it

is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

The Word of the Cross

In the previous verse, Paul had used the word "gospel" for his preaching:

1Co 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Then, in the very next sentences, he uses a term which is synonymous with gospel:

1Co 1:18 For **the word of the cross** is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The gospel, the good news announcing salvation in Christ, is a *word, a message preached, about*

the Cross. About a King crucified at the hands of wicked men. About an apparent ultimate defeat.

But in the mind of the world, a king must not be any of these things. He must be great, victorious, powerful, marching into His capital with great pageantry. And do we not see the people of Jerusalem clinging to this idea of their Messiah?

Mat 21:5-11 “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” (6) The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. (7) They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. (8) Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. (9) And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (10) And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city

was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” (11) And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Perhaps I am speculating a bit here, but in a way isn't this scene a bit comical? Not of course from God's eyes nor of the eyes of His real people, but in respect to the crowds. They are throwing their cloaks down in front of Him, cutting off palm branches to garnish His way, crying out Hosanna to the Son of David... *But all the while He is riding on the colt of a donkey!* Should that lowly humility have communicated a kind of dissonance in their thinking? They want a powerful king to drive out the Romans and make Jerusalem the envy of the nations once more. But surely they are willfully blind to what is right in front of them – the Lord mounted on a donkey's colt, marked by utter humility.

This ignorance of God's way of salvation, of the nature of the gospel as the Word of the Cross, lays a church open to wolves in

wool:

“The wolf knows how powerful he is on the pulpit and is not afraid to let everyone know it. It is possible that the congregation does not realize just how narcissistic their minister is, but they all boast that he is unlike all others.

He may not have a great deal of empathy, but he does possess an irrefutable skill as an orator. His sermons touch the souls [ie, emotions] of his followers, and he is frequently praised as being an effective tool for saving sinners' souls. He may be overly dramatic at times, but when the congregation hears his rich, sonorous voice, they acknowledge that their pastor is superior to others and feel lucky to have him. This is a narcissist's dream. [Malignant Narcissism: Recognizing a Dangerous Disorder, Bloomsbury Publishing, Cary Smith]

But where is the Word of the Cross really found? What does a real minister of Christ look like? What do the true people of Christ look

like? What is their gospel and how do they present it?

1Co 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And the content of the Word of the Cross is –

1Co 1:21-24 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through **the folly of what we preach** to save those who believe. (22) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, (23) **but we preach Christ crucified**, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, (24)

but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Only Two Categories of People

In the end, when we distill all categories of people down to the very fundamentals, there are only two classes of people in all of humanity:

- Those who are perishing
- Those who are being saved

The Bible uses various terms, but it always comes down to these two groups:

- Those outside the ark, perishing in God's judgment
- Those inside the ark, saved through faith in God's Word

- Those under the Law,
- Those who are under grace

- Those who are in Adam
- Those who are in Christ

Paul uses the first titles here in verse 18 – Those who are

perishing, those who are being saved.

Every one of us here, every single person joining us this morning online, *is in one of these two categories*. People often fancy, especially many people who claim to be Christians, that they can have one foot in one and the other foot in the other. This at least for many of these Corinthians was the goal. To be saved, yet to crave the approval of the world. But the thing is impossible. It is the one or the other. I am in the City of Destruction, or I have left it.

So then, how do we know which group we belong to? How are we to know if we are under God's wrath or if there is no condemnation upon us?

You have the answer right here in this same verse:

1Co 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

- Those to whom the Word of the Cross is foolishness
- Those to whom the Word of the Cross is the power of God for salvation

Now, it is not difficult to recognize people who openly and plainly voice their disdain for the Word of the Cross. The entire notion of their need of a Savior, of their position as one of under the wrath of God in need of rescue from hell...is mocked and scorned. And not only the message, but the messenger! Christ Himself, the subject of the Word of the Cross, was mocked and scorned and killed. These kind are quite evident and easy to see.

But...the enemy is cunning and subtle. We can be deceived in this matter. Many, many people who would be highly offended and angry if anyone suggested they might be dead in their sins, are just certain that they belong to the “those who are being saved” category. And yet, in fact, they regard the Word of the Cross as foolishness.

How can we tell? How can we honestly examine even ourselves? Is the Word of the Cross foolishness to me? Because the ultimate folly is to choose self-deception and refuse to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves to see if we are really saved or not until it is too late. How can I know?

Well, the gospel really begins here. That is to say, the Word of the Cross only makes sense as the most vitally important truth in all of life, IF we understand that it begins with this:

Rom 3:9-20 What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, (10) as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; (11) no one understands; no one seeks for God. (12) All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

(13) “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their

lips.” (14) “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” (15) “Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) in their paths are ruin and misery, (17) and the way of peace they have not known.”

(18) “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

(19) Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (20) For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

What do you say to that? This is the beginning of the Word of the Cross, and a real test of whether we regard it as foolishness. Face the thing truthfully. Is this message folly to you? Do you respond with excuses, with efforts to soften what this Scripture is saying *about you* as you were born into this world?

Or perhaps let’s put it this way – *Is*

your mouth closed? Has your mouth been shut by this description of what we are if we are not born again in Christ? Has the Word of the Cross caused you to shut up all of your excuses.

“so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.”

Is your response to these terrible truths about man in sin, about YOU in sin,

Hab 2:20 But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”

I remember when I was a teenager our family attended a liberal Baptist church (American Baptist denomination). Verla and I were married there – fortunately by her pastor who was a true Christian. But that “church” had all the trappings. Fine sanctuary, big organ, large choir (led by my high school physics teacher), the pastor’s wife who delighted in the praise she received for her operatic singing (they later divorced).

Every Sunday following the pastoral prayer, the thing was scripted for effect, the choir would break out into this “the Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silent before Him” chorus.

But I can tell you that except for a very, very few individuals, for all of this “let the earth keep silent” business, the mouths of those people were anything but shut. If presented (which they were not because the pastor was one of them)...if presented with these terrible truths which are where the Word of the Cross must begin, instantly they would begin with the “but...”, “Oh, surely Paul did not mean...”, “Oh, no, your interpretation is too harsh. Man is not all bad. Certainly there are many good people in this world.”

But until *your mouth and my mouth are shut, until the objections cease coming from our mouths, then such a person is not a Christian.* You cannot truly leave Sodom and be saved from God’s wrath if in fact you want to look back longingly for it. “It wasn’t such a bad place after all. Why surely God cannot be

tell us that everyone there is all that bad?” Such people, excuse-making mouth still open, will unless they repent and shut up with a believing silence, join Lot’s wife in the judgment.

1Co 1:18-19 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

The day has begun, and it is coming in its fullness, when all of man’s wisdom and cleverness will be gone forever. All glory will go to Christ. The Word of the Cross will be praised as the wisdom of God. Which group are you in today?