

Christ Community Covenant Church
Spirit filled life in a broken and fallen world: Foolish Wisdom/Unsuspected Power
Pastor Dave Scherrer - August 28, 2016

Who wants to be happy?

I believe all humanity has this in common: that they want to be happy. They do not all agree on what brings the greatest happiness, but they do all long to have it. And this longing is not bad. It is good. ***Evil consists in trying to find happiness in ways that displease and dishonor God. Goodness consists in finding happiness in ways that please and honor God.*** To our delight, God has established this world in such a way that doing good through faith in Christ always eventually lead to greater happiness. We do not live in a world where we must choose between our eternal happiness and God's glory! God has created this world and its moral laws in such a way that the more we choose to glorify God, the happier we will be. **Finding that path towards an uncompromised personal happiness and at the same time holding uncompromisingly to the Glory of God takes wisdom.** Now all we have to do is figure out what ***wisdom is, because true wisdom and perfected power have been redefined by God's Kingdom values and priorities.***

Wisdom and Power redefined by God

I didn't look this up in Webster's Dictionary but it seems to me wisdom in the world seems to be about credentials and life experience and power is about making others submit to your will.

Wisdom in the world seems to be about credentials and life experience
Power in the world is about making others submit to your will

We don't have enough time to cover both wisdom and power this morning so we will focus on wisdom for now. Wisdom has been equated with being a 'professional' - having years of experience in a field or enterprise, maybe having lots of letters behind your name that represents academic degrees, that constitutes a common opinion on what is wisdom I think. And power in the world today has all to do with influence and control not authority and character. Let's go ahead and turn our attention to our study of 1 Corinthians because this discussion is front and center in our passage this morning.

As I mentioned last week, when we study the first chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul is addressing a concern that was raised by some members of the church in Corinth (Chloe's people) who visited Paul in Ephesus where he was planting another church. They expressed their concerns about name dropping and power grabbing efforts on the part of some in the church, creating divisions among the fellowship. Paul takes an interesting tack on this I think. He writes about using God's wisdom to address these power issues being raised. Let's look the passage together:

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

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. 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.

So in this introduction to his addressing the concerns about divisions in the church is a brief discourse on something that might be called the foolish wisdom of God and the unsuspected power according to God.

Foolish Wisdom/Unsuspected Power

God has a habit as He establishes His Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven of turning this world value system upside down and inside out. He says things like "If someone wants to you to go one mile, then go with them two." Or, "If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God you must first be a servant of all." "Turn the other cheek." "Pick up your cross daily." These don't seem to be the secret of happiness that we agreed upon earlier that we all long for. But remember we are looking for an eternal kind of happiness, one that can't be taken away by the relentless whims of the world - a happiness that comes not from things that wear out and relationships that disappoint and from fleeting pursuits of power and wealth. We want it all. Happiness that lasts AND God's glory to shine. This can all be pretty concerning for us who are trying to understand God's rule and reign in our lives. Clearly we need a different kind of wisdom to achieve this happiness. We need to understand God's wisdom according to His new Kingdom economy.

Wisdom in God's Economy

Over and over God is saying your humankind wisdom cannot fathom the depths of his mercy and grace and power and purposes. He promises great things but just exactly how will be a mystery . . . What we do know is that human wisdom can't get us there . . . !

Isaiah 29:14

Therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people,
with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,
and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden."

God is saying when you pursue wisdom from the Godhead then this eternal happiness naturally follows:

Proverbs 19:8

He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; He who keeps understanding will find good.

Proverbs 8:32-35

"Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, For blessed are they who keep my ways.

³³"Heed instruction and be wise, And do not neglect *it*. ³⁴"Blessed is the man who listens to me,
Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. ³⁵"For he who finds me finds life
And obtains favor from the LORD.

Proverbs 16:16

How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver.

Proverbs 24:13-14

My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;

¹⁴ Know *that* wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find *it*, then there will be a future,
And your hope will not be cut off.

Paul immediately takes us to the foolishness of the cross as an example of God's wisdom.

The Foolishness of the Cross

1 Corinthians 1:18

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 Cross is a stumbling block to the Greeks and Romans. New Testament scholar Anthony Thiselton wrote that death on a cross was regarded in Roman society as brutal and disgusting. It was a stumbling block (v22) or "*scandalon*" (God on a cross is *scandalous*!) in the Greek as Paul writes of it here. It was reserved for convicted slaves and convicted terrorists, never a Roman citizen and rarely even a common criminal. It was so offensive to good taste that the idea of crucifixion was never mentioned in polite society. They like their

heroes to be handsome, to be silver tongued, to be victorious, to be popular. To have your life end in defeat, and not just defeat but a disgraceful public torment – ridiculed and mocked - is contrary to every so called wise thought of that culture. Jews too had a hard time with a Messiah who ends up crucified. Old Testament law declared that to be killed and hung on a tree is to mean that you are accursed by God. **Deuteronomy 21:22-23** tells us ***"If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.*** In Jewish wisdom it is scandalous to even entertain the thought that Messiah could meet His death through crucifixion. It cannot even be considered. It is pure folly.

The church in Corinth was filled with Greeks who have been persuaded by the teaching and powers of Christ but still find his death disturbing. Converted Jews too had found Jesus to be compelling in His life but troubling in His death. But Paul puts the cross front and center. He demands they see it as the centerpiece of their faith.

It may seem folly in this world's system, but God has shown that this death of His Son on the humbling cross has set us free from every lie of false wisdom and the coercive powers of false gods that seek to constrain you with shackles and throw you into slavery.

So what does this all mean to us? How do we achieve this happiness in the face of the scandal of the cross? It means simply that we must stop seeking our happiness in one way and start seeking it in another.

What sets Christians off from the world is not that we have given up on the universal quest for happiness, but that we now seek our happiness from a different source and in different ways. We have learned from Jesus, ***"who for the joy set before him endured the cross"*** (Hebrews 12:2), that the joy we seek may require that we choose to suffer for Christ's sake. Still we must never become self-pitying because ***"the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us"*** (Romans 8:18). Nor can we ever become proud since we know that ***"suffering produces patience, and patience produces approvedness, and approvedness produces hope"*** (Romans 5:3, 4)—hope that God will restore our happiness one hundredfold (Mark 10:30).

My good friend the 20th century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died by hanging at the hands of the Nazis just hours from being liberated by Allied forces, said this about the cross:

"If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a god who corresponds to me, who is agreeable to me, who yields to me. But if it God who says where he will be, the place is the Cross of Christ. That is where God truly meets humanity".

I have two thoughts by way of application for our little fellowship here in Arvada, not so unlike the old church of Corinth.

As we strive to crossover into our world, we must be sure to crossover with the cross.

1 Cor. 1:22-24

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.***

Popular Christianity has been big business in politics, entertainment, sports, etc., but many have crossed over without the cross. Yet, Christianity without the cross is like music without a tune. When you and I talk about our beliefs, we must make a beeline to the cross of Christ. That is what makes our message both unique and powerful.

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

It may take a crucified church to bring a crucified Christ before the eyes of the world.

In my opinion it is not just the person that must take up their cross daily. The church is called to sacrifice for the sake of the world. We as a church intend to die to ourselves - to 'our agenda', our so called 'place' in the church community. We intend to live recklessly for Christ. We intend to love the world the way that Christ loved the world – without regard for self-comfort and self-satisfaction. I see a risky love for our 4Cs future. We invest in the world around us, not because we want to build our congregational size or financial budget, but because Christ is glorified when we act as light in our neighborhood as people see our good deeds and glorify our Father who is in heaven. That should sound familiar.

This is the spirit behind our 4Cs Cares Day: The crucified church giving up a day to serve our community as an act of worship. I believe that the churches that God is going to do great things through are weak and foolish in the world's eyes.

Someone is going to say, "Why do we have to do this? How will this make our church better? Do we really think that someone is going to come to our church just because of this act of kindness on our part? None of those things are our motivation. We do kindness for the sake of kindness. Remember, I recognize that many of us do this on our own. I know of many here that volunteer for various good causes. You sacrificially give money and time to the hurting and under loved. But you know that we don't do it often together. And this is our chance to participate in these great good deeds as one fellowship under the headship of our Savior.

There is a book and film entitled *A River Runs Through It*. The movie chronicles two brothers coming of age in early 20th century Missoula, Montana. The boys grow up under the stern tutelage of their minister father. This preacher teaches his sons about life, grace, and love, through the art of fly-fishing. But as the boys mature and follow very different paths (one straight-and-narrow, the other wild) they find that fishing is the one bond that still draws them together as adults. Thus, the title *A River Runs Through It* was not a description of the land as much as it was a description of a recurring theme in their lives. When all else failed, they could always go back to the river and bond around their love of fly-fishing.

If I had to pick a title for our Christian community experience here at 4Cs, it might be "A Cross Runs Through It." When all else fails, we always go back to the cross and bond around our love for the One who died for us there. Ultimately, all that we believe in is wrapped up in the cross of Christ. It is the central truth of the Christian faith and the preeminent event of human history. The cross is our message, our hope, our confidence. It is our badge of honor and our emblem of suffering and shame. Though the world questions the cross and even despises the cross, we rally to it. Therefore, let us love the cross, preach the cross, stand by the cross, and never be ashamed of the cross. Hold it high as the banner of our salvation. Lift it up as the hope of the world. There is no power greater than the power of the cross. The Old Rugged Cross is the only hope that can lift men and women out of their sins, release them from condemnation, give them new life, and set their feet in a new direction.

Benediction