

1 Corinthians 2 (2013)

- Last week I put to rest any concern that ours is a church of “feel good” preaching, as if there were any doubt
 - I was reminded after my last sermon on the foolish audience that believes the Gospel, that no one comes here expecting to be puffed up
 - I admit I like to feel good about myself too...who doesn't?
 - The world loves it so much that many churches now preach messages of improving self-esteem and self-worth
 - We're told that it's healthy and important to maintain a positive view of oneself, and perhaps it's true to a degree
 - But pandering to the flesh has eternal consequences
 - This new approach to preaching in the church has twisted the Gospel itself into a message of happiness and materialism
 - Today men and women are invited to join Christianity as a source for earthly happiness and fulfillment rather than for the opportunity to reconcile with a God Who judges sin
 - So with so much feel-good preaching ringing in our ears these days, I'm sure it's a bit of a shock anytime we encounter a message that runs contrary to that stream of happiness
- At the end of the day, Christians are supposed to ask what does the Bible teach us about ourselves and about God?
 - Does the word of God command God's children to develop greater self-esteem?
 - Does it teach us we were called into faith and blessed with the Holy Spirit so that we might think better of ourselves?
 - Does it identify lack of self-esteem as the source of our problems?
 - What does the Bible say?
 - Simply put, the Bible says that we do not need more self-esteem
 - Mankind already has way too much self-esteem

- Self-esteem is the psychologist's term for an old Biblical word, "pride"
 - Pride is a bad word in scripture
 - Satan's pride was the source of evil in the world
 - And man's pride is the source of our sin and all its misery
- Instead of more self-esteem, the Bible says we need more Christ-esteem
 - We need a greater appreciation of Who Christ is, what He's done for us and who we become in Him
 - And at the same time, we need less self-esteem to make room in our hearts for more of Christ
 - As John the Baptist said, He must increase but I must decrease
 - For Christ to be properly magnified in our understanding and in our life, we must diminish our view of self
 - So don't be surprised if you don't feel affirmed as we study scripture together
 - In fact, if our study of scripture leaves you feeling better about yourself, then you're not listening carefully
- One of Paul's key purposes for writing was to effect this change among the believers in Corinth
 - Paul wants to address their pride over how they entered the faith by instilling in them a new perspective on how they entered into the faith
 - In Chapter 1 and the beginning part of Chapter 2 Paul taught good communication theory
 - Communication theory says that communication always involves a sender, a receiver and a message
 - In Chapter 1, Paul explained that the Lord designed a foolish message
 - It proposed a foolish-sounding solution to the question of how man may find God and be reconciled

- And then the Lord chose a foolish audience to receive the message
 - A group of people the world wouldn't consider wise or strong or noble
- But what about the messenger?
 - Paul now teaches in Chapter 2 that God also chose foolish messengers to deliver the message of the Gospel
 - Men the world also viewed as weak and unimpressive

[1Cor. 2:1](#) And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

[1Cor. 2:2](#) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

[1Cor. 2:3](#) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

[1Cor. 2:4](#) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

[1Cor. 2:5](#) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

- Paul says he did not come to Corinth with any superiority of speech
 - In Greek, Paul literally said he didn't come with prominent words
 - Apparently, to hear Paul wouldn't have impressed you or me
 - When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he quoted his detractors as they described Paul's speech

[2Cor. 10:10](#) For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."

- Paul's speech was called contemptible or despised
- Remember, Greece was ground zero for professional debaters and orators in the ancient world
 - And so here comes Paul, a man who lacked a stage presence
 - He was unimpressive, probably because his impressive letters cause you to expect better
 - I can almost hear the whispers in the crowd now: "He seemed so much taller in his letters."

- But it wasn't just Paul's speech that was unimpressive
 - Paul says he came without superior wisdom
 - There's that word *sophia* again
 - Paul walked into a city filled with Greek wisdom and philosophy, yet by Corinthian standards he had little wisdom to offer
 - His arguments for the Gospel didn't rest on powerful and intricate defenses or explanations
- Instead, Paul says he simply proclaimed the testimony of God
 - The Greek word for proclaim is the word for announce or declare publicly
 - Paul went about the city proclaiming the truth of Jesus and then waited to see what kind of response he received
 - And the testimony was simple: Jesus and Him crucified
 - Jesus refers to the God-man, the incarnation of God in the form of Jesus Christ
 - A man who was God in the flesh, who lived a sinless life
 - And to Him crucified refers to Jesus' atoning work on the cross, His death in our place and His resurrection to glory
 - That was the message Paul proclaimed
- At the end of v.4 Paul notes that his presentation came with a demonstration of the Spirit and power
 - Paul's referring to something unique in the ministry of the apostles
 - These special men of the early church played a unique role in establishing the church
 - They were commissioned to preach the Gospel and deliver Jesus' teaching to early believers
 - In fact, their teaching became our scripture
 - In order to authenticate their message, God gave these men spiritual gifts of a different kind, gifts that were wholly unique to their station

- We read in the New Testament of apostles raising men from the dead
- Healing the sick merely by the casting of their shadow
- The ability to cause men to fall dead merely at a word
- The ability to handle dangerous snakes, to be bitten even, and not to die
 - Self-evidently, these are not gifts common to the believer today
- These men combined the Gospel message the Lord gave them with the spiritual powers they received by the Spirit to establish faith where none before existed
 - Their powers were essential to validating their message and mission
 - Since the powers they demonstrated were clearly God-given powers, their audience realized that their message was approved by God
 - And when false apostles tried to deceive the church, their deception would become evident since they lacked these powers to validate their message
 - That's how the early church knew to ignore false apostles
- So Paul says the message of the Gospel was not without power
 - It came with power from God, in the form of Paul's apostolic powers
 - The truth of this message was authenticated by the power of God
 - Therefore, it didn't need to rely on human wisdom and human power
- Knowing this, Paul said he did three things:
 - First, he showed up
 - He said he came to them
 - This is probably 95% of any ministry work

- Having the courage and conviction to follow God's call and go to people who most likely wouldn't want to hear the message
- Secondly, Paul proclaimed the message
 - Paul was active and purposeful
 - He didn't just wander through Corinth looking for someone he could quietly approach and get to know over coffee
 - He didn't just hope a spiritual conversation might come up on its own
 - Then maybe ease into a conversation about Jesus
 - He wasn't content to simply sit in a public place
 - Wearing his WWJD t-shirt
 - Reading the Bible on his iPad
 - Listening to TobyMac
 - Hoping someone would look over his shoulder and ask him what he was reading
 - He proclaimed the Gospel boldly, publicly and frequently
 - He went into synagogues, homes, businesses
 - He declared the truth
- And Paul expected – he depended upon – God's power to show up on cue and cause a proper response, at least in some
- Did you know that evangelism could be this easy?
 - Did you know it doesn't require superiority of speech?
 - It doesn't rest on superior wisdom?
 - It rests entirely on showing up, proclaiming the truth of the Gospel publicly, and then waiting for God's power
 - We go, we proclaim, God changes hearts...it's that simple
 - Could it be that our hesitation to evangelize is partly out of an ignorance of what's truly required?

- Perhaps we've imagined the process in exactly the wrong way
- We've been so worried about having the right words, about making the arguments, answering the challenges
- That we forgot that the point is simply to proclaim a foolish message
- The joy of serving Christ in the Great Commission is in the simplicity of what we're called to do
 - We proclaim Christ, and Him crucified
 - We tell the story of the Gospel to the world, and it doesn't matter how many times they've already heard it or how likely they are to reject it
 - It only takes a second for the Spirit to bring faith to the heart and it comes by the power of God
- Paul says in v.5 that God designed the process of salvation in this beautiful way so that our faith wouldn't rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God
 - The Greek word for rest is *eimi*, which means belongs
 - The message of the Gospel and the results it achieves belong to God alone
 - In other words, we can never declare that we are "of Paul" or "of Apollos" or even of ourselves
 - My salvation didn't depend on human wisdom, nor does it depend on my own wisdom
 - It rests entirely on the grace and power of God
- Now since the beginning of his letter, Paul has repeatedly emphasized the foolishness of the message
 - But when Paul uses the word foolish, he means in comparison to the world's definition of wisdom
 - That doesn't mean that the Gospel message is actually foolish
 - It is a truth the world in its ignorance rejects
 - And yet, Paul says for the one who has received the Gospel and come to faith, God will make available real spiritual wisdom

- That wisdom doesn't come all at once
- And it doesn't show up automatically

[1Cor. 2:6](#) Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;

[1Cor. 2:7](#) but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

[1Cor. 2:8](#) the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

[1Cor. 2:9](#) but just as it is written,

**"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."**

- Paul says yet we do speak wisdom
 - When he says "we", he's referring to the apostles
 - Paul, Apollos, Peter, etc.
 - Through these men, God was at work bringing wisdom to the believer
 - It's a wisdom very different from the kind the world seeks
 - This news must have piqued the interest of the Corinthian church
 - Finally, the wisdom loving Greek believers were hearing what they longed to hear
 - There was a heavenly wisdom they could come to know
 - But Paul says this wisdom is accessible only to the mature
 - Paul's going to come back to this issue of individual maturity and its relationship to our experience in the body later in Chapter 3
 - But for now, it's enough to know that the arrival of faith does include an opportunity to know mysteries and wonders of God
- Paul says this wisdom is not something found either in this age or among the powerful members of society, both of which are passing away
 - Wisdom is a fancy word for truth

- There is a truth of this world, of this age, and then there is the truth of God
- There is a truth that worldly rulers understand and there is a truth that God makes known
 - Of course, the truth of this age is no truth at all
 - And the rulers of this age are proponents of myths and various self-deceptions
- The myths our world hold to be true are as temporary as the world itself, Paul says
 - One day all men die and pass away
 - And when that happens, whatever lies they helped create or sustain will pass away with them
 - Eventually the world itself will pass away, burning up as Peter tells us
 - And when that happens, all the lies of Satan and men alike will be gone forever
 - The wisdom that comes from God outlasts creation itself because it predates Creation
 - Knowing that should encourage us to take little note of them or lose little sleep when the world scorns our contrary views
- Even more surprising, Paul says God determined to obscure His wisdom in a mystery that was outside the reach of the world
 - A mystery is a truth hidden until an appointed time when it is revealed by God
 - What is this mystery, this truth that God prepared and then revealed?
 - It is none other than the Gospel message itself
 - The message that God would come as man and die for our sin
 - That a Church of believers would be established on earth
 - That Christ will return to earth to establish His Kingdom

- And everything else the New Testament reveals to us by the Spirit
- As Paul already taught, the Gospel message is a wisdom hidden from the world
 - When it was revealed, the world missed it
 - Jesus came and declared the kingdom, yet the world overlooked His message and His sinless life
 - It was as if Jesus talked a foreign language...they couldn't understand the importance of what He taught
 - And Paul says the Lord wanted it this way, as Jesus Himself said

Matt. 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

- The rulers of this age missed God's mystery of Jesus as Messiah
 - Paul says if they hadn't missed it, they certainly wouldn't have crucified the Lord
 - And then Paul quotes from Isaiah 64 & 65 to prove this was always to be God's plan
- Isaiah says the human eye, ear and intellect has not perceived the things God has prepared for His children
 - The common way this passage is interpreted goes something like this:
 - The heaven God has prepared for each of us is so marvelous that we can't imagine what we will find there
 - It's so wonderful, it's unimaginable
 - Those statements are true statements
 - Heaven is an unimaginably wonderful place
- But that's not what Isaiah and Paul are telling us in this passage
 - Paul explains the full meaning of Isaiah's statement in vs.10-11

1Cor. 2:10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

[1Cor. 2:11](#) For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

[1Cor. 2:12](#) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

- Paul says the things that our eye and ear and intellect couldn't imagine in advance are the very things we are now having revealed to us by the Spirit
 - We have come to understand God's plan from the beginning of time
 - The plan of redemption in Jesus
 - And now we know our place in the plan, as men and women appointed to believe and be saved
 - And now we're learning the next things God has prepared for us
 - Paul and Isaiah aren't teaching that we have no hope to understand the things God has prepared
 - They were teaching that apart from the power of God, men could not appreciate all that God had prepared in Christ
 - Paul says these mysteries are the wisdom of God
 - And it is even now being revealed to us, beginning with the truth of the Gospel itself
- God did not expect His children to stumble through this world in ignorance, waiting for a future day in Heaven when we finally understand God and His work and plan
 - Obviously, not everything can be known now; many things await until we reach the Throne room
 - But far more is available to us now by the Spirit, Paul says
 - Paul says the Spirit searches all things
 - This phrase means there is nothing of God that is too profound for the Spirit to reach and reveal to us if it be God's will
 - So everything that is in God is available to us in the Spirit
 - Just as a man's own spirit is intimately aware of everything that the man is and everything he knows, so it is with the Lord's Spirit

- No one knows the thoughts of God but the Spirit of God
- Until the Spirit makes Himself known to us, we cannot know God
- But once the Spirit indwells us by faith, circumstances flip and now we have access to all that God is and all He knows
- That what Isaiah meant when he said no man could imagine what God has prepared for those who love Him
 - Without the Spirit of God, a man is locked out of what God has prepared for us
 - Notice the wisdom is prepared, which means it is necessary for us to take advantage of it
 - Coming to faith instantly grants us all of God's wisdom at once
 - But as we work with the Spirit, He may reveal these things to us
 - It's like having a library card
 - Obtaining that card doesn't result in all the knowledge of the books on the library shelves automatically transferring into your brain
 - It grants you the opportunity to learn what has been prepared for you in all those books
 - If you devote yourself to learning what they hold
- Similarly, we have the Spirit indwelling us expressly for that purpose, Paul says
 - The Lord's intent was to grant us access to the mind of God
 - When Jesus told the disciples that a Helper was coming, He was referring to this teaching ministry of the Spirit

[John 14:26](#) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your **remembrance** all that I said to you.

- The Spirit is still working today in the same way, bringing to mind Christ's teaching and explaining its meaning
- We have all received a Spirit whose mission is to teach us what has already been freely given to us by God

- Like the books in that library, everything is freely available
- God is not asking for us to earn or deserve the wisdom that comes with a life lived in Christ
- He has prepared great wonders and knowledge and power for His children
- He gives us opportunity to seek that wisdom, and in His timing and will we receive the blessing of that wisdom
- But if we live like the Corinthian church, we stand the chance of missing out on that blessing
 - The Corinthians were so busy resting in the world's wisdom and their own understanding, that they never bothered to use their Heavenly library card
 - To seek the Spirit for understanding
 - To search the scriptures for truth
 - To check out a book
- Let's not trade the foolishness of God for the wisdom of men
 - Pray, read your Bible, listen to the Spirit
 - Go out, proclaim the message, rely on God's power
 - Membership has its privileges...let's use our library card