1 Corinthians 1:22-31 Sermon Manuscript

“So That No One Would Boast”

 I’m sure you have heard of the objection from those who refuse to believe in Christ that the reason they don’t believe is because “*Christianity is a crutch for the weak*.” One person who rejects the Christian faith put it like this: “*As far as I'm concerned, religion is just for weak people -- people who need a crutch to lean on to get through life. I don't need religion or God. I take life as it comes, and meet whatever it hands me in my own strength*.” Another person put it like this: “*In my view, religion is only for weak people who can't stand on their own two feet. Life isn't easy, but it's useless to lean on some imaginary "God" for help. We have to fight our own battles and can only depend on ourselves. I don't have any use for religion*.”

 But you know what’s ironic? If we think about it, the phrase “*Christianity is a crutch for the weak*” that is a phrase intended to mock and scorn Christianity is actually true. What’s wrong with admitting we are weak and in need of the crutch of God to get through life? We are a bunch of weak people who are weak from the power of sin, unable to help ourselves to God, and we need God’s strength to lift our weak selves up to Him. But while that phrase is meant to be insulting to Christians, I think that phrase isn’t insulting enough!!! Christianity is not just a “*crutch for the weak, it is a stretcher for the dead*.”

 A crutch involves us way too much in our salvation because it implies that God supplies not all but only the rest of what we are lacking in for salvation. Having a crutch still gives us some glory because we are still contributing somewhat to our salvation, as miniscule of a contribution that might be. “*Christianity is a crutch for the weak*”? The Roman Catholic church can have that with their twisted doctrine of salvation of Jesus getting you initiated by His grace into the process of salvation and the rest is up to you through you doing the sacraments to complete your salvation. No, for us, give us the phrase “*Christianity is a stretcher for the dead*,” because THAT is biblical. That is an accurate portrayal of who we really are as Ephesians 2 says because we are not alive in our works, but we are DEAD in our transgressions. Spiritually dead, unable to move a finger towards God, and thus we need Jesus Christ’s stretcher of salvation to carry the dead into life in Him. And what is the end result of viewing ourselves as needing to be carried by a stretcher? So that no one may boast before God, but that our only boast is in God who made us alive in Christ. And that is what our text is all about today that God in His wisdom and glory designed salvation so that all praise, glory, honor, power, and boasting will not go to us, but to Him alone.

 Now last week we went over 1 Corinthians 1:18-21 and we looked at how our culture mocks the message of the cross. They see it as foolish that an all-powerful God would willingly come down to die for the sins of others He did not commit. The cross is offensive to our culture because it destroys our pride and leaves no room for us to boast in our own achievements. And while the mention of a cross was taboo to say and horrific and offensive to think about in those days, verse 21 says God was “*well pleased*” through the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who believe. And then we come to verses 22 through 23 where it says, “*For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness*.” There was nothing inherently wrong with seeking for a sign from God. God often revealed Himself through signs and wonders to show His power, presence, and glory to His people. But God gave the greatest sign of all the signs he has shown, which was the incarnation of the Messiah of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ.

 And even though Christ did many signs and wonders to authenticate His ministry and authenticate who He was, yet tragically, His own people did not recognize or acknowledge Him as the Messiah. About the mid 100s, a Christian by the name of Justin Martyr had a dialogue with a Jewish Rabbi named Trypho. Justin was trying to persuade Trypho from Daniel 7 that the Son of Man was Jesus the Messiah. Trypho unpersuaded said, “*Sir, these and such like passages of Scripture compel us to await One who is great and glorious, and takes the everlasting Kingdom from the Ancient of Days as Son of Man. But this your so-called Christ is without honor and glory, so that He has even fallen into the uttermost curse that is in the Law of God, for he was crucified*.” The Jews just could not reconcile the suffering and death of the Messiah with the conquering and powerful image of a military ruler they had prophesied in the Old Testament. And thus even to this day, many Jews still believe the Messiah has not yet come because their conception of the Messiah was so different than Jesus of Nazareth. Yes Christ is the Lion from the tribe of Judah that will one day roar and literally crush the enemies of God. But He is also the Lamb of God who first went to the cross to be slain for the sins of His enemies. The Lion and the Lamb is an oxymoron and should not belong together in the same phrase, and yet that is the amazing truth of who Jesus is, the Lion and the Lamb.

 As I talked about in the previous week, the Greeks valued and sought after “wisdom,” which like the signs, might not seem on the surface bad. But the problem was, the Greeks sought human wisdom, not God’s wisdom. They were seeking to understand everything by human logic, human rational, and human wisdom, instead of God’s logic, God’s rational, and God’s wisdom. And human understanding is finite and limited and furthermore, it is tainted and corrupted by sin. They loved to learn about new ideas and philosophies. The word “philosophy” in fact is two words combined into one, “philos” which means love, and “Sophia” which means wisdom. It is a love for wisdom, but not just any wisdom, a love particularly for human wisdom. One person I think captures the dark side of human wisdom pretty well. He says it is “*human intellectual conceit, the puffed-up consciousness of the cock-sure, which prevents knowledge of the self as well as God*.” I think that quote captures much of today’s major universities and colleges.

 An ancient satirical Greek novelist by the name of Lucian of Samosota wrote a novel = titled “The Passing Peregrinus,” which included mocking religion, and Christianity in particular. In it he called Christ that “*crucified sophist*” and his believers as “*poor wretches*.” It’s ok to a certain extent if there are some things that are hard to understand because we are human and limited in our understanding. But it becomes not “ok” or acceptable when our human logic, reasoning, and wisdom (if you can even call it “wisdom”) becomes the ultimate authority in determining the meaning of God’s Word instead of trusting that God’s Word is accurate and correct and without error. When it comes to studying philosophy, we need to be discerning in what we expose our mind to. I’m not saying there is no place for studying philosophy, but much of the philosophies of this world is rooted in unbelief. I have seen the damage of what philosophy can do when taken in wholesale. For example, in my Freshman year, I remember our dorm floor Fischer 4A gathered in our community room to hear this upperclassman who was a Philosophy major give advice or a speech for us Freshman. And instead of encouraging us in the Word of God, this upperclassman arrogantly boasted that he could tear down any biblical theology or belief we held to. That’s why as we read Colossians 2:8 says to “beware of philosophy…” “beware of philosophy.”

 That’s why I have mentioned that there are no true contradictions in Scripture. God cannot contradict himself unlike we do. There’s only tensions that exist in Scripture, but not contradictions. For example, when it comes to the whole Evolution controversy, scientists claim that all that we see today and humanity came about through evolutionary processes from slim to apes to humans through a process of billions upon billions of years. Scripture, however indicates that one kind does not produce another kind. A fish does not evolve into an ape. God made each creature including us humans out of nothing. And humans produce their own kind, humans. And if you believe that the earth is billions of years old and that God used evolution to bring about humans as we know of it today, then theologically you have a big issue. The issue is death. Death would have had to have existed before the Fall in Genesis 3 and if death existed before the Fall, then death is not the consequence or penalty of sin, and thus we don’t need a Savior to save us from penalty of sin which is death. So are you going to believe in the “human wisdom” of these so called scientists who claim evolution is “science”? By believing in evolution, whether you realize it or not, you are saying that the Word of God is wrong. Or are you going to be a “fool” in front of the world, and believe in God’s wisdom and God’s Word that what He has said is the absolute truth.

 To Jews like rabbi Trypho, Christ crucified is a stumbling block. And to Gentiles, like Lucian of Samosota Christ crucified is foolishness to them. But…verse 24 “*But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*.” The power of God and the wisdom of God directly correspond to the stumbling block of the Jews and the foolishness of the Greeks respectively. The Jews believed that Jesus was not the Christ because He was not powerful. He didn’t topple Rome and free and lead the people of Israel out of enslavement to Rome. Like the chief priests, scribes, and elders in Matthew 27 who mocked Jesus yelling out “*He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him*…” that is how the Jews viewed Jesus. And like the men of Athens who mocked Paul by saying “*what would this idle babbler wish to say*?” In other words, what is this babbling nonsense that is coming out of him? Christ is foolishness to them. But if you are called by God unto salvation, if God has drawn you near to Him and opened up your eyes to truly see Christ as He is…you will see Christ as the power of God and wisdom of God. Why? Verses 25-26 “*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble*.”

 How foolish of us to think that anything that God does is foolish or weak! Paul is using a little bit of satire here in using the language of the Jews and Greeks against them. He’s saying this: “*Okay, even though it’s impossible for God to be weak or foolish, let’s just suppose for the sake of argument that God does have a little bit of folly and a little bit of weakness. Even if he does, that foolish aspect of Him is still going to be wiser than all the combined wisdom of this world, and that weak aspect of Him is still going to be stronger than all the combined strength in the world*!” Paul is taking their flawed, sinful, human logic and wisdom and showing the Jews and the Greeks how their own wisdom and thinking contradicts itself.

 And as if that wasn’t enough, Paul says, “*Look guys! Just take a look at us, take a look at the church. Do you see a bunch of famous, strong, respected, esteemed, royal people in our midst? There might be a few, but a majority of us are nobodies*! There’s not many “mighty” meaning there’s not many wealthy people that have access to social and political levels of power. There’s not many wise according to the flesh. You don’t see the church filled with mostly famous professors or doctors that the world esteems in the church right? You don’t see any of the royal family of Rome in our church right? We don’t see all the politicians, white house staff, and famous actors and actresses of Hollywood filling up the pews right? It is not to say there are exceptions to the pattern. Recently, a South Korean scientist by the name of Young Hoon Kim made headlines for some comments he made. Kim specialized in cognitive science and he holds the highest IQ ever recorded at an IQ of 276. He tweeted on social media on June 18th, 2025 “*As the world’s highest IQ record holder, I believe that Jesus Christ is God, the way and the truth and the life*.” In a follow up Tweet, he wrote “*Christ is my logic. Amen*.” We of course give praise to God for soul, whether famous or not, who comes to saving faith…but it is very rare for someone of Dr. Kim’s caliber to acknowledge Christ. Normally, a person’s intelligence gets in the way of humbly recognizing his sin and coming to the Lord for salvation. I like to say that out of all people, scientists should be the first people to become Christians because they are learning about how awesome and majestic and powerful our Lord is in creating this magnificent universe. But again, Young Hoon Kim is an exception to the rule. And it isn’t like famous people like Kim are prevented by God from coming to Him per say, it is not because God necessarily favors the nobodies over the somebodies of this world because the nobodies are more special in themselves than the somebodies. No, it’s because God purposely designed it that way to prevent boasting in human achievements and accomplishments.

 Verses 27-29 “*But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may abolish the things that are, so that no flesh may boast before God*.” It wasn’t like God was trying to invite all the rich, famous, powerful of this world to accept Christ and they refused, and so God had to resort to plan B to invite the poor, obscure, and powerless people of this world to fill His kingdom. No, God purposely chose to operate in this manner so that those who are puffed with pride in themselves will never come to Christ, and those who humble themselves before God would be accepted by Christ. It would be like as if Jeff Lyon as the basketball coach and recruiter, instead of picking 6 foot 2 Jonathan and the terminator indestructible machine that is Isaac and state golfer Ivan, other athletic guys, instead for his all-star team intentionally decided to chose a bunch of babies like Haze, Campbell, and Leon and all the sick and dying at the Cascade Valley Nursing Home to form his choice basketball team.

 Notice instead of saying that God has chosen the foolish “people” of the world, he says God has chosen the foolish “*things*” of the world to shame the wise. “*Things*”… “*things*!” God has chosen what the world considers as just foolish “things” not even consider them people, just that “thing” over there. The base “things” of this world. Those of us who are despised by the world, looked down upon by the world. Disrespected, a laughing stock of humanity. In fact, Paul says we are “the things that are not,” literally the “nothings.” We are the things that are not. And if identifying you a “nothing” offends you, then maybe you need to check your heart for pride because you might be valuing yourself according to the world, and not according to the Word of God! Are you boasting in yourself, in any of your achievements, in any of your good works? Are you boasting that despite all the suffering and hardships you faced in life, that you, and not God, picked yourself up by your own bootstraps and you didn’t need God to get through life and be successful? Well if you are thinking that way, then it is going to be really hard for you to see salvation the way God wants you to see it because God has designed salvation so that verse 29 “no flesh may boast before God.”

 Verses 30-31 “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to use wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” By “HIS” doing, not by “YOUR” doing, but by “HIS” doing, you are in Christ Jesus…you are saved by His grace. You have nothing to do with your salvation. You didn’t earn it and you didn’t deserve it. Salvation has nothing to do with us, but everything to do with God, so that when He returns again for us and we are before His throne, none of us will be standing with our chin lifted high in pride at our own achievements, but every single one of us will be bowing before Him, heads bowed low to the ground, giving all praise, power, honor, and glory to the only One who is worthy to receive it. True power and true wisdom is found in Jesus Christ who was powerful enough to save you from your sins when you couldn’t do it yourself, and was wise enough to make the way of salvation accessible by simply accepting and trusting in the work of Christ on the cross as a gift to you. Don’t be an enemy of God. Don’t be foolish enough to think you can outsmart God. Don’t be dumb enough to think you are more powerful than God. Isaiah 10:33-34 presents a picture of what will happen to all those who stand in lofty pride against their Maker. “*Behold, the Lord, Yahweh of hosts, will lop off the boughs with a terrible crash, Those also who are high in stature will be cut in pieces And those who are lofty will be made low. He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an iron axe,
And Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One*.” But He is a God of grace and love and mercy and He delights to give grace to the humble. So if you haven’t already, humble yourself before God and cry out for His love and mercy so that He will lift you up to the cross where Christ will save you from your sins [pray]