1 Corinthians 2:1-16 Sermon Manuscript

“Power and Wisdom Through the Spirit”

Once upon a time, there was an actor, a professional performer, who was coming through town. He came to a school to perform his theatrics in front of the kids. He asked for any volunteer to come with their favorite poem or book and to try to see which version of their reenactment performed best. Volunteer after volunteer the man beat the kids at their own game and craft, outperforming them in passion, delivery, and persuasion. When he asked if there was anyone else who would like to volunteer, an old man in the crowd stood up to walk to the stage where the actor was. When the actor asked the old man what passage or poem he would like to read from, the man pulled out Psalm 23. So, the actor read Psalm 23 with gusto and passion.

Then it was the old man’s turn to speak. This man had been walking with the Lord for a long time. He was very familiar with the psalm. He read it, hands shaking from old age. His voice wasn’t loud, persuasive, or dynamic like the professional actor, but something about this man’s voice convinced the audience of his performance more than the actor. His voice was no impressive, but there was intimate ring to it. After they were finished, the actor said afterwards, saying “While I knew the psalm, he knew the shepherd.” That is a picture of the difference between human wisdom and God’s wisdom. That is the difference between human power and God’s power, but what sets human wisdom and power from God’s wisdom and power? Furthermore, how can you get God’s wisdom and power? How do you cross that chasm from human wisdom and power to God’s wisdom and power? The answer to all of those questions is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit.

Well last week we saw from a human perspective, from the unbeliever’s perspective, both for the Jew and the Greek, why unbelievers reject the gospel message. Why the Jews sees the cross as a stumbling block and the Greeks see it as foolishness. The Jews sees the cross, the gospel message, as a stumbling block because they view the Messiah as a conquering king rather than a suffering servant. What they didn’t understand was that Jesus had to come first as the suffering servant to bear the curse that you and I deserved for our sins by dying on a cross, which, the book of Deuteronomy says that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed. They could not reconcile the fact that their prophesied Messiah who would rule the nations one day would come to be cursed like a criminal on a cross of wood.

Similarly, the Greeks viewed the cross of Christ as foolishness. They too could not reconcile the fact that an all-powerful God would subject Himself to the crimes and sins of others and die the most humiliating and painful death man has ever known at that time. “How could someone who would die as a criminal on a cross by able to save anyone?...” was their human logic and reasoning. And similarly, today, many view the cross as foolishness or a stumbling block for similar reasons. They see the cross as foolishness because it leaves no room for pride or boasting. In their human wisdom, they ask “How could I be forgiven of my sins if I only believe and accept the grace of Christ? What’s the point of living morally if that’s the case?... What’s the point of repentance?” When I shared the gospel with a friend of mine, this is what he texted back about being saved by grace through faith alone, and not by works. He said this: “*I believe that if I kill a man, I wouldn’t just be accepted into heaven because I know he died for my sins. I believe I would have some work to do before those gates were opened for me*. *Who do we repent*?” That is the thought process of someone enslaved to human wisdom.

But we learned that God has intentionally designed salvation and redemption in such a way that if you are too puffed up in yourself with pride, you will be too large to fit through the door to the kingdom of heaven, but if you humble yourself by recognizing your sin and need for the Savior, you will be small enough to be able to fit through that door into the kingdom of heaven. God has chosen what the world considers the weak and the foolish things of this world to shame the strong and the wise. God delights to use the “nothings” of society to manifest His glory. He delights to manifest His glory, power, and wisdom through what society views as something to scrap off the bottom of your shoe. Like the incident of the poor man begging for food at Lazarus’ gate that Jesus told where Lazarus, the rich man would just walk over the poor man, trying to avoid that dirty thing that was strewn out in front of his gate, begging for his mercy. The people they deem as unattractive, unimpressive, unsuccessful, poor, etc. And if you look at the church, by and large, with a few exceptions, the church is made up of what society would consider as “commonfolk.” They don’t have any impressive qualities. God has made it clear to us who are being saved, that is it not by our doing that we are in Christ Jesus, but by His doing…and thus he ends chapter 1 like this, in verses 30-31: “*But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD*.”

And then Paul continues into chapter 2 where he is going to talk about the reason why unbelievers see the cross as foolishness while we see it as the wisdom and power of God, which is because they don’t have the Spirit of God, but we believers do. Chapter 2, verses 1 through 2: “*And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come with superiority of word or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the witness of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.* Paul was well trained not only as a Jewish rabbi of the highest order, but he was most likely well acquainted with Greek ways and customs as well. He probably knew the tactics of rhetoric and speech that the Greeks so highly prized, yet he chose not to his knowledge to manipulate the audience with what he calls the “*superiority of word of or wisdom*.” Furthermore, Paul was V. 3 with them “*in weakness and in fear and in much trembling*.” This was not only Paul’s posture of humility and knowing his place, but he was in this weak condition with the Corinthian believers because he had some rough and tough challenges that he experienced his prior missionary journeys before he came to Corinth. Before this, he was in Philippi in jail for his faith. He was driven out of Thessalonica, and in general persecuted for the faith. In other words, Paul didn’t arrive to Corinth all cheery and triumphalist and with an air of confidence. He was a man weak from his trials, beaten down, and suffering.

But God made the apostle Paul go through those trials to not only humble him, but also to magnify God’s power through Paul’s weakness which Paul will talk about in his second letter to the Corinthians, “*when I am weak, then He is strong*.” Verse 4 says, *and my word and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*…” for what purpose? The purpose being this V. 5 “*so that your faith would not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*.” I am sometimes curious to hear how other famous preachers preach and so I will listen to how they preach. I was curious to hear how Martin Llyod Jones sounded. Let’s just say he’s not necessarily my most favorite preacher to listen to. He’s pretty good for putting me to sleep! I love hearing the passionate, emotional, and dynamic way John Piper communicates the truth. But Llyod Jones is slightly monotone, and there’s not anything that wows me from his preaching style. But I am shocked to see that quite a few people attended the church he was pastoring. 1500 plus people attended Westminster Chapel! But that goes to show you that the people who attended that church probably were not there to hear his fiery preaching, but they came because they knew he would consistently be able to feed them God’s truth accurately.

But even though the Word of God is counted as foolish by the world, it does not mean that the Word of God doesn’t have any wisdom at all. It does! Just not of this world. Verses 6-8 “*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 being abolished. But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages to our glory, 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*.”

He is saying essentially, those of you who are mature in the Lord, who have been walking with the Lord for some time now, you know the wisdom I am talking about. It is a wisdom that only those to whom God predestined to show it can see. Here again we get the divine sovereignty perspective of the coin of salvation as well as the other side of the coin; human responsibility. God predestined to show His wisdom before the ages, meaning before creation, to the elect. But He did not predestine the rulers of this age to see His wisdom. Because if they were predestined to see His wisdom, Paul says “*if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*.” Wait a minute, how could God blame someone for their sin of crucifying the Lord of glory if they were predestined to not know that Jesus was the Lord of glory? But to even think like that is relying human logic again. It is depending on human wisdom to answer. Human wisdom cannot answer that, but God’s wisdom can, and that’s why we need to trust that both realities are true, that God has predestined some to see His wisdom but others He passed over, and yet somehow, those who do reject Christ are fully responsible for their sin of rejecting Him. We need to trust Him that He knows what He’s doing. He is God and we are not.

And Paul quotes from Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17 to back up what he just said. Verse 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*.” Now this might seem on the surface like it is talking about the wonders of heaven that are awaiting those who love Jesus, but this is not talking about wonders of heaven but about the wonders of God’s wisdom awaiting those whom God has predestined before the creation of the world to see and inherent. Isaiah is also saying that no matter how hard one tries, no matter what we look at with our eyes, hear with our ears or believe with our heart, the wisdom that leads to salvation only comes from God to those whom He has “prepared” beforehand to receive. And what is the vehicle by which God reveals that wisdom to us? It is the Holy Spirit. The third member of the Godhead whom Jesus promised would come to indwell all those who put their trust in Him. Verses 10-11 “*But to us God revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men know the depths of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the depths of God no one knows except the Spirit of God*.”

As much as a husband and wife know each other very well after decades of living together, yet the husband does not know the wife as well as she knows herself and the wife does not know the husband as well as he knows himself. There are certain things that are in the deep recesses of our heart that we don’t even share with our spouse for various reasons. And in the same way, no one ones God in God Himself except the Spirit of God. But the amazing reality of salvation is that when you put your trust in Jesus and are justified from your sins, God gives you His Spirit to know Him and His thoughts intimately. Verses 12-13 “*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the depths graciously given to us by God, of which depths we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual depths with spiritual words*.”

Now these two verses are likely talking about the apostle Paul and others like him who are inspired by God to speak authoritative Scripture….because one of the issues of this epistle, which becomes an even bigger issue in the next epistle is that people questioned whether Paul was truly commissioned as a legitimate and authoritative spokesperson for God. Paul is saying “we weren’t taught by human wisdom or teachers, but God himself through His Spirit taught us these spiritual depths that came from him, and combined them with spiritual words, which when he says “combining spiritual depths with spiritual words…” that is most likely a reference to the process of inspiration, how God has produced the Scripture in our laps. That’s what 2 Peter 1:21 says, “*For no prophecy was ever made by the will of man, but men being moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*” You hear the objection to Christianity, “well the Bible was written by a bunch of men…” Yes, it was written by men, but not only by men, it was written by God using the instrument of men, through the Holy Spirit, where he provided both the spiritual depths as well as the spiritual words necessary to communicate exactly what He wanted us to know.

And it is the presence of the absence of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God that makes the difference between you seeing the cross as foolishness verses seeing the cross as glorious. Verse 14 “B*ut a natural man does not accept the depths of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually examined*.” The friend that I brought up in the beginning of the sermon that rejected the idea of being saved by grace through faith alone, and not by works? He is a natural man, meaning he is devoid of the Spirit. He is dead in his transgressions and sins, meaning he is spiritually dead. So he is literally unable to understand how Christ dying for our sins means the greatest news that anyone can ever hear, and thus he rejects it. It takes a spiritual man who has the Spirit of God living inside of him to understand and to accept the depths of God.

Hence Verse 15 “*But he who is spiritual examines all things, yet he himself is examined by no one*.” We are able to examine, decipher, and discern spiritual truths, both earthly realities and heavenly realities, but an unbeliever cannot. An unbeliever, this world of unbelievers cannot examine a believer accurately. All that results of an unbeliever examining a believer is ridicule, misunderstanding, and mockery. An unbeliever may be able to come to an understanding of why Christians believe that Christ had to die for the sins of those who would come to Him. They may understand that Israel had a system in place where animals had to be sacrificed to appease a wrathful God against sin temporarily, and that Christ came along to be the ultimate and eternal sacrifice for the sins of the world so that we could be forgiven and not have to continually slaughter animals for our sins. Logically I think he could make those connections. But spiritually? He is unable to see the glory behind all of that. He is unable to see the life-or-death significance of the cross. To him, it’s a nice story or a nice little fairy tale that Christians have made up to give them some hope to live on in this life filled with suffering and hardships. You know that Korean scientist with the highest IQ that I mentioned last Sunday? Young Hoon Kim? He didn’t say “Christ is my logic” because he first saw how logical Christianity was, and was convinced to believe in Christianity because of its logic. No, God predestined Young Hoon Kim to salvation, where the Spirit of God opened up his blind eyes to see God’s wisdom in its proper light. Under the lens of the Holy Spirit, he saw the message of the gospel in a whole new light, not only as logical, but as gloriously logical! And that leads us to our last verse for today.

Verse 16 “*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will direct Him? But we have the mind of Christ*.” Isn’t that amazing? There is no higher order, no higher authority than God. No one can stand in judgment over God or stand with more wisdom than God to tell Him what He can and can’t do. Yet God has given us His own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to live inside of us so that we would have the mind of Christ. It just blows my mind, I can’t comprehend that. Jesus said these wonderful words to His disciples in John 16 starting in verse 13. “*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.*” If you have the Holy Spirit residing in you, you will be guided by Him into all truth, and Jesus will disclose Himself to you in an intimate way. How could a Holy God that is separate from sin, who must judge sin, come to dwell inside of sinful man? Well Christ made that possible by dying on the cross, taking the penalty for your sins and the wrath that you deserved for your sins, because He loves you, He loves you. You don’t have to clean up your life to come to Him. All He asks in return is for you to turn away from your life of sin, and start following a new way of life in Him. “*For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*.” [pray]