

The Foolish Cross – Part 1

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1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-25 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...Jews demanded miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

A visitor to Palestine was in a small town museum when he saw a **skull** labeled as that of St. Paul. The next day he was in another town at another museum when he saw a different skull identified as the skull of St. Paul. Confused, he went to the museum keeper and asked "Which one is it?" The keeper replied, "Both--this one was his skull when he was a young man!"

We hear of things everyday that we would call foolish. We are constantly warned with the old adage, DON'T BE A FOOL. And even though all of us do things every day that are foolish, none of us want to be identified as a fool. Our text says ***the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing***. The word used in original Greek New Testament for "foolishness" is the same word from which we get the English word **MORON**. In other words, people in the world, those outside of faith, think it is "moronic" for us to believe that something good came out of someone dying on a cross.

The wisdom of God, far superior to any and all of man's wisdom, confounds and confuses the world. ***God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--*** He chose the cross. God chose Christ Crucified! There was no more despicable means of death at that time than crucifixion. The Romans recognized this, and passed a law saying that no Roman citizen could be subjected to such cruelty. Only those who were not Romans could be crucified. It was this heinous form of execution that God used to accomplish the payment for sin, all sin, sacrificing the spotless Lamb of God in our place. The cross of Christ, no matter how foolish and moronic it appears to those outside of faith, is the wisdom that saves. The preaching of the cross is what we need and what the world needs, because by this message comes forgiveness and salvation. ***...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

Some think it foolish to take comfort in an instrument of execution, yet that is exactly what Christians do. We proudly display crosses, which represent one of the cruelest forms of execution of all time. They range from crude to ornate. There are innumerable designs of crosses that we wear as jewelry. And our text today speaks of the cross as "foolishness." Is it? If it is merely an object of art, something made to look aesthetically pleasing, then it is foolish. And the evidence says that for many, that is all it is. A news show a while back interviewed a young boy about 11 or 12 who had just come out of a video store with a fistful of R rated movies depicting sex and violence, saying that he and all his friends were watching them. A cross hung prominently around his neck. For many, the cross is just plain foolishness. It has no meaning whatsoever.

But God's Word tells us the cross has meaning. Paul speaks of the message of the cross, which, for those who are being saved, is far from foolishness. Instead, it is the wisdom and power of God. You know what took place on that cross. You know that Christ paid for the sins of all men when he died on that piece of wood. You have faith in the work of redemption that took place there. So for you, the cross is anything but foolish.

There were those in Paul's day, and some still today, who think that the message of the cross is foolishness. They have different reasons for thinking it foolish, but the end result is the same: they will perish. In the New Testament times, people were all too aware that crucifixion was not a pretty thing. It was the supreme form of punishment. The victims were ridiculed and tortured in numerous ways, and died a slow and painful death. How could anyone receive comfort and joy from that kind of an event? It just didn't make sense.

To the Greek mind it was just foolish. They didn't have Old Testament prophecies to guide and show them that this must take place. But to the Jewish people, it was more than just foolish: it is also called a **stumbling block**. This term is used many times throughout the Bible, and it has a deeper meaning than one might think. You might think of a stumbling block as being something like the toy left in the middle of the floor that you trip over late at night. This is the primary meaning of the term, something that causes you to stumble. But even more than that, a stumbling block was as an obstacle to faith. Perhaps you could think of it as the ironing board that blocks your normal pathway through a room. From the Old Testament Law, the Jews knew that anyone who hung on a tree, or a cross, was cursed. How could the one who was supposed to be God and

Savior be cursed? This didn't make sense to them, so the Gospel message was a stumbling block to the Jewish people in addition to being considered foolish.

Also, the Jews were wrapped up in the need for obedience in themselves. They thought they must live according to all the laws that they had developed if they were to ever have a chance of being saved. The cross was a further stumbling block in that they tried to substitute their own suffering and sacrifice for the cross. They took comfort in things like their circumcision and obedience, placing the emphasis on their own deeds. If they could save themselves by their actions, what need did they have of the cross of Christ?

What can you do to make the Gospel message "unfoolish" to those around you? What can you do to eliminate the obstacles that keep others from understanding who Jesus Christ is? First of all, be sure you understand what the message of the cross means. Man, in his foolishness, abandoned God. This meant nothing but eternal death lay ahead. Our sinful condition deserves punishment. But God still loved man, and in His power and wisdom sent Jesus Christ, True God and True Man, into the world to pay the price for sin. After living a perfect life, He took the sins of all men, including everyone of you here today, upon Himself. With those sins, He went to the cross, and paid the price for sin, once and for all. The Scriptures plainly tell us that ***God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself***. You are assured that trust in Jesus is all you need to inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Understanding this for yourselves, you must live like you know it. God has given you, free of charge, the most precious gift available: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. That merits a response! Does your life reflect your gratitude to God? I'm not talking here about church attendance or contributions to the church, although those are important reflections of your understanding of this message. I'm speaking of your day to day life. Do you live each day God gives you as though you know the message of the cross? Do you respond by taking time to study God's Word and learning more about Him, or do you ignore this gift? When people observe your life, would they be able to tell that you have faith that Jesus died to pay for your sins, or would you be no different than those who regard the message of the cross as foolishness? If you truly understand and believe that the Gospel message is not foolishness, but the power of God for salvation, then your life should show it.

A final step that you can take in making the message of the cross "unfoolish", or wise, for others is to share that message with them. Present the Good News to your fellow man the way that you have come to know it--not as something foolish, but as wisdom for everlasting life. God has revealed this message to you, not only so that you could be saved, but so that you will share it with others. *How will they believe if they have not heard, and how will they hear unless someone tells them?* You are to be involved in the process of sharing this message with your neighbors in actions and words.

There will always be those who reject the message of the cross foolishness. This text tells us they will perish. Don't be a fool, and don't let the message of the cross be foolishness to you. Look to God's Word, which tells you the Good News of deliverance from sin and eternal life, all because of the cross. And wear your cross proudly, both figuratively and literally. Let men see that you know the power and wisdom of God, which makes you wise unto salvation. May this be your prayer:

**In the cross of Christ I glory, Tow'ring over the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime**

**When the woes of life o'ertake me, Hopes deceive and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me; Lo, it gleams with peace and joy.**

Only the message of the cross has the power and the wisdom of God. Only the message of the cross offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life. On Calvary eternal life and eternal death met. It was there that the Lord Jesus innocently suffered and died as a common criminal to pay the penalty assessed for your sins, the righteous for the unrighteous. By God's grace you have had this foolish cross proclaimed to you. It was poured into your heart through Holy Baptism. It is nurtured by the Word and the Sacrament of the Altar so that it will be firmly fixed in you. Thank God you know about the foolish cross!