

Small Group Questions Sunday 6 October 2019

Wisdom of the Cross – 1 Cor 1:18-2:5

It's one thing to be on guard for a lion. It's another thing to be on guard against the values of a culture that have gone wrong.

Our culture influences our thinking slowly... without our realizing it.

- How might we become aware of ways that we have been influenced?
- How can we work against just becoming like the world around us?

Read James 4:4 - You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

The Corinthians could easily be described as an 'adulterous people'. Paul is trying to help them live out their faith amid all sorts of confusing pressure from the world around them. We also have all sorts of confusing pressure from the world around us. And yet, as 1 Peter says it, we are called to be aliens and strangers in this world. The Corinthians believers were boasting in the wrong things. Their values were in the wrong places. In our text, for today, Paul talks about three things that are key to our faith, but don't fit with what people expect.

Wisdom of the Cross- a crucified messiah -1:18-25

Read 1 Cor 1:18-25

- What stands out to you in these verses?
- What appears foolish in these verses?
- Why do you think it appears foolish to people?
- Why would God work in a way that seems foolish?

Paul focuses on two groups of people: the Jews and the Greeks. In many ways their expectations are similar to what people might think today. The Jews expected the messiah to come with power. The Greeks expected the messiah to be supremely wise.

Our temptation is to want to earn our place with God. We are tempted toward what Tim Keller has called, being 'middle-class in spirit'. Jesus called us to be poor in spirit, but we like to feel that God owes us something, or like we have earned our place with God. We've worked hard. We're educated. We come from good families. All tidy and middle class.

But... Our confidence should come from the gospel... which throws all our other sources of confidence out the window!

- Why do you think we are tempted toward being 'middle-class in spirit'?
- How can we counteract this while also giving our best to living for Christ?

The Christian message is that your salvation is not based on anything you do, but only on what Jesus has done.

- Was there a time in your life that you came to realize this, in a meaningful way, for the first time?

- What did it take to help you understand this?

Wisdom of the Cross- the Corinthian believers- 1:26-31

Read 1 Cor 1:26-31

Look at the values at the end of vs. 26!

- How often do we value people based on their education, or position of influence, or the family they are born to!
- Can you think of a time when you have been uncomfortable with the praise given to a person based on their education, position, influence, or family?

Jews look for power... Greeks look for wisdom...

- where in these verses do you see how the Corinthians themselves are an example of God's work?

Read Acts 4:13

- What do you know about the wider story around this verse that makes it more significant?
- Why, do you think, does God choose to work powerfully through people that are willing to be weak before him?

Wisdom of the Cross- Paul's preaching- 2:1-5

Read 1 Cor 2:1-5

Cultural note- The Sophists were travelling philosophers that were happy for truth to serve any end. They were born into well-known families, well educated, great communicators and it is likely that Paul was being compared to the Sophists.

Paul's preaching is not about his wisdom or power... the Sophists are better at that. What really matters is that God's Spirit works through it. The focus, therefore, is not on how great Paul is, but on how great the Spirit of God is.

- How might this be encouraging as God uses us?

Quote- Fee talking about Paul summarizes what we are looking at this week, he says in effect, "So you think the gospel is a form of sophia (Hebrew for wisdom)? **How foolish can you get? Look at its message; it is based on the story of a crucified Messiah. Who in the name of wisdom would have dreamed that up? Only God is so wise as to be so foolish" (1:18-25); "Furthermore, look at its recipients. Yourself! Who in the name of wisdom would have chosen you to be the new people of God?" (1:26-31); "Finally, remember my own preaching. Who in the name of wisdom would have come in such weakness? Yet look at its results" (2:1-5)."**

The message of the cross looks like foolishness to people who don't believe... but to us it is the power of God. It is a beautiful, powerful, message that cannot be improved upon.

We need to be careful not to settle for a 'middle-class' gospel. We cannot earn our place with God. It is all gift.

We are weak. We are chosen. We can be used.