



Sermon, Sunday March 17, 2024

“Christ Crucified Is God’s Power and Wisdom”

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 ¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

Introduction: The Crucifixion of Jesus

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent. Today’s text, 1 Corinthians 1:18, says: “**For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**”. In this verse, ‘message’ in ‘**the message about the cross**’ is a translation of the Greek word ‘**logos (λόγος)**’. This ‘**Logos (λόγος)**’ is a core concept of Greek Stoic philosophy and refers to the origin or principle of all things. The Gospel of John repeats ‘**Logos (λόγος)**’ three times in verse 1:1. John 1:1 says: ‘**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**’. The New Revised Standard Version Bible translates Logos as ‘**the Word.**’ In today’s sermon, I will call it ‘**the message of the cross.**’

‘**The message of the cross**’ in today’s text refers to the destiny Jesus must go to. This means that the end of Jesus’ life was death on the cross. In fact, it is difficult for many people in the world to accept Jesus, who died on the cross according to Roman law in his early thirties, as our Savior and the Son of God. Jesus’ death on the cross was difficult for even his disciples to accept. (Matthew 16:22, Matthew 17:23) Everyone at the time of Jesus thought of the death of the cross as a failure in life and a failure in calling. Apostle Paul was aware of this fact, so he says the following in verse 23 of today’s text: “**but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.**”

In this passage Paul refers to Jews and Gentiles. Jews are the people of the Old Testament who believe in God, and Gentiles are the people of the Roman Empire who boast of civilization. According to today’s text, the Jews thought that Jesus’ death on the cross was like a stumbling block for the people. According to Deuteronomy 21:23, anyone who died by hanging on a tree was considered cursed by God. So, to the Jews, Jesus’ death on the cross was shameful and cursed, not something to be proud of.

But why does Paul claim that Jesus’ death on the cross is ‘the power and wisdom of God’? Our doctrinal answer to this question is the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ. In other words, our sins are forgiven, and we are saved through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It means that Jesus atoned for our sins. However, many modern-day Christians are not satisfied with this answer. This is because we do not have the awareness that we are sinners, and we cannot agree with the statement that the problem of our sin has been solved through the death of Jesus.



What we need to know in this part is that Christian doctrine was established through the continuation of religious life after the church was established. In other words, the doctrine was not created first and then the church community began, but the doctrine was created after the church community was created.

To put it simply, the disciples had a very clear experience of salvation through Jesus' death on the cross before the doctrine that Jesus went the way of the cross emerged.

Christians must hold on to the very clear experience of salvation through Jesus' death on the cross throughout their lives. And we must enter a deeper world of salvation experience.

I ask you again. What on earth did Paul and the Christian leaders experience in Jesus' fate so that they could say that Jesus' death on the cross was the power and wisdom of God?

Body: Wisdom debate and the power of God

In today's text, Paul asks a question about the nature of wisdom. In verse 19 of the text, he quotes Isaiah 29:14 and says: **“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”** And in verse 20 he says: **“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”**

The worldly wisdom that Paul speaks of in these verses is simply the principles of the world. Paul is speaking about wisdom to the Jews, who boast of the law, which they regard as the wisdom of wisdom, and to the Romans, who pride themselves on having blossomed into the greatest civilization of their time.

In fact, it is good to know the laws of the world and live according to them. So, we strive to gain the wisdom to understand the ways of the world. People with this kind of wisdom are recognized in the world. Therefore, people with a lot of wisdom become the mainstream of society and have vested interests.

This year there is a US presidential election. The candidates are all people who are said to have extensive knowledge of wisdom. They all claim that they should become president for the sake of the people and that their party can lead the people to a better life.

However, as you all know, people who claim to be wise clash with each other. Also, in the world we live in, laws conflict with each other. In fact the conflicts between wise people that occur in our lives are almost at the level of war. Considering our reality, Paul's words that God discards worldly wisdom and intelligence fit well with our situation.

I'm not saying we don't need wisdom. Wisdom is essential for our lives. The wisdom of elders can solve many of the world's problems. Additionally, Jewish law and Roman civilization are incomparably beneficial wisdom.

However, what we must not overlook is that no matter how good wisdom is, if it is made absolute, it will distort and destroy human life and the world.

Paul was an expert in the law, but after his conversion, he gave his all for the gospel of Christ. He saw exactly what the essence of worldly wisdom was. So Paul says that no matter how good the law is, it only makes us realize our sins, but it cannot give us life. This is the limit of worldly wisdom.

So Paul speaks in verse 21 about the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of the world. **“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.”**

The wisdom of God that Paul speaks of in this verse has a different dimension and direction from the wisdom of the world. Paradoxically, Paul says that it is God's wisdom that saves believers through **‘the foolishness of our proclamation.’** Because the world does not know God through its own wisdom. That is



why, Paul exclaims, Jews seek supernatural miracles, Greeks seek wisdom in life, but Christians preach Jesus Christ crucified to the world. Because, for Christians, the cross is the power and wisdom of God.

Do you think that Paul's argument makes sense? At least for this to make sense, we must provide evidence that our sins are forgiven through Jesus' death on the cross.

I ask you again. Why is the way of the cross the power of God?

Please recall again verse 23 that **'the cross of Jesus is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles'**. The world fears, is reluctant, ignores, rejects, and ridicules the fate of Jesus on the cross.

However, God is with Jesus in his death on the cross. In other words, God was crucified with Jesus Christ on the cross.

Christianity began with the cross event of God's death and is a community of people who find ultimate hope in that event. Perhaps people in the world may laugh at this Christian faith.

This is because many people in the world do not realize that the world created by God is full of His grace and that we can fully enjoy it in the small things of our daily lives.

Please don't forget. There is no significant difference between poor and rich people in enjoying the things that are important in the essence of life. This does not mean that I praise poverty or view the rich life negatively. This means that we do not need to live our lives envious of other people's lives, missing out on truly precious and blessed things, or worrying about what will happen if we are not recognized by others.

We must remember that Apostle Paul experienced God who was with him during the death of Jesus on the cross. This experience of Paul is the same for us as Christians. We must not forget that Jesus' death on the cross contains God's grace that we did not expect.

Conclusion: Emmanuel God!

Now let's summarize today's message. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! The cross of Jesus Christ frees us from sin. It frees us from death, the result of sin. Therefore, those who believe in the message of the cross of Jesus do not worry about what their fate will be.

Please don't forget. No matter how low our lives fall, it will never fall further than Jesus' death on the cross. Also, the crucified Christ is 'Immanuel' God, who is always with us.

God, who is with us, overcame the power of death and was resurrected. Therefore, we who are in Him and with Him also experience resurrection. Therefore, Paul was able to declare without hesitation that the crucified Jesus Christ is the power and wisdom of God. I hope we can all respond with 'Amen' to Paul's declaration.

