

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Sermon Title: "Simple yet Awesome and Powerful" (A Journey through First Corinthians)

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{SLIDE 1} How simple the message of God is. How easy is God's message of salvation for us to hear and understand. It doesn't take much brain power. It doesn't take a lot of effort.

Do you know how simple the message of God's salvation is? If we only had ten seconds to tell somebody about it, all we need to say is this: "Jesus Christ died for your sins so that you may live forever." That is all it takes to get the message across to somebody, 12 small words: "Jesus Christ died for your sins so that you may live forever." No legal document could be so easy to understand. No legislation dreamed up by Congress could be communicated with such clarity and efficiency.

{SLIDE 2} The first time that Jesus spoke with people, when he started his ministry on earth, the Gospel of Mark tell us that Jesus simply said, "Time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news." That is slightly longer than 12 words, and may take more than ten seconds to say, but the message is clear. It is straight

forward. A person doesn't need a doctoral degree or special security clearance to grasp the message of God. Just open your ears and hear it, "The time is now. God's kingdom is at hand. Turn from sin. Believe in Jesus Christ." So simple.

{SLIDE 3} We could get a little more complicated, if we want. Just slightly more complex in sharing God's message of salvation. However, the words are still easy enough to understand and even to repeat. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life, for God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him." It is a little more involved, but it is the same, simple message from God about salvation. John 3:16-17 is still easy enough that the verses can be printed on cardboard and lifted up in a crowd at a football game. People still stand behind the goalposts at the back of the endzone and raise the placard to tell everybody about God's message of salvation for all, which is easy, clear, straightforward.

{SLIDE 4} Paul told the Corinthian Christians that he didn't come to them with lofty words that would be difficult to understand. They wouldn't have to stand on a ladder to grasp them, because they would fly off their heads in great confusion. Paul came to them knowing nothing, he says, but Jesus Christ and him

crucified.¹ He approached them with weakness and fear and trembling, knowing that such a message of God is so easy to get, but it is so powerful that it shakes the foundations of a person's life and transforms them forever.

That should get people's attention. A man named Jesus who was crucified, but not crucified because he was a notorious criminal. Crucified not because he had it coming to him anyhow. Crucified because he was and is the Son of God. Crucified because his goal was to remove our sin and give us everlasting life with the God of all creation. That is the simple message. That should attract people's attention. They should be able to understand it, and they should be able to believe. No problems, no worries. Paul shared the message, and it caught people's hearts, and they were never the same.

{SLIDE 5} Alas, this simple, clear message of salvation from God is difficult to grasp. It is a message that people cannot easily understand. Not because the message itself is difficult, but because people choose to make it difficult. People choose to turn it into some complex and even perplexing word from a huge God that none of us could ever get to meet or

¹ Cf. 2 Corinthians 2:1-2.

draw closer to.

Paul says that it has to do with human wisdom and wisdom from the Holy Spirit.² Human wisdom is limited, and wisdom from the Spirit is unlimited. Human wisdom can only see a part of the larger picture, and wisdom from the Spirit holds the larger picture and then some. But people still want to rely on human wisdom to get them through the day. People want to believe that human wisdom will find all the solutions and grants us all the security and peace we need.

{SLIDE 6} My son was given a survey at his college, and he was asked to rank his top three classes. The third is philosophy. He likes his philosophy class, about as much as I like my class when in college. He likes it because it makes him think. Philosophy means the love of knowledge, so the class is helping my son figure out what he believes and what he doesn't. It is helping him work out problems by seeing as many sides to the problems as possible, and then prayerfully makes the right decision.

The major problem with philosophy is that it takes a person only so far. Even my son realizes that he can think about so many things, but then he needs to think about God. All his brain power gets him so far,

² Cf. 2 Corinthians 2:4, 7, 13.

but then he needs to give the whole of his life to God and pray for God to manage his life. God has all wisdom. God is the author of wisdom, so God has a pretty good idea of how to make things work. How God has made things work is to give us a simple message that speaks about his love. God gives us an easy message that talks about being in relationship with God, and then living with God forever. Philosophy may love knowledge, but it is only concerned with earthly knowledge. It cannot see God or hear God or even touch God. We need the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for that.

{SLIDE 7} Paul talks about the wisdom of God, the wisdom of the Spirit that we just mentioned, as being “secret and hidden.”³ This wisdom of the Holy Spirit is secret and hidden partly because our wisdom is limited. Our minds can only grasp so much – we cannot grasp anything. One of the things we do not grasp is that there is a God who loves us and wants to be a part of our lives. We do not normally think that there is a God who wants to take care of us for all eternity, if only we allow such a God to do so. We wouldn’t think about God unless God said something to us. We would keep think about ourselves: our daily

³ 1 Corinthians 2:7.

schedules and our pressing deadlines. Those would occupy our minds most of the time.

Paul writes to the Romans at one point, and he tells them in Chapter 5 that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were without strength, God chose to send his Son to erase our sin.⁴ That was never our idea. We would never think to ask for such a thing to happen. We never thought that we needed a Savior, and that God could provide for us such a Savior. Our minds could never come up with a storyline like that, God's only Son sacrificing himself for us. So it is secret to us. It is hidden, for we are unable by our own efforts to seek it out.

It could only come from God. It could only come from the great wisdom of God. God sees how broken and lost this world is and knows exactly what to do with it. God has the larger picture, and God knows how to mend brokenness and seek out the misplaced. While we were wallowing in our human wisdom, God used great wisdom and created the greatest storyline the world could ever know. It comes to us as simply as, "Accept the good news of Christ and believe. Receive salvation today."

⁴ Cf. Romans 5:6, 8.

{SLIDE 8} The message of salvation is also secret and hidden partly because human wisdom chooses to keep it secret and hidden. Human wisdom rejects any wisdom that God may provide. Such wisdom is thought to be unnecessary when it comes to living our lives and making daily decisions. We don't want God getting all up in our business. We don't need God's approval when it comes to being who I want to be.

{SLIDE 9} "If the rulers of this age would have understood that God has wisdom to offer," Paul says, "they wouldn't never have crucified the Lord of glory."⁵ Caiaphas and Annas and their crew of priests of the temple would never have felt Jesus to be a threat to their leadership or their religion.⁶ They wouldn't have been offended by his teaching and preaching. They would have seen the miracles of Jesus' healings and believed that God had come to earth. Alas, they relied on their human wisdom that rejected everything that Jesus was doing. Their human wisdom told them that Jesus was a threat, not the Solution of the world. The threat must be dealt with, and so Caiaphas and Annas and the priests of the temple crucified him.

{SLIDE 10} Pontius Pilate and even King Herod would never have allowed Jesus to hang on a cross. Herod wouldn't have asked Jesus to perform miracles

⁵ Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:8.

⁶ Cf. John 11:49-53, 18:1-24.

for his entertainment, but would have sat Jesus down and given him a meal and asked to share the wisdom of God with him.⁷ Herod would have wanted to grow in faith in God. Pilate would have rejected the pleas from the crowds that Jesus must be crucified. He would have discussed the matter with Jesus and learned about his kingship that comes directly from heaven. Pilate would have known the truth of what Jesus said, because Truth would be standing before him, and Pilate would know it in the depth of his heart.

Alas, Herod wanted parlor tricks and Pilate wanted civil peace. Human wisdom told them to take the easy way out and reject looking deeply at what God was doing with the world. They rejected religion altogether in order to keep themselves comfortable.

{SLIDE 11} Paul experienced some of this before becoming the great missionary that he became. He thought he was doing the right things for his religion and career. His human wisdom told him to fight the new sect called the Christians, and arrest them at every turn and execute them if possible. Human wisdom said that he could become a great man among his own people, if he fought for their beliefs and

⁷ Cf. Luke 23:1-12.

customs. Human wisdom convinced him that God would approve of all his work against the Christians, and would probably reward him with many wonderful blessings.

But then the wisdom of the Spirit caught up to Paul. He soon realized that he was not working for God but against God. He did not understand the larger picture of what God was doing, that God was leading his people through his Son Jesus to a new understand and a new way of life. Christ had to get his attention by throwing him to the ground and blinding him for three days. In that period Paul got a glimpse of what God was doing in the world through Christ. Paul's mind opened just a bit to see Jesus and listen to his message of salvation and believe that Jesus can turn his life around, as well as everybody else's lives.

{SLIDE 12} The wisdom of the Spirit was no longer secret and hidden to him. He didn't want it to be secret and hidden any longer. Paul let go of his human wisdom, his selfish ideas, his directionless plans. He requested more wisdom from God, and then he went out to share that wisdom with others. He offered it plainly. He spoke in simple words. Accept and believe. Turn from your selfishness and welcome Christ into your hearts. Realize that we can only see so much, and God can see everything, so ask God for

his wisdom to opens every door. Ask for wisdom from the Holy Spirit that gets us over the mountains to the other side.

It is so simple, if we only understand that our human wisdom reaches so far, and that God's wisdom reaches beyond and gets us to the place where God resides.

{SLIDE 13} This wisdom from God, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, is available for all who want it. It doesn't take great mental or physical effort to obtain it. We just need to ask. We just open our mouth and request it from God.

When we do ask, we not only receive wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we receive the Holy Spirit as our true Counselor. We receive Christ as our one and only Savior. We receive God as our steadfast Father. We receive all of God and all God has. We are restored. We are made whole. We have salvation forever.

That's as simple as it gets.

Assurance of Pardon:

Listen to this Good News: “If we claim that we’re free from sin, we’re only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is absolute nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins – be honest and open about them – God won’t let us down. God will forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing.” Since we confessed our sins, God will forgive us through his Son Jesus Christ and bring us into the light of his salvation. Thanks be to God. Amen.