

# 1 Co 1:22-25 Sermon Outline

**Theme:** We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those

whom God has called, the power of God and the

wisdom of God.

**Intro:** *Rapport/Application*

**Point 1:** Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,

*Image: you know how this looks/feels*

Jews demand miraculous signs, like in Egypt,  
III;

credentials in the form of visible, identifiable acts in which his claim like the manna, of Nu 14:11,22 – a refusal to take God on trust, he must present his on men, & ability to meet their need, is validated. (cf Gideon) They were sceptical, egotistical.

Jews showed little interest in speculative thought. Their demand was for evidence and their interest was in the practical. They thought of God as active in performing mighty wonders, therefore they demanded of Jesus a sign (cf Mt 12:38; 16:1-4; Mk 8:11-12; Jn 6:30). A crucified Messiah to them was a contradiction in terms – those hanged bore the curse of God. Dt 21:23. and Greeks look for wisdom,

They were absorbed in human speculative philosophy. No names were more honoured than those of their outstanding thinkers. Those who failed to appreciate their wisdom were barbarians. They took no notice of the fact that this wisdom often degenerated into meaningless sophistries (cf Acts 17:21).

III; A well-known graffiti in Rome – a worshipper standing before a crucified figure with the body of a man and the head of a donkey, with the caption, ‘Alexamenos worships his god’. That’s how the worldly wise regarded the message of the cross.

Even to speak of a crucified man was a breach of etiquette.

But people aren’t saved by exercising wisdom, salvation comes to those who believe.

The party slogans in Corinth all bear witness to an overvaluing of human wisdom, and a failure to understand, or rightly value, the gospel. The gospel is not the wisdom (in a Gk sense) that saves, it is the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which saves.

*Extend: so what are you going to do about it this week?*

**Point 2:** But we preach Christ crucified

*Image: you know how this looks/feels*

but we preach Christ crucified:

a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

III

Apply: How do people see the crucifixion nowadays?

but to those whom God has called, Christ the power of God and wisdom of God.

III

‘called’; God takes the initiative in salvation. The gospel teaches that God had to come to man, man

didn’t speculate / attain his way to God.

Christianity isn’t only available to the intellectually gifted, even the humblest can know God and

overcome sin – a wisdom far superior to anything the

philosophers could produce

*Extend: so what are you going to do about it this week?*

**Point 3:** For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom

*Image: you know how this looks/feels*

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom,  
and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

*Extend: so what are you going to do about it this week?*

**Aim:** Follow Jesus & put your trust in him

<sup>22</sup> Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,

<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified:

a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

<sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks,

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

<sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom,

and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

**The gospel is foolishness to the world**

**but the power of God for those lowly ones who believe**

**and so Paul didn’t come in eloquence, wisdom and strength**

**but in weakness, fear & the Spirit’s power,**

**resolved to know only Christ crucified.**

**The gospel is foolishness to the world but the power of God for those being saved**

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;

the intelligence of the intelligent I

will frustrate.”

**God was pleased, through the foolishness of the gospel, to save those who believe**

<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

**God has taken the lowly things of the world to nullify the high and mighty so that we don’t boast (and the glory goes to him)**

<sup>26</sup> Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

**Paul didn’t come in eloquence, wisdom and strength but in weakness, fear & the Spirit’s power, resolved to know only Christ crucified.**

<sup>2</sup> When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.

## 1 Co 1:22-25 rev

Dear Congregation

This is now the third passage in our series on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians.

A couple of weeks ago we were encouraged to thank God for his grace, his gifts, and the glory to come when Jesus returns. Last week there was the appeal that we practice our unity in our Lord Jesus Christ, in spite of our differences.

And today we see that *Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's saving power, the ultimate expression of his wisdom.*

In Paul's day, that was something most of the Jews and Greeks overlooked. They were looking for power and wisdom, but they were looking for the wrong kinds, in the wrong places.

But is that the kind of power and wisdom that's going to meet our most basic need, fix our most basic problem?

The power and wisdom the Jews and Greeks really needed had been walking and talking with them, was now being proclaimed to them, but because they were looking for the wrong kind, they didn't see it.

But Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

### Point 1

People make the same mistake today. After all, what comes to most people's mind when they think of power today – horsepower, political power, power in a company? What comes to mind when people think of wisdom – maybe being street-wise, knowing where and how to get what you want, knowing the right people in the right places, knowing how to get ahead.

*And in their own way, people today also look for their versions of miraculous power and wisdom.*

Because people are still looking for answers to the big questions: Where do we come from? Where are we going? Who are we? Why are we here?

And at first, the wisdom of our day sounds encouraging. For the atheist, the wisdom of our day says there is no God - we're our own god. We can do whatever we like. For the pantheist, the miraculous signs and wonders of our day say that we're all one with God, and so again we're still free to do whatever we like.

The downside of seeing things that way, though, is the answers you get to the other questions.

Where do we come from? Well, the atheist has to believe that we're just the product of chance processes, just a higher form of animal. Nothing special.

And where are we going? Well, nowhere - death is the end. That's it.

And why are we here? For no particular reason, really. We just happen to be here. We have no purpose. We have no meaning.

And the result of accepting answers like that is that instead of feeling like gods, we end up feeling pretty worthless – we're dust, and there's no point to our existence. And so we see a lot of people suffering from lack of self-esteem, people feeling lost and confused, rates of depression and suicide climbing.

And the pantheist apparently even has miraculous signs to support their claims, but they're left with subjective answers to the big questions that aren't satisfying either. They believe, that we're all travelling in circles, lifetime after lifetime, incarnation after incarnation, trying to climb the ladder of karma until hopefully we reach Nirvana. But, they all have their own particular experience of what that means in practice, differing practices, differing beliefs built on the same basic approach – the end result is being left with nothing definite, and no guarantees – no confidence, no security.

***In Paul's day, it was the Jews who demanded miraculous signs.*** Their tradition taught them that the Messiah would feed them like Moses had fed Israel with manna in the desert. They kept demanding that Jesus give them a sign that would leave them without any doubt that he was the Messiah. But then they gave the credit for his miracles to the devil. And they pretended that he never did rise from the dead on the third day. Their problem was that they knew the kind of Messiah they wanted, and a crucified Messiah wasn't it.

And then when it came to *the Greeks, the kind of wisdom that impressed them was speculative and hypothetical*. Some of it was based on evidence. A lot of it wasn't. Acts 17 tells us that the people of Athens spent their time doing nothing but talk about and listen to the latest ideas. The people in Corinth were much the same.

And it's probably no surprise that the latest ideas that impressed the Greeks didn't include a crucified Saviour. It was actually an insult for them to even mention someone who'd been crucified. To give you an idea of how they felt - a well-known graffiti in Rome was of someone worshiping a crucified figure with the body of a man and the head of a donkey – the caption read, 'Alexamenos worships his god'. That's how the Greek and Roman world in those days generally thought about the message of the cross.

And as we saw last week, the approach of the Corinthian Christians shows how they still valued human wisdom too much, and the gospel not enough. They either didn't completely understand the gospel, or didn't value it highly enough.

But do we value it highly enough? Or have we fallen for the definitions of power and wisdom of our day and age - things that look or sound more impressive to most people than the simple message of the gospel? Do we hope for other, more impressive things, to do what only the gospel can do?

Like yeast in bread, the message of the gospel quietly and slowly redeems, and transforms, the hearts, minds and lives of those God calls, the societies they live in, and eventually the whole world. Are we wanting to see it do something more spectacular than that? Are we wanting some proof that it's true apart from that? Are we looking for miraculous signs and wisdom from the gospel that God simply doesn't promise?

Or are we looking to some form of human wisdom to do what only the gospel can do? Are we looking to psychology or the law or education or entertainment to redeem and transform the world and make it a better place? Because ultimately, only repentance from sin, trust in Jesus, and a willingness to live for

him will ever do that.

Don't make the mistake of looking to miraculous signs or human wisdom to achieve what only the gospel, in it's own simple quiet way, can achieve.

## **Point 2**

*And so God sends us, the church, into the world*, not with miraculous signs, and not with human wisdom, but *with the simple message of Christ crucified*.

And so we hear about how people take the gospel out into the world by printing and distributing Bibles – maybe through organisations like the Bible League, or MERF.

And we think of Christian missionaries, today, and down through the ages. The message they've always brought into whatever culture they've gone has been the gospel.

And then there's us. Some of us involved in Religious Education in schools, some of us bringing the gospel into aboriginal communities, some of us inviting non-Christian friends to an outreach course, some of us door-knocking, some of us speaking into the lives of our friends and acquaintances when we have the opportunity.

And when we do have the opportunity to give spiritual guidance to someone in this kind of way, what message do we bring? And isn't it the simple message of the gospel – Jesus, the crucified and risen one who can save us from our sin. Christians today still follow the example of Jesus, and Paul, the Apostles, and the early church, and bring the message of Christ crucified to the world.

Of course, there's a problem - *the gospel is a stumbling block to Jews and absolute foolishness to Gentiles*.

The Jews tripped over the gospel every time they came across it. They couldn't accept it. They still stumble over it today, except for a small percentage of them.

And to the Greeks, and Gentiles generally, the gospel is foolishness, absolute ridiculousness. We want superheroes. We dream up gods, with superhuman qualities and abilities, that fight their battles and leave

their slain scattered across the battlefield. Compared to the heroes of our imagination, a man who died on a cross as a common criminal doesn't sound like the ultimate answer the world needs, does he?

Philosophers during the last century or two have felt exactly the same way. Albert Schweitzer, 100 years ago, said that Jesus put his shoulder against the wheel of the world, and it turned, and crushed him. What sort of hero is that? A little bit earlier, Nietzsche already said, 'God is dead'. According to them, we don't need someone like Jesus any more. And you only need to listen to how today's comedians treat Jesus and the crucifixion, to know what most people think. We have to do the politically correct thing and treat other religions with respect. But it's OK to ridicule a crucified Jesus and a weak message like the gospel. You aren't a Christian in Australia today because it's the popular thing to do.

And yet, in spite of what the majority think, to those whom God has called, ***Jesus is the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

Maybe when we think of power, we are inclined to think of things that impress us, spectacular things like nuclear bombs. Maybe we don't think first of someone dying on a cross. But who else ever had the power to defeat death itself, and rise to life after three days in the grave? Who else ever had the power to conquer sin? Our problem is that we're too quickly impressed by the wrong things. We too quickly ask the wrong questions, and so we're too quickly impressed by the wrong answers.

But what greater wisdom could there be than the answer to our most basic need? And an answer that not only the philosophers can understand, but that any person in the street can make sense of. This is a wisdom that's far greater than anything any philosopher ever came up with, because it hits the spot, it meets everyone's need.

And so, if we've fallen for the lie that the gospel can't transform and heal at the point that we need it most. If we've started to look to one of the other answers people offer, like psychology, or legislation, or education – then we need to be convinced again that even though these other things have their place, they

can never take the place of the gospel. They can never meet our basic need and save us from our sin. We need to simply depend completely on Jesus, crucified on the cross, died for our sin, risen from the dead, so that through faith in him we might be saved. In Jesus we find the answers to all our deepest questions.

### **Point 3**

And the reason that's the way it is, is because *the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*

How often don't our issues become battlegrounds of wisdom and strength? 2 kids disagree about something at school and decide to sort it out after school with their fists. As adults they trade strength for wisdom and use lawyers in the courts. You see in Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, how nations take the same approach on a grand scale.

And even though that's our preferred method of sorting things out, Jesus comes with a different approach. He comes with a simple way, a way of weakness – Jesus dying on a cross so that we don't have to die eternally for our sin. And he calls us to follow in his footsteps - not to settle for the power or wisdom of the world, but to take a third way, the simple way of weakness and humility that Jesus was willing to demonstrate on the cross. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Which approach do you take? The way of human wisdom? The way of spectacular power? Or the 3<sup>rd</sup> way of humility, weakness, sacrifice, service – the way of Jesus dying on a cross and rising from the dead so that we might be saved from our sin.

### **Conc**

Some time ago there was a welsh woman who lived in a valley a long way from anywhere. She was simple-minded and hard-working. Finally, at great cost to herself, she had electricity put on at her cottage.

After a while one of the neighbours asked her, 'You hardly use the electric lights, I wonder if it was worth what it cost you to put them in?' 'Sure it was,' she said, 'I switch them on every night so I can see to light my lamps. Then I switch them off again!'

And it makes us laugh. She has power available at the flick of a switch. But she still kept up the tedious job of trimming wicks, pouring oil, lighting smelly lamps, and straining her eyes!

But the Corinthians were a bit like that. They had access to the power of God in Jesus Christ but still preferred to fall back on the foolishness of human wisdom.

And our constant temptation is to do the same thing - to look to other things that seem more impressive than a man dying on a cross. Let's remember that God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom. God's weakness is stronger than man's strength. We're best off simply following Jesus, putting our trust in him, and approaching things the way he did.