

**Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5**

**Theme: Series: A Church Just Like Ours—Is God stupid? (God's wisdom, man's foolishness)**

**Sermon delivered by Iyabo Agbelusi during Holy Communion Service on 13/08/2017 at 10.30am**

Last Sunday we considered the fact that the cross could *be preached with no effect* if it were presented with *the wisdom of words- desiring to entertain or impress people*. Indeed, the cross has been sanitized because we are so familiar with it - some people cross themselves in a superstitious manner, even when they do not think of pleasing Jesus who died on the cross. To many it's a religious symbol, to others, it's a form of fashion for tattoos & jewellery.

**V18** - 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.

Now, to those who reject the salvation of the cross, the idea of being saved through the work of a *crucified* man sounds foolish. This is because the cross is synonymous with a gallows or the electric chair and in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, crucifixion was principally reserved for slaves and criminals. No wonder some people might ask; what message might this cruel, repulsive, disgusting instrument of death have? Therefore, **to those who reject Christ, who are perishing, the message of the cross sounds stupid**. They cannot understand how this symbol of a horrendous, revolting death could possibly make people become adopted as children of God. Logically speaking, it shouldn't but God does not work by human logic. He does not give us what we deserve.

**To us who are being saved** however, the gospel message is the power of God: There is inherent **power** in the preaching of the true gospel, when it is received with faith. Hearing and believing of the true gospel will bring the **power of God** into your life just as this message has transformed the lives of those who believe in Jesus.

So, what is the **message of the cross**? It is the gospel of Jesus and it's impossible to preach the gospel without presenting the **message of the cross**. Therefore, preaching a high moral standard is not preaching the gospel, preaching the universal fatherhood of God or the universal brotherhood of man is not preaching the gospel. The **message of the cross** is the **gospel** - Jesus Christ the Son of God, was crucified on the cross to pay for your sin and mine. Through this sacrifice, He opened the door to forgiveness of our sin and a new life in Christ for as many as will receive Him. This happens when we come to Christ as sinners to repent of our sins and receive the new life He offers us.

The message of the cross creates a division within humanity: Those who are perishing...those who are being saved. It doesn't matter who you are...the colour of your skin or your economic status, or the language you speak...you fall into one of those two groups. There is no halfway house or neutrality...every single person will be condemned or saved by what they do at the foot of the cross of Christ. And the stumbling block for every one of us who stand there involves a little three letter word called "**sin**."

**V19-21** - In vs 19, Paul uses quotations from Isaiah to show how mere human wisdom is bound to fail because God opposes arrogant human wisdom and will not bow down before it. To both **cultured Greeks** and pious Jews, the story of Christianity sounded like the sheerest folly- the Greeks (whose life was spent debating vain philosophy), held a worldview that, "*with enough information and knowledge we can figure life out on our own*." They thought they were wise and could deal with all of life and death through their empty philosophy.

On the other hand, the **Jews** tried to answer to life issues with the covenant and their hope of a conquering Messiah... they thought... *we have a heritage that guarantees our salvation...and pretty soon God will send us a warrior to put us back on top.* Both Greeks and Jews were wrong.

We see in vs20-Paul points out that: No wise man, scribe or debater can do what Jesus Christ has done for us. As it was then, even today, people fail to realize that God cannot be found through human wisdom and philosophy, but only through the *message of the cross*. The pursuit of human wisdom can never bring the true knowledge of God to anyone. In our society today, we see that Human “wisdom” is constantly rejecting God and opposing Him, and ultimately showing itself foolish and perishing in doing so.

The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words and to them, a Christian preacher with a blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected. It seemed that the Christian message had little chance of success amongst these Greeks and Jews. But Paul pointed out that, **‘what looks like God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom; and what was viewed as God’s weakness is actually stronger than man’s strength.**

Of course there’s no foolishness or weakness in God; this is a merely tinging irony that beats down human presumption. Note that Paul isn’t condemning learning or education; he merely says that by themselves they are useless for obtaining spiritual wisdom that leads to God. One wise man said, you cannot learn godly wisdom in a University and get a degree in it. It can only come to a heart in right relationship with God. Remember that Paul was also highly educated, so he should know.

No wonder Spurgeon said, “It is certain that a blind man is no judge of colours, a deaf man is no judge of sound, and a man who has never been quickened into spiritual life can have no judgment as to spiritual things.”

**Vs 22-25** The Jews anticipated a miraculous Messianic deliverance, not the *message of the cross*. Their desire for deliverance was not bad, but their rejection of God’s way of deliverance was. Instead of giving the Jews and Greeks what they demanded in deliverance and human wisdom, God gave them something unexpected- **a crucified Messiah.**

The Jews had already figured out what kind of Messiah they wanted - a military Messiah who would come and overthrow the Romans, restore Jewish power and territory. Jesus performed all kinds of miracles and signs: healing the sick and blind, raising the dead, reaching out to the lowly and outcast...but He didn’t do what they wanted...and the cross got in the way. They believed if they were good enough by keeping the laws they didn’t need a Saviour. Especially one who “is cursed by dying on a tree.”

Still today, many people would like to bypass the cross, and make their own Messiah- one that provides what we want... success...happiness...victory. we don’t want sin to be mentioned. We might have heard “All have sinned and fall short” (Romans 3:23) but we give excuses like, *I just barely fall short, so I don’t need too much forgiveness...so I’ll do some good things...say a prayer...get baptized to make people happy...or come to church.*

Jesus didn’t die on Calvary and rise gloriously from the dead to make good people better...He died and rose again so sinful dead people could have forgiveness and life eternal. Either we are still perishing in our sin or we have been saved by the power of God through Christ crucified.

Those who insist that we must change the emphasis of the gospel because people can’t relate to the cross today must realize that God knowing our need of salvation planned it His own

way. Salvation is not the achievement of any human wisdom; it is the embrace of God's dramatic, unexpected act of love at Calvary.

**Vs 26-29 God's "foolish wisdom" is also displayed by whom He has chosen for salvation.**

For us who think to give ourselves a pat on the back because of God's work in our lives, Paul reminds us that we have not been chosen because we are so rich, smart, famous or great, but because *God* is so great and gracious. Jesus is our **wisdom**, righteousness, **sanctification and redemption**.

**Chapter 2:1-5**, Paul didn't come as a philosopher or a salesman when he came to Corinth; he came as a *witness*. We too must be servants of the gospel. We must always rely on the Holy Spirit to do His work, therefore when we have opportunity to share the gospel; never hold back saying, 'I don't know enough'.

God is not stupid, if we preach His word faithfully, clearly and simply, He will back up His word by His power. **Let us pray**.