

# Written Copy: The Gospel as God's Power for Change-1 Corinthians 2:1-2

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Sunday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## Text: 1 Corinthians 2:2-5, 13-14

<sup>2</sup> For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.<sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, <sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

## Exegetical Statement

As Paul continues to address the desire of members of the Corinthian Church to attach themselves to human leaders who have in some way touched their hearts and are seen as more special than others. He calls their attention to what they saw in him when he first came to them. He describes himself as lacking strength, perhaps ill or tired from travel with fear that manifested itself physically. He did not preach with great oratory skills, but simply proclaimed the Gospel that he had received from Jesus Christ Himself. It did not contain such arguments that would appeal to the learned or try to explain the mysteries of God that are beyond understanding. He desired that their faith rest not in him or his performance, that they would not see him as wise, but that they would be changed by the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel can only be understood and held onto as truth by those who have received faith and understanding from the Spirit Himself, who being God searches and reveals the heart and will of God and makes them known to us. The world and its rulers can hear and speak back what the Gospel says, but it will do nothing for them. They will hear the death of Christ being a victory as foolishness. That any man could take upon himself the sins of the world and forgive others by His death is an absurdity. And they definitely cannot and will not understand that this was done "for them". This can be seen in the fact that the enemies of Christ thought that they could stop Him and His followers by putting Him to death. All they did was work into God's plans to assure salvation be won for all men and provide the confessional power for His Church. The Gospel, unlike the changing currents and wisdom of man is the timeless wisdom of the God who created the world and promised to save it. That God would become man and earn forgiveness for all Himself was kept a mystery until Jesus was born of the virgin and began to proclaim Himself as the Christ. The Gospel, even proclaimed by a sick and fearful man has the power to change lives through the presence and working of the Holy Spirit. Paul wants them to give glory not to him or any man but to Christ alone who is the only name under heaven by which we must be saved

## Focus Statement:

The work of creating and sustaining faith in the hearts of hearers is not contingent on the skills or entertainment quality of the presentation, but upon the power that is the Holy Spirit to create the faith necessary for the hearer to see Christ's sacrifice for sin as being for him. It is the Spirit who unveils the mystery of the Gospel and makes it real truth. The Spirit helps us understand God's will and God's wisdom for us and His Church

## Function Statement:

### Why it's important to know:

The Church in its desire to reach out to the current generations who are absent from the pews struggles with how to change the way we communicate the Gospel and changing the Gospel Message itself, especially when the goal becomes entertainment and not salvation

### What the hearer should do as a result:

Trust in the Spirit's power to work no matter how entertaining the worship service is. We are to use the gifts we have been given in the glory of God but see the work that is being done in worship not as entertainment but as creating repentant hearts that trust not in an entertainer but in Christ alone

## Subject Sentence: The Gospel: God's Wisdom and power to save

All of us have a desire to grow the Church, and specifically see this congregation grow. Many of us look at the world we live in, especially the generations following the Baby Boomers and see that by and large they are not here among us. Their lifestyle, while it may include what they call faith in Christ does not involve participation in Corporate Worship. Some really do have saving faith in Christ but perhaps have never understood or struggle with His clear call in Scripture to become a part of the Body of Christ in a local congregation. They don't understand His call to be living sacrifices who sacrifice their time, talents, and treasure in His service both as individuals and as the Body of Christ-His Church. Others may seem according to the way they talk or act that they have faith but really don't. Take for example people you encounter that wear a cross. Ask them: "Why do you wear that cross? What does it mean to you?" I've heard a variety of answers. Sometimes I've heard a great answer such as "It reminds me I have a Savior ". But other answers I've heard are "It matches my earrings", "It was a keepsake of my Mom's", and "I'm Catholic".

Some might tell you they follow Jesus, but their Jesus can be a far cry from reality. In Dan Kimball's book "They Like Jesus But Not the Church" he explores some of the opinions the current generations have about Jesus. He hung out in Coffee Shops and talked with patrons and workers. He talked with young men and women who cut his hair, worked on his car, and sold him his clothing. He developed a rapport with them and then asked them "Who is Jesus?" He listened and let them talk without trying to correct them until they had fully explained what they believed and why. Here are some of the examples of what he heard

**Duggan, a 30-year-old Coffee Shop Manager:** “Jesus was a great teacher. A caregiver. A carpenter. A human being. Approachable. He was the everyday man who lived among others and understood the trials and tribulations of what it takes to put food on the table. But at the same time he was a great leader. Jesus was the voice of peace and hope and inspiration to many people. Jesus had a lot of moral conviction about the goodness of the human beings. Instead of seeing darkness in people he saw goodness.”

**Erika, a 30-year-old Graduate Student:** “Jesus is someone I really respect. His teachings hit you at a very personal level. Jesus is a man whose actions, story, and life are very powerful. He obviously had some sort of intense spiritual connection to God.”

**Gary and Erica. 31-year-old married couple:** “Jesus was a charismatic and motivating man who taught some revolutionary and beautiful philosophy. He told people that they could change. He was so giving and so loving”

**Dustin, a 27-year-old College Student:** “I believe Jesus historically lived. It’s cool to think that he really lived among us. I respect what he stood for and how he went against the establishment with his message. Jesus was probably spiritually enlightened, charismatic, and compassionate. He was driven to help people find inner peace. Jesus taught really good things to people about love and how to treat others as yourself.”

They have a Jesus as a historical figure, an enlightened and enigmatic man who helped make life in this world better. But lacking here is any kind of confession that He gave His life to make our life now better and to redeem us for a better world to come. And when you consider that their authoritative source for who Jesus is comes from outside the Church,

since most have never set foot inside a Church that teaches Biblical Truth, we begin to understand why they believe what they believe. Human wisdom will allow for Jesus to be a great leader, someone who had new ideas about the equality of all people regardless of race or sex. A kind of hippie precursor that preached “Make love not war” their Jesus was a mild and timid man that always ran from a fight. He turned the other cheek because he was scared to do otherwise. Jesus the philosopher, Jesus the wise man, but never Jesus the Son of God, because that humanely speaking is impossible. They have confused the real Jesus with a Jesus of their own imagination, one that that they can be comfortable with.

These men and women need to hear what we have to offer, the real Jesus. So how are to reach out to this un-churched culture and tell them? Many Churches that appear to be successful do so by entertaining them. Turning worship into a show. Good music that lifts up the heart and soul and makes them want to come back. I know of a Church that starts out their Service with secular music. A video was shared with me of a service that began with the Worship Band playing “Stairway to Heaven”. Now as a guy who still enjoys rock and roll I can tell you the band rocked! They did an excellent job and sounded like professional musicians. But here's the problem: the lyrics to that song are “ And she's buying a Stairway to Heaven”. Now that stinks of works righteousness. That's not the Gospel. The person who shared the video with me, who grew up in the Lutheran Church yet attends there agreed with me that the song is not Scriptural. They said its like pre-service music to draw people and grab their attention for when the Pastor does preach the Gospel. Now I attended a Christmas Service there several years ago. The sermon was good Law and Gospel preaching. But the service began with a skit about a Mall preparing to close on Christmas Eve and the Security Guard helping a frantic Father find last minute gifts. It

was funny. The opportunity was there to turn it into a law and Gospel message, but it didn't happen. It was great entertainment, but it wasn't worship. For those who have no experience with what worship is or who Jesus is how are they to know when the fun stops and the worship begins? It just reinforces their opinions about who they think Jesus is but doesn't grow them in their knowledge of He who professed Himself to be

Paul was dealing with a similar problem at Corinth. The Church there had confused the messenger with the message and the power behind it. Like today they were confusing the preaching of the Gospel with the entertainment of the day. It seems that there were traveling orators that would go from town to town and speak on a variety of subjects, from politics, to social issues, to religion. These men were skilled in what they did. They would be the motivational speakers of their time. People back then didn't have TV, the Internet and gaming systems or books readily available. So, they would go and listen to these traveling orators for amusement. How influential was their speech and how entertaining was their presentation directly reflected on whether they got paid or not, whether they would eat that day or not.

Paul is contrasting them to himself when he first came to town to plant a church there. **1**

**Corinthians 2:1** “**And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom**” He did not sound like these

polished traveling orators. He probably didn't sound like the popular on TV and Radio today such as John MacArthur, Adrian Rogers, Beth Moore, David Jeremiah, Joel Olsten, Billy Graham, Franklin Graham, Oral Roberts and others. He described himself in **1**

**Corinthians 2:3** “**And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,**” He

describes himself as lacking strength, as being in weakness. He doesn't elaborate but its easy to understand why he might be talking about physical illness or even exhaustion. In **2 Corinthians 11:24-28** Paul describes his life as an Apostle: **<sup>24</sup> Five times the Jewish leaders had me beaten with 39 lashes; <sup>25</sup> three times Roman officials had me beaten with clubs. Once people tried to stone me to death; three times I was shipwrecked, and I drifted on the sea for a night and a day. <sup>26</sup> Because I've traveled a lot, I've faced dangers from raging rivers, from robbers, from my own people, and from other people. I've faced dangers in the city, in the open country, on the sea, and from believers who turned out to be false friends. <sup>27</sup> Because I've had to work so hard, I've often gone without sleep, been hungry and thirsty, and gone without food and without proper clothes during cold weather. <sup>28</sup> Besides these external matters, I have the daily pressure of my anxiety about all the churches."**

But Paul didn't come to entertain. He says in **1 Corinthians 2:4** **"and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"** He had something far more worthy to share with them. A message that didn't look to himself or his skills as a preacher to make a difference in people's lives It was the message that brought to bear the power of the Holy Spirit on those who would hear. **1 Corinthians 2:2** **"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."** Paul preached the Gospel. He preached the Law to break hardened hearts so that people would turn in repentance as the Gospel did its work by the power of the Holy Spirit who is always present when it is preached, read, and sung.

He came to them and preached to them the message of God and the wisdom of God that the unbelieving world finds foolish. He told them about Jesus who was born to the virgin Mary in a manner that probably had all the townsfolk of Nazareth thinking he was an illegitimate child conceived by Mary and Joseph out of wedlock. But God's truth says He is the supernatural product of the Holy Spirit working in the womb of Mary to bring forth the man named Jesus, who was also at the same time the divine person God the Son. He told them how Jesus walked the roads of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea teaching and preaching that the Kingdom of God has come, and that He is the means by which it comes, so repent, turn away from your sins and look to Him as the mediator of God's forgiveness. He looked like any other man, and yet He healed every disease and sickness brought to Him. He showed His supernatural authority by casting out every demon He encountered. He lived a perfect life and never did wrong, never sinned, a fact that we can only hold by faith as we can't quite imagine how in this world of temptation that is even possible.

His perfect life of love and service to others could be passed off as it is today as being the life of a very good man. His end is another story. Paul made it a point to preach that Christ didn't live to die a natural death. He was crucified. An innocent man sentenced to die the horrible death of a convicted felon. Not because of what He had done, but because of what you and I have done and continue to do. Not because He couldn't stop it; He had the power to come down off the cross at any time. But He refused to do so. He hung there out of love for you and for me. He hung there until He had suffered God's just and righteous wrath over our sin. He hung there until He had paid the price to redeem us from the devil's kingdom. He hung there until He could cry out that all that had stood in the way of you and I being called the Father's precious children had been removed from our record forever. He hung

there until He could cry out at the last “It is finished”, that you and I have been made right by God. And so that we might know that it truly was finished, and we have been made good enough Jesus rose again from the grave. And in doing so proclaimed that just as He rose again so would we on the Last Day.

He simply gave them the Gospel. Not because that’s all he had to say. To those who believed in Jesus and as a result sought to live a new life, He had much to say about how we are to live as Christians and how we are to be His Church. But the most important message he had to give them, both before they had come to faith as well as after was the Gospel Message of Christ the Son of God and Son of Man who died and rose again. He kept that as the most important message so **(1 Corinthians 2:5) that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.** That message, even though it was preached by a man who was weak, and fearful, and trembling, by the power of the Holy Spirit effected the supernatural change in people’s hearts and lives. It was the means by which Christ called them to faith and called them to be a part of the Church. 2000 years later it’s still as effective as it was then. It’s the message that called me back to faith and keeps me in faith. It’s the message that is doing the same for each of you that have come to hear it today.

So how can we reach out to a culture that likes Jesus but not the Church? We can come alongside them in friendship. Develop a rapport with them so that we might gain permission to ask them about their spiritual beliefs. And then let them talk. Ask and then listen to what they actually believe about Jesus. Don’t be quick to correct or interrupt. When they’ve had their chance to speak then in a loving and winsome way give them what Paul preached: the real Jesus Christ from Scripture and Him crucified. It’s a 2000-year-old



account, but the Holy Spirit is still present when it's spoken. And He uses it as His means to change hearts and lives.

If they express interest to hear more invite them to worship with you. They won't find an atmosphere of a comedy club or a rock concert. Let's face it, if that's what you're after then professional performers can do it a lot better than we can. Instead they will hear the Law that breaks hearts and moves people to repentance, and then they will hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not just in the sermon, or even in the readings, but in the Absolution, in the Sacraments, and in the hymns we sing. Turn back for a moment in your bulletins and look at the words of our sermon hymn. [*Read through it*] It's the Gospel put to music so that it touches the heart and has the power of the Holy Spirit to create and sustain faith., to change lives.

There are generations of young people and not so young people that desperately need to hear the message that Paul came to Corinth to preach: Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of their sins and resurrected for their salvation. There are a lot of ways we could dress up the message in a worship service, and there are a lot of ways that this wisdom and power of God can be confused with the wisdom of man. When you leave here today you can find a lot of places and means to be entertained. But while you are here my prayer and goal is that you hear Christ and Him crucified. That this message, through the power and working of the Holy Spirit will create and sustain faith in your life. I pray that is what's happening in your heart: that you are built up in faith towards Christ and kept in that faith for eternal life to come. Amen