Christ Crucified, the Power and Wisdom of God

1Corinthians 1:18-31

Key Verse: 1:18: “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.”

In today’s passage Paul continues to encourage the believers in the Corinth Church, especially confidence in the message of the cross. Let’s see how Paul encouraged them to have strong faith in Jesus Christ who was crucified on the cross.

First, the message of the cross is the power of God. (18, 22-23) Look at verse 18. “***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.***” Among the believers in the Corinth Church there were some who were ashamed of the gospel, which is the message of the cross. From a human point of view, the cross was an object of shame and failure. From a human point of view, Jesus was a Jewish carpenter who had been condemned and executed by Roman law. So, some Christians in Corinth Church were ashamed of identifying themselves as Christians in public.

What did Paul say about them? He said in Romans 1:16, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile*.” Paul said that he was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that grants salvation to everyone who believes. He answered the same in verse 18. Let’s read verse 18 again. The message of the cross sounds foolish to those who see Jesus as a son of a carpenter. But it is the power of God to those who are saved through their faith in him. Amen! How does the message of the cross become the power of God? Since Adam’s Fall men had been helpless before the power of death which was the result of sin. They were like the Hebrew slaves under the tyrant King Pharaoh. Even though they lived as slaves for 430 years, there was no way to get out of their situation. They had to live as slaves forever from generation to generation under the Pharaoh’s whips and rods. All human beings were powerless and helpless like these Hebrew slaves under the power of death.

But God made our salvation possible through the cross of Jesus. In Exodus God commanded Moses to kill animals and put their blood on the doorposts of each house. All the Hebrew slaves obeyed Moses’ command. When the angel of the Lord struck all the firstborns in Egypt, he passed over the houses which were stained with the blood of the animals. Moses and his people were saved by the blood of the animals. After this, God delivered them out of Egypt and opened the Red Sea so that they could march to the Promised Land. In the same way God chose his own son Jesus and let him die on the cross, shedding his blood so that whoever believes in him, whoever has the blood of Jesus in their heart, shall not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16) It was impossible for the Hebrew slaves to get out of Egypt. But God made it possible by the blood of animals. It was impossible for sinners to be saved. But God made it possible through the blood of Jesus. It was impossible for the Hebrews to enter the Promised Land, but God made it possible through Moses. It was impossible for us to enter the kingdom of God, but God made it possible through Jesus. Amen!

Look at verses 22-24. “***Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God***.” In these verses Paul mentioned again that Christ crucified is the power of God. The message of the cross is the message of love. God is love and love has power. He showed his love to this world. His love has power to take away the sword of hatred and cloud of darkness. There was a Roman centurion who had executed Jesus. He had witnessed the whole process of the crucifixion. He was the pride of Rome, but an object of hatred to the Jew. He was the last person to be changed. But when he heard Jesus’ words on the cross, he was changed. “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*.” (Lk 23:34) The centurion heard Jesus’ forgiving prayer on the cross. He had never seen anyone who had prayed like that at the last moment of their lives. Jesus’ forgiving prayer moved his heart. Soon he confessed, “*Surely this man was the Son of God!*” (Mk 15:39) Like this centurion, because of the message of the cross, numerous people in human history have been freed from the slavery of hatred, anger, grief, sorrow, and all kinds of elements of darkness. This is the message of the cross and this is the power of God’s love. Is there anyone among us who are struggling with hatred? Come to the cross! Is there anyone who is still suffering from all kinds of impure spirits and power of darkness? Come to the cross and hear his message, his prayer on the cross! Amen!

Second, Christ crucified, the wisdom of God (19-21) Human technology has been developed rapidly from generation to generation. Now we live in the age of driving self-driving cars. AI begins to replace human beings in all areas of our life such as manufacturing, business, medicine, education, art, sports and even in court. Some hire AI lawyers. Students write their essay through AI app. Last week one Princeton student invented the anti-AI essay writing app program. It seems human beings have begun to rebuild the tower of Babel again. But what did God say to us in verses 19-20? Look at verses 19-20. “***For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?***” Even though we live in the age of AI, we do not know how to overcome an invisible virus. For the last three years, we lost so many lives because of COVID-19. Still, we are facing another virus which we don’t know how to defend ourselves.

Look at verse 21. “***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.***” After the Enlightenment movement in France in 18th century and the Theory of Evolution in England in 19th century by Charles Darwin, people in this world have attempted to seek the evidence of God’s existence. Their conclusion was that there is no God. Someone said that if God existed, he died, and so on. Even today their effort continues through their experimental research, reason, logic, and all kinds of method which they could use. But they have failed. This is because, as Paul said, through its wisdom the world does not know him. We know God and see him only through the eyes of faith. As Hebrews 11:3 says, “*By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible*.” Our God is a spirit, and he works beyond human reason, experience, logic, law of nature, and so on. How can science prove the miracles of God? How can physicists explain Jesus who changed water into wine and walked on the water? Who could explain the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary? All these miracles can be understood by faith in the power of God.

Then, why did Paul say that Christ Crucified is the wisdom of God? This wisdom of God is hidden in the work of redemption and revealed in the message of the cross. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. (He 9:22) This is because blood represents life, and salvation is serious as a matter of life and death. However, there was no one who was qualified to satisfy the requirement of God’s standard. This is because there is no one righteous before God, not even one. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So, God enabled a virgin to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and gave a perfect sacrifice for the atonement of sins. Jesus is the perfect God and the perfect man. God valued the blood of Jesus who shed on the cross for the atonement for our sins. This is the same as God saw the blood of the lamb for redemption of the Hebrew slaves.

Jesus satisfied both God’s justice and his mercy on the cross. Justice and mercy are opposite words. Those who practice justice deny mercy. Those who practice mercy deny justice. But Jesus satisfied both on the cross. This was why Jesus said on the cross, “*It’s finished*” (Jn 19:30) He meant that he completed paid off the debts of our sin. He meant that he fulfilled God’s justice and mercy through his obedience. Paul explains this in Romans 3:25,26. “*God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*” Here the words, ‘forbearance’ and ‘unpunished’ indicates God’s mercy, and the words ‘just’ and ‘justifies’ indicate God’s righteousness. The word ‘a sacrifice of atonement’ is written as ‘a propitiation’ in another version. The word ‘propitiate’ means ‘to appease God,’ ‘to pacify the wrath of God.’ God condemned Jesus on the cross in our place to satisfy his wrath and to set us free from the condemnation. Praise Jesus!

God enables us to be saved by faith, not by works or by any human achievements. It is like using credit cards for our convenience. We travel around the world and use credit cards wherever we go and whatever we purchase because this world accepts them as credible money. In the same way God provided an easy and simple way for our salvation through faith in Jesus. This is the wisdom of God. Look at verse 21 again, “*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.*” God is pleased with those who are saved through their faith in the message of the cross.

God’s wisdom is proven true by its power. Look at verses 25-29. “***For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength***. ***Brothers and sisters, 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. 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. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.***” According to Paul the believers in Corinth Church were groups of common people. They were from low class families. But after believing Jesus they became a royal priesthood and holy nation. (1 Pe 2:9) God shamed the wise and the strong of this world through the believers who believe the message of the cross. Jesus chose his twelve disciples from rank and files in Galilee and shamed the teachers of the law and leaders in Jerusalem. This is the wisdom of God and the power of the message of the cross.

Paul had confidence in the message of the cross. When Rev. Billy Graham was asked by an English interviewer, “Why did you preach the same message again and again for the last 50 years? Don’t you have any new message for this world?” Dr. Graham answered, “I have no message for this world but Christ Crucified.” We need Paul and Graham’s confidence today. Today we lost the message of the cross in person, family, school, community, and even in church, especially in the sermon of pastors and preachers. Why do churches lose power and influence today? We need a spiritual revival. The spiritual revival starts from restoring the message of the cross! We must repent of our sins and come to the cross. We must love the cross and follow the cross. We face many problems, but the solution is this: restore the message of the cross! The message is simple: Jesus loves you and died on the cross for your sin. Repent and believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord! May God richly bless your confidence in the message of the cross and send us to preach Christ Crucified as our priority! Amen