

Wouldn't it be great to one up God? No doubt you know people who actually try. "If God is so almighty," they start. "Is it possible for him to create something so heavy that even he can't lift it?" Got him! Can't answer it right? It seems the created has outwitted the Creator. Human beings win. They've shown themselves more clever than God. God's greatest strength really seems to be his greatest weakness. God's outwitted and undone. God's the fool, right?

You've heard some of these seeming contradictions before. Mysteries of faith so divine they actually defy human logic. How can God be three in one at the same time? How can Jesus be Mary's Son, God's Son, completely God and completely man at the same time? How can Jesus be born in Bethlehem and be the Lord with no beginning and no end? How can God who doesn't need sleep or food fall asleep and eat? How can immortal God die on the cross? There's an answer to that question in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the second lesson for tonight. It's...

The Foolish Wisdom of the Cross

No one ever said church-going people had to leave their brains at the door. Though your friends sometimes think you do. We process the words of Scripture with our intelligence well enough. But every time an apparent contradiction comes up we're asked to simply believe it. We're told the Holy Spirit uses the very words of the Bible to convince and enlighten us to know God's ways aren't our ways. God's thoughts aren't our thoughts. Sometimes it all sounds foolish.

But there's one contradiction above all others. More than humanity and divinity crammed into one body on earth or the complexity of the three in one God. Those are almost beyond questioning because they're so complicated. And it's more than can God make a rock so big. This contradiction is personal. Can God lift a burden created by his creatures, his rebellious creatures, that's so big they can't do anything about it? In theological terms, is it possible that God, who is holy and in whose presence no unholy person can stand, could bear the guilt and punishment for our sins?

We've built up a lot of sins. In the all seeing light of Scripture we reach the same conclusion as Isaiah. **"For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us."** And Isaiah lists some of them specifically. **"Rebellion and treachery against the Lord, turning our backs on God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived."** Your heart wanted to tell that lie to your parents. God was also listening. It felt good to turn to the bottle when times were tough. You turned your back on God. Gossip felt good. It was rebellion against God. There's no use, you and I have been convicted of sin. We don't stand a chance and we can't stand in his presence.

That doesn't stop the world from trying though. Take all the wisdom this world's got, political leaders thinking they can control the environment, scholars storing up knowledge to dispense for profit, philosophers speculating about God and guessing at the ways of the universe. Take all that worldly wisdom and none of it can answer life's biggest question; how do I get right with God? worldly wisdom says work harder and God will reward you. offer more works of service to humanity and you'll have to find yourself in paradise. Do your best and that's good enough. **"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"** All human intelligence offers nothing.

Maybe you think you've got the solution, thinking you've outsmarted God. But while you're coming with a rock so big you're tripping over the stumbling block. **"We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."** God is completely just. Exodus says, **"He does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."** God has no choice but to punish your sins and mine. But let us not forget God is also completely merciful. Exodus also says, **"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin."** By God's unsearchable compassion he chooses to forgive everything that would damn us to hell forever.

In reality God is an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp. He is two things that can't be reconciled. Justice and mercy in one is a contradiction no human wisdom can explain. Until you look at the cross. There God punishes all sin of all time for all people; there God forgave all sin of all time for all people. Jesus suffered the punishment meant for us, not accidentally but willingly. Poor sinners like us were forgiven in Christ's cross. Seems foolish but it leads us to say, **"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"** Forgiven sinners trusting in what seems foolish to those around us, but to us it's both God's justice and mercy on display in our lives.

During these next 40 days of Lent we'll have opportunity to see more about God's solution in Jesus Christ. **"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."** Along the way we'll find puny foolish worldly wisdom. Pilate thinking he was politically wise, but being spiritually foolish. Caiaphas the high priest thinking he was wise doing God a favor by punishing one man to save the nation of Israel, but sacrificing the Son of God to do it. Herod demanding a miraculous sign from Jesus, but not asking Jesus the right questions. The world sees foolishness in the cross. God reveals the cross is true wisdom and comfort, forgiveness of sins and escape from hell.

Today our sin still threatens us, our hearts condemn us. The devil wants nothing more than to convince us that Christ's death meant nothing and that our sins still aren't forgiven. That's worldly wisdom. The wisdom of the cross says, **"It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"** When division or false doctrine are threatening God's people, the wisdom and power of the cross lifts us from pride and self-promotion to be humble listeners at the feet of our Savior. Even death doesn't scare us because of Christ's cross. The wisdom and power of the cross lifts our eyes to the Lord's mercy and compassion.

Can God create a rock so big even he can't lift it? Who cares? Can God punish all sin and at the same time forgive all sin? There's an important question. And one that for human wisdom seems unanswerable, even foolish. God shows himself wise. Even when God's actions seem foolish, his own Son dying, a cross meant for criminals, sinners saved through no action of their own, all of it is still wiser than human wisdom. Where God seems weakest, dying helplessly on the cross, there his weakness was shown to be stronger than any of man's strength. Christ's cross, the power of God and the wisdom of God, the foolish wisdom of the cross.