

It's getting to be that time of year again. The weather gets dangerous. Storm systems come out of the Rockies meet up with dry lines from over New Mexico and run right into some moisture coming up from the Gulf of Mexico. When it arrives at the right time over Oklahoma you know what's likely to happen. Thunderstorms, violent wind, hail, and tornadoes. But if you checked and all the meteorologist said was everything would fine, sunny, and beautiful you would have some doubts. You wouldn't listen to such foolishness. If they said everything would be destroyed in the worst storm ever, and this was the end you wouldn't listen to that claim of power either.

The message proclaimed by the apostle Paul came across like those two extremes to people. And it offended them. On one side people considered what he said weak and were offended. On the other side people considered it foolish and were offended.

As we read Paul's message today we need to examine to see if we're falling into one of these two sides. Are we being offended by the message he proclaimed because we want signs or wisdom? We need to get into Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in the second lesson. There it's plain what Paul says...

**We preach Christ crucified  
Considered weak but God's power  
Considered foolish but God's wisdom**

If I'm confident that I'm right anyone who would want to convince me otherwise will have to come up with some pretty strong arguments. I've already got the truth. Anything else needs to be proven. That was the Jews Paul referred to. **"Jews demand miraculous signs..."** Jews knew all about God from their history. They had been following him as a people for centuries and had seen miraculous signs. God split the waters of a river so they could walk across on dry ground. God sent water out of the rock so they wouldn't get thirsty. God did miracles in the past to convince them of who he was.

Then Paul came along and preached Christ crucified. That wasn't powerful or miraculous. It was exactly the opposite. Christ Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah God promised to send centuries earlier. But when the Jews matched up what they already knew, miracles by God to prove who he was, with what they saw in Jesus it didn't fit. They had other requirements of who the Messiah should be. They expected power used for the benefit of the people, them. Give food by miracle. Heal diseases when sick. Keep bad things from happening. These were signs the Jews figured were essential. So they demanded them. Instead Jesus claimed he would be crucified. That offended them. Jesus could never be the Messiah because no messiah of theirs would be crucified. That was weakness and humility they couldn't take.

We like power too actually. Better than weakness. Especially when we think religion. Ever get offended by the people who defame the name of Jesus? They seem to get away with bad mouthing Christ and making fun of his followers. It might even be offensive that Christianity responds with a sigh rather than the might of armies and warriors fighting for God. I also wonder if sometimes we get tired of hearing about Christ crucified when we really want to hear about something that moves us. Healing or help that is extraordinary. Signs from heaven that we could point to and say, "See, he's real. And he's powerful." Without those signs we fear we're standing up for something weak and unproven.

We preach Christ crucified. That message does not and must not change no matter how weak and offensive it might be. Because the very thing that people describe as weak looking is the very thing stronger than any human strength. **"But to those whom God has called...Christ the power of God..."** It could only be God's power. Let's face it, death is weakness. It's succumbing to a power stronger than you. And Jesus died, was wounded, bleeding, pierced. He was as weak looking as it comes. But Christ on the cross is made good news by God. It is made powerful because that's a substitute dying. The cross is the power of God to overcome unbelief and doubt in your heart. The power of the cross gives forgiveness of your sins. Secures your eternal life. Christ Jesus was crucified for you, considered weak but God's power.

My grandma used to have problems with rabbits in her garden. All day long they would eat the flowers, get the greens, and basically destroy everything that was growing. So she set a trap. A box with an open door and a little lever inside. She put some food, like lettuce, on the lever. As soon as the bunny hopped inside and started nibbling on the snack, the door smashed closed. It worked great. But sometimes she would have to catch something else. Different animals meant using different food. It might be peanut butter or a piece of fruit. Some animals fell into the trap by one food, other animals fell into the trap by another. Jews were offended by weakness. They were offended Jesus looked weak and didn't do any miraculous signs for them. Gentiles were offended by something different. They were offended because Jesus didn't compute according to their reason and they thought he was foolish.

Anyone not a Jew is considered a Gentile. Gentiles in Paul's day were always on the lookout for wisdom. **"Greeks look for wisdom."** They wanted understanding above everything else, things to make sense. What wasn't wisdom for them was a savior who would die. That made no sense. A savior should send all his fighting men into battle in order to defend himself. That would be wisdom. They couldn't offer an explanation for why a savior would suffer. Any savior would reasonably get away from suffering. And most of all it didn't make any sense that a savior would die and then come back to life. Wisdom says no one dies and comes back to life. It was actually offensive to their reason that someone would talk this way.

It wasn't that much different than today and people seeking truth. People seek things they can understand. They'll believe in things according to reason, things that make sense. When something doesn't make sense it can offend them. Some are offended by Christ crucified. Death that's bloody and called a sacrifice doesn't make sense. One man giving his life for others isn't reasonable. So it's offensive. Then there are those within Christianity who advocate for sacrificing Christ to reach those put off by Christ. I mean, if bloody crucifixion talks offends, cut that part out. Suffering savior makes no sense so it's out. Dying savior, can't be taken seriously so that's out. Resurrection. The hardest and most offensive. Nobody has ever seen someone come back from the dead after three days like Jesus claims, so that is definitely out. What's left is a Jesus of people's imagination. A good man, good teacher, someone they might want to live like. Totally understandable. Nothing foolish.

Science and philosophy rule today. People fight against the offense of the cross. "Christ crucified? That old story? No one really believes Jesus died, do they? Certainly not as a sacrifice for others." To them the cross is foolishness. And before we think that this isn't something we face, remember we like things to make sense too. Has doubt ever crept in when thinking about the suffering and the death of Jesus? Did one man really die for everyone? Did he really die for me? Doesn't make a lot of sense. Seems farfetched. Seems a little foolish to believe in someone I've never seen and no one else I know has. Foolish to believe in something science can't even prove.

We preach Christ crucified. **"But to those whom God has called...Christ...the wisdom of God."** Jesus perfectly shows God's wisdom to you. Think of every subject you studied in school, from math to history to science. Picture your college degree hanging on the wall. Think of the education you've received just by living, watching your parents, and experience. Put it all together and tell me, how do you get right with God? No answer from any school subjects, degrees, or street experience. Only God has the answer. True wisdom is Christ. Wisdom is knowing the Savior who suffers. Christ crucified. Won't make reasonable sense. But it's the very wisdom of God to save you. By God's wisdom in Christ is a message of hope. Hope we have in Christ. Love seen in a Savior who loved you. Grace understood by experience.

In God's ways things are upside down. **"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."** The things we would think are strong like military might and signs, those are left undone because they are really weak. But in Christ crucified weakness, not doing signs but giving the greatest sign in the cross is really God's power. And the understanding and wisdom we crave, that is left undone because they're really foolish. But in Christ crucified the foolish, sending a Savior to suffer for the world and show you grace, that is really God's wisdom. That's why we preach Christ crucified. The things considered foolish are really God's wisdom and the things considered weak are really God's strength.