

## 1Corinthians 1:18-2:5 - The Wisdom of God

### 1. The Quest for God

Did you hear about the book – “The Boy who came back from Heaven” –by Alex Malarkey?

Alex was in a car accident which left him in a coma.

But when Alex was in the coma – he had visions of his father who died in the accident.

Alex saw angels and he meet Jesus.

The Publisher described the book as

“a supernatural encounter that will give you new insights on Heaven, angels, and hearing the voice of God”.

The book tapped into a deep need, particularly in the America culture,

Of understanding heaven, of looking past this life to the afterlife.

It sold 112 000 copies in its first year of sale.

It received a platinum award from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association in 2013 for selling over a million copies.

Sadly, on January 13, 2015, Alex Malarkey released an open letter confessing that he had lied about everything.

His confession starts –

“Please forgive the brevity, but because of my limitations I have to keep this short.

I did not die. I did not go to heaven. I have never read the Bible.”

On January 15, 2015, the publisher pulled the book, and no longer distributes it.

Knowing God does not come through knowing Alex Malarkey’s experience of heaven.

However, the very foundation of knowing God is explained in the passage before us.

The very source the knowledge of God,

The very source of knowing God is set out for us.

And it is very surprising. It is very revolutionary. It is very astounding.

Because it is the last place on earth that we would look.

## 2. The Foundation: The Cross is The Wisdom of God (vv. 18-25)

You see, the foundation of knowing God is the Cross of Christ.

In fact, the Cross of Christ is the Wisdom of God. – << v. 21-25 >>

Now, v. 21 is the key.

And there are two parts to the cross being the very wisdom of God in v. 21.

Firstly, the world did not know God through wisdom,

And secondly, it is through the folly of what we preach that God saves those who believe.

### ***a. The Destruction of Human Wisdom (vv. 18-20)***

So firstly, the world that does not know God through wisdom.

That is, Paul is making the bold statement that humanity has not, can not,

And will not reach God

through it's own knowledge, expertise, rationality, sheer force of will.

In fact, a couple of verses up, in v. 19, Paul quotes from Isaiah, Chapter 29:14

***"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."***

On the one hand, there is the wisdom of the world,

which says make the politically expedient decision.

Strength in numbers save your country, Hezekiah.

On the other, there is absolutely suicidal, foolish of trusting in God.

Which says, God alone will save.

God alone will rescue your country, Hezekiah.

And in the one act of salvation, God destroyed the wisdom of the wise.

Well, how much more so, when it comes to the cross. Look back at v. 18 << v. 18 >>

In the eyes of the world, the cross of Christ is foolishness.

This disgraceful, humiliating execution of a Jewish Teacher by Roman brutality.

And yet, to those being saved, the cross of Christ is the power of God.

For this disgraceful, humiliating execution of a Jewish teacher is the very source of salvation.

But even more, the wisdom of this world was destroyed in that one very act of humiliation.

***b. The Folly of What We Preach (vv. 21-25)***

Well, you may well ask, how is the wisdom of this world destroyed in the cross of Christ?

Paul divides the world of wisdom into two categories.

On the one hand, Israel, God's own people,  
who already had access to wisdom, in scriptures,  
But who demanded "signs" of God's action in the world.

On the other hand, the Greek world, who sought success in life through "wisdom".  
Wisdom in politics, wisdom in trade, wisdom in love, wisdom in the household.

For the Jew, the cross is not a sign, pointing to God's act of salvation,  
Rather, it is a stumbling block – Who would imagine the messiah – massacred! Preposterous!  
And so many Jews fail to see the promises of God fulfilled in the cross.

And for the Greeks – well,  
an executed Jewish teacher wouldn't be found in the fortune 500 listing for 33AD.  
Plain and simply put, the cross of Christ, is a folly, a stupidity, a lunacy.

And yet, when we view the world of wisdom, from the perspective of the cross,  
That we actually see how the cross destroys human wisdom.

For if we move from the cross of Christ to the Jewish sign seeking  
The cross reveals the failure of many Jews to see the greatest sign of God,  
The cross reveals God's definitive act of salvation in history  
and sadly many of God's own people missed it!

And if we move from the cross of Christ to the Greek wisdom thinking,  
The cross reveals the futility of human wisdom  
because it can not see God's wisdom in the cross.

May well Paul say, the cross of Christ is the wisdom of God.

### **3. The Formation – Pt 1): Consider your calling (vv. 26-31)**

And so, Paul holds up the mirror of the cross to the Corinthians.

And he shows how the wisdom of God in the cross, formed the Corinthians. <<v. 26-31>>.

The cross has transformed the Corinthians.

In the sight of the world, they did not have cleverness, influence or high status.

And yet, the cross transformed them, and gave them something better,

Instead of cleverness, the cross gave them wisdom.

Instead of influence, the cross gave them righteousness,

And instead of high status, the cross gave them redemption.

But even more, God has intentionally chose the lowly, the despised, the weak,

So that the strong, the wise, and the mighty can not boast in and of themselves.

And I think Paul is re-training the Corinthian's about their own identity and status.

That is, Paul is re-centring their sense of "being" back onto the cross.

For it is easy for the Corinthians,

To define themselves as the world would have them think.

Remember last week – "I follow Paul", "I follow Apollos", "I follow Peter", ...

And so now, Paul corrects that thinking.

There is only one person to boast in, v. 31 – "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord".

And so, what about our identity, how do we define ourselves?

Well may we say with Paul, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord".

#### **4. The Formation – Pt 2): When I came to you (2:1-5)**

And so Paul continues on this trajectory of the human weakness, by describing the form of his visit to Corinth. <<Ch. 2:1-5 >>

Paul's proclamation of the gospel was shaped and formed by the gospel itself.

There were no superior oratory skills,  
There were no lofty speeches,  
There were no plausible words of wisdom.

Rather, there was only weakness, there was only fear, and there was only trembling.

And yet, in that weakness, in that fear, and in that trembling,  
There was something more powerful, and much greater occurring.

God was at work, through his Spirit and by his power,  
To bring the Corinthians to life, through the message that was preached.

God was superintending the whole process,  
So that through Paul's weakness, and through the proclamation of the foolish Cross,  
The Corinthians were saved, by the very Spirit of God.

Paul proclaims the gospel in weakness, and God's power and Spirit work through that weakness  
so that our faith rests in God.

## 5. God's Quest for us

Well, we started today by with one boy's quest for God.

But I want to finish on the reverse quest, that is, God's quest for us.

Firstly, God's quest for us, squashes any human attempt to reach God.

For if the Cross of Christ is a stumbling block to the sign-seeking Jews,  
And they have a completely biblical world-view of the Old Testament,

Then how much more will the cross of Christ be a stumbling block to the sign-seeking 21<sup>st</sup> Century,  
Who look for anything "miraculous", even from a 6 year old boy, and call it a sign of God.

And if the Cross of Christ is foolishness to the wisdom of the Greeks,  
And they were steeped in the philosophical tradition of Plato and Aristotle,  
Then how much more will the Cross of Christ be foolishness  
to the wisdom of the post-modern world,  
We not only have Plato, and Aristotle, and Descarte, Cant, Hume, Rousseau, Hegel,  
But also pick and choose from the Great Philosophers – because you make your own truth.

And secondly, God's quest for us, must be God's quest alone,  
Because only God can save us.  
Only God can take the weak words of Paul, and transform people's hearts.  
Only God can take the message of the Cross, and turn it into the words of eternal life.  
Only God would send his son into the world, to die that death,  
In order that he might save a people who have continually rebelled against him.

And so, as we go out this week, may we be part of God's quest for humanity.

As vv. 23-24 state –

"<sup>23</sup>but let us preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Let's pray.