

1 Corinthians 2vs1-5

The weak and the foolish gospel must be preached in weakness and foolishness so that the power of God may be demonstrated.

Introduction

Hi everyone, I greet you all in the wonderful name of our Lord Jesus Christ. My name is Musa from Christ Central Soweto. Today we continue in our series on leadership from the book of 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Last week we saw that even though the message of the cross seems foolish and weak when assessed by the standards of this world, it is actually the wisdom and power of God to save a dying world. God's wisdom nullifies the wisdom of this world and shows it to be wanting (Like the King who had no clothes).

Today we shift our focus to the proclamation of this important message. How should such an important message that demonstrates the power and wisdom of God be shared? If you were given the most important message in the world to share, a message that would change the course of human history- in what manner would you share it? Let's say 6 months before the COVID-19 was known by anyone, you became aware of this disease and was told that you must share this news and warn people about the dangers but also tell them that you know how to make the vaccine, how would you do it?

I imagine that for some people this might be a means to become extremely rich and famous and they would monetize this information, copyright it and become rich. Some might use this information to bet on stocks and indirectly benefit from the hardship of others. Maybe you might think to yourself, who will listen to me- a nobody? So, you will get a

prominent personality to share this information on your behalf. Perhaps you might start studying how other prominent people address people and learn their trade so that you also can speak like them, act like them and maybe be rich like them so that the message gets across.

This is an interesting question to think through because in many ways it highlights for us what we consider to be a wise and powerful way of sharing information both as who receives information but also as one who shares it. We as people find certain ways of communicating more appealing than others and so we are drawn to people who are like this or talk like this.

The question that we are seeking to answer is that, in the church how should our leaders share the message of the cross with us? If the message of the cross is foolishness to the world,

how should this foolish message be shared with the world? Is it right for pastors to take the cultural expressions of communication and just adopt them in the church unfiltered? Does this undermine the gospel or does it provide a wonderful way for that gospel to be received? This is what we are tackling today.

Context

The place of public speaking in the first century

Before we jump straight into the passage some cultural context would be helpful. In first century, Corinth, philosophy and oratory skills (speaking skills) was not just an interesting hobby for those in the arts, it was a way of life for the Greeks. The Greeks prided themselves with thinking and speaking. The celebrities of the day were those who spent their time thinking and speaking to people. So, to stand out you needed to be

appealing to people both in the things you spoke about but also how you said it. The closest equivalent I can think of today as a culture like this is African Americans and hip-hop culture. Rap music to African Americans is not just words and beats but an expression of culture, the people who are best at this are celebrated and very rich in their communities.

So, when a new speaker came to Corinth for the first time, they had to build up their reputation. So, to build that credibility they would offer entertainment at dinner parties, speak in public places, and compete for people's applause. And to appeal to people you needed to wow them (it was all about the showmanship). If people were impressed with you, you would gain a bigger audience and people wanting to sponsor you which led to students and more money. **The credibility of the message rested on how appealing and**

entertaining the speaker was. This is the world that Paul first preached the gospel to in Corinth.

Preach the gospel in humility (vs. 1-3)

So, in chapter 2vs 1 Paul starts by comparing what they are culturally used to to how he shared the gospel with them when he first met them....

2 And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.^[a]

When I first came to you, says Paul, I did not come with flashing lights or following the latest trends of how to be an effective and compelling speaker. It was not with eloquence or according to human wisdom. The point of my speaking was not for you to focus on my testimony as the speaker but for you to focus on God's testimony.

*² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except
Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

This was the focus for Paul, to preach Christ and him crucified. The message of the rejected king who saved the lowly and rejected people so that they can be reconciled to God. As we learned last week, this is a message that does not make sense to our world for it cuts against the grain of conventional wisdom, yet this was the power and wisdom of God to save.

So how do you preach such a message? Paul says the manner and the way you conduct yourself must match the message you have come to preach (i.e. a foolish and weak message but be preached in weakness and foolishness), vs. 3...

³ I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.

The manner and approach of Paul matched his message. History tells us that the apostle Paul was often accused by his

opponents of being unimpressive in real life. In his letters when we read Paul, he seems very impressive but in real life it was another story. This is what his opponents said of him in 2 Cor. 10:10...

¹⁰ ... *“His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.”*

Paul was a short man who got beaten up a lot. And he did not hide these weaknesses from his congregants, Paul never pretended to be what he wasn't. He was often ill and beaten and yet remained confident in the power of the gospel to save.

These weaknesses to Paul were not a hinderance to the gospel but exactly what the gospel needed because it shifted the focus away from him on to someone else. The gospel is a testimony about God, it is truth revealed by God about God and not by human opinion. Paul was not like the other

speakers of his day who went on and on, trying to impress by speaking about many subjects. Paul's job was to step aside and let the gospel do its work. His job was to...

Preach the gospel plainly (vs.4)

Vs. 4...

⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,

Paul and the speakers in the first century had very different goals in their speaking. The sophists aim was to persuade people through the manipulation of arguments and skilful talk. Paul's aim on the other hand was the demonstration of God's power in people's lives through the simple proclamation of the gospel.

If at the end of his preaching people said to Paul, what a great sermon! You are such a gifted and talented preacher, Paul considered that a failure for the focus of the people was on the wrong person. If, however at the end of the sermon people are deeply convicted of their sin and repent and believe in Jesus. If they forsake idols to praise the one true living God, Paul was happy. It was not about looking wise but about the demonstration of the Spirit's power. The Spirit's power here is us repenting and trusting in Jesus for that is God's mission.

You know it still stuns historians why such a hated and despised religion such as Christianity became the fastest growing religion in the first century. It went against everything that was considered wise in those days. Christians were considered stubborn because they only worshipped one God and refused to honor any of the house gods in people's homes (something that was very offensive). Christians said sex should

only be with your married spouse, which mean powerful men could not have sex with anyone they pleased with (which sounded crazy to people). They took care of all the poor and rejected, not only their own (to people that seemed counterproductive). And to make matters worse if you stole from a Christian, burnt their property, and killed their loved one they did not retaliate. They forgave you and moved on with their lives. This to the first century just looked weak and foolish yet it spread like wildfire. Why?

So that people trust in God's power and not you (vs. 5)

Paul gives us an answer in vs. 5...

⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on

God's power.

What was happening in the first century, what is happening in you is not because Christians are smart and we somehow

bumped into something that other people didn't know. It is not because of human wisdom but it's the demonstration of God's power. And to experience this power of God you need to relinquish your own power and wisdom. You need to be humble and accept that you bring nothing to the table, you need to surrender all so that your faith rests on God and not on yourself.

The job of the leader and preacher in the church then is to step aside, they must also realise and remember that if they add anything to the gospel they subtract from it, and if they remove anything from it it ceases to be the gospel. Their job is simply to preach it plainly and simply so that people trust not in themselves but in God's power to save. This passage echoes the words of Zechariah 4:6...

*'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says
the Lord Almighty.*

It reminds me of the famous song by the William brothers...

*I'm just a nobody trying to tell everybody,
About somebody, who can save anybody.*

The place of contextualization in preaching

Does this passage mean that Pastors should not try to be contextually relevant to the people that they preach to? I guess it depends on what you mean by contextual. If being contextual means that we change the message of the gospel, and we shift the focus away from Christ onto ourselves. If it means changing the hope of the gospel from God and his kingdom to ourselves and this world then No, we must never contextualize the gospel.

But if by contextualize we mean that we are seeking ways of presenting the gospel in ways that are clearer to people, understanding their cultures and our culture such that we present the gospel plainly to both cultures so that the power of God can be at work, so that people do not trust in us but trust in the God who saves then Yes, we must.

The important thing is that we move out of the way and let the testimony of God be plain for all to see so that the power of God might be seen in us all. And for this to happen we need to be less so that God will be more.

Let's pray...

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