Foolishness of the Cross (Part 2)

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Date: 19 October 2026

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[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.! Elder Tom Holland teaches on 1 Corinthians 1, verses 19-23.

! And by the way, that foolishness is reserved for those who are perishing because of their rejection of the cross.
And that's the only vehicle by which mankind is saved, is the cross. And if you reject the cross, you're about as big a fool as you can ever find on this planet.
And the cross puts on display the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1, verses 19-20 say this, For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
[1:40] Now the Apostle Paul is quoting a passage there in Isaiah 29, verse 14, to reveal that the wisdom of men will be destroyed.

That Isaiah passage has not yet been fulfilled. It will be fulfilled in the last days. And all vain philosophies, which we're talking about in our study of Corinthians, but all vain philosophies will be swept away, along with all the arguments that men tried to make against the truth of the gospel of Christ.
All of these man-made arguments will be a pile of ashes, and Christ will take His place as Lord of lords and King of kings.
We can read about that in Revelation chapter 17. So this prophecy has in times fulfillment, but as so often happens, there is also both immediate fulfillment and significance.
And when Isaiah made his prophecy, I should have gotten Mike Dershon to tell me how to pronounce this, but I didn't. But he was the king of Assyria, and he had plans on how he was going to conquer Judah.
[3:17] Isaiah was alarmed, but the Lord told him, said, well, don't worry. And I think when the Lord says that to us, we should take him at face value.

Don't worry about it. Because this evil plan will fail. And it will fail because of God's power, and they did not have to rely on Judah's strength or Judah's ability to wage war.
In fact, and you'll be familiar when I say this, God sent one angel. One. And that one angel killed 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian army.
And you can read about that and should in 2 Kings chapter 17. Now God had told Israel many times He would fight for the nation.
And all they had to do was fulfill two commands. Israel had to trust what God said and had to obey.
[4:45] That sounds like our salvation. Trust and obey. I could carry that on and say, for there's no other way.

But I won't do it. We hear that quite a bit coming from the mic section of the choir. Paul's up there near him. How often do men and women say, no, I'm going to fight my own battle?
And those typically get in God's way. Particularly after God's told you, I'm going to fight for you. Don't worry. Don't be alarmed. And as we've seen over the last couple of weeks, human wisdom often gets in God's way.
But we have to trust and obey. How often do men and women try and fight their own battles? Human wisdom gets in the way.
It's unreliable, first of all. Consider these inspired words in verse 20. 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Where is the one who is wise?

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[6:04] Boy, that will grab your attention. Where's the one who's wise? Where's the scribe? Where's the debater of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world?

Isaiah once asked a very important question. He said, where are the wise men? If read in context, Isaiah was speaking about Egypt.
And they had a host of what they called wise men. Even around the Pharaoh, they camped out with soothsayers and mediums and all kinds of wizards.
And they were put there to produce wise counsel to the nation of Egypt. But they couldn't pull it off. In fact, Isaiah said that these wise men were leading Egypt astray. And he likened them to a man who drinks too much, gets drunk and staggers around and falls in his own vomit.
[7:22] Not a nice picture now that we've eaten. Isaiah said that God has given Egypt the spirit of confusion. Now certainly, we can say with total confidence that the Apostle Paul was one of the wisest men that ever lived.

It is interesting that he uses the term here debater. And this is not a reference to the Old Testament. A debater was a very Greek term.
They loved to debate among themselves. They would meet in a public forum and they would launch into a debate.
A debater is a very Greek term. The Greeks loved together and they'd get together and they'd debate each other over who has the best philosophy this week.
Who's the best philosopher this week? They loved philosophy. They loved it. And so Paul, he sets about to stab them with a knife.
[8:41] But then once he stabs them, he twists it and turns it for maximum effect. And the Greeks loved to surround themselves with admirers and then try to impress others with their logic and their powers of debate.

But here we have a Jew and at the same time he's a Pharisee. That's an unusual combination, but he was. The Apostle Paul. And he comes along and he says, where are your debaters?
That's all we hear about Greece is you guys have debaters. That's all we hear about Corinth. Where are they? When the debate was concluded for that particular day and that particular argument, they hadn't solved anything.
Nothing had been solved. Poor people were still poor. Society's problems were still just as intense. All that had been debated for that session was still folly and frivolous.
And at the end of the debate, nothing had changed. Nothing had been solved and nothing had improved. As Dr. MacArthur points out, this type of rhetoric could just as easily have been done in our day.
[10:17] There are churches that have this all the time. Men like to think they're great thinkers, but at the end of the day, what have the politicians and the scientists and professors and philosophers and sociologists done to improve our condition?

I had to take a class in sociology when I was in college. That was a waste of time. It was horrible. So over the centuries, human wisdom has not provided basic solutions.
They certainly haven't improved the situation. Turns out that much human wisdom, like in Paul's day, is part of the problem. when men look on God's wisdom as foolishness, there will be no peace, there will be no joy, and no hope for mankind.
Only the cross has the solution to life. and that's been rejected by the masses of people on this planet, in this hemisphere, in the eastern hemisphere, and you could just go around the world.
And only the cross can solve life's problems. I have traveled to many of the Reformation countries. I've been to England, I've been to Scotland, I've been to Wales, I've been to Switzerland.
[12:05] John Calvin preached there, and a Swiss theologian named Zwingli, and so forth. But in those countries, when I was there, the lights had gone out.

Literally, all was darkness. my little hotel, which was a beautiful little Swiss hotel, and I walked out on the street, and there was this cathedral that stretched for blocks, and there was about a hundred people inside.
Diane and I had an occasion several years ago now to pay a visit to Glasgow Cathedral in Glasgow, Scotland.
And we went to Glasgow Cathedral on a Sunday, and we attended the church service in Glasgow Cathedral.

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There were about twelve people there. And this little old man came out in robes and carrying a Bible that he didn't have the strength or knowledge to have in his position, but he went up these winding stairs to a platform, and he started this device up there, and he, I guess you could say started preaching.
[13:36] It wasn't much of a sermon. No one greeted us or even spoke to us with one exception, a little lady about our age, nicely dressed, spoke to us after the service.

She sought us out. She was the only person. The preacher sure didn't. By the way, that service ended when that device he touched, it started ringing like an alarm clock. And he stopped in mid-sentence and turned it off and came down those stairs and walked out of the building.
Wow. But this little lady sought us out and we kind of wanted to engage her about the service, which we got nothing out of.
And I said, but the real question that I have for you is this is an ancient building, clearly. It's massive, massive, but there are only about a dozen people in attendance.
What's the future of this church? She said, well, she said, that's already been decided. We have adopted a written document and when we are down to a certain number of attendees and we're almost there, we will turn the keys of this building over to a trust and it will be converted that everything you see in here will be a museum.
[15:14] There'll be no church. That's folly. It's foolishness. Massive, massive cathedral. That church would have held ten Highland Parks.

the grounds surrounding it, which were graves, would have covered downtown Barterville easily. It was just amazing.
What is the future for this church? Well, they don't have one and for all I know, it may already be a museum. That church had no power but there is a power that we can speak of.
There's definitely a power. It's the power of God's wisdom. In 1 Corinthians 21-25, for since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.
For Jews demand signs and Greeks and Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified. A stumbling block to Jews, folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, the wisdom of God, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
[16:55] Now, the human race has a terrible track record when it comes to knowing God and then ignoring God.

The only method of truly knowing God is Christ Jesus. And John probably gives us the best instruction there because in John 14-6, you'll be very familiar with it, Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me. And we see in these few words the infinite wisdom of God.
We also see words that are understandable yet rejected by the vast majority of the human race. On more than one occasion I have shared this passage with a lost person and they tell me, well, don't misunderstand me.
I believe in God. I just don't believe in Jesus. Or, I don't believe He is the only way to heaven. There's multiple ways to heaven. The truth is we cannot know the truth about God by listening to the world.
[18:31] We get to know God by listening to the incarnate Word of God, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We must deal with our problem and God's solution or we will never be saved.

So what is our problem? Our problem of sin. sin that permeates the soul and what is God's solution?
It is salvation provided only by the cross of Christ. There's no other solution to the sin problem. Well, the Greeks that Paul had to deal with really believed you could come to grasp with divine human wisdom and human philosophy.
If you had wisdom and philosophy, you're going to be okay. They believed that. No one ever got saved by believing in philosophy.
no one. I had to read a book by B.F. Skinner one time. What a waste of time. So how does a man or a woman get saved?

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[19:47] Paul tells us, and we read it once already tonight, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. That word believe as you should know by now, pastuo, trust, obey.

The Greek word folly that appears here is the same word for foolishness. So does this passage indicate that God saves people through folly or foolishness?
I'd say, I think it does, but it's their folly and their foolishness and God can still save people. They're foolish. foolishness. It's what I meant last week and tonight by talking about the foolishness of God. I realize that if we don't take this in context, it can be terribly an offensive term, but the fact is that the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
Now let me say something that I don't intend to startle anybody. I don't think I will in this crowd. The foolishness of God in the context here is our only hope.
[21:05] It's our only hope. There's no other way to be saved. We can only be saved by believing what the majority of this people, of the people in this world reject because we teach it and preach it as absolute truth and that's rejected.

and that is the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. The world doesn't want to hear about that. We have to believe.
But what do we have to believe? Everything concerning the gospel of Christ. Christ. When we come to believe the gospel, what do we receive in exchange?
There's an exchange there. Well, for one thing, we're transformed. When you believe the simple gospel of Christ, you are transformed.
You're regenerated. we're born again. A better way to say that is we are born from above. We've been given a new birth.
[22:19] Sounds like Romans chapter 8, doesn't it? Believing in the power of the cross and the atoning sacrifice of Christ gives us new life.

I can't get enough of Romans chapter 8. I can't get enough. And I always begin that in verse 1, which you should have memorized by now.
There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Can you imagine no condemnation? Let me put it to you this way.
The simplicity of the gospel of Christ gives us what the wisdom of the world could not. Men don't want to trust God's wisdom.
They'd rather rely on their own. And remember from our study last week, I said that's moronic. I referenced the book of Romans moments ago.
[23:30] We have the evidence of the existence of God all around us. Even the heavens display the glory of God.

Look up tonight when you leave. I know I will and Robert will. We like to do that out there. But listen to Paul in the words of the book of Romans.
I'm only going to read chapter 1, verses 18 to 20. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. for His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.
So they are without excuse. That really reads like an indictment in a court of law. And over my career I dealt with many of those starting all the way back in 1971 and coming forward.
[24:57] Men not only deny the truth, they hurl accusations against the truth and against the truth giver. Every time I see a sunrise, I see the glory of God.

Every time I see a sunset, I see the glory of God. vast majority of people don't. Astronomers have lost the glory of God that can be seen through a telescope peering at the stars.
Scientists have lost the glory of God looking through a microscope. How can anyone look at a mountain and not see the glory of God?
people do not recognize the power of God contained in one atom. Do you realize in one atom God could, if He so chose and He will choose someday, is capable in that one atom of destroying the universe?
all you got to do is start a chain reaction. Ask the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When Paul went to Athens in Greece, something happened that always moves me.

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[26:28] He decided, well, I've arrived, I'm going to walk around and look at all the statues and shrines that I've heard are on display in Athens.

And when he finally had an opportunity to debate various Greek philosophers, Paul said this, and this is out of Acts chapter 17 beginning in verse 22.
So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.
Boy, you talk about dripping with sarcasm. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription.
to the unknown God. Can you imagine Paul? He's got to be relishing in this. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.
[27:46] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives all mankind life and breath and everything.

and he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him, yet he is actually not far from each one of us.
For in him we live and move and have our being. And even as some of your own poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring.
Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by art and the imagination of men.
The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all who can that man possibly be, he raised him from the dead.
[29:32] And that's what Paul was doing in Greece to tell them. Now, there's two verses I passed over and we're going to cover those and then close.

And they're important. Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.
Unbelief is the plague of the human race. The most extreme unbelief is the cause for people to reject God reject Christ, ignore the cross, and spurn any move of the Spirit of God in their lives.
It is interesting to note here the approach of Jews to the massive and pervasive plague of unbelief. In Paul's day, it was a simple matter.
If you want us to believe in you, show us a sign. And there are multiple passages in all four gospels where Jews demanded that Jesus show us a sign, prove who you are.
[30:49] Why did Jesus and later Paul refuse to do so? Well, one answer is they were not circus performers. They weren't putting on a circus show.

If either had shown them signs, would it have ended there? Would that have been enough? No. Of course not. Their demands for a sign would have increased and probably gotten bizarre.
the Greeks didn't demand signs. They were willing to rely on their comfort zone. They wanted to see displays of wisdom.
They wanted to debate Paul. And if Jesus had appeared, they'd want to debate him. But the Greeks' point of struggle was a crucified savior.
That to them was unthinkable. And it could in no way be defended. The Greeks wrote about their gods, and they were described as indifferent to men and aloof from them.
[31:56] Why did Paul, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, single out Jews and Greeks? Well, in his day, Paul knew that Jews and Greeks represented unbelieving mankind.

Both groups had found their reason to reject Christ Jesus as the Messiah. For his part, the apostle Paul focused on the one true reason why the cross of Christ encompassed truth.
It was a sign. After being dead for three days in the tomb, Jesus came back to life and was seen by hundreds of people. Many even witnessed Jesus ascending back into heaven.
wisdom. But what about wisdom? Reject the gospel and spend eternity in hell. Not much of a choice. Receive the gospel and spend eternity in heaven with Christ.
Sounds pretty wise. Christ is the power of God. It is a real power. it is offered to men and women. It is the power of a guaranteed salvation.

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[33:15] It is a power of deliverance from Satan and life with God and life with his son for all eternity. That's what we get.

And we're going to continue that next week. Let's close with a word of prayer, brother. Thank you, Father, for your grace, your mercy, the peace we can get from your word.
Lord, be with us this week. Bring us back safely to church Sunday, here Wednesday, and then next Monday. We ask all this in Jesus' name.
Amen. To learn more, visit us in person or see the website at highlandparkbaptist.net.
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