

## “Unity: Boasting Together in the Lord”

### Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Graphic: cross, division, wisdom vs cross, boasting

Key Verses: 1:30-31 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom of God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Theme: Unity in Christ comes to the church when we give God the credit and glory for every provision and blessing in our lives, our spiritual gifts, and our salvation through Jesus Christ. We lose perspective, get haughty, and independent when things go well for us. We are called to boast in Christ alone, to rejoice, and give God glory for all things.

### 1) Introduction

- a) **(CUE 1)** Last week we began a series of messages from the book of 1 Corinthians, focusing on our UNITY in Jesus Christ. There is unity in the church, in the body of Christ, when those who are following Christ are all united under the His banner...under the cross.
- b) Paul is urgently appealing to the church in Corinth to be of one voice...one mind...and one purpose – **DO NOT BE DIVIDED!** When we focus on our common identity in Jesus Christ, we are united together. But we aren't united only by his teaching and example – Jesus isn't just a great teacher and friends – most critically, we are united by the **CROSS**. Paul uses the term **CROSS** as shorthand for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which provides the way of salvation for those who respond to God's grace by faith.
- c) And last week we left off with Paul saying, in 1 Cor. 1:17 that Christ sent him to proclaim this Good News about Christ, about the cross, not with eloquent words - with eloquent wisdom - so that the cross might not be emptied of its saving power.
- d) Paul's like, “God forbid if I try to convince you with my words...I want the horror and the hope of the cross to be the thing that convinces you about the love of God and its power to transform your life from sinner to redeemed, righteous, sanctified follower of Jesus Christ!”
- e) Because, as we'll find out today, if it's about **ME**, then it's not about Christ. If it's more about my **WORDS**, it's less about the cross. If it's MY thing, it's not **CHRIST'S** thing. And for Paul, and hopefully for us, it's about Christ's thing way more than it's about **MY** thing. Because Christ's mission the only mission that can unite us for the sake of the Kingdom.

- f) (CUE 2) And today, Paul talks about boasting. What does it mean to boast together in what GOD is doing in our lives and in the world? How do we do that to the glory of God? And what are the pitfalls to boasting in our own achievements, even in the church?
- g) Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 18. If you didn't bring your Bible with you today, there are copies in the holder in front of you for you to use.
- h) (CUE 3) Let's pray...

## 2) Scripture

### a) Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

- i) (CUE 4) I sat in a calculus class during my sophomore year of college one day and the professor was giving us this complicated equation and diagram for, get this, a floating, inverted, donut shape in negative space. This was the most ridiculous thing I had ever heard in my life. First, I couldn't possible picture that, and second, if I could, what use would it be? Foolishness, I thought! Eventually, I got it and got a C in the course...
- ii) (CUE 5) When the message of the cross was presented to the people in the Greco-Roman world, the Jews and the Greeks, it was their version of the inverted donut in negative space. It didn't make any sense at all!
- iii) For the Jews, the Messiah had to come as a military leader!...a powerful political and religious leader! Not a crucified one! Not a dead one!
- iv) For the Greeks, mostly pagans, a dead god is foolish – nothing like the umpteen gods made of wood and stone and metal that we worship.
- v) That's why Paul says the “message of the cross is foolishness” to them. The fact that eternal salvation for human beings comes through, and only through, the death and resurrection of a god-man, is preposterous!
- vi) For those who are perishing - Paul's code word for anyone who is not a believer in Christ - this message is foolish. There are stumbling blocks in the way, there is a lack of reason. The Jews wanted to have Jesus be the triumphant king...the Gentiles didn't know what to think. The Jews wanted SO BADLY to have a Messiah...the Gentiles didn't want one at all. And these two groups of people reject the message of Christ on the cross because it's not what they wanted.

- vii) BUT...BUT...for those who are being SAVED, it is the POWER of God. For those who stop and listen, who allow the Holy Spirit to work in their lives, this is incredible news!
- viii) (CUE 6) And remember, Paul's writing to the church...those who have heard the gospel and are being saved. The key difference between those who are rejecting the message as foolish and those who are accepting it because it IS so foolish, is the reception of the Holy Spirit into the life of the believer to make sense of what would otherwise be foolishness.
- ix) But why did God choose THIS way? Why death and resurrection?
- x) Well, for the Type B people, the answer is simple, according to Paul. Because God chose to do that. This was God's way of showing love. We can never fully grasp it, but it's awesome because God, verse 19, destroyed the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning, he thwarted. God chose the cross because it was radical and it was right.
- xi) For the Type A people here today, this is a little more complicated. But basically, God chose the foolishness of the cross because He is holy and the only way to restore the relationship between humans and God (like it was at creation), was to somehow pay the price for our sin. Sin is the barrier to that relationship...Jesus is the bridge to God. Because Jesus was fully human and fully divine, He was the only One who could take our sin on himself, even though he himself was sinless.
- xii) Either way, as those who are being saved, this IS the power of God. This IS salvation. This IS the uniting factor in the body of Christ. And it's in that salvation that we trust.
- xiii) Paul is presenting this ironic contrast: that the wisdom that we gain in THIS world – wisdom to do more, know more, have more, be more, gain more – that this wisdom is fleeting! Where is the one who is wise? The scribe – the one with the book knowledge? The debater – someone who has great skill with his words? They are not here, says Paul. And it doesn't matter anyway, because those skills are not the skills God chooses to convince people about the truth of the gospel.
- xiv) God uses simple people. God uses simple words. The cross is NOT complicated, even though our Triune God IS.

- xv) And this was an encouragement to the church in Corinth, because, as we'll read, there weren't many people with these skills anyway.
- xvi) So when they shared the good news about the cross and the salvation it offers, they didn't have to be wise or eloquent. Just genuine.
- xvii) Divine wisdom and power are revealed through weak, humble, foolish things, like the cross, and the Corinthians church, and Paul's preaching; and maybe your witness to your co-workers, and what about your Sunday School class, or our worship?
- xviii) Look at verse 26...

**b) Read verse 26**

- i) Apparently, the folks in the Corinthian church were just like me. Not many were wise. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth (although my parents did take me to Burger King once and I got one of those crowns).
- ii) Right? Consider your own call. Paul's just finished telling them that the wise and powerful things according to the world are NOT the things that beat a path to the cross. And then he does something that no preacher should ever do...he uses the congregation as his sermon illustration.
- iii) He's talking about weak, foolish, lowly things...and then he points to the congregation and says, "You know...things like YOU!"
- iv) But it's OK because remember what he said...THOSE things are the things that lead to salvation. You've been called.
- v) Look at verse 27...

**c) Read verses 27-29**

- i) In verse 24, Paul, said that for those who were called – the cross of Christ is the power of God. Being CALLED means hearing and responding to the offer of salvation.
- ii) And you, church, are saved because you answered the call, even though you were foolish, weak, and lowly.
- iii) If it were the other way around – if you were wise, strong, and noble – you would have status because of who you were in the world.

- iv) But, and notice how Paul uses this term chose...
- v) **(CUE 7)** God CHOSE what is foolish, to shame the wise. Underline that word.
- vi) Shame was the worst thing you could experience in the Ancient Near East – much worse than death.
- vii) God CHOSE what is weak to SHAME the strong.
- viii) God CHOSE what was low and despised, EVERYTHING THAT IS NOT, to (I love this) reduce to nothing things that are.
- ix) Basically, God used nothing to take that which was something and make it nothing. That how POWERFUL God is.
- x) How can we brag when it's God that has chosen, chosen, chosen us.
- xi) He can turn a hopeless situation into a transformational moment for the kingdom. God takes people who are at the end of their ropes and pulls them up for His glory. God can take the disease and crush it before the doctor's eyes to show how powerful He is. God finds the wisest person and lays them out in shame before the world. We see it every day on the news and we witness it over and over in the world.
- xii) Just when we think it's safe to brag about who we are and what we've accomplished, God reminds us that we're standing in quicksand. He's the one choosing to use us, in spite of us.
- xiii) Our lives are not created and sustained by what we do...
- xiv) **(CUE 8)** Look at verse 30...

**d) Read verse 30-31**

- i) The source of life for us is not in the latest fads, the grades we got on our latest report card, the evaluation from the boss, or the amount of medications we take...
- ii) Our source of life, for those who are saved by God's grace, is Jesus Christ. Through His sacrifice on the cross and defeat of death comes our wisdom. No other source has any power. No other god has any power to make us righteous, transform us, or redeem us from our sin.

iii) Only Christ can be our righteousness - restoring our right relationship with God. Only Christ has become our sanctification - being transformed and set apart for God's purposes. Only Christ is our redemption - being freed out of our slavery from sin to a new master in Christ.

iv) Because God does all this...let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

e) So, what does it mean to boast together in what GOD is doing in our lives and in the world? How do we do that to the glory of God? And what are the pitfalls to boasting in our own achievements, even in the church?

### 3) Application

a) (CUE 9) Boasting has gotten a pretty bad reputation, lately. Usually, boasting is about bragging up our accomplishments. But there is improper boasting and proper, godly, boasting.

b) The first one is when we get into a position in our lives when the things that we have done or the successes we have experienced are more about us than Christ. That's improper...it's taking the wisdom of the world and making your success about what you know, how powerful you are, or how highly acclaimed you are.

c) We see this all the time in professional sports! Johnny Big-muscles is the best quarterback in the world, but won't take the 15 million-dollar salary because HE'S worth more. HE'S got mad skills! HE'S amazing! And instead of giving glory to God for creating him that way, he sucks up the accolades and whines about his paycheck being too small to live on.

d) Maybe you've been in a position where someone wanted to give you glory for something and you REALLY WANTED to take the credit. Maybe you DID have a great idea...and every fiber in your body just wanted to join everyone else in patting YOU on the back.

e) This happens at work. This also happens in the church. Church XYZ is in the paper all the time for all the great ministries they are doing. I'm not saying it's bad to be recognized or lift up the ways that we are engaging in ministry.

f) The question is, what is our response to it? Because secretly, or not so secretly, we all want to be loved, adored, worshipped, have accolades thrown our way. We all want to get the glory and the credit. It's one of Satan's best tools to divide the church.

- g) And if that's the path we chose, without giving all the glory and honor and credit to the God who creates, sustains, and transforms us, then all we're doing is boasting improperly.
- h) Proper boasting makes us into conduits for Christ. Proper boasting takes whatever praises we receive and passes those on to God.
- i) And it has to be genuine. I sometimes wonder about the football players that score a touchdown and then look up to heaven as if to say, "Thanks God, for making me look really good." And then the next day you read about what they did AFTER the game.
- j) If God truly uses that which is foolish, weak, and low to convince others of the power of the cross, then why would we ever want to appear strong...or wise...or noble apart from Jesus Christ, in whom we have life.

#### **4) Conclusion**

- a) When we are all pulling in the same direction...when we are all agreeing to give the credit and the glory to God, then we are united in Christ for the sake of the Kingdom of God.
- b) On facebook this week, I asked the question, "What does it mean to boast in the Lord." Here are some of the answers:
  - i) "be loud and praise His name as you tell everyone about Him"
  - ii) "Kinda like John the baptizer said, More of Jesus and less of us. May the focus be in Him! and to Him be the Glory!"
  - iii) "Psalm 105:1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples. 2 Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. 3 Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad."
  - iv) "to praise his name out loud whether it is with song or talk."
  - v) "it is to brag about what an awesome savior we have. to tell with pride and joy how good He is to us! :)"
  - vi) "to acknowledge that everything that has come, or not come to you that is good or right, has come from the Lord Jesus Christ, and to thank Him and praise Him accordingly."

- vii) These are real people with real desires to boast in the Lord with their lives and their words.
- c) I'll finish by reading a song by Paul Baloche, called I Will Boast in the Lord.
- d) Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom  
Or let the strong man boast in his strength  
Let not the rich man boast in his riches  
But let the humble come and give thanks  
To the One who made us, the One who saved us

#### CHORUS

- I will boast in the Lord my God
  - I will boast in the One Who's worthy
  - I will boast in the Lord my God
  - I will boast in the One Who's worthy, He's worthy
- e) Everything we are and everything we have is because God has allowed it to be that way. Without Christ, we are perishing.
  - f) Invite Christ to once again give you the perspective you need to see your whole life in His...the perspective from the cross...and then go out and boast together about THAT!
  - g) **(CUE 10)** (kneel) Let's pray...