

others expressed in mercy, compassion and obedient service. It's not self-preservation pride but humility; it's not self-protecting power but love serving in weakness. Yet by that foolishness Christ undid our death by dying for us. His life for our lives. His one Good Friday becoming all our Easters. His Easter transforming all our Good Fridays. The scandal and the foolishness of the cross are overcome by the weakness and foolishness of God. And so as Paul says we preach Christ crucified. For by the cross and only by the cross does God bring us to righteousness, holiness and redemption.

No one can be saved by knowledge. The devil and all his minions know God, but they are not with God.

No God can be worthy of being God who says He loves us but protects Himself from our pain, our death, and in our death loses us.

But in Christ the Son, God stepped into our lives, suffering with us, sharing our death, and even experiencing the despair of being forsaken by the Father. And through that He fellowships with us. Jesus does not leave us as orphans. The Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Father, the Holy Spirit is God with us, God with us now, so that by trusting in Christ Jesus we shall by our re-birth and our resurrection be with the Father, the Son and the Spirit, God with us and us with God forever.

I have tried to explain it so far as I see it, and understand it. But we don't have to understand it but rather live in it, anymore than infants in arms have to understand what their parents do for them. Like infants cradled in parental arms we rest in the resurrected arms of the crucified Christ through whom we are born into being children of God, who provides and cares for us and died for us, so we may live with Him, in perpetual love and joy and peace. Amen.



Berakah Blessings; 11 July 2021

1 Corinthians 1: 23, 24 and 30b

“we preach Christ crucified, a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews

and Gentiles, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”

What do you think of the cross?

Mainstream, Bible believing churches often speak of the cross in terms of Jesus being the suffering servant, the compassionate saviour, the glorious life-giver. The cross as Christ's ultimate act of grace on our behalf. How often do we think of it, as Paul writes of it in the first chapters of 1 Corinthians, as the power & the wisdom of God?

From the first days of the Christian faith the cross has been seen as a scandal, an embarrassment, as something offensive to right thinking people. Reactions and rejections that are still widespread today – and often expressed in ways that nobody thought of in the early days of the faith. The world does not like the cross. And as the views of the world live within Christians, some Church-goers struggle against the cross. That was happening in Corinth. Both converted Jews and non-Jews struggled to understand it. People from both backgrounds would rather Paul didn't go on about it. But Paul would not let the cross go. We preach Christ crucified, by which he meant the Church preaches Christ crucified. It is the message of the faith.

And the key to understanding the cross is not to consider it from human perspectives but to look at it from God's perspective.

Well, you might say, how can I know God's thinking on the cross? Surely we can only know what people can think of it? And as every husband and wife, parents and children know, despite all shared love and talk we never really know the thoughts of other people, even our nearest and dearest. Only the person's own spirit knows their own thoughts. So how can we know God's thoughts? The answer is, by the Holy Spirit. As our spirits know our thoughts so God's Spirit knows God's thoughts. As Christians the Holy Spirit fellowships with us. God does not leave us to struggle

alone to understand our faith, by the Spirit we can know the things of God. And what the Spirit reveals about the cross is that its human viewed scandal and embarrassment is undone by the resurrection.

Do you remember the first things we discover about Paul. As Paul himself tells us in Philippians he was a circumcised Jew, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the Law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church. The first thing we know about Paul is that he persecuted Christ, by persecuting the Church.

Why did he persecute the church? Because of the cross. The Church claimed that Jesus was God's righteous one, the long looked for Christ, a son of man who was also the Son of God. But when Saul, as he was then called, looked at Jesus he saw a man who was crucified on a cross. As a Pharisee zealous for the Law, Saul knew that the Law said that any one who was hung on a tree, which included being hung on a cross, was cursed by God. So how could the church claim that Jesus was the Christ and very God with God, for by God's own Law his crucifixion declared Jesus to be cursed by God. The two views contradict. It's like talking of frozen fire or dry rain.

But then Paul personally meets the resurrected Christ. And his eyes, which had seen Christ through his understanding of the Jewish Law, were blinded. Luke tells us in Acts 9 that Christ then sent Ananias to Saul so that Saul might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And so it was. He who had been blind to the Easter truth of Christ, now saw by the Spirit that the resurrection was God's vindication of Jesus – He whom Saul thought cursed by God was by that same God exalted, raised up, glorified. The scandal of the cross was shown to be the power of God, and the foolishness of the cross the wisdom of God.

And what was the Easter glory of Christ? At its simplest it can be put like this. In Adam every human being came to sin and to death. We were created for an eternal togetherness with God, but Adam's disobedience separated us from God as a knife cuts flesh from bone.

Adam's legacy is the context of our living and all the sins we make construct the coffin of our own death. And there's nothing we can do to undo it. The sin was made by a man's disobedience and only a perfectly

obedient man could undo the sin. But what man never sins? Of course God could just wipe away our sin and say, there, there it doesn't matter, but where's the justice in that, for why should evil gain the blessing of the just? Somehow something was needed by man and God, that reconciles God to man and yet also deals justly with evil and sin. Thus came Jesus, by the power of the Most High and through Mary, man of God and son of man. The man who only did what God His Father asked Him to do. The one man who never sinned, and yet freely takes to Himself the punishment of sin, the curse of death that He did not deserve. The curse that condemns us was taken up by Christ. So Yes Christ was condemned by His Father on the cross, hence His cry, My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Yet behind all this is love. The Son loves the Father and faithfully obeys Him. The Father loves the Son and faithfully delivers Him. And by that cross bound love Christ enables all who trust their lives to Him to enter His Father's love and live with God.

The Father's raising Christ to life, exalting Him to glory at His right hand, is the way He restores us to righteousness, holiness and redemption. When by the Holy Spirit you see that, then you see the power and the wisdom of God.

The cross didn't make sense for the Jews and it didn't make sense to the Romans, the Greeks and all the former Corinthian non-believers, the Gentiles of the world, then and now. When it comes to common sense the cross doesn't make sense. How can anyone accept someone as Lord and Saviour who is unable to save himself from such a degrading and humiliating death? To the sensible man or woman the crucifixion of Christ was self-evident proof that he couldn't possibly be God. It was a philosophical stupidity. A silly foolishness.

Tidball suggests that the Corinthian believers, a mix of Jews and non-Jews, then, and still today we might add, viewed the cross by the wrong criteria. Their view was rightly that of love but wrongly grounded in self-love and family love. Surely a man who was the Son of God would never let Himself be crucified and surely His Father would never let His only Son be crucified? Self-love and family love protects its own.

But our criteria is not God's criteria. God's criteria is love but it is love for