

Scripture Reading 1 Cor. 1:10-31.

text: 1 cor. 1:17-25.

Theme: Christ Crucified: the paradox of the Gospel.

Dear congregation of Jesus Christ: have you ever been discouraged when you think of the state of the church in North America? If you have, maybe you have thought of the following questions. Why isn't this church building packed to the doors? Why are we not inundated 淹没 with unchurched people begging us to tell them the way to get right with God? What ought we to be doing to attract their attention, to get a hearing in this world? Are we wrong to be carrying on in the way that seems to be so ineffective? Is there an onus 负担 on us to change what we're doing? these are just some of the questions that might come to our minds as we think about what it means for us to be a reformed church in (blank) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Perhaps you think, these are questions that we have been asking in the last twenty years or so, and we're on our own when it comes to finding answers. That's not the case, friend. The Corinthians were asking these kinds of questions, and the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to give God's answers to them. The text for (blank) is 1 cor. 1:17-25, and for our theme we'll consider Christ crucified: the paradox of the Gospel. 1. Challenges that rise from the proclamation of this message. 2. The hidden cause for the success of this message.

Corinth was a large port city in the country of Greece. It was known for being multicultural. Since it was a port city, people from various parts of the Roman Empire would stop in Corinth on their travels. These travelers who stayed in Corinth were welcome to practice their religion. Archaeologists 考古学家 have unearthed temples to twenty-six different gods in Corinth. Not only was Corinth notable for its multicultural character, but it was also notorious 声名狼藉的 for its immorality. That which was shameful was promoted shamelessly. Corinth was a city crazed with the pursuit of pleasure with no limits, no restrictions. In terms of places with similarities to Corinth, I thought of Toronto. Another preacher has compared Corinth to New York with its importance, and sophistication, as well as to San Francisco with its licentiousness. However, we should not think that these ideas are limited to these particular places. These Corinthian ideas are rampant 猖獗的 in our society.

There's one more thing we need to know about Corinthian society that will help us to understand the text more fully. Unlike our culture where people are famous because of their appearance or their athletic ability, people were famous in Corinth because of their ability to speak. words were important in Corinth and other Greek cities. Every man who was a citizen of the city had the opportunity to speak at public assemblies, and so to impact the policy of his city, and the decisions that were made. When we hear this, we might think that knowledge of the facts, knowledge of truth would be important in convincing others through your words. However, even during the time of Socrates 苏格拉底, some four hundred years before Paul came to Corinth, truth had taken a backseat 次要位置 to persuasion, in terms of the power of public speaking. I remember a dialogue dealing with the power of rhetoric 修辞 where a doctor brought an effective communicator along with him. the person he was helping needed a painful amputation 切断手术 in order to save his life, and where the doctor had failed to convince the patient that the surgery was necessary, the rhetorician succeeded.

During that time, travelling teachers named sophists 诡辩家 gave classes in persuasive speaking, and they charged for their services. Their name sophist comes from the Greek word for wisdom, and this has come down to us in the word "sophisticated." These teachers were masters in asking the kinds of questions that would trap their opponent and make him look foolish. Remember those words wisdom and folly, they are key in understanding Paul's work in Corinth.

We have only two of the letters which Paul wrote to the Corinthians. There may have been as many as four of them, One letter before 1 Cor., to which the Corinthians responded with some questions. Paul answers those questions and responds to their news in First Corinthians. In 1 Cor. 5:9, Paul said, "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people." So there was a letter before 1 cor. If we needed to have it, God would have preserved it for us. Then as the Corinthians didn't respond to the stern warnings and reproofs in first Corinthians, it is possible that Paul wrote an even more sharply-worded letter, the letter of tears. He speaks of it in 2Co 2:4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you. And in 2 Co. 7:8, Paul said that he made them sorry with a letter. This letter of tears may have been First Corinthians or a letter written between the two epistles we have in the Bible.

Paul has heard that there are divisions in the Corinthian church. In addition to its obsession 迷住 with persuasive speaking, the Corinthians were a city of philosophical factions 派别. There were as many as fifty different philosophies with their loyal adherents 追随者. What they were doesn't matter, but that they were impacted the Corinthian church. This tendency to identify with a leader and form a party around that leader was happening in the Corinthian church. "I am of Paul," cried one group. Paul is our hero! "I am of Apollos!" exclaimed another group. "I am of Cephas!" a third group said. Cephas was Peter's Aramaic name. Then there was a fourth group and they might have thought of themselves as superior. "I am of Christ!" they said. Paul responds to this with three tremendous rhetorical questions, questions where the answer is obviously, "No." "Is Christ divided?" was it God's intention that His people should focus on one person, one human preacher with the result that there should be quarrels and disunity in the church? Absolutely not! Then come two related questions about the nature of the Gospel. Was Paul crucified for you, were any of you baptized into the name of Paul? Of course not! The gospel isn't about Paul, it's all about Jesus. the Gospel lifts up the Name of Jesus alone. In the gospel the person and the work of Jesus Christ is central, and He is exalted. That's why Paul says what he says in v. 17. "For Christ did not send me to baptize,

but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.” Paul was clear on the objective of his mission. God sent him to preach the Gospel. The Greek word for sent is similar to the word apostle. An apostle is someone who has been sent with a commission, a particular task to perform. When Jesus met Paul outside Damascus, he told Paul that when he was inside the city, someone would tell him what he should do. When God sent Ananias to Paul to restore his sight, this is what God said about His plan for Paul. “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

” Sometimes the profound things can be said very simply. Paul knew what God wanted him to do, and he did it. That’s the secret to successful godly living. That raises the question for us, Are we clear on what it is that God wants us to do as church? This church exists in this time and place for a reason, to fulfill the purpose God has for us. Among the things the church is to be and do is to be the pillar and ground of the truth. That purpose is closely connected to Paul’s mission. In explaining Paul’s mission, we will become clearer on God’s purpose for us.

In the introduction to the sermon, I asked a series of questions. They were essentially asking, “Does the method we use not matter, as long as we get the message out?” Paul answers that for us in v. 17. “For Christ sent me to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.” The positive act of preaching the Gospel involved the negative act of rejecting the wisdom of words. The nature of the message Paul proclaimed limited the methods he could use in conveying 输送 that message. Paul deliberately chose not to use the method of the wisdom of words because that would empty the message of its power.

What challenges to the message did Paul face? We read about them in v. 22. “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom.” These are words in a letter, but they are a summary of Paul’s experience. Can you imagine someone coming up to Paul in Corinth. “You know Paul, the Gospel really is a hard sell for Jewish people. After all, they are the villains 坏人 in the story. It was Jewish people who incited 激励 the Romans to crucify Christ. You want them to believe on Jesus for salvation. If you give them what they want, then maybe they’ll do what you want them to do. And what do they want? They want signs, that’s what! They want miracles, wonders, amazing feats 壮举 that are supposed to point to something even more important than the event itself. Didn’t they pester 纠缠 Jesus with requests for signs? Paul, you have the power to do miracles. Why don’t you do some signs as part of your presentation of the Gospel, and you will get the attention of the Jews, and who’s to say, they might even believe the Gospel if you do signs. Jews request a sign, Paul said.

This wasn’t the only request Paul had to deal with. Greeks seek after wisdom. There were two ways that the Greeks thought that they sought for wisdom when it came to Paul’s message. First, they objected to the content of the message, and they did so on a number of grounds. The God of the Christians was unlike the Greek gods and goddesses. All the Greek divinities were apathetic 缺乏感情的; they were in a realm where they were beyond the problems and sufferings of people in this world. Unlike the Greek gods, the Christian God chose to do something about sin and suffering. He entered this world with all its pain and trouble in the person of His Son; and he took on humanity so that he could die for the sins of His people. Congregation, we have grown up hearing these truths. They don’t strike us as novel or unusual, but they would have grated 刺激 on the sensibilities of Paul’s Greek listeners. That God would become a man so that He could be beaten, spit on, have his hair pulled out, stripped naked, and nailed to a cross; these were revolutionary ideas, they would have rocked the world of the Greeks.

The Greeks had one more issue with the content of Paul’s preaching. It was the idea of the resurrection of the body. The Greeks had a saying, “The body is a grave.” They said this because they thought the soul was the most important part of a person, and that once the body died, it stayed dead, and a person passed on into a better disembodied 无实体的 existence in his soul. So here comes Paul into Corinth preaching about a God who does appalling 令人震惊的 un-godlike things to produce a result that you don’t want to happen if you’re a Greek, namely, the resurrection of your body. Anyone trying to preach the Gospel to Greeks in Corinth has a public relations disaster. Small wonder Paul and his associates were accused of turning the world upside down. Could people say the same about my preaching of the Gospel? Could people say the same about the way you live and share the Gospel as individuals, and as a church?

The Greeks had a problem with Paul’s delivery. Remember, they came out of a culture that praised style over substance. The way that the message was said mattered more than what was said. Instead of a sermon, they wanted Paul to stage debates and to have dialogues with people to show the intellectual superiority of Christianity. They wanted Paul to teach them how to trip their opponents up with tricky questions and to make them look foolish. They wanted pithy 精练的 sayings, something new, sophisticated, and respected by their society. And Paul comes to Corinth and he preaches! Can you believe it!

What will Paul do? The Jews want signs and the Greeks want wisdom. Paul describes how he responds to this pressure in v. 23. “But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.” Paul describes his message this way because the crucifixion of Christ was central. To be sure, Paul didn’t stop with the crucifixion. He will later tell the Corinthians that Jesus died for the sins of His people, according to the Scriptures’, and that he was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. The central event that gave significance and meaning to the work of Christ was His crucifixion, and that’s why Paul describes his preaching this way. That phrase, Christ crucified, also highlights the offensiveness of the Gospel, especially for Jews. Christ is the Greek word for Messiah, God’s anointed One, appointed to save His people from their sins. The Jews expected their Messiah to bring about the overthrow of the Romans, and prosperity

for the nation of Israel. They ignored the passages which spoke of suffering, shame and death before glory, and they thought of the glory as being limited to physical Israel with no focus on eternal life. For these Jewish people to conceive of their Messiah being crucified, was inconceivable. Crucifixion was a death so bad that no Roman would endure it, no matter how wicked he or she was. The Romans crucified people they thought of as scum 糟粕. There was nothing lovely or noble about crucifixion. It was a place of shrieks 尖叫 of agony, blood, excrement 排泄物, flies, inexpressible pain, and thirst. That's what happened to God's Christ, Jesus the messiah, Christ, crucified.

How did people respond to this message? To the Jews it was a stumbling block. Literally, it was a scandal. When Paul preached in various cities, if there was a synagogue, he began there. It was his purpose to prove to the Jews and proselytes 改信仰者 from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ, God's Messiah for fallen mankind. Often, Jewish listeners would become hostile to this message and they would instigate 鼓动 persecution against Paul. What about the Greeks, how did they respond? They said that the Gospel of Christ crucified was foolishness, literally that it was moronic 低能的. The content and the delivery were unacceptable, and they rejected the Gospel.

If you have rejected the Gospel until now, why have you done that? What could possibly justify your continued resistance to God's commands. He commands you to repent of your sin, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and until now you say, "I won't." He invites you to receive salvation in Jesus, and until now, you have refused. If you are unconverted, God is not going to change the gospel to suit you. You must change in order to suit Him, and His righteous standard. In Jesus, everything has been done to bring about the power to change you. He can change your cold, dead soul. He can make it alive. He can give you faith to believe on Him, and repentance for your sin. He can give you desires and abilities to begin to obey Him. All you need for life and salvation, and godliness is freely offered to you in Jesus. There's life in a look to the Crucified One! No one here has to stay unconverted and unbelieving. No one here may stay unconverted and unbelieving.

The message of Christ crucified is the ultimate classifier of humanity. We see this in "1Co 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." There are two groups of people. For all who are dead in sins, the message of the cross is foolishness. Paul doesn't mince 切碎 words. All such people are perishing. They are now without God and without hope in the world, Ephesians 2:12, and they are heading to eternity without a Savior. That is the description of all resisters, deniers, and mockers of God's Gospel.

In the rest of our time together we'll consider the hidden cause for the success of this message. We see that immediately in the second half of v. 18. "to us who are being saved it is the power of God." There is a group of people, for whom the Gospel is not scandalous and foolish. They see it as the power of God. To be more precise, they see Christ, who is proclaimed in the Gospel, both as the power and the wisdom of God. v. 24. Christ and the Gospel are the power of God to accomplish His saving purpose. The Gospel is the means by which sinners hear about Christ, and Christ is the one by whom they are saved. Did you notice the language of being saved in v. 18? The translators want us to know that this is a passive verb, that the people who are being saved are not active in earning or securing their salvation; being saved is something that happens to us.

How is it that men, women, boys and girls who were dead in sin, who thought of the Gospel as foolishness now see the power of God in it? How is it that sinners are saved by the Gospel? Paul gives us the answer in v. 24. "But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Does Paul mean that everyone who hears the Gospel is called in this way? No, that is not his meaning. The people of v. 18, the perishing people have heard the Gospel; and that they consider it to be foolishness, and the diagnosis that they are dead and perishing are solemn, dreadful things. There is a genuine, sincere call that goes out whenever the Gospel is proclaimed. Whenever the Gospel is preached, faithful preachers serve as ambassadors for God to rebellious sinners. In the Gospel God comes with the offer of peace to those who are His enemies, be reconciled to God. What happens when God intends to save sinners, is that the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the Gospel to work in the hearts of sinners. It is very much like the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead four days. His body was in a grave. Lazarus was incapable of giving himself life; but when Jesus cried "Lazarus, come forth." These words were a call, and a command. The call gave Lazarus life, Jesus words of authority made Lazarus alive so that He could obey Jesus' command and come out of the grave. So with the preaching of the Gospel, God calls sinners to repent and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, and this call, empowered by the Holy Spirit makes sinners alive spiritually. This call is effectual. God saves everyone whom He calls in this way. And what is the result of God's work, sinners believe on Jesus for salvation! v. 21 shows us that this is God's plan. "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." God works faith in Christ in the hearts of His people through the means of the preaching of the Gospel. God does not save by the preaching of foolishness; but by the so-called foolishness of the Gospel, as the world sees it. I'm reminded of the hymn "I know whom I have believed" and these words. I know not how the Spirit moves, convicting men of sin, revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in Him." That's what it means to be effectually, savingly called by the Gospel. Why does one person believe the Gospel and another shrug it off? The difference is that God has chosen to call one out of sin into life in Christ, and he has chosen to leave another, yes, even to harden that person in his or her sin. Many people hear a sermon. No one sees the special call of God at work, it is mysterious and hidden, and yet the results are obvious. God's special call which comes with the preaching of His word will inevitably 不可避免 result in saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Why does god act in this way? Ultimately, God does all that He does for His glory. god has given the Gospel, not in a miracle that all in the world can see, not in a form suited to stroke the egos 自负 of the intelligent, but God has given the offensive message of Christ crucified in the unsophisticated form of sermons. In doing this, god was ultimately fulfilling prophecy, given some seven hundred years before. "For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." That's a quote from Isaiah 29. 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" That's a quote expanding Isaiah 33:18. The Lord has a purpose, and it will prevail. He is not limited to working as people expect Him to work. Philosophers and scientists have their schemes. They think that either they can ignore the Bible or they think that they stand in judgment on god and His Word. But in the foolishness of the message that is preached, and in the weakness of Christ, crucified, God will bring their plans to nothing. Those who consider the theories of philosophers and scientists from the standpoint of God's Word will tell you that we have nothing to fear from godless science and philosophy. Every attempt to explain either the origin of human life or the purpose of human life apart from God is doomed to failure. Why is this the case? Because all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are contained in Jesus Christ and the Word of god. Why is there a church? Why are sinners saved? Why does the Gospel work? all of this is the case "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

What should we do as reformed church in (blank) in the year (blank)? We must not change the message we proclaim. There is salvation in Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and in no other. We must make every effort in proclaiming the Gospel to those who have not heard it, also in this area. We should not be afraid when people respond with ridicule. That's the way perishing people have always responded to the message of the cross. But we should also pray and work with the expectation that God will extend His effectual saving call so that Jews and Greeks, church members and unchurched people will be saved. there is one way to be right with God, through faith in Christ crucified. As you go, let the Gospel motivate and permeate 充满 everything you think, do, and say. God bless your witness to Christ crucified.