

**ST.PETER'S MILTON. Sunday 7 March 2021**

**LENT 3.**

**THEME: Christ the Power & Wisdom of God.**

**Bible Readings:** 1 Cor.1v18-25 & John 2v13-25

### **1 Corinthians 1.Christ the Power and the Wisdom of God**

<sup>18</sup> For the message about Christ's death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is God's power. <sup>19</sup> The scripture says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and set aside the understanding of the scholars."<sup>20</sup> So then, where does that leave the wise? or the scholars? or the skillful debaters of this world? God has shown that this world's wisdom is foolishness!

<sup>21</sup> For God in his wisdom made it impossible for people to know him by means of their own wisdom. Instead, by means of the so-called "foolish" message we preach, God decided to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews want miracles for proof, and Greeks look for wisdom. <sup>23</sup> As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles; <sup>24</sup> but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For what seems to be God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and what seems to be God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

<sup>26</sup> Now remember what you were, my friends, when God called you. From the human point of view few of you were wise or powerful or of high social standing. <sup>27</sup> God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful. <sup>28</sup> He chose what the world looks down on and despises and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. <sup>29</sup> This means that no one can boast in God's presence. <sup>30</sup> But God has brought you into union with Christ Jesus, and God has made Christ to be our wisdom. By him we are put right with God; we become

God's holy people and are set free. <sup>31</sup> So then, as the scripture says, "Whoever wants to boast must boast of what the Lord has done."

### **John 2. Jesus Goes to the Temple**

<sup>13</sup> It was almost time for the Passover Festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> There in the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the moneychangers sitting at their tables. <sup>15</sup> So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins; <sup>16</sup> and he ordered those who sold the pigeons, "Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that the scripture says, "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire."

<sup>18</sup> The Jewish authorities came back at him with a question, "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?"<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again."<sup>20</sup> "Are you going to build it again in three days?" they asked him. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple!"

<sup>21</sup> But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body. <sup>22</sup> So when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what Jesus had said.

### **Jesus' Knowledge of Human Nature**

<sup>23</sup> While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in him as they saw the miracles he performed. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all. <sup>25</sup> There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, because he himself knew what was in their hearts.

## Introduction:

Last month. Two aspects of God's character seen in two songs – Christ the Creator and the Redeemer. Story of the Boat – Twice Mine!

This month. Two more aspects of Christ's nature – the Power and the Wisdom of God.

Greek words? Power = dunamis, dynamite, dynamo; Wisdom = Sophia, sophisticated, sophist...theosophy etc...

**Two verdicts:** 1) those who are **perishing or being lost** or 2) us who are being **saved**, made whole, restored, found, recovered. Note that Paul does NOT say 'those who WILL perish' and 'us who HAVE been saved'. Paul puts both in the present tense. It is happening now. Lost men and women are perishing now. Something that is perishing is something going bad, like rotten eggs or tomatoes, past their sell-by date! Eventually you have to throw them OUT. All sinners are perishing and we are ALL sinners by nature, until Christ transforms us. But if we know God through Jesus we are 'being saved' that is being made more like Jesus, as the Gospel influence, power and wisdom works in our lives more and more. We are being saved from sin and its grip on our lives. There are ONLY two types of people in this world – those who are perishing and those who are being saved. Which one are we? Perishing or saved from perishing? How can we know? Ask ourselves 'Is Christ crucified foolishness & nonsense or is it the power and wisdom of God to me?'

**Three reactions:** Those that stumble at the cross, those that laugh at the cross or those that are transformed by the cross. Stumble, Laugh or Transformed?

Paul is writing to the sophisticated, intellectual Greeks and the Jews eager for signs and miracles. Paul simply points to Jesus and His Cross as the supreme evidence of God's wisdom and power. Of course we must include the Resurrection also, but Chapter 15 of this

chapter gives a very full account of the evidence for and the implications of the resurrection. We will come to that on Easter Day!

## JESUS CLEARS THE TEMPLE. A SIGN FROM GOD?

In the Gospel reading, John records the first account of the Cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem by Jesus. This is possibly earlier in His ministry, whereas the other account in the 3 other gospels places this event soon after his triumphal entry in Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday. Jesus is furious that His Father's house has been turned into a marketplace, instead of being a house of prayer for all nations. There is such a thing as right anger at injustice and Jesus makes a case here for taking drastic action when there is a need. His zeal for God's house was prophesied.

But then the Jewish leaders quiz him about what right he has to do this action. They demand a sign. He tells them a riddle. This temple will be torn down and rebuilt in three days! Impossible they say. It took 46 years to complete Herod's modifications to the Second Temple (begun by Hezekiah after the Exile). But Jesus was referring to his death and resurrection. That was and still is the greatest SIGN and SIGNPOST to faith in the Power and Wisdom of God.

We cannot know God through just wisdom, intellectual pursuit alone. It is good to study, to ask questions, to explore but also to pray and ask God for wisdom. He promises to give it to those who ask.

We cannot know God through our own effort, however hard we may try to put things right or climb up to meet with God. In an exam, if the pass mark is 50% and we gain 5% or 49%, we both fail. But God's standard is 100% and we all fail to reach that perfect mark!

The last few words of John 2 also help us because they remind us that Jesus knows our hearts even better than we know ourselves. He knows what is IN our hearts. And He alone can give us a Heart transplant as well as a washing of our brains. He can renew our minds and give us a new heart to love and serve God.

But we have to ASK Him.

Paul also affirms in this passage the importance of preaching. In one translation it is 'the foolishness of preaching' but it is rather the content than the style that is important. The message is Jesus and Him crucified AND risen. Christos and Anastasis!

Jesus Christ – the power of God. He can give us the power to do what He has called us to do. Primarily to love God and to love others as we also love ourselves.

Jesus Christ – the wisdom of God. He gives wisdom to those who again ask Him. The Holy Spirit can give us a special GIFT of wisdom when we need it.

God's Holy Word is full of wise words that can guide us, as the Psalm 19 reminds us also. God's Word, His Law, is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean & true; it converts the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, endures for ever and is righteous altogether. So, we should desire it more than gold!

### **Application:**

How are you getting on during Lockdown 3? Zoom fatigue, longing for a hug, missing your family, missing playing or watching live sport, worried about your business, your health, your finances, your future

Paul points us to Jesus as the true answer to all of our concerns and worries for ourselves and others.

Through Jesus, we can know God, the source of life, wisdom and power for daily living. He will help us if we ask Him. He is CALLING US to come to Him, to Know Him through Jesus, whose death on the Cross makes the Bridge, the Access, the Way Back to Father God.

Through the Cross, we can be made right with God. It may seem foolish or even a stumbling block to many, but it is the ONE sure way

of getting right with God and knowing Him as our Father. And He is a good Father, who gives good gifts to His children.

During this season of Lent, as we approach the wonderful season of Easter, It is good to journey with Jesus as he approaches the Cross. I encourage you to read one whole gospel in the second half of Lent, perhaps take John's Gospel and focus especially on Chapters 10-20. Ask yourself Three Questions:

- 1) What do these chapters tell me about God: Father, Son & Holy Spirit? Look out especially for the 'I AMs' in Ch.10,11,14,15.
- 2) What do these chapters tell me about human nature?
- 3) What do these chapters tell me about my response to what Jesus has said and done?

(I have a Bible Correspondence Course based on John which I have used for Teen Confirmation in the past. If you are interested in a copy, please let me know. 3 Chapters per week. Question and Answer plus a Verse to Learn each week. Quiz at the end! Certificate if you finish!!)

20 COPIES of Lesson 1 available today. Take home, complete and bring back next week, or drop into the office earlier. I will pick them up, mark them and you can collect No.2 next week.

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## FURTHER REFLECTIONS:

Paul reflects on his ministry and message amongst the sophisticated people of Corinth, the commercial capital of Greece in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD. Paul had come to Corinth to bring the good news after a short visit to the Intellectual capital of Athens, but Corinth was more populous though also more worldly as a port, with its mixture of peoples, cultures, Greeks, Romans and Jews especially. Acts 18 describes the planting of the church in Corinth, where Paul worked as a tent-maker with Priscilla and Aquila, Jewish believers who had been exiled from Rome.

Paul's message about Jesus and his shameful death on the Cross seemed to be foolishness to the Greeks (indeed all non Jews, or Gentiles) and a display of weakness to the Jewish people. But it is in fact the opposite.

The message of the cross is the power of God – with the power to save those who are perishing (v.18). Indeed, the foolishness of this message - is able to save those who believe (v.21b).

Through the world's wisdom, we cannot know God and indeed the world's wisdom is made foolish by God (v20). Jews demand, insist on miraculous signs – displays of supernatural power and Greeks, look for and seek wisdom – clever, impressive, intellectual,

Paul's message was one of perceived human weakness and foolishness – Christ Crucified – it was a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Greeks.

BU, to those God called – both Jew and Greek (gentile) – so not all people dismissed the message – Christ the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.

After this, Paul goes on to describe those whom God calls. They are mainly the weak (not powerful) , foolish (in human terms), insignificant and not influential but there were a few noble, wealthy, clever people amongst them. God's purpose was to help us not to rely upon our own cleverness or strength but on God alone (v26-31). Our only boast should be in Christ Alone. Christ who **is our Wisdom – our righteousness, our holiness and our redemption**. That is **'by Him we are put right with God; we become God's holy people and are set free'**.(GNB)

John Wesley, the great Anglican open air preacher and founder of the Methodist movement, often preached on this verse 31 as one of his ARROW Sermons – which he would take out of his quiver to preach often to the miners in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. And when they responded in faith, rivers of tears would flow down their grimy soot-covered faces as they repented and believed that God could put them right with Himself through Christ alone.

Then Paul describes his own approach to preaching in Corinth (2v1-5). He did not come with wise, clever and persuasive words but instead depended on the Spirit's power as he brought a simple message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Indeed, he came in much weakness, fear and trembling but God helped him, so that the new believers came to depend on God's power not on Paul's clever preaching!

**CALLING:** 1v.1 Paul's call to be an apostle; 1v2 Called to be holy; 1v9 Called into fellowship with God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; 1v24 those whom God has called... Christ the power and wisdom of God.

**WISDOM.** There are hints of Proverbs Chapters 8 and 9 in Paul's discussion about Wisdom and Folly. In Chapter 8, Solomon describes Wisdom as a woman who calls out to all humans (especially the simple ones!) to hear and learn wisdom, which is more valuable than any precious metals (v1-11). The fruits of wisdom are then described – prudence, knowledge, discretion, understanding, sound judgment and even honour and riches may follow. (8v12-21). Wisdom was there at the creation of the world and served as a craftsman beside the Creator, the Lord (v22-31). 'Whoever finds me finds life and receives favour from the Lord' v35

In chapter 9, Wisdom has built her house – Seven Pillars, possibly 7 aspects. A wise person accepts rebuke, correction, instruction and is quick to learn, being teachable. Indeed 'the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding'. 9v10. This is the key theme for the whole of Proverbs (see also 1v7 and 2v5).

However, Folly also sits at her house, is loud and calls out to the simple and they fall flat on their faces, lacking discipline or discernment. They end up in a bad place! (9v13-18).