

Sermon - 01/29/23
Ps 15; Mic 6:1-8; 1 Cor 1:18-31; Mt 5:1-12
01-29-23 - Boasting in the Lord

The past couple weeks we have been following the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the congregation in Corinth. We noted that Paul saw the Corinthian saints as children of God, saved by grace and strengthened to do God's perfect will even in times of trial and temptation. Sadly, there are factions and strife in the body of Christ in that most difficult city – Corinth – factions so extreme that the very unity of the church is threatened.

We know something about that in our own time as well.

The world presses in with godless thinking and earthly wisdom – in 1st c Corinth and in 21st c Banks. The Lord knows us – He knows our frailty and weakness. Verse 21 – Worldly wisdom does not reveal the truth of God – rather the preaching of God's Word brings freedom and deliverance to our fallen souls. God reveals truth by the working of His Word in hearts and minds. Proclamation – preaching – Jesus Christ the crucified – light in the darkness – hope in despair. "...faith *comes* by **hearing**, and **hearing** by the word of Christ." (Ro 10:17) There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Here I believe we are getting a bead on the challenges in the Corinthian church. Some are declaring that they "know" what's what. Some are claiming to be in perfect tune with the Lord. There's an old saying that goes: "Anybody who has all the answers hasn't been asked all the questions." There is an air of one-up-man-ship among the family of God in the city of Corinth.

So, some Corinthian church members claim to be superior in the gifts of the Spirit – in knowledge of God – in the right to say what goes and what doesn't. Further into the letter, Paul is going to confront his readers with what he has learned is going on. It is shocking.

Paul always refers to the "foolishness of preaching." He says, "...Jews demand signs and Greeks demand wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks." (v 22) When God's Word is proclaimed the power of God and the wisdom of God are unleashed in Christ Jesus. (v 24) The Word awakens the calling of God in human hearts and minds. That's the Holy Spirit. "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." (v 25)

Before Paul criticizes and chides the brothers and sisters in Corinth, he brings a pure Gospel message. It's not the preacher – it's not even the rhetorical brilliance of the speaking. No, it is the working of the Word made flesh – the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus – of apparently humble birth – seemingly just a poor kid who learned carpentry from his dad. Later, Jesus a wandering preacher, healer and miracle worker. A young man who got in trouble with the church leaders and the governing authorities – Jesus crucified – buried in a borrowed grave. Yet, anointed and gloriously resurrected on the third day. Jesus – alive now and enthroned in the heavenly realm by the power of God! Thank-you Lord!

"...God deliberately chose (those) that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose... "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies." ...Everything that we have—right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start—comes from God by way of Jesus Christ." (vv 27-28 MSG) God chose the church at Corinth – God chooses you – and me – anybody who hears, receives and lives by His Word.

I had a friend at school. He was a privileged kid from New Jersey who had been successful in business – working for a large firm as a manager. He earned seven figures a year and had many perks included in his package. But David felt that sense of the injustice of the world. He liked what he was doing. He was good at it. But, in his travels he encountered the poverty of the people, especially in the 2/3 world – places where he was sent to develop a marketing plan for his company's products.

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He saw clearly that folks didn't need more or new and improved things. He was reading his Bible and was encouraged spiritually. His Christian friends were surrounding him with acceptance and love. He made a decision to serve Christ. He left his marketing job and began his theological education. The next time I heard from him, he was leading a mission from San Diego to various towns in Mexico – planting churches and encouraging churches that were already flourishing. This is the power of the Gospel to change lives. He never regretted his decision – and today he claims to be rich. Abundant life does not mean having many things, it means having much of Jesus – His promise of fullness fulfilled in you. David has learned to thank God for the times of lack and discouragement and disappointment.

The main thing is, boasting is impossible in the presence of God. The Father has given us Jesus – the source of our life. “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.” — Jim Elliot

Jesus' life in you brings everything that has true, eternal value: “wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom.”

If you boast, Beloved, boast only of what the Lord has done. Amen.