



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

1 Corinthians

“God’s Folly”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, it’s 7:30. Let’s open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege that is ours again to open the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the message that they contain. We especially give Thee thanks for Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians, for it speaks to so many of the concerns that the Christian Church has today. And we ask all that Thou shall give us guidance and direction as we attempt to think through it and find the mind of the Spirit. Give us open hearts. Enable us to be responsive to the truth, and then also submissive to that truth in our daily lives.

We thank Thee for this assembly of believers. We pray Thou blessing upon them and upon all of their loved ones, their families, their friends. Enable us, Lord, also to be fruitful witnesses of Thine, with the courage to speak a word concerning our Lord Jesus in the daily experiences of life that so many of us have. And we ask especially now, as we study together, that the Holy Spirit may be with us in a special way, and we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are looking at 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 18 through 25, and the subject is “God’s Folly.”

Now, obviously we are not talking about God being foolish. But we’re talking about God’s folly in the sense that it is he who is ultimately responsible for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is folly to the world. So it is that sense as we speak of God’s folly.

The Apostle writes in verse 18 of chapter 1, “For the message of the cross”—many of you have the Authorized Version, it reads simply, the word of the cross, and that’s true to the Greek word *logos*, which is used there, but my text has “message.”

“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. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’” I think the Revised Standard Version renders this something like, “the cleverness of the clever.” And I may make reference to that later, so that’s the reason why.

“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? 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. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

Corinth was not unlike our world today. The Word of God, God’s wisdom as the apostle refers to it, is scorned. In detail the Jews valued irrefutable, tangible proof by divine signs. There are many like that today who will not believe the Bible, because they believe that they require irrefutable, tangible proof of the inspiration of Scripture. The Gentiles, on the other hand, valued eloquence and fine words.

It is no wonder that the crucified Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews. As a matter of fact, to the Jews the idea of a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms, for the simple reason

that when they thought about the Messiah, they thought about those marvelous expressions in the Old Testament that describe the glory of the Messiah.

For example, in Isaiah Chapter 11, in a passage that most would grant has to do with the Messiah, the passage reads this way,

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse and a Branch shall  
grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of Wisdom and  
understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might,

The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of His  
eyes, But decide by the hearing of His ears;”

The idea of the Messiah hanging upon a tree would be so contradictory to that, at least at first glance, that one can understand, at least, why some of the Jews would have a problem with the idea of the crucified Messiah.

Now, we in no sense intend to say that they’re really justified in that, but one can see why they might have questions, if, of course, they studied the other passages of the Old Testament that describe a suffering Messiah, and we think of our Lord’s words to the disciples on the Emmaus Road, because he called them fools and sloth of heart to believe things that the prophets had written. Ought not Messiah to have suffered these things than to enter into his glory?

So a surer understanding of the Word of God would have delivered them from their problem, but, nevertheless, they had that problem. The apostles had to deal with it. And it’s clear that Paul has that in mind here because he says, We preach Christ crucified to the Jews, a stumbling block to the Greek’s foolishness, because they were looking for the answer to philosophical questions with which they were concerned.

Now, it’s not the world’s false boasting. It’s wisdom; it’s ability that causes the apostle to write 1 Corinthians entirely. But the facts, as we read through the book, indicate that there was a lot of false boasting going on in Corinth in the church. And so, consequently, the idea of distinguishing the wisdom of God from the foolishness of men was something that had application to the local church as well.

So he writes, of course, with the Jews and the Gentiles in mind, but also, as we shall see, with the local church in mind. With Jews, who wanted signs, and with the Greeks, who were intoxicated, as one man says, with fine words; very much like our university scene today in which one said is often not so much the problem, that is, as to whether it’s true or not, but rather the articulacy and cleverness with which it is said. So we understand, then, part of the problem that the Corinthians were having and that Paul was having with them. Secular silence, for example, never has brought anyone to God. It’s ultimately, of course, the doctrine of the atonement as set forth in the Word of God that is the means by which individuals come to the knowledge of the lord.

Now, it’s evident as we read through these verses—I hope you caught it just reading through it one time. I know you’ve read through it many times, but I mean tonight, reading through it, you should catch this: That to Paul, human wisdom arises clearly from man’s rebellion against God. In other words, what we are talking about when we talk about human wisdom, we are talking about the ways by which men have avoided the truth of Scripture that says that they have rebelled against God.

There is an interesting paragraph I read by David Pryor in which he makes this comment, “One of the marks of purely human wisdom is its reliance on eloquent persuasive presentation, complete with a plethora of words.” The Swedish film director, Ingmar Bergman once remarked, “When God is dead, the Christians chatter.”

Well, of course the truth is, that God is very much alive and that men are dead, but it is true that our age is characterized by chattering a great deal about the things that really matter or should matter. And their chatter is not in harmony with the Word of God, and it may be that there’s some

connection with the fact that they have, as their fundamental viewpoint on life, that God doesn’t really matter.

Well, the apostle is going to talk now about the folly of God’s salvation. And he begins with a *for*. He just said in verse 17, remember, *for* “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.”

Now, the *for* that begins verse 18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,” explains that to nullify the cross is to nullify the gospel. In other words, if we speak evil of the cross, if we insist that it has no real significance in human life, then that’s also an attack on the gospel. That’s evident from these two verses. Christ did not send man to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. The gospel and the cross of Christ are closely associated. And so he says “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but unto us who are being saved, it’s the power of God.” It’s the gospel. It’s the means by which individuals are saved.

So what do we mean when we say, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing? Well, probably a lot of things are meant by that. And I wouldn’t be attempting at all to plumb the depths of the foolishness of those who are perishing. But when we talk about the word of the cross and it being foolishness to those who are perishing, some of the things that come to my mind are the ways by which men think that they come to salvation. Because the common sense and probably the most—the most common sense is that men believe that we are by works saved.

Now, the works are of different kinds. There are religious works, and there are people—many people sitting in our churches, particularly our mainline churches—you know them. I’m not saying they’re all unconverted. There are many of them that are converted, but they’re really vast numbers of them that are unconverted. A simple conversation concerning the gospel makes that very plain.

Their concept of what it is to be a Christian is to join a church or to have grown up in a church, to have been baptized, and to occasionally observe the Lord’s Supper, and participate in the

life of our churches, which, in so many cases today, is the life that does not fundamentally grab itself in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; in the preaching of it and by the Holy Spirit, the earnest desire to live the truth of the gospel.

To talk with people about how men get to heaven is very revealing. I suggest to you, if you don’t do that now, start doing it. You will be educated in what men think concerning the way to God. So when I think of this statement, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, I think specifically of that; that is, that men are saved by works and, therefore, the cross is really foolishness to them.

You will notice that the apostle concedes that his message appears worthy of contempt because he says, the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. He admits it has no attraction to human wisdom. The message of the cross is foolishness to them who are perishing. He knows that this Messiah hanging upon a tree does not make any sense at all to Jewish people who are acquainted at all with the Old Testament. And it doesn’t make any sense to the average Gentile who feels that he gets to heaven by his good works, whether they be church good works or other good works, the kinds of works that are praised in our society, the social works, just to use one example.

So the message of the cross is foolishness, he admits that, to those who are perishing. They do not say the sense of it at all. But now I want you to think about another thing. If the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, should we pay much attention to them? They are the perishing ones. So, consequently, little value is to be put on the opinion of perishing people. Often we put entirely too much value on the perishing people, but these are perishing people. And, consequently, their views about how one gets to heaven, Christians should not pay attention to except, of course, as a means to carry on a conversation with them about the truth of the Word of God.

Who would want to condemn the gospel at the cost of perishing? And so the apostle writes of them in that way. The message of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but it’s to them that perish that it’s foolishness.

Now, apostle is a student of the Word of God, such as you and I ought to be, but most of us couldn’t, as we say, hold Paul’s Bible while he preached it—and that includes all of us in the final sense. But most of us do not have much of a—enough of a conception of Scripture to even understand some of his illustrations.

For example, here is one right here. For it is written, “I will desire the wisdom—I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Now, was that the verse you’ve memorized recently? Don’t look at the margin from whence does it come. Don’t look at the margin. How many of you can tell me the text’s location?

Well, I happen to know that. The reason I know it is because of some professional interest in this, which the average person should not be expected to have, because for many the years I taught 1 Corinthians, the exegesis of the Greek text at the seminary; so, therefore, I happen to know that.

But this text is a text the apostle gives to individuals who would know if he wrote this to the Corinthians, and they were both Jews and Gentiles, and he expected them to understand this. So let me explain for just a moment what he means by this text. The text is from Isaiah chapter 29. You might turn over there for just a moment. It’s Isaiah chapter 29 in verse 14. But verse 13 is interesting, too. The prophet says,

“Therefore the Lord said:

“Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor me

with their lips,

But have removed their hearts far from Me,

And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work.

Among this people,

A marvelous work and a wonder;

For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,  
And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.”

Judah was concerned at this time by the invasion of the Assyrians under Sennacherib. The story is told in the Old Testament. Those having read through the Bible last year, you may remember it. And Sennacherib was moving to take over Judah and Hezekiah, really a godly king—in general, he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. Unfortunately, Hezekiah’s staff—leaders in society don’t always have the best staff, do we? In fact, they don’t always appoint the best men for their staff, do they?

Well, Hezekiah had some people on his staff who had some ideas that Hezekiah—I don’t know whether Hezekiah was going along with them entirely or not. I didn’t bother to read that over in great detail, but I do know this: That many of the people who were under him thought that the way by which they could meet Sennacherib’s challenge was to make an alliance with Egypt. And so if they could make an alliance with Egypt, that, of course, might save them from Sennacherib.

Now, these individuals were not spiritual people. Notice in verse 13 Isaiah says, Therefore the Lord said, “Inasmuch as these people draw near me with their mouths and honor me with their lips but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the commandment of men,”—so they had some serious spiritual problems. It’s not surprising then that when trouble comes, instead of paying attention to the Word of God and the promises of God—for God. It’s missed them that he would deliver them from the Assyrians. His word was there. He promised them that. And so these individuals evidently, to some extent, working behind Hezekiah’s back—maybe he gave approval. I’m not going to speak with authority on that point—were attempting to make an alliance to save themselves. And so God speaks and reminds them that the thing that’s significant is obedience to his Word. “Behold, I will again do a marvelous work among these people, a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.”



In the very next chapter, he tells them to not go down to Egypt, “woe to the rebellious children says the lord, who take counsel but not of me, and who devise plans, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who walk to go down to Egypt and have not asked my advice.”

So Paul says, drawing from that, the principle that when we are in difficulty, we do not go to men; we go to God. The truth—wisdom—resides with God. So the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but unto us who are being saved, it’s the power of God. For it’s written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Beautifully applied text reminding them of their old past history. And we know what happened. God did deliver in a remarkable way. As a matter of fact, Sennacherib and his army left without even a battle, as you may remember. It was God’s Word that is the power of God for Israel’s deliverance.

Now, having made the statement from—from Isaiah 29:14—now what Paul does is pick out a few phrases in Isaiah in two other places and form them into his words, like a person who speaks to another friend of his, but he uses a Word of Scripture, a phrase or two, weaves it into his sentence. We usually recognize those things.

I remember one of the things that some of the men at the seminary used to do to unmarried men, and the kid—the boys would want to kid them a little bit about the fact that they had a date. And they would see them going out. And they would say, what are going out for? They wanted to have them confess that they had a date with some lovely young lady in the city here. And occasionally the boys would say, “I’m going out to do some personal work.” [Laughter] Well, we know what that phrase meant, personal work. We knew that Denny had a date with one of the young ladies.

Well, the apostle does something like that, but more purely, I might say, in verse 30 when he says, where is the wise? Where the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Those wise men and those describes have kept records were the ones back upon whom Hezekiah was supposedly relying. So he says, 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? These are taunting words by God in the context of Isaiah. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer?

So it’s God’s way of taunting the natural carnal man, reminding them that the only relief is trust in the Lord God. He does what the world fails to do, and in a way wise men thought foolish. So God has made foolish the wisdom of this world.

The other night in the Lord’s Supper, I think it was—you know, when you get to be an old man, your memory is not perfect. In fact, I don’t guess mine ever was perfect, but it was close to perfect, at least I thought so. But now it’s not all that perfect. I think the other night I meant reference to the Jesus Seminar. I would like to say something about that in this context. There are a number of scholars, outstanding New Testament scholars—that is, well-known New Testament scholars—who have been studying the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas, because they generally recorded in a rank as one of the Gospels. We have five, according to them. They’ve been studying for six or seven years the things that our Lord has said in the Gospels with a view to discovering precisely what Jesus Christ really said.

Now, obviously they don’t think that our Gospels are authentic records of what Jesus Christ really said. And so a number of books have come out recently, particularly one called *The Fifth Gospel*. This is the product of the Jesus Seminar. And in it there’s a new translation in which—and it’s all coded. So if you will read through it, you can tell by the color of the print around the color in which the words appear the things that Jesus undoubtedly said, which I think amount to about 18 percent of our Gospel. Eighty-two percent of what he said is not authentic. There are things that probably come from him, things that doubtfully come from him. And there are things, of course, that Jesus never said. That’s not my—not proper to go into the details of why this is so. There are certain principles that lie back of this that New Testament scholars believe allow them to find, with a reasonable sense of certainty on their part, what Jesus really said. There are certain things he would have said if they were Hebraic things or Jewish things. There were certain things, of course, that he could not have said, which were not that, and so on. Sometimes I would like to, perhaps, go into a

little bit of detail with reference to that, because it would help you to understand what these people are talking about.

But what is very interesting about it—now, these are well-known New Testament scholars to new—to other New Testament scholars. I made reference the other night, I think, in the Lord’s Supper to this. And I also made reference to what Jacob Neusner, Professor of Religious studies of the University of South Florida, said about the Jesus Seminar. Now, Professor Neusner is a Jewish man. He is an outstanding Jewish scholar. He’s not a Christian. He’s friendly with the Christians. We all meet in the Journal of Biblical Literature, Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, I should say, and so he’s well-known. He said in reference to this an interesting thing. He said, “The Jesus Seminar is,” quote, “either the greatest scholarly hoax since the Piltdown man or the utter bankruptcy of New Testament studies. I hope the former.”

Now, I found that very interesting, because Mr. Neusner would normally be the kind of person that might want to think that the Gospels were not authentic, because he has to deal with them as a Jewish man. He seeks to do that. But what we find is really a blatant example of the wisdom of this world. Here are New Testament scholars in our institutions who are saying, in effect, that the New Testament—that is, at least the Gospel section of the New Testament—is largely inauthentic. That’s remarkable.

So when the apostles says, 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? It doesn’t say there’s no wisdom of this world. There is wisdom in this world. It’s the world’s wisdom. But it’s obvious that the Apostle Paul would say God has made all of this, including the Jesus Seminar, foolish by what has been accomplished through Jesus Christ, because the only saving power exists in the gospel. There is no saving power in the Jesus Seminar or in the five Gospels as interpreted by them. Most of them would probably acknowledge that. There’s no saving power in that. But the apostle and countless believers down through 1900 years give testimony to the fact that it’s the gospel that is the means by which

they have come to new life. They have been saved. That’s the power of God unto salvation. So the wisdom of the wise.

I was also very much interested in something that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* last month—in fact, two days after Christmas. The title of the article was, “Hell Reconsidered: Perdition of Tradition is All the Rage Again.” Remarkable that people should be interested in hell again. The article begins, written by Judith Valente, “Ever wonder what happened to hell?” Here is an update. “Hell went into eclipse in the late 60s during the is-God-dead period. Now, it’s popping up again. We’re not talking about Bosnia or Somalia hell or even about flying-out-of-Kennedy-airport-at-Christmastime hell. The honest-to-goodness hell, the abandon all—abandoned-hope-all-ye-who-enter-here-one is resurfacing in cafe conversations, plays, Hollywood movies, books, and college classrooms.”

That was interesting, in college classrooms. There are a couple of illustrations that were given. “Hell is a burning question on some college campuses,” she writes. Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey—it’s a good university—had to limit enrollment to 100 students in a course called Death and the Afterlife after 400 signed up one semester. When Theologian Herman Tull offered a similar course for 90 students at Princeton last year, the class immediately filled up.

Well, that tells me that even the world, in many cases, realizes that their wisdom is foolishness. And so they’re now turning away from those things to something more substantial, at least something they hope will be more substantial.

John Calvin has some very interesting words with reference to this—I’m not sure I can find exactly them, but I thought I had them in my notes—in which he talks about the Scriptures and how—where is this? Yes. He says, “For whatever knowledge and understanding a man has accounts for nothing unless it rests upon true wisdom. And it is of no more value for grasping spiritual teaching than the eye of a blind man for distinguishing colors. Both of these must be carefully attended to, that knowledge of all the sciences has so much smoke apart from the heavenly science

of Christ that man, with all his shrewdness, is as stupid about understanding by himself the mysteries of God as an ass is incapable of understanding musical harmony.”

Isn’t that interesting, that figure? How often have you ever seen a donkey come within ear of the kind of music our kids listen to today and see the donkey start? [Johnson gestures in a dancing motion, followed by laughter]. Have you ever seen that? John Calvin is up-to-date, at least we make him up-to-date.

He says, “For in this way Paul gives the lie to the consuming pride of those who exalt in the wisdom of this world so that they despise Christ in the whole teaching of salvation, thinking that they’re happy if they cling to the things of this world. He also checks the arrogance of those who are trusting in their own capability, seek to penetrate into heaven”.

Now, let’s go on. He writes verse 22: For Jews request a sign and Greeks seek after wisdom. Now, this was something that characterized the Jews. And you will remember the Lord Jesus refers to that in his conversations with him. They come to him and ask him for signs, and so it’s not surprising to read that in the Word of God. And he also refers to the fact that they ask for signs. It was characteristic of them to ask for signs, and so he refers to that here.

Now, he goes on to say that the Greeks—he mentions—let me come back to the place in verse 21, For Jews request—22, For Jews request a sign—you know, some of those places are passages like Matthew chapter 12, and I believe it’s about verse 39 where we read those words—but he answered and said to them an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. And then in John chapter 6 the same thing takes place, they ask for a sign and—and so it’s not—it was common for them to seek after a sign. They desired miracles as evidence. The Greeks like acuteness and cleverness. They liked signs.

We have one instance in the Bible in which the Lord tells a story—or is it a parable? I think it’s more likely a story, but Scriptures don’t make it absolutely plain. The story of the rich man and Lazarus. You remember the certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared

sumptuously every day. And then the beggar named Lazarus who had been at the gate of his house. And being in torment he calls out to Father Abraham. And he asks Abraham to have mercy on him.

And Abraham says, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and, likewise, Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted, and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you, there is a fixed so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot; nor can those from there pass to us.

And then he said, I beg you, therefore, Father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers that he may testify to them that they also may not come unless they come to this place of torment.

Then Abraham said to them, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.

And he said, No, Father Abraham, but if one goes to them to the dead—from the dead a sign, they will repent.

And so we read the Father Abraham said unto him, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

Why is that so? Because in the Word of God there is the power of God unto salvation. That’s why. If we are not willing to believe the Old Testament word, for example, Jesus said, you will not believe my words. There’s a unity in the Word, and it is the saving instrumentality of the Lord God. There is no other saving instrumentality.

So the apostle said, the Jews request a sign, and Greeks saved them unto wisdom, but we treat Christ crucified. Very offensive to the Jewish people who were expecting a royal deliverer, and very offensive to Greeks and Romans who were looking for a brilliant, scintillating philosophy that would give them the secret of life. You cannot find it. After thousands of years, the philosophers of today are still wandering in the dark. Read their literature. They even acknowledge it. They’re wandering in the dark after all of this time. And as far as the signs are concerned, we have the well-attested and final sign of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we preach Christ crucified to the Jews, a stumbling block; yes, a stumbling block. This word was used of the death stick of a trap, the stick on which in the trap you put the bait. So, consequently, it was—it was called a scandal, *scandalon*, from which we get the English word scandal. And so it was the critical part of the trap. If you touched that trap, then, of course, you were caught. So he says, Christ is to the Jews a stumbling block, a scandal, and to the Greeks is foolishness.

We shouldn’t be upset, of course, knowing the Jews are offended by the humility of the cross and that the cross has been left to scorn by the Greeks because; of course, the wisdom of the Jewish men and the wisdom of the Gentile men is not saving wisdom. What is the saving wisdom? Paul calls it the gospel. And he speaks of it as the means of salvation. And, more specifically, he says it’s the word of the cross. It’s the message of the cross. Why is that so? Because what does the cross tell us? It tells us, first of all, that men are sinners. That’s the whole problem. If men only realize they were sinners and thus unto judgment, if they would just pay attention to the clarity of human life—will there be an obituary in the paper in the morning? Yes, there will be an obituary there. And it’s been there right along. It will be there. Dying men and women. Why do they die? Why is it? Why do we avoid that? That ought to be on the discussions of—this ought to be on the front pages of our papers, in any kind of discussion that we get together. Why do men die? Why do they die? They die of course—you all know—you die because you are a sinner. And you are indwelt by the sin principle, and you are a dying man. That’s what Paul calls them in verse 18. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. We’re on our way out of this world of which we are a part now, every one of us. Those who are younger. Those who are older.

And we don’t know the order, incidentally. You may say, Dr. Johnson will die before I. No, I’ve buried a lot of people who are younger than I am. As a matter of fact, some of my students I had when I was in my thirties, a number of them are now with the Lord. I can remember telling my students, and they’d always laugh. You know, I would say something about I’m going to the Lord before you, and I want to tell you this. A number of those men who have heard me say that, they are with the Lord now, and I’m not there yet.

Sin, salvation through Christ—through the cross of Jesus Christ and eternal life—only by God’s method of salvation is the wisdom of God. The world calls it foolishness. We call it wisdom. We call it the truth. The Scripture calls it the truth of God. It’s the inviolable truth of God. To the Jews, a stumbling block, because of the difficulties they’ve thrown up in the way of the truth of the cross of Jesus Christ. The Greeks call it foolishness.

But Paul says in verse 24, But to those who are called—ahh. There is that word again, isn’t it? Look back at verse 1 of chapter 1, Paul *called* to be an apostle, a called apostle. Notice verse 2, he mentions to the church of God which in Corinth to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus *called* saints. Verse 9, God is faithful by whom you were *called* into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ. And now verse 24, but to those who are *called*, both Jews and Greeks, they’re not talking about Gentiles only. They’re not talking about Jews only. All Jews and Greeks, to the *called* Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. No stumbling block to the called, no scandal of the cross.

Christianity is a scandal to the world about us, the idea that men are saved by the cross of Christ. Think of it—men—a Jewish man hanging on a tree as a means of human salvation, further the only means of human salvation. What a scandal. Christianity has to bear that scandal. It’s criticized for them, but that’s what the Scriptures teach. You know, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh under the Father but by me.” So, *called*. These are those whose hearts the Holy Spirit has touched, has brought them by the grace of God to rest on the cross of Christ as their ground of salvation. They have been by the Holy Spirit brought to the knowledge of their sin. They’ve been brought to the knowledge of Christ as the son of God, the sin bearer, and they have been brought to rest upon him for time and for eternity. That’s the gospel, the good news, concerning our salvation.

And I must finish up. In verse 25, we read these words, “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” The foolishness of God, well, that statement is one that’s rather unusual in the original text. It really is an expression that means the



*foolish thing* of God and then the *weak thing* of God. The reference, of course, is to the cross because the foolish *thing* of God is wiser than men, and the weak *thing* of God is stronger than men.

What the world ignores is its own condition, evidenced in its perishing state. There’s a final question that one might ask. This is a question that we all have to answer at one time or another: Is there a desire for deliverance from our sins?

I know that the vast majority of you, perhaps everyone in this room, is really a Christian. But it’s the question that we, at one time or another, must ask: is there a desire for deliverance from our sins? The word of the cross is addressed to man’s inmost soul. It’s that that ultimately is the source of our salvation.

Now, the gospel’s best defense and appeal is grounded in persons who have responded positively to that statement: Is there a desire for deliverance? Yes. There is a desire for deliverance of thy heart. The gospel appeals to me by the virtue of the Holy Spirit. I’m resting myself for time in eternity upon him.

You may be here this evening, and it’s possible you are not a Christian. It’s possible your trust is in something else. It’s possible even that you think by attending Believers Chapel now and then or frequently that you have forgiveness of sins. It’s possible because you have some associates in this room that are friends of yours with whom you associate, it’s possible that you have an outward profession of association with Christians and regard yourself as a Christian.

It is so important, of course, for us to be sure that within our hearts by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit there has arisen a desire from God to be delivered from our sins, and then a knowledge by the Holy Spirit that a way of deliverance exists in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. I certainly hope that that is your experience. Let’s bow together for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these words that the apostle has spoken. We sense, Lord, he spoke out of great concern for the Corinthians, to be sure that they fully understood the ground of their relationship to the Lord God. And we marvel, Lord, at how applicable these things are to us today, 1900-plus years later.

Men often wonder whether the Bible is the inspired Word of God. It speaks to us in so many pages of the fact this does not come from men; it comes from a loving father in heaven who is certain to bring all of his own to heaven. All the called will ultimately be there.

And, Lord, if there should be some in this audience who have questions and concerns, move them at this moment by Thy grace to turn to Thee to trust in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who, on his cross, paid for our sins and, thus, has become, he and his cross, the wisdom and the power of God for all.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.