

Series: A Missional Church for a Pagan Culture

VBC

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1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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“Impressing or Impacting”

INTRODUCTION

Being near the intellectual hub of Athens

- and impressed with the power of Rome
- the Corinthians gave themselves to ambition, competition, success
- they cherished the wisdom of the age
- they wanted to be cool*
- so they attached themselves to the latest fad, the latest philosopher
- they entertained themselves by listening to the gifted debators of their day and their impressive rhetoric

- they were infatuated with personalities
- with the Stoics, the Sophists, and others who claimed to make sense out of life
- they loved what came off as clever, witty, amusing, glittering
- they valued rubbing shoulders with the literati
- enhancing their image by aligning with a name

- and now that they had found Jesus--they wanted to showcase their new found sophia
- their new philosophy
- hoping Paul-or Apollos or Cephas would enhance the message of Christianity
- by foisting themselves above the common herd--and impress everyone
- It was form--not substance that mattered
- it's no different today
- we still look for personalities to attach to
- look for ways to convince the world we are cool
- athletes to come to Jesus to enhance the credibility of the message

- this frankly seems to be the aim of many churches today
- to be known--above everything else--for their passion, innovation, creativity--coolness
- illus-church in Canton
- the pastor was blogging about a recent successful weekend of ministry
- the current theme is built around poker
- with a look alike Elvis singing
- an awesome band

-black jack tables in the lobby--with winnings going to a good cause

To all of this--Paul reacts--he confronts them in chapter one with a number of questions--

1. *Is this what the gospel is – just another cool message?*

-another philosophy, another Sophia?

-do you really think it is going to impress?

-do you know our message? It is astonishingly odd to the world--this message of the cross

-in fact-it is foolishness, madness in the eyes of those who reject it-read 1:18

-it calls people to acknowledge they are sinful – in need of a Savior

-it allows for no man to boast-1:29

-the wisdom we have received is more apt to offend than impress – are you aware?

-or will you water it down – make it appealing to the ear – -pleasing to the ego – in hopes of drawing a crowd?

2. *Are you aware at how impressed God is with your philosophers?*

-where is the wise man?-read 1:20

-what I mean – where is the wise man who truly discerns the ways of God?

-whose message saves a person

-does anything they say have enduring significance?

-or are they really anything more than paper heroes who win the passing applause of a dying world?

-doesn't their endless preoccupation with self amount to folly?

3. *Have you looked at who you are?-read 1:26*

-who in the name of wisdom would have chosen you guys?

-since when did you think you would impress others?

-have you seen me? Not exactly rock star cool

-our commonness tells us that God defines wisdom and power differently

-that He is not interested in trying to impress the world

-and yet – we keep trying – illus YFC

4. *Do you remember how I came?*

-was it in my plan to become another name?

-did I come with the intention of becoming the latest show in town?

-let me remind you how I came – read 2:1

- I did not come with a triumphant posture, manipulative rhetoric, spectacular miracles
- I refused to jump into some competitive performance designed to stroke egos, elicit applause

So let's get something straight here

- effecting culture – doing ministry – isn't about putting on a show
- keeping up with the latest trend
- going after the beautiful people...unless you want to impress a crowd

But if you want to impact culture – change the world – it will demand something else

- a determination to do two things –

1. RESOLVE TO BE DEFINED BY THE CROSS-2:1-2

- if you're more interested in impacting than impressing
- resolve to live a cruciformed life-a life formed, shaped by the cross

Illustration – in early Europe – which became largely influenced by Christianity

- the architecture reflected faith
- the inspiration behind most of church designs was the cross – nave and transept – so that people would walk in and be reminded by the cross

- this was how Paul saw himself – cruciformed
- he resolved to know only this – Christ and Him crucified
- to speak with the simplicity and forcefulness of the cross

-what does this mean?

- live a life that reflects your own death to the world--death to sin, death to self

-what mattered to Paul – was that men would not say – what a great speaker

-but what a great savior – what a great cross!!

-and here's why –

a. THE CROSS REVEALS THE POWER OF GOD

- it alone is the power to effect eternal change
- cleanse us from our sin – I John 1:7
- reconcile men and women back to God and into deep relationship- 2 Corinthians 5:19
- disarm the powers of darkness – Colossians 2:15
- satisfy the justice of God – I John 2:1

-it is the cross that has the power to purchase us for God – I Corinthians 6:20

- the power to cover the cost of sin – once and for all – Romans 1:24
- the power to crush the bondage to sin
- the power to effect our healing – I Peter 2:24
- the power to rescue us from an eternal grave
- the power that shatters all human arrogance, pretension

Hence – Paul would say – “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus--through which the world has been crucified to me”-Gal 6:14

-more...

b. THE CROSS DISPLAYS GOD’S BREATHTAKING WISDOM

- for it satisfied both God’s desire to lavish us with love
- and at the same time it fulfilled God’s demands for justice

- while some viewed the cross as sheer nonsense
- as entirely at odds with cultural expectations of the day
- a stumbling block – foolishness-a scandalous message for social climbers
- the reality is this – there is no higher wisdom than the Cross – it is wiser than all of man’s wisdom – 1:25

2. RESOLVE TO BE A DEMONSTRATION OF GOD’S POWER-2:3-5

- you can try to impress the world with your power
- with your eloquence – your clout – your ability to persuade
- but if you want to make an impact – than get out of the way
- Paul was a man with something of the power of God in his life
- He knew what it was to be strengthened with power in his inner being
- he had experienced this power of God, this ministry of the Spirit, to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all he could imagine or ask

- a. Part of it is explained by the message – get the right message – and something of God’s power will flow through your life

- b. Part of it had to do with weakness – side by side a theology of power is always a theology of weakness
- Paul attributed His power to his weakness – note 2:3

-what was behind this sense of weakness, fear?

- i. fear of the crowd?
 - fear that he would flop in front of the audience?
 - fear that his appearance, his delivery, his voice, his training would not play well
 - come off as a rank amateur in the rhetorical performance?

-was he intimidated by the sophistication of the super-apostles (11:6)?

- ii. or was it a fear that had nothing to do with the Corinthians?
 - maybe it was a fear of his own tendencies
 - an awareness of his own propensity to fall into the trap of self-reliance and self-importance
 - and chase after the rhetorical tricks of the day

- modulating the voice to beguile the ear and sway the emotions
 - use words chosen-not so much for their truthfulness--but for their effectiveness
 - words that focus on meeting needs, making the hearer happy, entertained
 - words aimed to control, manipulate, astound--elevate one's stature
 - but in the end--are words that are cheap, transitory--words that empty the cross of its power

And Paul's trembling was this

- that people might put their faith in Paul's wisdom rather than God's power
- 2:5

It's when we are mindful of our own weakness

- our own desperation for God
- IT'S WHEN WE ARE NO LONGER RELYING UPON OURSELVES
- that God's power is unleashed

CONCLUSION

- when I came to Christ
- it was not the result of some impressive, flashy personality
- but it was the simple message of the cross