

22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 A 1/12/25 Isaiah 42:1-7 Matthew 2:1-12 Psalm 85
Hymns: 128, 155, 130), 134

CHRIST CRUCIFIED: THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD

Sweet the moments, rich in blessing, Which before the cross we spend,
Life and health and peace possessing From the sinner's dying Friend.

Here we rest in wonder, viewing All our sins on Jesus laid;
Here we see redemption flowing From the sacrifice He made. (TLH #155:1-2)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

One Christian remarked about pastors writing sermons, "Every week the pastor has to come up with a different way to tell us that Jesus died for our sins on the cross." Essentially, that's true. We were taught in seminary to make sure that in every sermon we write we show how the text relates to Jesus' death for our salvation. We all know that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. So why do we keep repeating that message over and over and over?

On several different occasions some of the Jews of Jesus' day demanded that He show them some miracle to prove that He is God. That was ludicrous, since Jesus performed miracles in public all the time. Many people came to believe in Jesus because of His miracles and His teaching (His Word). But many others refused to believe in Jesus in spite of the miracles they saw Him do. Once when some Pharisees witnessed Jesus casting a demon out of a man they accused Jesus of getting His power from Satan (Mt. 12:22ff.). When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus – and Lazarus! – because so many people were coming to believe in Jesus due to that miracle. (Jn. 11:39-53; 12:9ff.)

Even though Jesus' enemies saw Him perform miracles, most of them still refused to believe that He is the Messiah. They had made up their minds about Jesus, and refused to be moved by His miracles or His words to think that maybe they were wrong about Him.

There are people who say, "If God would perform some miracles to show me He's there, I could believe in Him." They figure that assuming God is all powerful, He can and should make Himself known to them by working some miracles so they could know He exists. But look at all the miracles Jesus performed during His public ministry: healing people of every kind of sickness and disease, making the blind see and the deaf hear and the paralyzed walk, casting demons out of people, and raising people who had died back to life. All those people, including those who hated Jesus, who witnessed Him perform miracles knew He has special, incredible powers. Some of those people came to believe in Him as the Savior. But sadly, the majority of

them did not. When Jesus fed the five thousand, although they all loved His miracle, they ended up rejecting Him as the Savior (Jn. 6).

When we're told, "*Jews request a sign,*" the original is literally, "*Jews keep on requesting a sign.*" Jesus' enemies kept on demanding that He perform miracles that would somehow prove to them that He is God. How many more miracles did they need to see?! Their real problem was that they rejected Jesus' words. Throughout the Gospels we see that Jesus said many times in very clear words that He is the Son of God, the promised Savior of the world. But His enemies refused to believe Him. They refused to believe the Word of God. No matter how many miracles people saw Jesus perform, as long as they kept rejecting His words they couldn't believe in Him and know Him as their God and Savior.

We're told, from the original, literally, "*Greeks/Gentiles keep on seeking after wisdom.*" This refers to all those who want to figure Jesus out using their reason. God created us human beings in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Yet there are plenty of people in the world who try to create 'god' in their own image – how they think 'god' should be – to make a god they can believe in. There are plenty of people who want 'logical proof' that God exists before they'll believe in Him. One such person is Richard Dawkins, a well-known evolutionist who is fiercely anti-God. Richard Dawkins was asked that if God is real and he has to face God one day, what would he say to God? He replied, "Why did You make it so hard to find You?" Unless Mr. Dawkins and all those like him can understand God using their reason, they will not believe in Him.

Those who keep trying to understand Jesus using their reason are like those Jews who kept demanding that Jesus perform miracles to prove He is God. They all reject God's Word. The Bible is very clear about who Jesus Christ is, what He did for us, and how we're saved. The problem most people have is that they don't want to hear it, and they refuse to believe it.

"*We preach Christ crucified,*" Paul says. "*We*" is emphasized in the original. However people may react, and whatever they may think, we will continue to "*preach Christ crucified.*" "*Preach*" here in the original means, "proclaim as a herald." A herald was supposed to announce the message he was given, exactly as it was given to him. We will continue to "herald" the message about Jesus Christ, just as God has given us that message in His Word. We will continue to say that Jesus Christ is true God and true Man, that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again, that we understand Jesus and know Him by faith, and that by faith alone in Jesus we are saved. God tells His pastors, "*Preach the Word*" – 2 Timothy 4:2. And God tells us all, "*Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*" – Mark 16:15.

"*We preach Christ crucified: to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.*" Most of the Jews 'stumbled' over Jesus, so to speak, by refusing to believe that He is the promised Messiah. They wanted their Messiah to free them from Roman rule, not save them from their sins. They thought Jesus was blaspheming God by saying He is the Messiah, and they crucified Him for it. Most people think that it's "*foolishness*" to claim that Jesus Christ is God who died on the cross for their sins. The problem of the Jews of Jesus' day who rejected Him and people today who reject Jesus is that they refuse to believe that they are sinners in need of eternal salvation.

This is the offense of Christ's cross. Christ's cross confronts us with our sins, and how bad our sins are, since it's because of our sins that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had to die. Christ's cross confronts us with the fact that there's nothing we can do to save ourselves, because Jesus did it all. Christ's cross confronts us with the reality that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world, and that only those who believe in Jesus are saved and are going to heaven. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* (Jn. 3:16, my emphasis)

"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." (Of course, God isn't foolish or weak at all. He is the all-wise, almighty God.) We're told, *"Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God."* Romans 1:16 says, *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"* (my emphasis). 2 Timothy 3:15 says, *"The holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"* (my emphasis). Although many reject it, the Bible's message about Jesus dying on the cross for our sins is the truth – real wisdom – and has the power to bring people to believe it and be saved!

Why, on the one hand, do so many people reject Jesus and His cross, and on the other hand, do we treasure Jesus and His cross? What makes the difference between them and us? Our text refers to us as *"those whom God has called."* God makes the difference. The message of Christ crucified, rejected by the world, is the very message God used to *"[call]"* us to faith and know it's true. *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* – Romans 10:17. We confess in Luther's explanation to the Third Article, *"I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel..."* (my emphasis). Peter tells us, *"You are a chosen generation, ... His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."* (1 Pet. 2:9, my emphasis)

Every Christian knows that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We'll never stop proclaiming the message of Christ crucified for us because that message is what first brought us to believe in Jesus, because that message of Christ crucified is keeping us in our faith in Jesus, and because that message of Christ crucified has the power to bring those who don't believe in Jesus to believe in Him and be saved!

Here we find the dawn of heaven While upon the cross we gaze,
See our trespasses forgiven, And our songs of triumph raise.

Oh, that, near the cross abiding, We may to the Savior cleave,
Naught with Him our hearts dividing, All for Him content to leave!

Lord, in loving contemplation Fix our hearts and eyes on Thee
Till we taste Thy full salvation And Thine unveiled glory see. Amen. (TLH #155:3-5)