

Christ & Him Crucified

2. The Conquest of the Cross

Introduction

The Text

1 Cor 1:17–2:2

¹⁷ (For) Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

³¹ so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

¹ And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The Outline

A. We find ourselves now in the middle of a sermon series entitled Christ & Him Crucified, taken from 1 Cor 2:2. Each message in this series, drawing from 1 Corinthians as its source, will come at this pronounced reality from a particular angle.

1. Last week we began by looking at (1) The Centrality of the Cross. Our critical question was: Why? Why did Paul decide to know nothing among them but Jesus

Christ and Him crucified? To which we responded essentially: because, in this fallen and flipped world, the cross of Christ is man's only hope for salvation. It is both diagnosis of his deepest problem and its cure.

2. Now, in the second message, our particular angle is defined as: (2) The Conquest of the Cross; and our critical question is: How does this salvation work? What does the cross of Christ actually accomplish? What is His victory? What is His conquest? And how does it relate to we who trust in Him?
 - a. To answer this we will focus in on [1 Cor 1:30](#). It is here, I think that the spoils of Christ's conquest are most clearly delineated.
 - b. And, as we follow the conquest of Christ and His cross, I will put my thoughts under 2 headings: (1) The Cross as the Conquest of a New Adam; and (2) The Cross as the Conquest of a New Humanity. In other words, we will look first at the conquest of the cross as it relates to Jesus Himself, and then we shall consider it as it relates to ourselves.

“Conquest”?

A. Before we proceed, allow me to clarify my use of the word “conquest.”

1. When I speak of “conquest” I recognize that I am utilizing the vocabulary of war. And I also recognize that in the ordinary use of the term, to be conquered, to be the object of another's conquest, is never a good thing.
 - a. Interesting to note, the ancient city of Corinth itself was once the object of Rome's conquest. In 146 B.C., the prominent city of Corinth was utterly destroyed—with its material abundance looted, its majestic architecture razed, and its citizens either sold into slavery or killed. One prominent philosopher at the time, observing the effects of this conquest, wrote of what used to be Corinth: “...one heap of stones covers the bones of those felled by the spear” (Polystratus). The city lay in ruins until a century later when it was founded by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony and grew to become the city that Paul would enter another century later. But this “heap of stones cover[ing]...bones”—this is what we typically think of when we hear of “conquest.” And this is what we get when we consider the kings of this world—self-aggrandizement, exploitation, destruction.
2. But Christ is not like the kings of this world. His kingdom, His reign, and His conquest are on the other side of that ancient antithesis we mentioned last time. The kings of this world, in their God-impeaching man-enthroning pride, exalt themselves over and against God and manipulate all else into serving their own ends. But Christ comes and humbles Himself beneath His Father, taking on the form of a servant, serving even kingdom rebels like us—attempting to bring us back in, not wall us out; to build us up, not tear us down; to give us life, not put us to death. We do not become the spoils of His conquest—chained and sold into slavery as if mere commodities. No! We are given the spoils of His conquest—set free and

allowed to participate in His triumph! The conquest of Christ and His cross is unlike any other conquest of any other king! May He conquer us afresh this morning!

(1) The Cross as the Conquest of a New Adam

1 Corinthians 1:30

A. As we begin to consider The Cross as the Conquest of a New Adam, let's look together at our key verse for the morning and make some initial observations:

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption...

1. First, observe that Christ Jesus is the central figure here. He is the One who became to/for us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. He is the source of all that follows in this glorious list. All of these things come to us from Him!
2. Second, we must ask about the relationship between the 4 items in this list. It is not so plain in the English (although the ESV does try to set off "wisdom" from the rest with a comma), but in the Greek the clearest translation would read: "...Christ Jesus, who became to/for us wisdom from God, which consists in righteousness and sanctification and redemption."
 - a. Putting this verse back into its context in Paul's discussion, remember that Paul has been supremely concerned with both wisdom and power. Paul is here then comparing "the wisdom of the world" (1:20) that fails to deliver on what it promises (it is all form and eloquence but no substance or power) with "the wisdom of God" (v. 21) as it is found in the cross of Christ that, while it appears foolish, truly is the power of God to save!
 - i. Put this next to what Paul says later to the Corinthians and I think it will be even clearer: "¹⁸Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. ¹⁹But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power" (4:18–20).

(1) The Corinthians loved worldly wisdom, but it was all talk (like a fan trash-talking from his seat in the bleachers—he has no intention of taking to the court, for he knows he's mocking athletes 100x as skilled as he is, still he takes pleasure in running his mouth). The wisdom of the kingdom of God, on the other hand, consists in power. It delivers on what it promises. When God says something, it happens.

- b. What we have in 1:30 then is just an expansion upon what Paul already said up in v. 18: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The cross is both the wisdom and power of God to save, and this righteousness, sanctification, and redemption delineate what this power to save looks like.
- 3. Third, and finally, if Christ and His cross are the wisdom of God, and this wisdom consists in the power of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, how should we define these things?
 - a. Put very simply: righteousness is being right in standing before God; sanctification is being set apart for intimate relationship with God; and redemption is being freed for the undivided worship of God.

The First & Last Adam

- A. Now, returning to our first observation—that Christ is the source of all this wisdom and power—we must ask how He became such a thing? Here we are ready to begin to see the cross as the conquest of a new Adam. In the Scriptures, the work of Christ is clearly set against the work of Adam.
 - 1. While this is implicit in the gospels (as we shall see), it is explicit in Paul. Consider his discussion in 1 Cor 15, where he compares the work of “the first...Adam” with that of, Jesus, whom He calls “the last Adam” (v. 45)—“the first man...second man” (v. 47).
 - a. These two Adams (or two men) comprehend, for Paul, the entirety of human history. These two Adams, and our relation to them, expose which side of the ancient antithesis we are on and determine our ultimate destiny—we are either with the First Adam: exalting ourselves over and against God, headed towards condemnation; or we are with the Second Adam: humbling ourselves under and walking with God, headed towards glory!
- B. At its most basic level, the Second Adam’s mission was to regain and bring to completion all that the First Adam had lost:
 - 1. The first Adam did not base his wisdom on the fear of the Lord, but bought into the counterfeit wisdom of Satan, putting man’s reason over and against his Creator’s: “Did God actually say?” (Gen 3:1b). And this counterfeit wisdom, though it promised much, delivered precisely the opposite.

As a result, Adam’s righteous standing became one of sin and condemnation; his sanctification as being set apart to serve God in the garden paradise ended with exile into the outer boundaries of creation away from God’s presence; and His freedom to worship His Creator became a terrible bondage—to Satan, sin, and death. The first Adam set in motion for mankind the very opposite of God’s intended design: an anti-righteousness, anti-sanctification, and anti-redemption—

and all of this because he followed an anti-wisdom that originated with the creature rather than the Creator.

- C. Now, cue the Second Adam. God becomes man, and in order to save humanity, He Himself must stand at every point where the First Adam fell.
1. Here is the reason Christ's public ministry begins the way it does. Immediately following His baptism and anointing with the Spirit, He is "...led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Mat 4:1). Following Matthew's account, the temptations begin with food and culminate with Satan's promise to Jesus of "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (4:8) if only Jesus will fall down and worship him.
 - a. At every point the Satan's goal is to get the Second Adam to go as the First Adam did: to question God's wisdom, power, and goodness and take the shortcut to pleasure and glory.
 - b. But at every point Christ's response is what? "IT IS WRITTEN..." When Satan comes with that age old question, the question that initiated the end: "Did God actually say?", Christ's answer is a demon-piercing, darkness-dispelling "YES!!!" It's an answer that initiates a new beginning!

Where the First Adam fell, the Second Adam stands.

2. But this was not the end of the combat. Luke tells us that after these initial temptations, the devil "departed from Him until an opportune time" (Luk 4:13). This time, we know from the gospels, is the time of His crucifixion.
 - a. This is why, when He first reveals to His disciples that he must suffer and die and Peter rebukes Him for such an idea, He responds with what? "Get behind me Satan!" (Mat 16:23). "I recognize that voice!" Here is Satan's last chance. Avoid the cross of shame, take the shortcut to worldly glory, deny the wisdom, power, and goodness of your Father, but He would not! Again, Jesus is by the book: "The Son of Man goes as it is written of him!" (Mat 26:24).
 - i. He would go to the cross and He would take on the anti-wisdom, anti-righteousness, anti-sanctification, anti-redemption brought in by the First Adam. And on the cross: the only wise man to ever live became foolishness for us; the only righteous man to ever live was made to be our sin; the only truly sanctified man to ever live, set apart for the purpose of His Father, "suffered outside the gate" (Heb 13:12) in the place of our exile; and the only truly free man to ever live, willingly gave himself up to the chains and the lashings and the nails. Satan, sin, and death had their full and furious way with Him!
3. But three days later, just after dawn, the Second Adam, having paid for all the failures of the First, regained and advanced in Himself all that was lost. "It was not

possible for Him to be held [down by death]" (Act 2:24). His resurrection is God's vindication to the world that: the One we called foolish is truly the wisdom of God; the One we called condemned is truly the righteousness of God; the One we saw as under God's curse, is truly set apart as the firstborn of a new creation; and the One we captured and nailed to the cross, is truly the first to enter into the full and lasting freedom of the children of God! Satan, sin, and death were all taken on and overthrown!

Here now, in Christ, is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption in its fullest expression! Here now is the cross as the conquest of a New Adam!

(2) The Cross as the Conquest of a New Humanity

The Old & New Humanity

- A. But this is only the beginning of His conquest. He has achieved this righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for Himself, but it must then be applied to us. He desires give us the spoils of His triumph. He is the source of such things and we are to be the recipients. He is the king and we are His subjects. As the First Adam stood at the head of a fallen humanity, so Christ is to stand at the head of a new humanity.
 - 1. As we move now to consider the Cross as the conquest of a new humanity, what immediately becomes evident is that before Christ can share with us the spoils of His conquest, He must first conquer us. We don't naturally want what He has to give. How terrible is our state?! The cross seems to us to be foolishness and weakness, something to joke about not glory in. If we are to be brought into Christ we must first be brought to the end of ourselves.
- B. All of humanity follows by nature behind the First Adam, maintaining the same principle of pride at its root. We don't want God or anything else ruling over us. Interestingly, we all are after righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, only our own twisted man-centered version of it. You will note that in my definitions above, each of these can only be rightly understood when seen in its relation to God. Natural man, in His pride, however, refuses to see these things with reference to God: righteousness means, I feel justified, good about myself, right. Sanctification means I am set apart from other people, special, worthy of admiration and praise. Redemption means I am free from all that troubles me. And we buy into the counterfeit wisdom of Satan and his world in hopes of attaining it.
 - 1. I was reading an article from the New York Times the other day on anorexia and I saw it grafting right onto the content of this sermon. These poor girls want to feel justified in their existence, right; they want to be set apart from others, special; they want to be set free from what oppresses them, and they buy into the counterfeit wisdom of the world that says beauty—skinny-supermodel-beauty—will provide this for them. But this wisdom is impotent. It cannot deliver on what it promises.

"You can't ever really say that ana isn't a form of self-hatred, even though I try to say that. If I was truthfully happy with myself, then I would allow myself to

eat. But I don't. And it's kind of like a strive for perfection, and for making myself better...You can't say that every ana loves herself and that she doesn't think anything is wrong with her at all...or else she wouldn't be ana in the first place."

- a. She knows something is wrong, this place is fallen, they are fallen. She knows she needs righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, but she's trying to attain these things without God and His provision in Christ, and so her attempts at self-liberation only take her into deeper bondage. One clinician describes the anorexic as falling "into an abyss, and they can't get out. And it's not about, 'O.K. I want to lose the 10 pounds and go on with my life.' It's, 'This has consumed my entire existence.'"
2. And we must see that we are all are tempted into this same sort of equation. The same genetic coding is in our fallen nature. How will you be justified, how will you be set apart and special, how will you be set free from the troubles that ail you? What wisdom will you buy into? This world's or God's? The world holds out: beauty will provide these things, the right job will provide these things, the right sexual partner will provide these things, etc. God says: "No, no, no! The cross of Christ alone will provide these things!"
- C. The new humanity begins where the old humanity ends. To quote from Paul here: "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (1 Cor 3:18). We must see all of man's wisdom as foolishness, all of man's power as weakness before we can see the cross of Christ for what it truly is: the wisdom and power of God to save! What appears to be a grand staircase ascending to the pinnacles of this world, truly leads down to the dungeons of the devil. Wide is the path that leads to destruction. And it is here, when we come to the end of ourselves that we are truly ready to meet with Christ!

1. Consider Nebuchadnezzar from last week.

Dan 4:34

³⁴At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation...

2. But this is also our testimony is it not? How many stories have I heard, just different versions of the prodigal son. I was going my own way until I hit the pods of pigs, and then I saw my own foolishness and the wisdom of my Father, and I headed home. And, even though I deserved His wrath, all His riches became mine. By Christ's sacrifice I am counted righteous before God; because of His rejection, I can be set apart for intimate relation with God; and by His precious blood, I have been redeemed! The best robe around my shoulders, a ring on my finger, his shoes on my feet, a fattened calf as a feast before me...WHAT AM I DOING HERE?! The spoils of His conquest are ours by grace through faith.

1 Cor 15:22

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Conclusion

A. Look back now at our key verse for the morning:

³⁰And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption...

1. Notice the priority and supreme importance of union with Christ! If He is the source—if our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are the spoils of His conquest—O how essential is it that we be found in Him this morning!
2. We've tried so hard to attain this on our own, to self-save. We've tried it all: money, education, beauty, etc. It's exhausting, it's depressing, and even when it seems to be working, it's fleeting. When we follow the kings of this world we are left with nothing but a heap of stones covering bones. But the king heaven, He is in the business of bringing life to these dry bones. There is only one thing you must know if you would be made right, set apart, and truly set free: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Union with Him by faith is all. This is too simple for us. We want to work, to have some part, but we must not allow this. He has done it! Talk with Him, trust Him, walk with Him, fellowship with Him, and in Him you shall be truly righteous, sanctified, and redeemed—a new humanity following behind a new Adam!

2 Cor 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.