

Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed*. As we heard from the reading in 1 Corinthians 15, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the heart of the Christian faith, a truth of utmost importance. As chapter 15 goes on to say, beyond what we read, "If Christ has not been raised, then [our] faith is futile and [we] are still in [our] sins, and are of all people most to be pitied....But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead." 1 Corinthians 15 might as well be called the Easter chapter; it's all about the resurrection.

But the passage that I just read came not from the *end* of 1 Corinthians, but the *beginning*. If chapter 15 is the Easter chapter, chapter 1 is the April Fools' chapter. The bookends of 1 Corinthians are teaching us that you only get to the *glory* of the resurrection through the *folly* of the cross. In order to bear the glorious image of the heavenly man, you must first become dumber than dirt. And from beginning to end, the gospel makes no sense to those who are perishing, to those who are opposed to God and His ways. Winning by dying seems like the worst strategy ever. How's that supposed to work? It's foolishness!

Now, we live in a post-resurrection world, which means that we've forgotten a little bit of the folly of the cross. Because the gospel has spread all over the world, it doesn't seem quite so foolish anymore. In fact, most of our heroes today are actually patterned after the cross: think of Superman, or Harry Potter. Winning by dying plays a huge role in those stories, because they come *after* the resurrection. Do you see that? Because of the Resurrection, winning by dying makes sense.

Now, contrast that with some of the old heros, old gods like Thor and Loki. I'm picking them, because they personify *power* and *wisdom*. Thor doesn't win by dying; he wins by smashing things with a hammer. Loki doesn't win by dying, he wins by being terribly clever. What can your god do? He can overpower you! What about your god? He can outsmart you! What about Jesus Christ, what can He do? Well, He can die. *That's the foolishness, right there*.

And it really hardly matters that Jesus then comes back from the dead; when it came to the great battle, He lost. Yes, if you look deeper, there is more to the story, but for those who are looking for power or wisdom, after they get to the cross, they don't have any reason to look deeper. Jesus failed. He couldn't avoid the cross with His wisdom or overcome it with His power, and since Jews seek powerful signs and Greeks seek wisdom, they aren't interested in Jesus.

They are too proud to admit that they value the wrong things in life. They don't think like God thinks, but they assume that their ways are higher than His. That's the prideful boasting that Paul is talking about, and that's why God chooses the way of weakness – He's attacking their boasting at the root. God's folly in choosing to save the world through a bloody crucifixion and an unbelievable resurrection is meant as an assault on the proud boasting of those who want to elbow their own way into the presence of God. They want to stand tall before God on the basis of their own wisdom and strength, but God knows that they cannot be saved unless they fall in humility at His feet, and so He puts a stumbling stone in their way to trip them up.

And I want to you think back to what we've seen in the gospel of Mark: Jesus *is* both powerful and wise. He defeats the demons and heals diseases with a word of power, and He silences the scribes with His wit and parables. He started small in Galilee with the town demons and the local scribes, but He's moving up in the world by refuting the Jerusalem scribes, and we're about to see Him expel an extremely powerful demon from a possessed boy, and a whole legion of demons from another man.

And if we were writing the story, we would expect a natural progression to unfold. Small town Jesus works His way up the ladder until He overpowers and outsmarts kings, high priests, and even Satan himself. And the big advantage of this story would be that it would be obvious to everyone that Jesus has won. All His enemies would be piled in a heap around Him, their great brains overheated and short-circuited; their power broken. The Easter announcement that Jesus has won would be easily accepted, and all the world would see it.

All the world would see, and nobody would have faith. Those who seek wisdom would boast in wisdom: of course Jesus won; He's the wisest! Those who seek power would boast in power: of course Jesus won; He's the strongest! How much faith does it take to pick the #1 seed to win the tournament, or Sherlock Holmes to solve the case? Not much!

So Jesus came in weakness, and God made the foolish decision to send Him to the cross, and the story of God's Son coming to save the world became a story of death. Now, if this were the end of the story, then we need to see that it really would have been folly in every sense of the word. Jesus' death alone didn't save anybody. Without the Resurrection, Christianity really is a fool's errand. If Jesus doesn't rise, then God is a fool.

But Resurrection is how God makes the wisdom of the world foolish. The cross by itself is folly; it's the Resurrection that proves that the foolishness of God is wiser than men. That's the point that 1 Corinthians makes by opening with folly and closing with Resurrection. God is *absolutely foolish* to take human flesh and die *unless* God raises that body from the dead. Christians are absolutely foolish to embrace weakness as a way of life, unless weakness is the way to eternal life, through the miracle of Resurrection.

God chooses foolishness, because foolishness cuts boasting off at the knees, and foolishness requires faith. For those who have faith, the foolish Jesus becomes to us wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that we can in fact boast, but not *our* wisdom, not in *our* power, but in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So what does this mean for us as we celebrate the Resurrection? It means we need to throw out all our wisdom, and embrace the folly of God. And here are three ways to do that.

The first relates to mission: don't try to get rid of the foolishness of the cross! As you share your faith with others, go ahead and tell them about Jesus the wonder-worker, Jesus the wise parable-teller. But don't ask them to follow Jesus the Teacher, or Jesus the Prophet. Focus on how Jesus laid down His wisdom and strength to go to the cross, and call them to put their faith in Jesus the Crucified Messiah. He didn't save us with His power or with His wisdom. He saved us by the open folly of dying, and by the secret wisdom of Resurrection.

And realize that some people will reject this message as foolishness. It just won't make sense to them, because they are looking for something else. That's not a bug in the gospel; that's a feature. Until you are willing to become a fool, your pride will keep you from ever knowing the wisdom of God. So don't blunt the sharp edges of God's folly. Removing the folly doesn't make it *easier* for people to come to faith; it takes away the *need* for the faith that pleases God. God put folly into the gospel for a reason. Don't get rid of it. Celebrate it.

Second, in the life of the Church, don't boast in power or wisdom, and don't lament weakness and folly. Paul says, "Look at you guys. Not many wise or powerful or silver spooners here. But that's not a *problem*; that's God's *plan*." Through the Church, God is teaching a lesson to the world that can only be taught by the weak and foolish.

Most pastors don't have PhDs. Most elders aren't movers and shakers. Most church members are pretty normal. Churches are full of average or less than average people. We're a bunch of fools for Christ.

This means that many of our efforts to serve and shape and save the world are as weak and foolish as we are. What does the world think of our movies, our music, our schools, our pregnancy clinics? *They're foolish*. But here's the thing: God isn't trying to impress proud people into the kingdom through wisdom or power. He's welcoming the humble into His foolish kingdom. God shows His wisdom through our weakness. God's cross-style folly continues when He points people to look for Jesus in this spotted, wrinkled, and blemished Church. But that's how He's going to save the world: by hiding glory inside a congregation of foolish saints.

Third, don't be fooled when God's work in your life looks like folly. Instead, boast in the Lord, and wait for Resurrection. Moms, the world looks at a life spent giving your best years, your body, and most of your mind to raising children, and they call it folly. Sabbath is folly, tithing is folly, prayer is folly, sexual purity is folly, covenant commitment in marriage is folly, headship and submission is folly, and on and on it goes. Praising a good God in the face of cancer or miscarriage or a terrible accident is *folly*.

But this is God's way: Build an ark, Noah. Leave your family and go wandering, Abraham. Go fight a giant, kid. Jump in there with the lions. All of you, take up your cross. Following God has never made sense, until the Resurrection comes. So when following God feels like folly, that's not the time to give up. That's when it's time to start worshiping God, for His foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom, and His weakness is stronger than man's strength. Where following God seems the most foolish, that's where the Resurrection will be the most glorious.

So as you celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, boast in the folly of God. 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, who in His foolish wisdom raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

Christ is Risen! *He is risen indeed.*

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*