

# 1 Corinthians 2.6-16

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## *Seeing Spiritually*

Christ Church Selly Park

Sunday 26 September 2021

Seeing the Son [3]

### **Foolishness**

We are in week 3 of our series on 1 Corinthians 1-4: Seeing the Son. In the first week we thought about *Waiting Eagerly*, in particular standing on the solid ground of God's call and grace. Last week we thought about *Believing Foolishly*:

- We saw how in the cross of Jesus God gives us a new set of values: what matters to God is not winning but weakness, not strength but sacrifice, not greed but giving.
- We saw how in the cross of Jesus God transformed even a cruel instrument of humiliation, torture and death into the ultimate symbol of beauty and life.
- And we ended by seeing how our part is simply to share the message of the cross, trusting in God's power to change hearts. And that is where we begin today.

I hope those of you in Home Groups enjoyed sharing your stories about being foolish last week!

Some of you may have heard of the Darwin Awards – given posthumously to people who die doing something incredibly stupid. They are possibly a little dark for a church service – but they also have an ‘Honourable Mention’ category, for idiots who don’t quite make the ultimate sacrifice.

In December 2019 a man was stuck in traffic in Halifax when his car exploded – with him inside. He had decided his car stank, and used air freshener to take away the smell. Except, he used *a lot* of the aerosol... and then lit a cigarette.

The explosion was so large, it damaged the windows of businesses either side of the road.

¶ Here is a picture of his car shared by West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.<sup>i</sup>

What an idiot.

¶ In last week’s reading, Paul goes out of his way to point out that he did not speak **with human wisdom** (2), that he came with **weakness** (3), speaking **without wise and persuasive words** (4). He even talks about **the foolishness of what was preached** (1.21).

*Incidentally, this is why it's important to have an open Bible when listening to a sermon. We can print the words of a reading on paper, or put them on the screens – but that doesn't tell us where the reading comes in the Bible, what comes before or after it, or whether or not the preacher is even saying what the Bible says!*

*So I encourage you to bring a Bible to church – or borrow one of the church Bibles from the back. Using a Bible on a phone is fine... if you can avoid the temptation to check your emails or social media while looking earnest, as if you are reading your Bible app.*

Anyway... by the end of chapter 2 verse 5, we might be forgiven for thinking that Paul's gospel message is complete nonsense.

## **True wisdom (6-10a)**

But then we reach verse 6: **we do, however, speak a message of wisdom**. This *does* make sense, Paul says, and it is **true wisdom** – for it is **God's wisdom**:

We declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

*1 Corinthians 2.7 (NIV)*

God's wisdom is **a mystery** – but it isn't a *permanent* mystery, forever baffling: it **has been hidden**, which means *it isn't any more*.

§ This picture is a still from a video. It looks like chaos: there are pieces of twisted metal, burnt-out cigarettes and empty drinks bottles on the floor, wheels from some slot machines, decaying flowers – and more. It symbolises brokenness, pain, decay, addiction, suffering.

But when the sun rises, § this is what happens. It's a piece of art called *The Light*, by Luke Bradford.

One day God *will* wipe away all our tears, heal all our wounds, and take away all our pain. But for now God shines his light *through* our brokenness and through our weakness, to show Jesus.

This piece of art is a picture of **God's wisdom**, of the **mystery** Paul is talking about. In Ephesians 3 he spells it out:

In reading this, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit ... This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

*Ephesians 3.4-6 (NIV)*

The mystery – it's *the Church*. This is what Paul declared, this is what the gospel is and is creating: a new *people*, a family that anyone can join, no matter where or to whom to you are born, where we all *together* share in the promise of new life in Jesus.

It's something totally new. No wonder **the rulers of this age** didn't understand it (8) – they didn't get it then, and they don't get it now, because worldly power is all about *us* and *them*, it's about keeping people separate, having a common enemy.

That is not God's way. God's way is to bring a ragtag bunch of hurting, broken, and repentant sinners together, and through them to show Jesus to the world. That is **God's wisdom**, God's **mystery** now made known – **it's the Church**.

This artwork is a picture of the Church: sinners in need of a Saviour, through whom God shines his light to show Jesus.

The next verse is often quoted when people talk about heaven:

What no eye has seen,  
what no ear has heard,  
and what no human mind has conceived' -  
the things God has prepared for those who love him.

*1 Corinthians 2.9 (NIV)*

Except, what's Paul talking about? He isn't talking about the afterlife, *he's talking about the Church.*

Look in verse 10: **these are the things God *has revealed to us by his Spirit.*** The inconceivable thing God had planned from **before time began** (7) – *it's the Church.*

God's inconceivable wisdom, is to make this *gesture round the congregation.* We are part of what he has chosen to create, and how he has chosen to shine Jesus' light into the world: through a new family, flawed and frail, but also forgiven and set free.

Is that not good news?

## **True Spirituality (10b-16)**

That's God's **true wisdom.** Second, this passage teaches us what **true Spirituality** is.

My wife has an odd way of starting conversations. She always begins them by saying, 'Hey, are you even listening to me?'

That's not true by the way...

Yesterday I accidentally deleted the audiobook Jess and I have been listening to. Now I'll never hear the end of it.

That's not true either by the way...

How good are you at listening?

Have you ever heard someone say something like this: 'I'm spiritual but not religious'? Or, 'I'm sure there's more to life, but I reject organised religion and am finding a spirituality that works for me'? Have you heard something like that?

The rise of the web and social media and video platforms like YouTube means we can find a church or leader or speaker or religion or spirituality that suits us.

But that is – my friend Peter says – simply *disorganised* religion. We end up talking about, not God but 'me' in a louder voice; or perhaps in a quieter voice with pebbles and diffusers and wind chimes. It is about 'me' not God; it is *meology* not *theology*.

The Christian faith is not that. We don't get to pick and choose, because God has told us what we need. If that sounds bad, that's the world infiltrating our attitudes. God is offering us *the* truth, from the one who *created* truth, from the one who knows the end from the beginning. God is offering us *the* truth about life – from the one who *created* it.

The question is: are we listening?

Did you spot how Paul figured out **God's mystery**? In fact, he didn't figure it out; he was *told* it: **these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit** (10). He says **we have received** this message from **the Spirit who is from God** (12). He speaks with **Spirit-taught words** (13); the message he preaches is **from the Spirit of God**, and **discerned only through the Spirit** (14).

In fact, just as in the first nine verses of chapter 1 Paul mentions Jesus nine times, in these seven verses of chapter 2 Paul mentions the Spirit *ten* times.

Why? Because the message of the cross, the message about Jesus that Paul preached, wasn't something he made up, but something *revealed* to him by God's Spirit.

That means true Spirituality is entirely the opposite of what most people mean when they use that word: it's not a case of finding what works for me, but *listening* to what God's Spirit is telling us about God – for after all, he's the one who'd know:

For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

*1 Corinthians 2.11 (NIV)*

Now, we don't hear the Spirit through some mystical state of meditation, we hear it through reading Scripture prayerfully.

I've lost count of the number of times Christians have told me they feel far from God, like he is distant, like he isn't speaking to them – and then admit they never read the Bible.

Jess has been away all week in Portugal visiting her friend who lives in Lisbon. By the wonders of modern technology we've been able to message one another, she's sent photos of the beach and the beautiful sky; we even spoke on the phone.

Now imagine if I'd ignored all her messages and phone calls, and then when she got home on Friday morning, I had a go at her for not speaking to me...

Friends, I know it's not easy. I know the Bible is strange. It says things that are hard to understand, things that are challenging. But that's because belonging to God's family is very different to belonging to the world.

In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul says:

If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation: the old has gone, the new is here!

*2 Corinthians 5.17 (NIV)*

We no longer belong to this world, but to God's family. Human wisdom is easy for us to understand, it comes naturally to us. But part of belonging to God's new family means growing in a new wisdom, in true wisdom, in **God's wisdom**.

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God... we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit.

*1 Corinthians 2.12-13 (NIV)*

Reading the Bible is not a textbook. There is no exam to pass. No: as we read the Bible, as we listen to what God is saying to us, the Spirit works within us, helping us to hear and understand; in fact **without the Spirit** we can't **accept** or **understand** God's wisdom (14)! The Spirit transforms and renews us from within, so we can see things as God sees them, so we can *See Spiritually*.

This is a miracle, a miracle of transformation. It's no wonder that Paul puts it second in his letter, after talking about the gospel, the message of the cross. We join God's new family through what Jesus has done on the cross. We grow into our new identity as children of God through the work of the Spirit in our lives. As we need daily to repent of our sin and receive forgiveness, so we need daily to be open to the Spirit growing and renewing us.

## Prayer

Yet again, we don't have a lot to do in this passage. Pretty much everything Paul talks about in the first two chapters here, are things we *receive*. They are things God *has done*, things God *is doing* for his children.

This is the foundation of the Christian faith: what God has done in Jesus and is doing through the Spirit. The Christian faith is not *meology* it is *theology* – it's not about 'me' and 'my way', it's about *him* and *his* way. Unless we take that to heart that we will come unstuck. That's what had gone wrong for the Corinthians, and it is why Paul had to begin his letter in this way.

The Christian life is not about earning or proving anything to anyone – it is about *responding to God's call*. It is about receiving a new identity as God's adopted children, and growing up as God's children. The Christian life is about learning to build our lives on the solid ground, the foundation of Jesus Christ –

But that's chapter 3, which will have to wait until next time, which is in two weeks, because next week is All In.

For now, I'd like us to pray. For this passage guides us in how to pray.

Maybe you're new to the whole church thing, or maybe you've been coming for a while, and still don't quite 'get' the message of the cross.

Maybe you do see God's wisdom in the cross and want to keep growing and being transformed by the Spirit.

Maybe you have friends, family, loved ones, who don't yet have faith, or whose faith is flickering.

Maybe you don't have a clue what you want, but you know you need *something*.

The way to pray for all those things begins: 'Come Holy Spirit'. In fact recently I have been wondering if *all* our prayers shouldn't begin that way. 'Come Holy Spirit, change us, renew us, open our hearts to understand, open our eyes to see Jesus.'

Let's stand, and let's pray.

*Thank you... mystery now made known, new family. Come, Holy Spirit... transform and renew... teach and grow... open our eyes to see Jesus.*

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<sup>i</sup> See <https://darwinawards.com/stupid/stupid2019-03.html> - retrieved 24/09/2021. See also <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-50810196> - retrieved 24/09/2021.