

# Christ in our Weakness

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading this morning is taken from 1 Corinthians chapter 1, starting to read at verse 26.

And it's on page 1145 in the church Bibles. That's 1 Corinthians chapter 1, starting at verse 26.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called.

Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God. That is our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

[ 1 : 16 ] Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. And so it was with me, brothers and sisters, when I came to you.

I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

I came to you in weakness, with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 2 : 40 ] Amen. family saúde. Amen. Let God set the agenda for us rather than us cherry-picking the bits that we prefer. And it also connects for us the truths that God reveals in his word with the implications for us as we just work through books of the Bible.

So that's what we're doing. And we're in a series in this letter, 1 Corinthians, written by an early church leader, the Apostle Paul, to a church that he planted in Corinth. And we have come up to this next section.

So let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. We praise you, Holy God and Heavenly Father, for your power and your wisdom.

As we see that power and wisdom in creation and supremely in the message of the cross. We pray that you would give us each this morning ears to hear your voice.

We pray that you would give us hearts that are willing to be open to your word. And lives that are willing to be transformed.

[ 3 : 47 ] For Jesus' name's sake. Amen. Well, I don't know whether you've ever thought before, why doesn't God make the church, his community of rescued people, just a bit more impressive.

I was chatting to a guy on Friday from Aberfeldy who loves the outdoors. And he said, you know, I wouldn't call myself a Christian, but I have been very struck by Bear Grylls and his faith, the chief scout.

I've read some of his books and he clearly is a man of faith. I'm very struck by what he believes. And I think Bear Grylls is great. And I found myself thinking, if only we had a few more people like that in the church, a few more influential people, people who are just a bit more impressive than some of us.

Wouldn't that make my friends a bit more interested in the Christian faith? Why doesn't God do it like that? Well, the church that this letter was written to was in Corinth, which was a prosperous Roman city.

It was an impressive city with impressive people. And the people in the church were a lot like the people in the city around them. So they respected the rich.

[ 5 : 03 ] They respected you if you had money. They were enchanted by influence and power. And they hung on the words of the wise. They had their equivalents of the gurus of their age.

The people that you bought the best-selling books by or you watched their TV programs and tried to glean from. There were particular people who had the equivalent of podcasts and YouTube channels that everyone latched onto.

And because they brought that into the church when they came to trust Jesus, it meant that within the church there was division. Because there were factions around different leaders who seemed to carry that same influence and impressiveness for people.

But we heard the Apostle Paul starting to correct that last week as he clarified with them that when he went to Corinth and started the church, he went with a simple message of Jesus Christ dying on the cross.

So have a look back at verse 22. He talks about two kinds of people who received the message.

The Jewish people who were the people who had the Old Testament. And then Greeks, which kind of stands for everyone else really, the nations.

[ 6 : 17 ] And he says, verse 22, Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. See what he's saying? It sounds terribly weak, the message of Christ crucified.

Of the God of all this, sending his appointed Savior into the world, and he goes and dies in weakness on a cross. Sounds very weak. And it sounds very foolish, the message of Christ crucified.

That God would need a sacrifice of his son in order to put things right between us and him for how we've lived.

It sounds foolish, it sounds weak. But it's the power of God. Because it saves you, whoever you are, when you come to it. God uses that message to save.

[ 7 : 19 ] So it's the wisdom of God and the power of God. And now, this morning, Paul points us to two things that demonstrate the power of the cross. He points us to his own ministry.

And he says to them, remember what I was like when I came. And he points them to themselves.

And says, remember what you were like when you were called. So the first point is about the people.

And I've called it the surprising community of the cross. The surprising community of the cross.

Look with me again at verse 26. Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. Look at that and think the respectable people of Corinth must have felt it was quite safe to look down on Christians and the church.

Church was the opiate for the masses. It was for the great unwashed. It was not for the learned. It was for the kind of the layabouts.

[ 8 : 23 ] Or it was for the downtrodden. Not for people who were well educated and rich and noble. And they felt safe doing that because of who was in the church.

And before we get to the reason why God does it like that, just consider how we see the same thing all around us today. Where is the church most growing in the world today?

Well, in China, the house church movement, which is largely among the poor in China. And it can be a stumbling block for some of the very well educated and perhaps more influential Chinese people who come to Glasgow to study in their thousands.

Because they look back home and they might think of the Communist Party and think of opportunity and influence. And they think of the house church movement. And they think of weakness and a kind of dead end.

It just seems a lot less impressive. In Brazil, the church has exploded. It's the Pentecostal church that has largely grown.

[ 9 : 29 ] And it's largely among the urban poor in what people call the favelas in a derogatory way, where people live in a poor way. And we're an Anglican church, part of the global Anglican movement.

Today, more people will go to Anglican church in Uganda than they will in the UK. More will go to Anglican church in Kenya than in the UK.

More in Rwanda than in the UK. And in Nigeria, more people will go to Anglican church than in all of those countries put together today. So how does the impressive West think when we hear that people in those other cultures are becoming Christians in their droves?

How do people rationalize that? Well, we think patronizingly, don't we? That's how people think. In the ivory towers of academic liberal theology in the UK, people think, well, those people just don't know any better.

They haven't read what I've read. In Western daily life around us, they think, well, those people, their lives must be so hard. Maybe they just need something to hope in.

[ 10 : 41 ] But we've got things sorted in the West. You know, we're so happy here. We don't need God anymore. We saw this last year when Billy Von Ipola, the Rugby Union International, who grew up in the Pacific Islands, he spoke out about being a Christian, partly in solidarity with another Pacific Islander rugby player who'd got in hot water for speaking about an element of his Christian faith.

And there was an English rugby journalist, Stuart Barnes, writing in a national newspaper. And he wrote this breathtakingly patronizing article about how it was that these rugby players just couldn't know any better because missionaries went there in the 19th century and told them this absurd message about God.

And they haven't realized that here in the West, we've come to learn that God is not there. And they just don't know any better, these people from the Pacific Islands. And when we see that around us, impressive people living impressive lives without reference to God, how does that make us feel?

Well, it might make us feel, because we maybe hold those people in awe, maybe I've got this wrong about God. Maybe it makes us struggle.

Or maybe it just makes us think, I don't need to look at the Christian faith because the key people in our society don't seem to have reference to God. And Paul here tells us, in the first century, in God's Word, this is exactly the way God does things.

[ 12 : 13 ] It's God who calls people into his rescued community. And he deliberately chooses the weak, the nobodies. Why does he do that?

Well, look with me at verse 27. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him.

Just think, if God had made a way to know him that you could find by human wisdom, if we could think ourselves to the truth about God, then how awful if people could then boast the reason I know God is because I'm smarter than other people.

Or if God called the influential, if the church today was full of the influential in society, then maybe they could boast, you know, I'm used to being first picked, and so it's no surprise to me that God wanted me on his team.

[ 13 : 21 ] So instead, who does God call to turn the whole world upside down? Verse 27, He calls the foolish people to shame the wise, weak people to shame the strong, lowly people to shame the lofty, despised people so that celebrities will be shamed in their pride, nobody's to nullify the people who really think they're somebody.

And in fact, those very things that in our world, our world encourages us to boast in, if we have them, they can actually become a barrier to us, turning to Christ.

Because they make you think, I'm somebody, I don't need a saviour, I'll back myself. I remember a friend saying to his friend, what are you going to say when you stand before God, when we all meet him?

And his friend said to him, management consultant, I'll back myself. I'll back myself. It's not that God would say no to any of those people if they come to him.

Jesus says, whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. If you're an impressive person here this morning, and you would like to come to Jesus, you can just come as you are, and he won't drive you away.

[ 14 : 34 ] Today would be a great day to do that. I notice that Paul says here, doesn't he, not many of you. He doesn't say not any of you. He says not many of you.

God called Queen Elizabeth of noble birth to be a follower of him. She was saved by the letter M in verse 26. It's not not any of you were noble.

It's not many of you. But look around the church today, here and around the world, and not many of us were like that when we were called by God. It is a humbling passage, isn't it?

It's a humbling thought for us who are Christians, isn't it? That for most of us, we could say that to some level this is true. One of the reasons God chose me was because I am weak.

And he knew that when I came to trust Jesus, I'd have nothing to boast in except him. I know that's true of me. It's humbling for all of us, this passage. And for those of you here this morning who were maybe here as guests, still looking in on the Christian faith, do these verses, maybe not, do they encourage you, don't spurn the message because you think church is full of weird people, odd people.

[15:49] Some of you will already have been thinking that today. You know, if you walk into church and the people you meet, some of them seem like misfits, some of them seem weak, some of them seem poor, some of them seem the kinds of people the world despises.

And you work with big shots all week and you hear and you think, what am I doing with these people? They're so weird. That is just how God wants it to be. So that on the day of Christ, when the people of God are revealed and Jesus invites them to spend forever with him in glory, the world's ways of boasting will be just turned on their heads.

They'll be shown to be a complete sham as he invites the nobodies to spend forever with him because they knew they were weak so they came to Christ.

And isn't that striking because people say to me, I'm not interested in Christianity, it's just a crutch for the weak. Have you heard that? What would this passage say to that?

Well, you're right. Actually, it is a crutch for the weak. It calls us to admit our weakness and if you're not willing to do that and accept this level ground around the cross, whoever we are when we come to Jesus, we come empty-handed.

[17:04] If you can't accept that, it might not be for you. If you're here as a guest, though, it could be a very challenging paragraph of God's word here. If you are a big shot, because it could mean that you will find it harder than other people would to admit that when you come to God, you've got nothing to boast in.

What could make you right before God? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. That could be hard for some of us to admit if you're a big shot. Last weekend, I was at my university reunion dinner. If you were here, Jonathan told you that it was going to be a gold mine for sermon illustrations. Here is one. At two in the morning, I was standing outside a kebab van called the Van of Life, okay, with old friends, the Van of Life.

And a young couple arrived and they were looking at the menu. They'd spurned the Van of Death. That's on the other side. We were at the Van of Life. And they saw us looking at the menu with our chips.

And this guy said to us, what's good here? So what's good here? I said, I'm a little bit out of date now, but 20 years ago, the chili burger was magnificent.

[18:12] You should have that. He said, 20 years ago? I said, yeah, we're here for a reunion. They said, oh, that's brilliant, a reunion. What do you do now? My mate next to me finished his mouthful of chips and cheese and he said, I'm the British ambassador to Estonia.

There stood my mates. One had just flown in from Abu Dhabi, another from a business trip to Norway for the Premier League, another still with half an eye on his emails because Goldman Sachs, he's so important to them that they can't let him just have a night out.

Still another runs a multinational company and has just got an OBE and they are big shots and I haven't given up praying for them. I've got my George Muller five, the five guys I pray for every day. I've not given up praying for them. There is hope because God is gracious and kind. At the same time, as time goes on in your life, if you are more successful in the world's eyes, does it get harder to be humble enough to admit that before God, nothing could make you right except the blood of Jesus.

There's nothing to boast about in what you've achieved. For the doorway into the rescue people of God is wide open. Nobody could say, I tried to get in and they wouldn't let me in.

[19:30] But you have to be willing to admit that you come empty-handed. You can't bring anything with you except weakness and the need to be rescued and sin from which you need to be redeemed.

And folks, it's so good that God is like this. You just look around you at the people around you in your church family. See around us this community of misfits and weakness of nobodies. Not many of you are looking around but you can look around over coffee and thank God, thank God that he has called these people because he's turning the world's way of judging upside down. So that's our first point this morning, the surprising community of the cross. But though we can't boast in ourselves, we can boast in something. And that's our second point, the astonishing benefits of the cross.

So let's pick things up again in verse 30. Have a look with me. It is because of him, God, that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God.

[ 20 : 34 ] That is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. Again and again, when the Apostle Paul writes about how we're made right before God, how we're made righteous, he immediately talks about boasting.

Romans chapter 3, Galatians chapter 6, Philippians chapter 3, here in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. He explains the gospel, the achievements of Jesus and then he immediately talks about boasting. The language of boasting was originally a military term. It was a ritual boast. It was how you got your confidence to charge in battle. And you might think of scenes you've seen like that in movies. I think of Gladiator where the leader, the gladiator, is riding on horseback across the front of his troops and they're all ready. The cavalry are ready. And it's the way, what they would say to their troops, that was the boast that they would give.

We've got what it takes. Look at your spears. Look at your horses. We've got this. That was the boast. And Paul is saying here, we've all got things that we boast in.

[ 21 : 43 ] Everyone's got things we boast in. He doesn't mean that you brag. He means what you get your confidence from. What's it going to be? When the chips are down, what do you turn to in life for your confidence?

When you have a setback, when you mess up, what do you fall back on? Do you think, at least I'm a good parent? At least I was a good footballer.

At least my mates think I'm funny. At least I did well in my exams. What is it? That's how our world works. Social media is full of boasts.

People telling you, you can do whatever you set your mind to. You've just got to back yourself.

Anything is possible for you. And the Lord says in Jeremiah chapter 9, which Paul is quoting here in verse 31.

He's quoting Jeremiah from 600 years before. He says, don't boast in anything except this, that you know the Lord, the living God.

[ 22 : 46 ] Let him who boasts boast in the Lord that you know him. No human wisdom or power or influence or riches could bring us to God. Only the weakness of a savior sent from God moved by a love willing to do whatever was, whatever had to be done to bring us back to him.

To endure being despised and rejected so that when he dies and his blood is shed, everything we've ever done wrong can be placed on him. So that when you come to God empty handed with nothing to boast in, he gives you the cross to boast in.

Cast iron confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he says it here, doesn't he? He is our righteousness. That's the word from the law court. That you go into the law court of God and the books will be opened about how you've lived your life and God will look at your life and he won't count you guilty.

Instead, he reads the evidence and he gets up from the judge's chair and he applauds. He will applaud. He'll congratulate you and he will walk away with the verdict on your life.

I'm righteous. I'm righteous. How could this be that I'm righteous? Because he sees Jesus' life for you. Christ is our holiness. That's the word from the temple where the temple was set up so that there was a most holy place guarded by a holy place.

[ 24 : 11 ] And then he went further out and there were temple courts and only the priests could go in and only the high priests could go in the most holy place and only once a year. And we would be standing on the outside because we're unclean and we can't stand before a holy God.

But thanks to Jesus Christ once for all sin-bearing sacrifice of himself God sees you as completely pure perfectly holy in his sight without blemish so that he can now invite you to approach him boldly and you can do that anywhere anytime through Jesus.

And Christ is our redemption verse 30 that's the word from the slave market. When we turn away from God we enslave ourselves to other things. But Jesus by his death has paid the price so that we can be have our freedom bought for us.

Free from the penalty of sin free from the power of sin and one day we'll be free from the presence of sin. So that the Christian is 100% sure of their weakness nothing to boast in before God and 100% confident of God's approval thanks to Christ and his work on the cross.

Saying with the hymn writer I will not boast in anything no gifts no power no wisdom but I will boast in Jesus Christ his death and resurrection for his wounds have paid my ransom.

[ 25 : 37 ] and it's wonderful the more that you can stand in that boast in day to day life because sometimes some of us we believe that when it comes to God but we still go out from here into the world feeling burdened by what other people think of us.

If you're a Christian you don't need to prove yourself to anyone. By all means strive for excellence for God strive to do your best with what God's given you to please him.

do things with all your heart as working for him but you can remember that whenever you fall whenever you don't hit the mark Christ is my righteousness my holiness my redemption he set me free so that I really would be free from other people's verdict on me and the one judge whose verdict matters over my life will stand up and applaud me thanks to him.

Someone else has the standards for you have no hold on you. Jesus lived a magnificent life a life of perfect poise always wise always compassionate he always knew what to do he always knew what to say they couldn't find any fault with him and we have confidence to stand because we stand with him we boast in him and because of that immense power of the cross it was also the fullness of Paul's ministry so that's our third point the unimpressive preacher of the cross so he reminds them what he was like let's pick things up again in verse 1 of chapter 2 and so it was with me brothers and sisters when I came to you I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaim to you the testimony about God for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified I resolved to know nothing except him and him crucified when Paul arrived in Corinth he was still reeling because riots had thrown him out in Berea and Thessalonica so he says in verse 3

I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling he didn't arrive full of charisma and self-confidence how did he persuade people in pagan Corinth that Jesus was real well verse 4 my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on God's power now we shouldn't mishear Paul he's not saying that he was deliberately foolish he's not kind of daft about deliberately not being clear in how he communicates he was obviously a very clear communicator and when we read about his ministry and acts we hear words like he reasoned he persuaded he proved that Jesus was the Messiah but when people heard Paul they didn't go away thinking what a magnificent speaker they went away thinking what a magnificent saviour and in that

[ 28 : 44 ] Paul was a deliberate reaction to the kind of public speaking of his day it's quite hard for us to think of what it was like because we're used today to people just speaking quite plainly but in those days oratory was a skill that people trained in for years and you would listen to a speaker if they were impressive in their rhetoric and their oratory that's what would make you listen so if Paul had adopted those techniques he would have drawn in a great crowd but people might have thought afterwards was it really the power of God that stirred me in that message or did I just get swept along by human methods so instead Paul says he says in 2 Corinthians 4 his next letter to this church that his goal was to set forth the truth plainly he says here in verse 3 it was nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified and in verse 4 it demonstrated the Holy Spirit's power how did it do that well when people believe that simple message that message that seems so foolish so weak and it transformed their lives what else could explain that other than that

God is at work here the power of the Spirit of God and so it's worth as we hear about Paul's ministry it's worth asking ourselves where we might start misplacing our trust in our passion to see results from our outreach and mission do we sometimes put our trust in a particular leader because of particular charisma or skill every so often a new Christian speaker emerges and the church falls for it again we get enchanted by the podcasts the YouTube channel and we say oh have you heard him he's such a good communicator he's so prophetic at last someone that our young people will listen to do we fall for that or is our danger that we we look for leaders who we think the world might find more impressive would we think of that for our next minister of our church we think well let's get

them because they've really harnessed social media or look at their stage presence surely people will come for that sometimes we also we have ministries we've had ministries and we have ministries in our country that target people like that and we have this ministry strategy that says well if we can reach the brightest and best then they can have the big impact and reach everyone else and it's good to try and reach everyone wherever they are so it's great to reach bright good impressive people if in the same way that we should try and reach everyone but how does that kind of strategy of reach the best to reach the rest fit with

God's way of choosing those who are lowly and weak the people who are not to shame those who are the weak to shame the strong and isn't this encouraging for you and me that you might not be a former national sports champion but according to these verses could we not expect that God can especially use you in serving him not when you feel most strong but perhaps when you feel most weak and it moves you to depend on him and people see that it's him at work God saves unimpressive people through an unimpressive message delivered by unimpressive messengers so that we can all see that the power is from him I was just thinking of one example of that in 1955 Billy Graham the American evangelist went to Cambridge to speak at their week of events their university mission and because it was

Cambridge and it was a high profile university it caused public clamor and uproar there were letters written to national newspapers about how outrageous it was that this American with such a primitive non-academic message about Jesus would be speaking at Cambridge University people said he would be laughed out of court and Billy Graham reacted to that he was sensitive to that so he swatted up on reading philosophers and he changed his approach and tried to connect with these academic students by quoting different philosophers and trying to make his message more sophisticated and after a few days he realised he wasn't connecting with people and on the fourth day he realised that he just needed to do what he would normally do and preach the simple message of the cross so he prepared a talk and he prayed for God's help and he spoke about the blood of Jesus and he spoke through the Bible about how all through the Bible from Abraham going up the mountain with Isaac and God providing the ram in his place right through the Passover to how God needed a blood sacrifice and that

Jesus came and his blood was shed that we could be forgiven and people were crowded in the church where he preached and he invited people forward to respond to the message and ask Jesus for forgiveness and 450 people came forward that night an astonishing extraordinary work of God and a man who was there who said that when he was there he was sat next to a university dean who thought the message would have no impact and years later he met a young minister and he said to him when did things start first start to fall into place for you with the Christian faith and he said Billy Graham Cambridge 1955 and he said which night and he said the fourth night and he said why and he said I can't remember much about what was said but I remember leaving that evening and thinking to myself for the first time Jesus really did die for me people thought it would have no impact it was the power of the cross God used it to transform people's lives and their eternities let's pray together the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of

[ 35 : 14 ] God we praise you holy God and loving heavenly father for your grace and kindness to us in the work of your son for your wisdom that devised this plan to call those who are not and shame the world's ways of being proud we thank you for your grace that you would call us to hear that message that we might be invited to turn and be saved and boast in Christ our righteousness holiness and redemption may you be at work in our hearts that we would not boast in anything other than him and him crucified and may that message mark our ministries our mission and our lives as we go from here into your world for his name's sake amen to and all to him