

“The Cross of Christ”

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2026 - CALEB STARR



Summary - "The Cross of Christ"

This week's message comes from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2, but to fully understand the context, we must first go back a few years to his first visit to the Corinthians in Acts 18. When Paul first came to Corinth, he preached Jesus in the synagogue, was driven out, and simply kept preaching next door. People believed and a church was born. For eighteen months his strategy never changed: preach Christ, teach the Word. The church in Corinth had been planted and new believers were growing in their faith. By the time he writes this letter (1 Corinthians), things have drifted. The church has split into fan clubs – "I follow Paul," "I follow Apollos" – and they have started to prize what their city prized: polished speech, impressive personalities, crowd-moving rhetoric. The sermon argues that this was never just about style. When the messenger becomes the attraction, the message of the cross gets pushed to the side in order for the messenger and his message to look impressive. Here lies the issue: the cross of Calvary was never meant to impress anyone. To the world it looks foolish and weak. To those being saved, it is the power of God. So here in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 Paul reminds them how he came. He refused lofty speech. He decided to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and him crucified. He came in weakness, fear, and much trembling. All of it was intentional – so that their faith would rest not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. A crucified message, carried by a crucified man. The call is personal and searching: Where is your confidence resting? Not on a gifted preacher, a polished program, or your own ability to impress – but on Christ crucified, and on the Spirit who still transforms lives through weak, humble, ordinary people.

Scripture - 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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.](#) 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Daily Reflection Questions (Use T.R.U.T.H. below)

DAY 1 | ACTS 18:1-11 – PREACH CHRIST, TEACH THE WORD. Verse 11 says Paul stayed "a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." What does your own steady diet of God's Word honestly look like right now – and what would it take to make it less occasional and more consistent?

DAY 2 | 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25 – THE FOOLISHNESS THAT SAVES. Verse 18 says the word of the cross is "folly to those who are perishing." When has your faith in a crucified Savior felt foolish or embarrassing in front of others – and what did you do with that feeling? Verse 25 says "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." What is one area of your life where you are leaning on what the world calls smart – a strategy, a résumé, a plan – more than on what God has said?

DAY 3 | 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31 – CONSIDER YOUR CALLING. Verse 26 says, "consider your calling, brothers." When you think honestly about where you were when Christ found you, what does that tell you about whose work your salvation really is? Verse 31 says, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." In conversations with coworkers or friends, what do you most naturally brag about – and what would it sound like to steer one of those conversations toward what the Lord has done?

DAY 4 | 2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-7 – TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY. Verse 5 says, "what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." In the way you talk about your faith, your church, or your serving, how much of it points to you – and how much points to Jesus? Verse 7 calls us "jars of clay." What weakness or limitation are you most embarrassed by – and how might God want to use that very thing to show someone in your small group or family that the power belongs to Him?

DAY 5 | 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10 – POWER MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS. Paul says he will "boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses." Who in your life – a friend, a small group member, a family member – needs to hear honestly about one of your weaknesses so they can see how God's grace has held you?

Daily Real Time with God (T.R.U.T.H)

T TALK TO GOD IN PRAYER- Start by asking God to help you understand the text and prepare your heart.

R READ THE BIBLICAL TEXT- Read the initial text, then read it again to look for key words and context clarity.

U UNDERSTAND THE TEXT - Explore who wrote the book and their audience, examine verses around the text, or look up key words to better understand their meaning. Ask questions like: Is there a sin to avoid? A promise to claim? A command to obey? What does it teach about God?

T THINK ABOUT AND APPLY THE TEXT- How does this verse change the way you live? Is there an application or choice you need to make to live or think differently?

H HONOR GOD IN PRAYER- Pray through God's Honor/Adoration, God's Kingdom/Surrender, God's Provision/Gratitude, God's Forgiveness/Confession, and God's Power/Protection (see Matthew 6:5-15).

Tools for Further Study

- <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>
- <https://www.bibleref.com/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/>
- <https://answersingenesis.org/answers/>
- <https://gospelcoach.ai/>
- <https://carm.org/>

Key Thoughts

The Backstory: Preach Christ, Teach the Word

Before opening 1 Corinthians 2, the sermon took us back to Acts 18, where Paul first brought the gospel to Corinth on his second missionary journey. What happened there set the pattern for everything he writes later.

- Paul preached Jesus as the Messiah in the synagogue – and was opposed and reviled.
- He moved next door and kept preaching.
- Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed with his entire household, and many Corinthians believed and were baptized.
- Paul stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:11).

Put simply, Paul's strategy in Corinth was this: preach Christ, teach the Word.

The Drift: When the Messenger Becomes the Attraction

Three to five years later, a report reaches Paul from Chloe's people: the church is quarreling. "I follow Paul." "I follow Apollos." "I follow Cephas." "I follow Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:11-12). These factions were shaped more by culture than by Christ and His Word.

Somewhere along the way, the Corinthians had been drawn toward what their city prized – impressive speech, eloquence, and oratory ability. The style of the speaker began crowding out the message of the cross. That is a serious problem, because the cross has never impressed the world. Today we wear crosses as jewelry. In Paul's day, the cross was a scandal – a device for punishing the worst criminals. "A most cruel and disgusting penalty." – Cicero, Roman statesman, describing crucifixion

Paul doesn't flinch: "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" (1:18).

Consider Your Calling

To help them remember God's wisdom, Paul points the Corinthians to their own story (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Scholar David Garland compares Corinth to modern New York, Los Angeles, or Las Vegas – large, strategic, influential, impressive. But Paul reminds them:

- Not many of them were wise by worldly standards.
- Not many were powerful.
- Not many were of noble birth.

God chose what is foolish, weak, low, and despised so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Key Thoughts

Paul's conclusion: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1:31). God was at work by His grace and through His power – not because the Corinthians were impressive.

#1 – A Crucified Message (vv. 1-2)

Paul's method of preaching matched his message. Corinth prized dramatic, emotionally persuasive rhetoric – whoever could move the biggest crowd. Paul is not against logic or wisdom. He rejects a worldly wisdom that puts the spotlight on the speaker: haughty, self-glorifying, applause-driven, and devoid of the power of God. They may have called it persuasion. Paul would have called it manipulation.

This doesn't mean we stop sharing the gospel with passion, or stop seeking God's wisdom for how to share it well. It means we must never assume God needs a worldly metric to make the gospel effective. They were searching for a master speaker; Paul wanted them to be mastered by the gospel.

In verse 2, Paul says he decided (ESV) – resolved (NIV), determined (NASB) – to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and him crucified. His mind was made up. He wasn't passing along good advice; he was proclaiming good news. Not self-improvement, but self-denial. Not what we can do for ourselves, but what Christ has already done on our behalf.

"If we are good people who have lost our way, but with the proper instruction and motivation can become a better person, we need only a life coach, not a redeemer." – Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity*

"Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's demands... all for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thou alone." – Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages"

The proof of the gospel's power was never applause or a crowd. It is a transformed life – and the power to transform lives is not in a skillful speaker but in the Spirit of God. As one story goes, a group of American pastors visiting London in the 1880s heard a famous preacher and left saying, "What a great preacher!" The next Sunday they heard Charles Spurgeon and left saying, "What a great Savior!"

"We might preach until our tongues are rotted... but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word of God to give it the power to convert the soul." – Charles Spurgeon

Key Thoughts

#2 – A Crucified Man (vv. 3-5)

A crucified message was carried by a crucified man. Corinth prized strength and self-reliance; Paul came "in weakness and in fear and much trembling." Not in his own power, not by the popular methods of the day – but with humility, dependence on Christ, and a sense of the weight of what he was proclaiming.

"Crucified preaching only can give life. Crucified preaching can come only from a crucified man." – E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*

Paul's posture echoes 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." The fruit of the gospel is a supernatural work – the power of God, in the Word of God, through the Spirit of God.

The sermon told of a blind, uneducated, 70-year-old woman in Africa who asked her missionary to underline John 3:16 in red in her French Bible. She sat outside a boys' school, asked students to read the underlined verse aloud, and then told them about Christ. Over the years, 24 of those young men became pastors. God does not need current trends, human wisdom, or worldly metrics.

The Point: Faith That Rests on the Power of God (v. 5)

Why did Paul refuse lofty speech, resolve to preach Christ alone, and come in fear and trembling? Verse 5 gives the reason: "so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

- The wisdom of men says: look to self, rely on self, exalt self, impress the audience, win the crowd.
- The wisdom of God says: look to the cross.

"He didn't want them to have a new philosophy, but new life." – John MacArthur

"We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7). And the clearest picture of God's wisdom is Christ Himself, who "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him" (Phil. 2:8-9).

The closing challenge: Where is your faith resting? Not on a gifted preacher, a polished program, or your own ability to impress – but on Jesus Christ and him crucified.

G.R.A.C.E Questions

ICE BREAKER: What's the most over-the-top, unnecessarily dramatic way you've ever seen someone do something simple? (A gender reveal with fireworks, a 40-slide PowerPoint for a family meeting, a three-minute voicemail that could've been a text – go.)

G – GIVE YOUR LIFE TO CHRIST - Surrender, both initially and daily

- Paul says 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” (Corinthians 1:18). When did the cross stop looking foolish to you and start looking like your only hope? If that hasn’t happened yet, what’s still standing in the way?
- Paul's message called for self-denial, not self-improvement. What would daily surrender to Christ look like in the most ordinary part of your day – and who in your family would be the first to notice the difference?

R – REAL TIME WITH GOD - Bible reading, prayer, scripture memory, journaling

- Paul warned against faith that rests on a speaker. Whose voice do you take in most during the week – sermons, podcasts, online teachers – and how much of that time is actually spent in the Bible itself versus admiring the message and/or the person explaining it?
- Paul came “in weakness and in fear and much trembling.” When you pray, do you bring God your real weakness, or a polished version of yourself? What would an honest prayer about one specific weakness sound like this week, and who in your small group could you ask to pray with you regarding it?

A – ACT IN OBEDIENCE - Following through on what God is teaching

- Paul stayed in Corinth “a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them,” steady faithfulness through opposition (see Acts 18:11). Where are you tempted to quit something God has called you to because the results look small or slow?
- Paul came “in weakness and in fear and much trembling” – and still obeyed. Where is fear holding you back right now, maybe in a conversation with a coworker or family member, and what is one step you could take anyway?

C – COMMIT TO COMMUNITY - Accountability, discipleship, doing life together

- The Corinthian church split into camps, each claiming to be the better group. Where do you notice “us vs. them” thinking creeping into your church relationships, whether over a preference, a style, or a person? What would it look like for the cross to level that ground?
- Paul was honest about his weakness and fear. What would it take for your small group to be a place where people admit weakness instead of performing strength – and what is one thing you could be honest about first?

E – ENGAGE YOUR WORLD - Stewardship of your life, influence, and mission

- What weakness or fear have you used as a reason not to talk about Jesus with a neighbor or coworker, and how does this passage (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) challenge that excuse?
- The sermon said the proof of the gospel's power isn't applause, but a transformed life. What specific change has Christ made in you that a friend or neighbor could actually see – and how could you tell that story this week?

“...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Real Time with God

T . R . U . T . H .

DATE ____ / ____ / ____

T TALK TO GOD IN PRAYER

LORD, AS I OPEN YOUR WORD TODAY...

R READ THE BIBLICAL TEXT

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

WRITE THE WORD:

KEY WORDS:

U UNDERSTAND THE TEXT

CONTEXT: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What did this passage mean to its original audience? What is happening in the verses around it? What do other passages or cross-references say about it? (Let Scripture interpret Scripture.)

KEY WORD MEANINGS: Look up the key words you found above (Blue Letter Bible works well). Write each word and what it means, however many you find.

ASK QUESTIONS LIKE: *Is there a sin to avoid? • A promise to claim? • A command to obey? • What does it teach about God?*

MAIN POINT: In one sentence, what is this passage saying?



T THINK ABOUT AND APPLY THE TEXT

Is the verse or text applicable to you, and if so, how? How does this verse change the way you live? Is there an application or choice you need to make to live or think differently?

SHARE IT: Who will I share this with this week?

H HONOR GOD IN PRAYER (MATTHEW 6:5-15)

Prayer is honest conversation with God. It is personal, as you humble your own heart, mind, and soul before God, and it is also communal, as you pray for others. Jesus taught us to pray "our" and "us," so as you pray personally, pray also for family, friends, your church, your community, and those who do not yet know Christ (1 Timothy 2:1).

GOD'S HONOR / ADORATION Matthew 6:9

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

GOD'S KINGDOM / SURRENDER Matthew 6:10

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

GOD'S PROVISION / GRATITUDE Matthew 6:11

"Give us this day our daily bread."

GOD'S FORGIVENESS / CONFESSION Matthew 6:12, 14-15

"...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

GOD'S POWER / PROTECTION Matthew 6:13

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."