

# SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## “Mind Matters: The Power of the Cross’

Rev. Mark Lampley

1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 and Proverbs 9:10

January 5, 2025

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*“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel— and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe.*

*For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. **The Word of the Lord... Thanks be to God.***

In this section, we focus on Jesus instead of the messenger. God wisely shows power through the work of Jesus on the cross. Fred Craddock concisely says, the “prideful confidence in human wisdom is antithetical to the deepest logic of the gospel.”

To be wise we need only to trust the cross-work of Jesus. We don’t qualify to deliver the gospel on our own merit, rather God does the work through us by the Holy Spirit. This shows God’s power instead of putting a light on a limited person, even if that person is: popular, silver-tongued, or influential.

Let’s imagine you are downtown Knoxville waiting for someone. Maybe it’s Market Square, Old Town or at Thompson Bolling Arena. You strike up a conversation with someone nearby. You’re reviewing Christmas break. The topic of religion comes up.

Next thing you know they ask: Why was Jesus even born? What was his purpose?... How would you respond?

You might feel like you’re **sinking**. You pray for wisdom. You muddle through some reply, but probably leave wondering how the Church has historically addressed such questions.

As blunt and somber as it may seem, the Church has said Jesus was born to die. It may sound foolish, but “the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Saying Jesus was born to die may be a little stunning; a little shocking to be talking about dying right after the Christmas emphasis on his birth however, this is exactly what God often does.

God has a consistent pattern of shockingly intervening... to save and to transform.

The importance of the way of the cross influences all things, even religious conversations with strangers. It transformed everything. It may look like nonsense to one lost in a perishing world, yet it is the power of God for salvation to those who believe. God’s sovereign plan is a beautiful expression of mercy for humanity and all of creation.

“When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through... Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” v. 26-30:

*Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 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; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to abolish things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.*

*In contrast, God is why you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”* **The Word of the Lord... Thanks be to God**

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As an illustration, Paul points out his missionary preaching. He reminds them that he did not preach with dazzling rhetoric or intricate wisdom. Instead, he simply proclaimed God’s work in his life.

Likewise, we can personally testify about God transforming us. This is our most powerful evangelical witness. We just trust the Spirit to lead in telling our story.

No one can argue with our own experience of encountering God or interpreting God at work in us. We are wise when we say how we have surrendered our heart to God. We may come across foolish declaring our weakness, yet in that very weakness we boast in God’s strength. When we claim our shortcomings for God’s sake, we become wise. Telling this is what makes our testimony powerful and effective. Not what we did, but what God did!

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To be humble in the Lord is to be wise. Paul wisely elevates God’s work above himself. He does this for God to have the credit.

He’s emulating Jesus, of course. Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

Author Max Lucado suggests for us to follow Jesus, we need to "tank our reputation." He points out that Luke wrote two of the most important books of the Bible but never once pinned his own name. King David wrote no song celebrating his victory over Goliath. But, he wrote a public poem on penitence confessing his sin with Bethsheba (see Psalm 51).

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In this section, we focus on Jesus instead of the messenger. God wisely shows power through the work of Jesus on the cross. Fred Craddock concisely says, the “prideful confidence in human wisdom is antithetical to the deepest logic of the gospel.”

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As an illustration, Paul points out his missionary preaching. He reminds them that he did not preach with dazzling rhetoric or intricate wisdom. Instead, he simply proclaimed God’s work in his life.

Likewise, we can personally testify about God transforming us. This is our most powerful evangelical witness. We just trust the Spirit to lead in telling our story.

No one can argue with our own experience of encountering God or interpreting God at work in us. We are wise when we say how we have surrendered our heart to God. We may come across foolish declaring our weakness, yet in that very weakness we boast in God’s strength. When we claim our shortcomings for God’s sake, we become wise. Telling this is what makes our testimony powerful and effective. Not what we did, but what God did!

Listen how Paul self-deprecates in light of the gospel... v. 2:1-5

*When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the testimony of God to you with superior speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

*And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were made not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”* **The Word of the Lord... Thanks be to God**

To be humble in the Lord is to be wise. Paul wisely elevates God’s work above himself. He does this for God to have the credit.

He’s emulating Jesus, of course. Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

Author Max Lucado suggests for us to follow Jesus, we need to "tank our reputation." He points out that Luke wrote two of the most important books of the Bible but never once pinned his own name. King David wrote no song celebrating his victory over Goliath. But, he wrote a public poem on penitence confessing his sin with Bethsheba (see Psalm 51).

Then there's Joseph. The quiet father of Jesus. Rather than make a name for himself, Joseph made a home for Christ. He brought him into his heart and family. He named him "Jesus", God saves.

Being humble allows God to shine. That’s being wise to put God above everything else. When we humble our own ambitions before an all-seeing, all-knowing God, we understand OUR limitations and sinfulness. By faith, we see how the cross differentiates between the creature and Creator.

And because of Jesus' sacrifice, we're convicted how we should and shouldn't treat others. We become wise about choice A vs. choice B when God has a say in all choices and their outcomes for His ultimate glorious purposes.

God chooses what seems foolish to us to capitalize on the power of the cross. May we be wise to humbly embrace God's Christmas gift that grew to die for us. It's foolish to live the Christian life without keeping Christ's saving work central. If you're already feeling like you're **drowning**, even 5 short days into 2025, to

set your mind to remember Jesus is the Rock. He is the Way. He is the one who can set our feet on dry ground to make our footsteps firm... in this New Year and always.