

**I CORINTHIANS 2:1-5**  
**THE MESSENGER!**

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Corinthians chapter 2 as we continue our in-depth study of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth.

As we will see in our study, Paul is going to speak about his first visit to Corinth.

To help set the stage for what we will be studying this morning, keep in mind that before Paul went to Corinth he went to Athens where he encountered the Epicurean philosophers who felt the chief purpose in life was pleasure, happiness. It wasn't that they denied the existence of god, but they felt the gods did not interact with man.

Also, Paul encountered the Stoics who were pantheistic in their beliefs, believing that everything was god and god was everything.

Both these groups were the intellectuals of their day, and they were trying to explain life but in doing so they negated the Giver and the Sustainer of life, Jesus Christ!

Please understand that they were looking for new things, things that would tickle their ears but not change their lives. They just wanted information but it did nothing for them in the end.

And as Paul spoke to these philosophers on Mar's Hill in Acts chapter 17, he did so in a philosophical way, he touched briefly on the resurrection but mostly spoke on their level.

The result of his efforts, "**And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.' So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed . . .**" Acts 17:32-34a.

These men, like many people today, like to hear new things, new information but that is all it is, **NEW!**

It doesn't change them; it doesn't move them and the words that Paul shared with them went in one ear and out the other, as I have said.

Many of the people who listened to Paul left just as they came, lost and dead in their trespasses and sins outside of Christ!

Now you would think that maybe Paul should have a band go along with him, and maybe a smoke machine with a great light show to get their attention. Maybe that is what he should do when he goes to Corinth!

Some may feel that way, but not Paul.

As Paul goes to Corinth, he continues to keep the main thing the main thing!

What is the main thing?

It is **JESUS CHRIST AND HIS RESURRECTION** of course!

One writer summed it up for us like this,

***Paul proclaimed the gospel of Christ crucified constantly in his ministry to the Corinthians so that their faith would stand in God's power, not men. In so doing, he brought them into a relationship with the Holy Spirit, the source of all true spirituality.***

- Dan Mitchell – First Corinthians – Christianity in a Hostile Culture, p. 35

And we will see that in our study this morning. That Paul's message was upon Christ, and it was not empowered by the wisdom of man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We also need to keep in mind that the Corinthians were a wild group of people. In fact, they were known for their immoral lifestyles!

They loved philosophy, they loved human wisdom, and this had come into the church, and it started to divide the church!

And, as we have seen and will continue to see, Paul is going to address that carnal spirit that they had, even though they thought they were so spiritual! They were not!

And, as we will see as we look at I Corinthians chapter 2, Paul continues on speaking about what he spoke of in chapter 1. He is speaking of the cross and the power of God to salvation.

Remember what he said in I Corinthians 1:21-24, **“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”**

You see, man’s wisdom says that you have to do some great thing, you have to accomplish some great feat to get to heaven or come before God.

But Paul was telling them that it is not through human wisdom that we are saved, we are saved by the life and death of Jesus Christ as He paid in full the penalty for our sins.

It is what Jesus has done and not what we have done.

It seemed foolish to the Greeks and to the Jews, it was a stumbling block because they felt the only way to approach God was through sacrifices.

The Jews were partly right.

It was **THE** sacrifice of Jesus for our sins that paid our debt, a debt we could never repay for our sins. It was a once and for all sacrifice, not a daily sacrifice.

A lamb could never take away your sins, but **THE LAMB**, Jesus Christ could and did!

We must come to God through Jesus and Paul is going to continue showing us that this is a heavenly wisdom and not a human wisdom.

Keep in mind how immoral Corinth was, and one writer, in expounding on what Paul was to do, he tells us also what he didn't do to bring the Gospel message to them.

He wrote,

It is often assumed that there are only two ways for us to engage our cities, our culture, and the world.

We tend to think that either we are going to become overly protective and separatistic, or we are going to assimilate and become just like the world.

But Jesus tells his disciples in John 17 that we are to be in the world but not of the world (vv. 15-18).

In other words, we are not called to under-contextualize (becoming evasive) or to over-adapt (becoming accommodating).

Instead we are called to be a countercultural alternative society of God's people – to be a light to the world and salt to the earth.

This was the very tension that the Corinthians believers faced in their own particular context – the dual dangers of separatism and assimilation, of isolation and absorption, both of which are equal threats to the gospel.

Like Paul in his day, we face the same problems as we try to engage in this world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And I truly believe what Paul has for us here is so important.

It is never the power of man but the power of God working in us and through us.

And as I have shared with you before, we try to accomplish these things by the wisdom of man, the plans of man, the programs of man and the list just goes on, but the focus is always man!

***“Then what are we supposed to do Pastor Joe? How are we to get the Gospel message out?”***

Let me show you why we are losing this battle and as you hear this, please understand that this is in direct opposition to how the early church functioned.

In America, about 69% believe they are Christians. And here is the incredible thing. More than half of them say that the Holy Spirit is not real!

According to a new study, more than half, (58%) of self-identified Christians in America say the Holy Spirit is not a real, living being.

Then what do they say of the Holy Spirit?

They believe that the Holy Spirit is just a symbol of God’s power, His presence and even His purity. Not sure how that all works out!

What is even worse is that those who claim to be born again Christians, those numbers are even higher!

Here we see 62% of them saying the Holy Spirit is not God!

And even those who have the most biblical world view, they know the Bible and they believe the Bible as they live it out, 40% hold the unbiblical view that the Holy Spirit is not God!

Let me just show you a few things to show you that the Holy Spirit is real because this will lead to what Paul has to say in our study this morning!

First of all, in Acts chapter 5 we see the story of Ananias and Sapphira who sold a piece of property and kept a portion of the profits for themselves.

There was nothing wrong with doing that, but it is what he told Peter that was wrong.

He told Peter that he was giving all the money from the sale of this property to Peter for the church.

And this is what we are told in Acts 5:3, **“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?’”**

If the Holy Spirit is not a person, then how can you lie to a symbol?

You can’t!

But if you still struggle with this, then listen to what Peter says about the Holy Spirit, something that you don’t need to know Greek to understand. God does not hide this, but it is in plain sight for all to see and believe!

In Acts 5:4 Peter continues to speak to Ananias, and he tells him, **“While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”**

Peter is telling us that what Ananias has done is that he has lied to the Holy Spirit, Acts 5:3, and not just the Holy Spirit, but to God, (Acts 5:4).

In other words, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity, He is God!

And we can see this in Ephesians 4:30, where the Holy Spirit can be ***GRIEVED!***

Also, in Hebrews 10:29 the Holy Spirit can be ***INSULTED!***

And just one more, and there are others. But in Romans 8:26-27 we see that the Holy Spirit can ***HELP AND INTERCEDE ON OUR BEHALF!***

And it is hard for a symbol, or a force or whatever you may think the Holy Spirit is to do that.

But it is not hard for the Holy Spirit to do anything because He is God and He is living!

So what is my point?

My point is this. If we are not relying on the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives to help us move the Gospel message forward, then what are we relying on?

I will tell you and it is not good.

We are placing our faith upon – ***THE PROGRAMS OF MAN!***

If you doubt that then please listen to this and I will show you how far the church today has moved away from the first century church.

And I am not saying that they were perfect, they were not. But they depended upon the Holy Spirit to move the Gospel message forward!

Let me give you this example.

In Acts chapter 4 Peter and John were arrested by the Jewish religious leaders for preaching the Gospel. This was all born out of the man who was lame all his life, some forty years, and Peter raised up and he not only stood on his feet, but he could walk and jump around!

And this was done all in the name of Jesus and thus, it offended these Jewish religious leaders.

It bothered them so much that these Jewish religious leaders arrested and threatened Peter and John. But they had nothing to hold them and thus, they finally released them.

As they were released, they went back to their brethren and shared what God was doing.

I want you to listen closely to their prayer, what is was for, what they wanted to do.

In Acts 4:29-31 we are told, “**Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.**”

First of all, notice what they didn’t pray for! They didn’t pray to be delivered from the Jewish religious leaders, to be spared from their threats!

I find that interesting because I think that is what we would be praying for.

Then what did they pray for?

That they would speak with boldness the Word of God!

That God would work signs and wonders through them!

And what was the result of their prayer?

They were empowered by the Holy Spirit!

And here is the key – ***THE SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD WITH BOLDNESS!***

And the reason that they could do that was that they were – ***EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT!***

Again, that is what is lacking today!

We tend to be more program driven than Spirit lead!

Paul is going to show us that in our study this morning in a message that I have called – ***THE MESSENGER!***

I have broken down the verses we will be looking at this morning into the following main points.

They are,

***THE FOCUS OF THE MESSAGE – I CORINTHIANS 2:1-2***

***THE WEAKNESS OF MAN – I CORINTHIANS 2:3-4a***

***THE POWER OF GOD – I CORINTHIANS 2:4b-5***

So with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in I Corinthians chapter 2, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this topic –

***THE MESSENGER!***

## **1 CORINTHIANS 2**

### **VERSES 1-2**

When Paul arrived in Corinth, you can read of that in Acts chapter 18, he met a Christian couple named Aquila and Priscilla. They were tent makers, as Paul was. And as Paul ministered to the people of Corinth for more than a year and a half he was able to support himself by his tent making!

What I want you to see here is that Paul did not come to Corinth as some philosopher or salesman, like he did in Athens.

No, he came as a **witness** of the living God, Jesus Christ!

And for Paul, I think he was down after his time in Athens. Things did not go well there, there was not much fruit there.

The question you may have regarding this, is ***“Why was there not much fruit there in Athens? They let him speak to them. So what happened?”***

This could have been the issue.

When you read of this in Acts chapter 17 you will find that Paul never tells them about Jesus Christ being crucified. In fact, you never hear Paul speak forth clearly about Jesus Christ dying for their sins, which is interesting to me.

Keep in mind that these were the brilliant men of that area. Thus, he spoke to them in a philosophical manner as well as trying to be very professional.

And what is interesting is that we don't see a church established there in Athens!

Now he is in the middle of this wicked, immoral place called Corinth! Make no mistake about it, Corinth was a very dark place!

But now things have changed. He is going to present things clearly to them. In other words, Paul needed to keep the main thing the main thing and so do we!

What is the main thing?

Listen to what Paul said in I Corinthians 2:2, **“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”**

There it is! And yet, we think we need to be so eloquent in our speech.

Let me give you an example to show you what I mean.

Helena Modjeska was a famous actress at the turn of the 20th century.

Once at a party she was asked to perform.

She presented an amazing oratory in her native Polish tongue.

The crowd was riveted to every word.

Her presentation was powerful, emotion-packed, and soul-stirring!

I mean, can you imagine!

But there is the rest of the story!

Later it was revealed that all Modjeska had done was recite the Polish alphabet!

I love that. But there is a problem with that as we can see, and we can also get caught up doing the same thing.

There are preachers, there are Christians, who try to impress with their Polish, you might say, but they don't really say anything!

And let me be clear on this. They can say *“nothing”* better than you've ever heard it said before and you will be taken in, captivated by it! But in the end, it is – ***NOTHING!***

Remember in Athens, Paul had waxed eloquently with his words among the Athenians - and it got him nowhere.

But now in Corinth he learned, **“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”**

He no longer got caught up in philosophical debates or side issues, but Christ crucified, the power of God unto salvation.

Many cults, false religions will love to take you down these rabbit holes of debating all kinds of things. Keep the main thing the main thing – Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead for our salvation!

You see, if a preacher or any Christian for that matter, is not careful, he will get in the way of the gospel instead of being a servant of the gospel.

They can obscure Jesus by their preaching, either in the presentation or the message.

Let me explain it like this.

There was this little girl who went to church with her dad. And the pastor was a big man, and he filled the pulpit, so much so that it was hard for the little girl to see the stained-glass windows behind him, which had a picture of Jesus on it.

One Sunday the usual pastor was not there, and a smaller man was there at the pulpit.

And during the service the little girl asked her dad, ***“Where’s the man who usually stands there so we can’t see Jesus?”***

Be careful on Facebook or other social media sights. Keep the main thing the main thing. I am not saying that you can’t talk about different issues, but remember that Jesus is the main thing and if we don’t speak of Jesus, we are not giving to them what they need to hear!

That is the main thing and folks, may we keep it the main thing as Paul said in Romans 1:16-17, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”**

The problem for us is just what the Corinthians were dealing with.

What do I mean by that?

I mean that the wisdom of the world sounds so impressive, and people can be very confident about it.

We are bombarded with all kinds of media grabbing for our attention from newspapers, magazines, television, all the social media sights that are out there today and what are they trying to do?

They are trying to conform you into the image that they want instead of being transformed by the Lord as He renews our mind as we read His Word!

Yes, the wisdom of the world is attractive, it wants us to seek after the good life, whatever that means. We can live life with gusto, we need to go after the real thing if we truly want to be beautiful people!

I remember growing up as a teenager, I found out that Brut after shave attracted women!

Yes, I was not shaving yet, but so what, it will attract women to me like some kind of magnet!

There were a few different slogans for this aftershave. Here is one of them, ***“Brut, it smells like a man!”*** Not sure if that was a good idea or not, but yes, I am a man!

There was also Hai Karate, and its slogan was, ***“Be careful how you use it.”***

That was intriguing to me, but I was afraid to use it! I did not want all those women coming after me!

And I will let you in on a little secret, Brut did not help my dating life!

My point is that it is easy to conform to what society is doing. They will catch you and they won't let you go until you buy their product. Their commercials are very good and the same is true with the news. They grab you and they won't let go until you conform to what they want you to be!

Think about it. We are being bombarded again and again, constantly saturated with the idea that if we just know the right things, if we take the right course, if we get involved in the right program, or if we learn how to try to develop these things within us by meditative processes and various other methods, we will achieve what we are after. It always sounds so beautiful.

Those are the lies of the Devil who wants to destroy your life not give you life. And yes, in his schemes there is some pleasure, but it is short lived and devastating in the end!

But if you really want to go for the gusto, then why not turn to Jesus because what we find in our Lord and Savior is life and not just life but – ***ABUNDANT LIFE!***

Think about this life that Jesus has given to us. He is the One who has opened the door to salvation for us!

He speaks to us, guides us and directs our lives!

He also provides for us and cares for us!

In other words, Jesus Christ gives to us – ***ABUNDANT LIFE!***

Look at the comparison that Jesus gives to us and what that thief, the Devil does. We are told in John 10:10, **“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”**

That Greek word for **“abundant”** is *PERISSON* and it speaks of being *“exceedingly, very highly, beyond measure, more, superfluous, a quantity so abundant as to be considerably more than what one would expect or anticipate.”*

In short, Jesus promises us a life far better than we could ever imagine. Abundant life is eternal life, a life that begins the moment we come to Christ and receive Him as Savior, and goes on throughout all eternity.

Make no mistake about it, the cross is not only the central message of the gospel but it’s also the central message of our entire Christian lives.

Paul never burned out because his goal was simple and singular, never changing, never wavering. **“I came to you,”** he said, **“preaching nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”**

I know, some may be thinking, ***“Get real Pastor Joe! Be practical Pastor Joe! I am having problems with my marriage! I am having problems with work! I am having problems with my children! Let’s face it Pastor Joe, I am having problems and how in the world is this going to help me?”***

Well, if all that is happening to you, you should write a country song! Just kidding.

What Paul said is the solution to the problem. And we will see Paul speak of this over and over in this epistle, the solution to every problem that plagues every person is the same – ***JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED!***

You must lay your life at the foot of the cross, place your problems at the foot of the cross and you will see healing in your life!

Let me give you this example.

Moses and the children of Isreal have crossed through the Red Sea and the whole Egyptian army was drowned in those waters.

They had a great victory. And now they are three days out and they are traveling in the wilderness and there is no water.

Keep in mind that there were some 3 million or more people without water!

As they have just seen this great victory, their deliverance from Egypt, they are now heading to the Promise Land, we are told in Exodus 15:23-27, **“Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, and said, ‘If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you.’ Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters.”**

Can you imagine as they first saw this water, some probably ran and jumped right in and as they tasted it, well, the waters were bitter, undrinkable.

All that water and they could not drink it!

But, instead of bringing it to the Lord they complained to Moses.

I wonder how often we do that. Instead of bringing a situation to the Lord, we complain.

I think John Newton in his song *Amazing Grace* spells it out for us as he wrote,

***“Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; ‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”***

Amen to that! And we may sing it, but do we believe it? He will lead us home!

And yet, we see so many Christians who believe that God was able to save them, but then it is up to them to work hard, stay saved to make it home.

Paul dealt with that issue in Galatians where he wrote, **“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth . . . Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”** Galatians 3:1, 3.

I think that is very clear. Our God is more than able, never forget that!

So we see that the children of Israel complained to Moses instead of bringing their requests, their concerns before the Lord.

But Moses does bring this to the Lord and the Lord shows him a tree and tells Him to cast it into the water and those bitter waters would be made sweet, and they were!

So why did He do it?

It does sound crazy, right?

And more importantly, what does that have to do with us as Christians?

When we find ourselves in bitter situations, around bitter people, having a bitter expression, it is only when we place another tree in the midst of those waters that the situation will become sweet in our lives and that is the cross of Jesus Christ!

I don't care what you are going through, bitterness is not of God, but sweetness is, and that sweetness will only come as you crucify the flesh and bring it all before the Lord!

And what we are seeing here is that God used this to test them to see what was in their heart, if they would trust Him, and they did not pass the test, they are still learning.

And this was not for God; it was to show them what was in their hearts.

Folk's, God does the same in our lives as He tests our character, what we are made of – the flesh or the spirit to show us so we can crucify the flesh and be filled with the Spirit!

What is interesting to me is that after this time of testing God brings them to Elim, where there were 12 wells of water and 70 Palm trees, a place of refreshing.

God knows what we are made of and when we need rest if we would only learn to trust in Him and walk by faith.

But here's the thing. If you refuse to let go of the bitterness, then you won't find those times of refreshing. It is only when we give it to Jesus that He can take those bitter things in our lives and make them sweet, bringing to us times of refreshing!

Remember what Psalm 30:5 says, “**. . . Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning.**”

Warren Wiersbe sums it up like this for us. He wrote,

*If life were nothing but tests, we would be discouraged. If life were all pleasure, we would never learn discipline and develop character. The Lord knows how to balance the experiences of life, for He brought His people to Elim where they found plenty of water and opportunity for rest. Let's be grateful that the Lord gives us enough blessings to encourage us and enough burdens to humble us, and that He knows how much we can take.*

- Warren Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – OT, p. 171

Exactly!

Whatever situations you find yourself in, place the cross of Jesus Christ right in the middle and let Him bring the healing!

So we have seen – ***THE FOCUS OF THE MESSAGE!***

And what was that focus?

**“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”**

As we read on, we will be looking at – ***THE WEAKNESS OF MAN!***

VERSES 2:3-4a

Think about all that Paul has been through on his first missionary journey.

He is preaching as he travels from one area to another and in most places that he went to he was not well received, especially among the Jews.

While in Lystra sharing Jesus with the Jews and the Gentiles, we are told that Jews from Antioch and Iconium came down and they got the crowds listening to Paul to revolt against him and they stoned him!

But God was not done with Paul, and he stood up and went back into the city and preached the Gospel once again to them.

It was a pretty tough journey and yet it was fruitful.

Then, on Paul's second missionary journey he continues to face opposition.

In Philippi we see Paul and Silas put in prison because they cast out a demon from this young slave girl and their owners were not happy because she made them a profit with her divination. Now that was gone.

And in prison we see that the prisoners with them got saved and even the jailer and his family!

But again, this was not easy.

Things got crazy in Thessalonica, and they had to leave and go to Berea.

While there we see Jews from Thessalonica come down and stir up the crowds so much that they had to flee once again and Paul arrives in Athens, where Paul preached to these Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers. But there was not much response to the Gospel, and I am sure that discouraged Paul.

So by the time we saw Paul arrive in Corinth, he was weary, he was tired, he was discouraged, he was disheartened.

And here in Corinth Paul was in the midst of a very immoral, ungodly, very wicked city of his day. I think he was just overwhelmed by all of this.

I am sure we have been there from time to time, Paul was!

How did Paul respond to all of this?

What changed his attitude?

The Lord stepped in, and we are told in Acts 18:9-11, **“Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’ And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”**

Notice this encouragement by the Lord to Paul. He told Paul,

***DON'T BE AFRAID!***

***SPEAK!***

***DO NOT KEEP SILENT!***

***I AM WITH YOU!***

***NO ONE WILL ATTACK YOU TO HURT YOU!***

***I HAVE MANY PEOPLE IN THIS CITY!***

And what did that cause Paul to do?

He spent 18 months there in Corinth, establishing the church there because of God's encouragement to go forward!

Now some of you may be thinking, ***“Hey, that is great for Paul, but God does not speak to me! I am not hearing from God. I don't get encouragement from God!”***

That is not true. God does speak to us; we just need to pay attention.

Yes, sometimes it is an audible voice that we know is the Lord, but most of the time the Lord speaks to us through His Word!

Listen to what Peter tells us in II Peter 1:3-4 regarding what God has for us. He wrote, **“as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”**

Did you see that?

God has given to us **“exceedingly great and precious promise.”**

The bigger question is, ***“Do we believe what God has promised us, so much so that we are willing to trust in Him and walk by faith!”***

Like Paul, we need to get our eyes off the situation and focus back on God to be encouraged.

Hopelessness and despair result when we take our eyes off of God and get them on the problem. We must force ourselves to keep our eyes on God and by faith trust Him to do the impossible through us.

Make no mistake about it, Corinth was a very dark place as I have said!

And, like we have seen, Paul was so overwhelmed by it all that we are told that he came to them **“in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.”** I Corinthians 2:3.

And you look at this, and you wonder, ***“Are you kidding me? Paul was weak! Paul was fearful! Paul trembled at the work that was before him!”***

Yes, yes and yes!

And I believe, because of the encouragement of the Lord, like we have seen, Paul goes on to say, **“And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”** I Corinthians 2:4-5.

Paul first shared his human ability, his human strength, and that was not good.

That, in a sense, was – ***THE WEAKNESS OF MAN!***

Let me share this with you and then I will expound on it.

We are told,

How well are you investing the weaknesses you’ve been given?

Perhaps no one has ever asked you that question before.

Perhaps it sounds nonsensical.

After all, people invest ***assets*** in order to increase their value. They don’t invest ***liabilities***.

They try to eliminate or minimize or even cover up liabilities. It’s easy for us to see our strengths as assets. But most of us naturally consider our weaknesses as liabilities - deficiencies to minimize or cover up.

But God, in his providence, gives us our weaknesses just as he gives us our strengths.

In God’s economy, where the return on investment he most values is ***“faith working through love”*** (Galatians 5:6), weaknesses become assets - we can even call them ***talents*** - to be stewarded, to be invested. It may even be that the most valuable asset God has given you to steward is not a strength, but a weakness.

- <https://bit.ly/41CmPyN>

Why, as Christians, is being weak so important?

Because we can't trust in ourselves, our resources, what we can do but we must trust in the Lord!

In II Corinthians chapter 12 we see this played out for us.

Paul was caught up to the third heaven and he could not even find words to describe what he saw. This could have happened when they stoned Paul and left him for dead. But he rose back up and went back to preach in that city.

And because of all that Paul had seen, how God was going to use Paul that we are told in II Corinthians 12:7-10, **“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

When Paul speaks of this **“thorn in the flesh”** it is literally speaking of a tent spike some 18 inches long that was driven into the ground to hold a tent in place. That is what this felt like!

Now it was not literally a tent spike that Paul walked around with, but that is what it felt like!

And Paul prays and listen to what the Lord told Paul, **“... ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ ...”** II Corinthians 12:9.

That is not what Paul was thinking but it is what Paul needed, and the Lord knows exactly what we need to grow in the faith and to stay on the right path.

Interestingly enough, the word “sufficient” means “*bear you up; carry you.*”

And what I want you to see is that the Lord will carry us through these times. I don’t always understand it, but I trust the Lord, and that is faith! He will see me through anything that happens in my life!

We need to follow Paul’s example and not harden ourselves to what God wants to do but be open and receive it with joy knowing it is what is best for our lives, not necessarily the easiest, but the best!

And when God does answer it, don’t fight Him over it, be like Paul and just forge ahead in the work being strengthened by Him!

And yes, God at times removes the burden from our lives, the thorn in the flesh. But at other times He strengthens us to bear the load, to handle the thorn in the flesh, not by our strength but by His grace.

You see, we need to come to the end of ourselves so that we can rest in Him.

Paul realized that he was strong when he was weak, which sounds like he is contradicting himself, but he is not.

Paul is saying that he did not rest upon his own strength, in fact the times he was the strongest were when he was the weakest and rested in the Lord, the One who strengthens all of us.

It is Redpath said, “*God works through man who has been wiped clean and turned inside out, his life emptied before the Lord until he is hopelessly weak, that no flesh might glory in His presence.*”

Yes – ***THE WEAKNESS OF MAN!***

So what are we going to do?

How are we going to accomplish all these things that the Lord wants us to do?

That is our last point – ***THE POWER OF GOD!***

#### VERSES 4b-5

Remember, Paul just spoke of – ***THE WEAKNESS OF MAN!***

He wanted the Corinthians to know that he has come not in his own strength, but in the power of God that has been given to him by the Holy Spirit!

As you look at I Corinthians 2:5 again, I think it is important to understand what Paul is saying.

What do I mean?

What I mean is that many today try to draw people into the church with all kinds of different things.

But let me say this. What you draw them with is what you draw them to! Don't use man's wisdom to bring people to Jesus, but the wisdom of God that is found in the Word of God and illuminated by the Spirit of God! You must bring them to Jesus!

It is as Spurgeon said, ***“The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls, nor does it lie in the preacher's learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we would exhaust our lungs and die, 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.”***

Absolutely!

Here is the difference between those who use the wisdom of man and those who surrender to – ***THE POWER OF GOD!***

The philosophers, the teachers, not only in Corinth but in the world, even today, depend upon their wisdom, their speech, what show that they are putting out there to draw the people and to get the people to follow their ways.

The problem with that is they may be pumped up for a time. It is easy to get people pumped up for all kinds of things. But in the end, when they return home, they are empty because what they were filled with had no power to change their lives!

Paul came empowered by the Spirit of God to bring the people the Word of God which had the power to transform their lives!

***“The Bible is more than just a doctrinal guidebook. It creates faith, produces change, causes miracles, heals hurts, builds character, transforms circumstances, imparts joy, overcomes adversity, defeats temptation, builds hope, releases power, cleanses minds, brings things into being and guarantees your future. You can’t survive without it. It’s as essential to your life as food.”*** (The Word for Today)

I am not a salesman.

I know, that is shocking because some feel that if we are going to bring people to Jesus, we must sell them on Jesus!

That was not Paul did and that is not what I do!

Then what do I do?

I am an ambassador for Christ. Paul put it like this in I Corinthians 5:20-21, **“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

Look at all that Christ has done for us, reconciling us back to God. And as we see that, how can we not share Jesus with others?

In fact, Paul tells us that we are His ambassadors and thus we need to bring that message of reconciliation to the world.

What is the difference between a salesman and an ambassador?

A salesman is selling a product or selling something. You may need it, and you may not need it, but he is going to sell it to you no matter the reason.

An ambassador is not selling anything, but he is representing someone, the person who has sent him out! Thus, the words that an ambassador speaks are not his own, but they are the words of the person that sent him.

For instance, an ambassador for President Trump would go to the country he is sent and speak forth the words of the President. He could not just go over and say what he wanted to say!

For us, as ambassadors for Jesus Christ, He has sent us out into the world to represent Him and the words we speak are His Words because we share the Word of God with people.

Why is that important?

Why can’t we just say whatever we want?

Because, as Paul said in Romans 10:17, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”**

In other words, keep the main thing the main thing - **“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”**

Thus, as we go out, we implore people; we come alongside people urging them to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, to not allow the terror of the Lord to come upon them, the wrath of God for their rejection of Jesus!

It is a message that they need to hear, and they need to receive!

In I Corinthians 1:17 Paul wrote, **“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”**

And that is what we should be doing!

Make no mistake about it, we can’t do this on our own but as we share the Word of God empowered by the Holy Spirit, lives will be touched, they will be changed because we are not doing this in our own strength, but – ***THE POWER OF GOD!***

Thus, as ***MESSENGERS***, we are to know – ***THE FOCUS OF THE MESSAGE!***

**“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”**

As ***MESSENGERS***, we are to understand – ***THE WEAKNESS OF MAN!***

We can’t do this on our own. We need to remember, like Paul, we go forward **“in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.”**

Then how can we do anything?

As ***MESSENGERS***, we go forward with – ***THE POWER OF GOD!***

**“... in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of man but in the power of God.”**

As I close, let me share these words with you. We are told,

When Paul had preached to the Corinthians, as when he had preached anywhere, he was determined to know nothing among his hearers except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

He was not interested in discussing men's ideas or insights, his own or those of anyone else.

He would proclaim nothing but Jesus Christ, the crucified, risen, and redeeming Jesus Christ.

He did not preach Jesus simply as the perfect teacher or the perfect example or the perfect Man - though He was all of these.

The foundation of all of his preaching was Jesus as the divine Savior.

- John MacArthur, I Corinthians 2

As **MESSENGERS** of Jesus Christ, may we not lose sight of that!