

Deep Things and Shallow People

JULY 9, 2023

WORSHIP

Spirit of the Living God, You Have Made Me Glad, Great Things, Anchor of Our Lives, Ordinary People, My Worth is Not In What I Own,

WELCOME

What do you recall was the most foolish thing you have ever done in your life? What life lesson did you learn from that experience?

WORD

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-21 (READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-2:13)

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

God consistently uses what the world deems weak, foolish, powerless, and vulnerable to thwart the plans of His people's enemies.

Haman found this out the hard way; this we learn in the Book of Esther. As the story goes, King Ahasuerus banished his disrespectful queen Vashti from his kingdom and made Esther queen in her place. Previously, Esther's uncle Mordecai had instructed Esther not to reveal her Jewish identity to the king. Perhaps Mordecai feared that if the king found out, he would reject Esther as queen.

Meanwhile, Haman, who was the second most powerful official in the kingdom, was growing mad at Mordecai the Jew for refusing to bow down to him. And so, with all his spite, he successfully manipulated King Ahasuerus into signing an edict authorizing all the neighbours of the Jews to rise up against them and to kill them on a certain date. Not content with this, Haman even built the gallows from which he was planning to hang Mordecai.

When Mordecai informed Esther of Haman's genocidal plan, at first she felt helpless to do anything about it. No one, not even the queen, could appear before the king unless summoned. Those who presumed to do so without the king's approval risked punishment by death – unless the king graciously held out his sceptre in the direction of the uninvited visitor. Thus, sparing his life.

One night, King Ahasuerus could not sleep and so he asked his scribe to read to him the account of his reign. The scribe reached the part where the attempt on King Ahasuerus's life by two would-be assassins was foiled by Mordecai who, upon overhearing this plan, quickly reported it to Esther. To the king's surprise, Mordecai's heroism had gone unrewarded.

The next day, King Ahasuerus asked Haman: "What should be done for the man the king delights to honour?" Haman, who assumed that the king wanted to honour him, told him that the man whom the king wished to honour should wear the king's robe and ride on the king's horse, being led through the city streets by the king's chief noble who should then proclaim before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour!" And so, to Haman's utter dismay, the king ordered him to do all these for Mordecai. Thus, the Jew who refused to bow to the proud and spiteful Haman now had to be honoured by Haman.

Shortly after, Queen Esther, who had been fasting for three days, finally appeared uninvited before the king.

Deep Things and Shallow People

JULY 9, 2023

WORD

To her relief, the king held out his sceptre and even told her that he would grant her petition. So she invited him to a banquet and asked him to bring Haman.

On the second night of the banquet, again with Haman present, Queen Esther finally revealed to King Ahasuerus that she was a Jew and that her petition is for her life and for the lives of all her people to be spared because the evil Haman had schemed to have them all exterminated. And this was how Haman ended up being hung on the very same gallows that he had built for Mordecai.

Haman thought he was wise and powerful. What Haman didn't realize was that by going against God's people, he was going against God Himself.

The enemy who was working through Haman, Satan, is still at work today. He's still trying to undermine and defeat, us, believers. And God is still working to foil Satan's wisest plans by keeping in place the gospel of His grace.

In the same way that God used the weak and powerless Queen Esther to display His might to save all her people, God uses repentant and reformed sinners who were once weak and hopelessly steeped in their sins, but are now saved by His grace through faith in Him, to spread His message:

- 1) That you, too, are a sinner who deserves to be punished for and to die for your sins. (For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws.– James 2:10)
- 2) But Jesus, in His sinlessness, was punished for and died for your sins in your place.
- 3) Jesus was buried and rose again on the 3rd day.

In other words, God offers the free gift of salvation for anyone who humbly admits that he too is a sinner in need of saving from his sins and meekly accepts Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.

And yet the world finds this gospel message hard to believe. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, tells us why this is so:

“For the message of 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; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”

– 1 Corinthians 1:18-21

Case in point: the story of Nicodemus, the great teacher of Israel (John 3). In his wisdom, Nicodemus knew that Jesus who was able to perform great signs and wonders – including raising the dead! - was sent and approved of God. For he knew that Jesus would not have been able to perform all those miracles unless God approved of Him. And he must have concluded that if God approved of Jesus, then He must also approve of Jesus's message. Most likely, he was inclined to believe that Jesus is their much-awaited Messiah.

But the problem was that Jews expected a powerful and politically triumphant Messiah who would free them from the tyranny of Roman oppression. What they never anticipated was a spiritually triumphant Messiah who had come to liberate the Jews as well as the rest of the world from the tyranny of sin and death and eternal damnation.

Deep Things and Shallow People

JULY 9, 2023

WORD

Much less did they foresee that this so-called plan for salvation entailed Jesus's dying on the cross so they could have eternal life. Indeed, until the last minute, the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to display how powerful He was by challenging Him to come down from the cross and save Himself (Mark 15:30) – thus proving, at least in their spiritually blinded eyes, that He is indeed the Messiah whom they have long been expecting.

Whereas Jews look for signs and wonders to believe, Gentiles look for wisdom – something that makes sense to them (1 Corinthians 1:22). But even now, whenever we witness about Jesus and His gospel to others, His message still seems hard to swallow for many: that a Man who died 2,000 years ago did so in order to save those who choose to believe in Him from their sins. That is, if they would only be willing to accept this free gift of salvation and acknowledge Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.

This seeming weakness and seeming lack of sense in the gospel is the very reason why many false teachers corrupt it to make it more acceptable and easier to swallow by promising health, wealth and prosperity that Jesus Himself never promised to any of His followers. In fact what Jesus promised to His believers was tribulation: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33. And far from offering a life of comfort, what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 16:24 was “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Paul summarized it neatly with these words:

“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. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

– 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Indeed, there is nothing more powerful, nothing wiser than the gospel when it is faithfully proclaimed by God's people. And when someone does get saved after we've shared the gospel message, how can we take any credit – knowing ourselves to be weak and foolish?

Again, as Paul puts it:

“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. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.’” – 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

There is no testimony in the world more powerful than a changed life. Every single believer has a powerful testimony about how they used to be before they got saved. Before Jesus made a difference in their heart, in their soul, in their lives.

Remember when Satan tempted Jesus and offered him all the kingdoms of the world if He would only bow down and worship him? This was the most insidious temptation of all because what Satan was offering was a chance for Jesus to be the king of the world without having to go through the cross. Satan assumed it was his plan all along to kill Jesus

The logo consists of the letters '4Ws' in a bold, white, sans-serif font.The logo features the text 'what's wrong with us?' in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. The word 'wrong' is written in a smaller font size and is positioned between 'what's' and 'with'. The word 'us?' is larger and positioned at the end of the line.

Deep Things and Shallow People

JULY 9, 2023

WORD

on the cross. What he did not realize was that the cross was part of God's plan from the beginning (Revelation 13:8): Jesus, in His sinlessness, needed to die for our sins so that He could rise again and save us from our sins. Satan's greatest mistake was going ahead with his plan to kill Jesus on the cross because if Satan had figured out that the cross was God's way of saving man from his sins, he wouldn't have pushed through with his plans. (1 Corinthians 6:8). In other words, if Satan had figured out that the crucifixion would end in the resurrection, then he would never have arranged to crucify Jesus.

As Paul so memorably puts it:

"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time

began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' – the things God has prepared for those who love him..."

– 1 Corinthians 2:6-9

Satan in his effort to outsmart God learned in the end that you can't outsmart God.

The only one who knew about God's plan for His crucifixion was Jesus Himself to whom the Spirit of God revealed it. Likewise, the Spirit of God is willing to reveal to us the deep things of God – all we need to do is to take the time to commune with Him in prayer and in the Word and to rely on Him more and more. The Spirit of God teaches us things not so that we can become puffed up with knowledge but so that we can pass it on to others. This we learn in 1 Corinthians 2:10-13: "...these are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."