



I’m gonna start by showing you a painting this morning – one of my favorite reformation paintings. This was painted a few years after Luther’s death by a man named Lucas Cranach. You might not be able to tell, but it’s a church. Luther’s here in the pulpit, the congregation’s on the other side, and Christ-crucified is in the middle.

There are a lot of reasons I love this painting. But maybe as we’re kicking off a series on the Reformation, it’s because this painting reminds us what the reformation 500 years ago was all about. It wasn’t all about Luther. Notice, he’s not in the middle of the painting? Jesus on the cross is. And Luther’s not pointing to himself; where is he pointing? To the bible, and to Jesus on the cross. And the people aren’t looking at Luther, they’re looking to Jesus on the cross as their Savior.

That’s what the reformation was all about: The bible’s message that Christ-crucified is all you need to be saved. In a time when that saving truth was hidden in bibles people never opened, and Jesus had been relegated to the corner while church leaders pointed people to themselves and their works for salvation, Luther simply opened the bible and pointed people to Christ-crucified as their all-sufficient Savior.

So did Paul. This painting, it could really illustrate Paul’s ministry in Corinth, as he describes it in the verses I’m about to read for you. The focus was always Christ, and him crucified. But there’s a reason he needs to write it. Because in church life in Corinth, that central message was being relegated to a corner as people’s focuses shifted elsewhere. And the same can very easily happen to us today.

So listen as Paul reminds us It’s all about Christ-crucified. 1) a message packed with God’s power, 2) a wisdom revealed in Scripture alone.

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. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

⁶ 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. ⁷ No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ 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—

¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

I. A message filled with God's power

To understand Paul's words here, you need to know a thing or two about life in Corinth. Corinth was a big metropolitan city where traveling philosophers would come to ply their wares, hoping to impress people with their clever arguments and their flashy oratory skills. So the things Paul mentions in the opening verses here – **eloquent speech, wise words, persuasive speech** – these were things that Corinthians valued very highly. In Corinth, a messenger without them wasn't worth listening to.

And this was causing problems in the church in Corinth. Some of their pastors were more impressive public speakers than others, so the congregation was splitting into factions that would follow the one who caught their ears. Worship was becoming more about being “wowed” than it was about Christ-crucified.

So Paul brings them back to his arrival among them. Did he come with the eloquent speech, persuasive arguments, wise words they valued? No. He deliberately decided *not* to.

When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And he explains why: **So that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but God's power.** Paul knew that wowing people with flashy words could win himself people's ears, but only the message of Christ-crucified could win God their hearts. He didn't want people to focus on him as preacher, but on Jesus as Savior. Paul didn't want people walking away from his sermons thinking, "Wow, that Paul sure can preach!" He wanted people walking away with Christ-crucified on their minds.

In fact, it seems like this wasn't just a decision Paul made; it was who he was as a preacher. We might picture Paul as a dynamic speaker, but he says he came to them **in weakness and in fear and with great trembling.** Seems like Paul was nervous and unimpressive in the pulpit. But that was okay. Because the power wasn't in flashy presentation, it was in the message of Christ-crucified.

Pastors today need this reminder. To make sure that as we spend hours preparing sermons, it's not to show you how clever we are, but to show you Christ-crucified. That my goal isn't to entertain you, it's to edify you, and the only thing that can do that is showing you a Jesus who died to save you from your sins.

But I think members need this reminder, too. We live in a world like Corinth that loves entertainment; values the medium more than the message. And we can bring that into church with us. Hoping to be more entertained than edified. Paying more attention when the sermon delivery is exciting, and less when it's kind of dry. Valuing worship that tugs at the emotions and not worship that shows us Jesus. Letting eloquence or lack thereof get in the way of the message. Wanting something "new" and not the same old, "Jesus died for me."

But God's power is in nothing but that simple message. That's what we need. When you're carrying guilt of some sin that you just can't forget, a funny story told from the pulpit has no power to bring you peace. But Christ-crucified does. You need to see a Savior who bled and died to pay for that sin, so that even if you can't forget it, God does. When you're alone and hurting, an emotional high or a feel good message won't fix you. You need to see Jesus, hanging from the cross, alone with your sins, so that God would always be with you, no matter how alone you feel. When you're struggling to love your spouse as God calls you to, the latest wisdom on reigniting a marriage doesn't have the power to help. You need to see Christ-crucified for you, to pay for your lack of love; Christ-crucified, the Spirit's power to fill your heart with love like Christ's. When you're on your death bed, a cute story won't take away your fear of what comes next. But seeing your Savior on the cross, taking away the punishment you deserved so that God will not punish you, that will.

"I resolve to know Jesus Christ and him crucified." May Paul's attitude be ours in worship. No matter if it's flashy or dry, whose stammering tongue is proclaiming it, or if we've

heard it 1000 times, it's all about Christ and him crucified for you and for me. That's God's power to fill us with faith, give us peace...God's power to save.

II. A wisdom revealed in Scripture alone

And it's a wisdom God reveals in Scripture alone. Paul says even if his simple message of Christ-crucified wasn't couched in wise-sounding words, it is the height of wisdom, because it's the only truth that saves. **We do speak a message of wisdom...** It's just not a wisdom Paul came up with on his own. It's not a wisdom any of us could have come to know or believe on our own.

Paul uses the illustration of trying to read someone's mind. You can get into trouble when you try to guess what they're thinking, right? Because ultimately no one knows but, as Paul says, their own spirit within them.

The same is true of God's mind. Do you know where all the world religions other than Christianity come from? Over the years, many very wise people have tried to figure out what God is like and what his thoughts towards us are on their own. And they all have one thing in common: They all get it wrong. Paul says they are **coming to nothing**. They all come up with a false version of a god that expects you to do something to get right with him.

And that human "wisdom" about God even creeps into the church. Like it did in Jesus' day among the Jews, when their rulers taught that being a Jew and following God's laws made them God's children. Or in Luther's day, when the leaders of the church taught that works of penance or buying pieces of paper called indulgences could save you from God's wrath. And it left Luther and so many others wondering how God felt about them, whether he was angry with them or not.

Thank God he didn't leave it to us to wonder and guess what's on his mind to us. Paul says, **What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no mind has conceived – God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.** What Paul preached, what's in your bibles, it's not just man's opinions about God, one version of many. It's God's truth – God's own thoughts about you. It's God the Holy Spirit laying bare God's heart toward you. And what you find there is so incredible that no human mind could ever conceive it.

There you find the truth that you are worse than you thought. So bad that there is nothing you could do to save yourself and get right with God. But you are more loved than you can ever imagine. It's not a love you can earn, but a love God has for you in spite of yourself. A love that moved God to do for you what you couldn't do on your own...in Christ-crucified.

There, at the cross, you see God's heart more clearly than anywhere else. How great his wrath is over your sins, how fierce the punishment you deserved for them. But how great his love is, that he would give that punishment to his Son in your place. How great his love is, in giving Jesus what you deserved and giving you what Jesus earned for you – forgiveness and salvation as his free gifts.

Yes, in Scripture and nowhere else, God reveals to you that salvation isn't something you prepare, but he **prepared for** you by sending his Son. In Scripture, and nowhere else, the Spirit leads you to understand that his love and forgiveness and eternal life are things he **freely gives** to you, no strings attached, through faith. In Scripture and nowhere else, he leads you to trust that it's true for you, making you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It's no wonder that Jesus said in the gospel today, "Remain in my word." No wonder Paul says, "**I resolve to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified.**" Even if you've heard it a thousand times, it's the height of wisdom, and what God uses to keep you as wise for salvation.

Yes, Cranach's painting summarizes the Reformation well. May it always be an accurate description of our worship and our lives, too. May it always be all about Christ-crucified. Amen.