

INTRODUCE

Good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 2. 1 Corinthians 2. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible, so if you don't have one, grab one of the hard-backed black one under every chair. You can open your phone or tablet. 1 Corinthians 2.

If you open a black one from under your chair, 1 Corinthians 2 is on **page 952.**

INTRODUCTION: PAUL

So, we made it to chapter 2! This 1 Corinthians series will take us through most of the year, as we walk verse by verse through it. And we spent our first month in chapter 1. So, let me give us a real quick recap.

- Paul was a prolific church planter in the first century.
- He planted upwards of 20 churches...
- And wrote much of what we call
- the New Testament in our bibles...

But remember, he didn't start that way.

- He began as a brilliant and zealous Jew...
- and he was known for his persecution of Christians.
- He sought out, arrested, and played a role in the execution of Christians up until his conversion.
- So, not exactly the poster-child for Jesus.

But after his conversion he had about two decades of training in obscurity, before he really became 'the Apostle Paul' as we know him today.

- Then he started planting churches in the Roman empire,
- and was wildly successful.
- And in Acts 18, he makes his way to a town called Corinth.

INTRODUCTION: CORINTH

Now, Corinth is a newer Roman colony that is on the up and up.

- It's attracting entrepreneurs...
- It's attracting those who want to make money...
- It's attracting those who are looking for the good life...
- lots of transplants...from all over the empire.
- Very similar to Denver.

And it's in that context that Paul started the Corinthian church, and he spent a year-and-a-half there, and then moved on to plant more churches.

Now we're three-ish years later, and Paul is hearing that there are some things going screwy in the Corinthian church.

- Where there had been unity,
 - there were now factions forming.
- Where there had been a desire for the message of the Gospel,
 - there was now a thirst for entertainment.
- And where there had been humility about their beginnings as nobodies,
 - there was now a jostling for prestige and honor and power. Pride had crept in.

INTRODUCTION: THREE ARGUMENTS

So, Paul writes this letter to address all their mess, and in the first chapter, he began to battle their current state with three main arguments.

He argues for THE FOLLY OF THE CROSS.

- He says the message of the Gospel seems kinda foolish
 - when looked at through the lenses of culture,
- but once the Lord starts to get a hold of your heart,
 - it becomes powerful!

He then moves on to THE FOLLY OF THE CHURCH,

- and the fact that God had chosen
 - not the best and brightest in the Roman empire...
- but rather, he had chosen those who were too humble
 - to take any credit for their salvation.

TRANSITION

And now, in the first verses of chapter 2 he takes on the third part of his argument: THE FOLLY OF PREACHING. He moves to how the proclamation of the Gospel is foolish as well.

And for my type A folks in here, just two movements today. THE MESSAGE OF OUR PREACHING and THE METHOD OF OUR PREACHING.

First, **SLIDE THE MESSAGE**. Let's dig into this, and see what God has for us. 2:1

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-2

[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.

EXPLAIN: ACTS

So, those first words: **when I came to you**, puts us in a time and place, and we need to dig into the context of when Paul came to Corinth to really get these verses.

And I know we spent a lot of time in the book of Acts in week 1 of this series, but I need us to go back there.

- So, will you please keep a finger in 1 Corinthians,
- and turn back two books to the book of Acts, chapter 18.
- **Page 927** in the black bibles.

Now, Acts 18 is the place where

- Paul comes to the city of Corinth,
- and decides to plant a church primarily composed of gentiles.

And we covered all that in week 1.

- But what I want us to focus in on today is what happened right before that at the end of Acts 17.
- Before coming to Corinth,
- Paul was in the city of Athens.
- Now, look at this with me. Acts 17:16:

ACTS 17:16–21

[16] Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [17] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. [19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus,

Now, the Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill, was the place where the town council met. Think of a place of gathering for the best and brightest and most influential in the city.ⁱ

[19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So, Paul begins to preach, what many believe to be his most famous sermon captured in the scriptures. Verse 22:

ACTS 17:22–28

[22] So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Now, there is much debate about what this ‘unknown god’ was officially, but the point I want to make is Paul is establishing common ground with his audience by focusing on something they would have known and understood. Paul goes on.

[24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

And then Paul quotes a Greek philosopher

[28] for

“In him we live and move and have our being’;

And then he actually quotes a poem, but it was written to the Greek god, Zeus!

as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we are indeed his offspring.”

So, Paul is offering a sermon that scholars have lauded as “a standard of excellence in depth and relevance.”

- Paul preached this message with great relevance and brilliance.
- He’s calling upon the points of connection with his audience.
- He’s calling upon illustrations from their culture.
- I mean, he’s even quoting their own philosophers, and poets.
- This is well done!

And then he continues.

ACTS 17:29–31

[29] Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

So, he uses illustrations they would be familiar with to launch them into a sermon on repentance, and judgement, and the resurrection.

Now, in verse 32, we see the results of Paul's preaching.

ACTS 17:32-34

[32] Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." [33] So Paul went out from their midst. [34] But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

EXPLAIN: LACKLUSTER

So, a couple of guys and a gal believed. And what's interesting about the end of chapter 17, is that it feels out of form for Paul.

- I mean, in contrast with Paul's previous successes in his ministry...
- this feels kinda...well...blah.

One of my seminary professors said this, *"it is easy to read verses 32-34 and feel some disappointment, especially when we recall the triumphant responses to the gospel at Pentecost."*

You see, normally the preaching of the Gospel would conjure up one of two responses.

- Either people would, en masse, believe and be saved!
 - There would be massive revival.

- Or, the other response would be blatant,
 - and outright anger
 - and aggression towards the messenger.

Like I said in week one of this series: this is how you know you have a successful preaching ministry: they either love you, or want to kill you.

But what happens after what was arguably Paul's most impressive and famous sermon? Seemingly lack-luster results.

And they do want to hear more from him, but what does he do? 18:1

ACTS 18:1

[1] After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

He just leaves. And begins the 50-or-so mile walk to Corinth.

Now, we're done in Acts, so flip back to 1 Corinthians 2, and let's read verses 1 and 2 once more with all that we've just discussed as the backdrop.

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.

EXPLAIN

Now, in Athens, did Paul come with lofty speech? YES!

And in Athens, did Paul come with wisdom? Absolutely!

- He preached well,
- accurately,
- with the right cultural engagement
- and a good message.
- Goodness, he ended with the best part, the resurrection!
- But did you notice anything he missed?

He never mentioned the name of Jesus Christ, nor the crucifixion.

And now he shows up after what one scholar calls ‘Paul’s flop in Athens’, deciding to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified.

I think this is Paul’s intentional response to what happened in Athens, and this is the folly of our MESSAGE: **SLIDE CHRIST CRUCIFIED.**

APPLICATION: RELEVANCE

Now, is Paul now saying

- that it is unimportant to connect with
- the people you share the Gospel with?
 - No.
- Is he saying that we shouldn’t consider our words
- and be careful about how we proclaim our message?
 - No. That’s not what I think he’s saying.

- Is Paul saying that the resurrection shouldn't be proclaimed?
- Only the cross?
 - Again, no!
 - 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the most complete treatments of the resurrection in the entire New Testament.

So, what is the point? Well, I'd put it this way: **NEVER LET RELEVANCE OVERSHADOW THE GOSPEL.**

When it comes to HOW we put the message of the Gospel out to our friends and family and neighbors: be careful about trying to make it cool, or hip, or, maybe the best word, RELEVANT.

Now, I don't think Paul's tactics in Acts 17 were an over-attempt to be relevant...but he did notice something, and I think he made some corrections upon coming to Corinth.

But relevance has become an idol in WAY too many churches in the West today.

- Relevance
- and cool
- and hip
- has become the gold standard in lots of churches...

And the effect has been a breed of church-go-ers with unhealthy expectations about what the church is supposed to provide for them.

So, the basic attitude is this:

ILLUSTRATION: RELEVANCE

“The church exists to give me an awesome experience,

- So, I want it to be easy. Ok?
- Good parking.
- Nice facility.
- Attractive people.

And I want the music to be catchy.

- And I would like some haze,
 - cause how else do I know the Spirit of God is here?
- while the superstar worship team sings
- and I listen comfortably from my chair.

Then I would like a sermon anywhere from twenty to twenty-two minutes
(which is never happening here).

- But don't make me feel uncomfortable about my life.
- In fact, let's not even talk about Jesus;
- let's just discuss something that we all have issue with.
 - Like relationships,
 - or how God wants all my dreams to come true.
- But don't talk about sin,
- don't talk about the cross,
- don't talk about anything where I might actually have to
- do business with the deep levels of my heart.
- I'd rather not have that.

And then dismiss us in a timely manner,

- cause kickoff is coming soon!
- So, get my kid off the Noah's Ark jungle gym...
- or off the Tower of Babel rock wall...
- thanks for letting a vegetable teach him
- to be a good friend
- or to obey me! ⁱⁱ

And that's not too far off the mark, y'all!

I'm completely serious when I say that I heard of a church that did Easter in 3D. Like I'm not joking,

- they gave you those red and blue 3D glasses
- and at different points in the service you would put them on
- and then...I don't know...watch Jesus rise in 3D.
- I don't know if I could handle that!

APPLICATION

But seriously, I don't think Paul is criticizing the way he was preaching in Athens. In fact, I don't think we should do anything LESS than what Paul did in Acts 17!

- I think we should try to connect with people,
- and engage the culture,
- and help things make sense
- to those who we talk to about Jesus.

I don't think we do LESS, but rather, MORE. You see,

- while the method is important,
- it should never overshadow the message.

So, Paul's like,

- *"Jesus Christ and him crucified.*
- *That's it!*
- *If we get everything else right,*
- *and we get that wrong,*
- *well, forget it."*

TRANSITION

So, the folly of our preaching is found in THE MESSAGE of Christ crucified.

But the folly of our preaching is also found in **SLIDE THE METHOD** of how we preach that message. There is something unique to HOW Paul preaches in Corinth. Look at verses 3-5:

1 CORINTHIANS 2:3-5

[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.

EXPLAIN: WEAKNESS

So, Paul is again using some of the language in chapter 1, and he says, **I was with you in weakness.**

- He doesn't want to be the hero,
- but he wants to **demonstrate the Spirit and power,**
- so that their faith wouldn't rest on a personality...
- but in the power of God.

Essentially, he's saying

- that he could have shown up
- and preached with such power and authority
- that he might have persuaded them,
- or convinced them,
- or even connected with them
- in such a way that it would lead them to faith.

But ultimately,

- that would have let their faith to rest on his wisdom,
- on his preaching,
- on his abilities.

But he wanted their faith to rest in the power of God.

- So, he showed up in weakness.
- The demonstration of the Spirit and power
- is not based on how entertaining, informative,
- or compelling the speaker is,
- but on the power of God
- transforming the hearts of the hearers. ⁱⁱⁱ

We preach, THE MESSAGE, Christ crucified...
out of, THE METHOD, **SLIDE WEAKNESS.**

ILLUSTRATION: STRENGTHS

Cause we all kinda know that God uses our strengths, right? Our talents, our abilities, heck, in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul goes on and on about spiritual gifts being used to build up the church!

- So, if you're extroverted and uber-friendly...
 - well, let's get you on the greeting team.
- You're musically or technologically inclined...
 - hey, worship team. Right?
- You love to take care of people and serve behind the scenes...
 - hospitality team.
- You're passionate about kids and them knowing about Jesus...
 - Fathom kids.
- You can crush a 6-pack of Mountain Dew,
- stay up all night,
- and are killer at ultimate frisbee...
 - youth group. Right?

God uses our strengths!

And I don't want to diminish how God has gifted us. NO WAY! Listen, I don't get to be up here with a face mic, without a certain level of giftedness around speaking.

But very often we overlook that God uses our weaknesses as much, IF NOT MORE, than he does our strengths.

- God uses our flaws...
- God uses our failures...
- and actually, those can sometimes be MORE powerful
- than our strengths being used...
- because of what we said last week:
- if it's our weaknesses that God uses,
- then we cannot boast in ourselves at all!

ILLUSTRATION: MY ILLUSTRATIONS

It's crazy how as the guy who gets to stand up here and preach and teach,

- how much MORE you seem to respond to the stories I tell
- where I am a complete loser,
- as opposed to when I do something good!

Like, I tell a story of something I've succeeded at, and you're like, 'meh!'

But then I'm like, "listen to my exploits of failure!"

- And you're like taking notes,
- and you're all teary,
- and tell me in the hallway how moving that was!

Like, you love Chris, the idiot, more than Chris, the hero.

And I would spin that around and say to you, whatever weakness you've got:

- Places you aren't very successful,
- sins that you've committed,
- mistakes you've made,
- places where you've just fallen flat on your face.

Let me pose this: what if those are some of the things God wants to use the most in your ministry?

ILLUSTRATION: STUDIO VS. LIVE

Case in point:

- after my burn out last year,
- and not preaching for 6 months,
- I was meeting with a counselor and a care team,
- and one of the Acts 29 pastors on my care team was Hunter.

And he asked me what I thought my preaching would be like when I got back to it.

And I used an illustration that I've shared with some of you. I said: I think the difference in my preaching will be the difference between a band's studio album and their live shows. Ok?

Take whatever your favorite band or artist is, and think of their best studio album. And then think about the time and money spent of that thing.

- They record,
- and re-record,
- and overdub,
- and beat sync,
- and auto-tune,
- and there's mixing,
- and post-production,
- and mastering.
- And all of that work is done to create the perfect recording.

Now, take that same song...same band, and consider the live performance.

- It's the same song,
- same musicians,
- but it's just not quite as polished...
 - maybe the drummer is off a bit...
- it's not quite as produced...
 - somebody's voice cracks...
- not quite as perfect as the studio version
 - the sound guy is just off that night.

And I told Hunter that I really, really like the studio version of myself...
and I'm much less comfortable with the live me.

- Cause with studio me:
 - I can curate,
 - and edit,
 - and auto-tune,
 - and get pretty close to perfect.

But the live me...who knows what dumb stuff I might say or do.

And then Hunter said something so profound...he said,

- *"But Chris, people LOVE their favorite band live!*
- *Cause there's so much more power in a live performance!*
- *And they'll love the live you better, too."*

And I think a year ago I was trying so hard to be the studio me.

The pastor:

- who knew all the answers,
- and had all the messages,
- and could handle it all.

But what I was covering over...

- was me.
- My weaknesses.
- And therefore,
- the power of God in my weaknesses.

TRANSITION

Our proclivity is to show off our strengths, and hide our weaknesses.

But it would seem that Paul,

- in coming in weakness
 - and fear
 - and trembling,
 - preaching only Jesus and Him crucified.
-
- It was in his weakness
 - that the church actually saw
 - the demonstration of the Spirit and power
 - that led them NOT to putting their faith in Paul,
 - BUT in the power of God.

CONCLUSION

Church, we are called to proclaim. To preach the Gospel.

To demonstrate and declare.

- THE MESSAGE is Christ crucified. The Gospel.
- And I think the best METHOD is to, like Paul, do this is through your weaknesses.

A friend of mine says, *“never trust a man until you’ve seen his limp.”*

And I think that’s right.

- When it comes to your friends,
- and family,
- and neighbors,
- and co-workers,
- and everyone...
- even your church family...

They won’t respond to the coolest, hippest, *Jesus is my homeboy* kind of junk.

Nor will they respond to the perfect you,

- with the perfect family,
- and perfect hair,
- with the perfectly curated social media,
- and the perfect explanation for everything.

But show your limp. Your message isn't *"I've got all the answers!"*

What arrogance.

No. Instead, we say:

- *"I am a mess...*
 - *but God chose me...*
- *I'm weak...*
 - *but my God is strong...*
- *I'm not much...*
 - *but I know a God who moves in power!"*

THAT MESSAGE plus THAT METHOD will lead to A MOVEMENT of God's Spirit and Power!

Let's pray towards that end!

COMMUNION

We respond in 4 ways:

- Communion
- Tithes & offerings
- Prayer
- Singing

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way also he took the

cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

ⁱ Craig Blomberg, From Pentecost to Patmos.

ⁱⁱ Adapted from Matt Chandler's *Members*.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Garland, 1 Corinthians.