

Those Whom God Uses

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture today comes from the book of 1 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2. Please follow along your Bible and the bulletins are on the screen. Starting in verse 26, we read, For consider your calling, brothers.

Not many of you were wise according to worldly 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, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

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

[1 : 2 7] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of the power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

So, this is the word of God. Great. Thanks, Anastasia. Let's pray together briefly, and then we'll look at the scripture. Heavenly Fathers, we come to your word this morning.

We want what Paul says in Corinthians, that our faith will not rest in the wisdom of man, but on the reality of who you are. We want that to be true for us and our church.

God, we pray that you will be speaking to us by your spirit through your word. That's what we want, God. We want to encounter the living God. We're not interested in just self-help tips, how to make life work.

We want to meet with the living God. So, God, I pray, come by your spirit and be with us. Help me, God, to explain your word. Help us as a congregation, including myself, to respond and to apply it to our lives.

[2 : 3 6] We pray in your great name. Amen. I wonder how long you have been part of Watermark Church. I wonder if there's some, I think there are some that have been here since the very beginning, 14 years and counting.

Some of us, it's your very first Sunday with us this morning. For some of us, you may have been part of many churches. Maybe for some of us, Watermark is their only church you've ever been a part of.

For some of us, maybe you'll move overseas and you'll have to look for a new church sometime. For others of us, maybe you will stay here, part of this church, for many, many years to come. Some of us are so deeply involved in the church, it feels like you have no time for anything else, i.e. some of the young adults.

And some of us are less so involved. Some love the church and some are weary about the church. Friends, when you look for a church, what is it that you look for when visiting a church?

What makes you want to stay in a church? What impresses you the most? What makes a really good Sunday at church?

[3 : 48] If you're new to Watermark this morning, we have been working, we're just starting to work through the book of 1 Corinthians and the New Testament. It's one of two letters that the Apostle Paul writes to a church in the ancient city of Corinth around 53 AD.

And he writes these letters. And as we heard a few weeks ago, the church in Corinth is going through a difficult time. It's quite a messy situation. There's lots of conflict. There's lots of division.

The church has camps and factions. There's this group over here. And they really like this leader. They're impressed with him. And they want to follow him. And there's this group over here.

They like this leader. And so they think, he's our guy. We are his follower. And there's all these camps and divisions and factions in the church. And Paul writes and he shows them that the division in the church is a result of their wrong thinking.

And their wrong thinking is a result of their wrong values. And he says, you guys in Corinth, you've adopted the values of your culture. Your culture in Corinth values what's impressive and brilliant and smart and sophisticated.

[4 : 56] And you're thinking just like your city. And so what you do is, you align yourself with those that you think are smart and sophisticated and intellectual and brilliant. And that's causing all this division in the church.

What's important to you is what's important to the city, but not necessarily what's important to God. What impresses God is not what's impressing you. You're impressed by the things that impresses your city.

And he says, God is not at the center. And that's why the church is divided into all these groupings and these factions. Now in today's passage, Paul continues this same thought. And what he's going to show us is that worldly thinking suggests that what makes a great church is impressive people and impressive leaders.

And most people think that's what's going to make a great church. If I can find a church where they're really outstanding people, really outstanding leaders, that's going to make a great church. And Paul shows us that God's thinking is inverse to that.

It turns it on its head. Because in God's economy, greatness has nothing to do with how great the people are, but how great God and the gospel is. In God's economy, greatness flows downstream not from how impressive people are, human brilliance or wisdom, but actually from the greatness of God and the gospel.

[6 : 17] Okay. And to do this, what he does is he's going to give us two pieces of evidence. He's like a barrister in court. And he says, let me give you two pieces of evidence. Exhibit A is the church.

Exhibit B are the leaders. Okay. Exhibit A, you guys. Exhibit B, me, he says. Okay. That's not me. That's Paul. Paul says me. Exhibit B. So let's look at this together.

Exhibit A, God chooses unlikely people. Now remember, Paul's, the thrust of argument, of Paul's argument here is, God's thinking is not the way that we typically think.

Cole Truman says it like this. We assume there's this basic continuity between the way the world is and the way God is. So in the world, if power is established by raw strength on earth, then we assume God's power must be the same, but just to the infinite degree.

And likewise, he says, if we think honor and praise is given to those that are impressive or rich or influential, we assume that God must just operate the same way.

[7 : 25] But actually, in God's economy, things are often inverse, upside down. God works in the opposition to how we naturally think. And so Paul says, let me give you Exhibit A.

Just look at yourselves. Verse 26, he says, consider your own calling, brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many of you were powerful or of noble birth, but that's deliberate.

For God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chooses what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chooses what is low and despised, even things that are not that impressive to show up the things that seem impressive.

And so Paul says, here's my evidence. Just look at the church. There's nothing particularly impressive about us. And here we see, I know we touched on this last week, an incredibly important principle in the Bible.

that God's ways of working is often the opposite, the inverse to how we work. God accomplishes His plans through the opposite of what we expect.

[8 : 33] As we said last week, if you're going to know God and know Him deeply, you must be willing to be surprised by God, even challenged by God. Because God often encompasses His plans and purposes.

He takes what's ordinary, what's unimpressive, even what's rejected and despised and says, that is going to be my instrument of choice. And so we see this throughout the whole Bible. Just think in the Old Testament how often God chooses not the firstborn, but the secondborn sibling to be the one through whom His blessing comes.

Which in ancient culture, I guess similar to modern Asian culture, was completely inverse to thinking, right? In ancient Middle East culture, the firstborn son gets all the goods and the rest just kind of follow in the footsteps.

And yet how often does God choose the secondborn? He chooses Isaac, not Ishmael. He chooses Jacob, not Esau. He chooses Joseph rather than his ten brothers in front of him.

Or think of King David, right? One of the greatest leaders in the Old Testament. And God says to Samuel, the prophet, go to Jesse's house, Jesse's father, David's father, and choose one of his sons to be king.

[9 : 45] And so Samuel goes and he says, Jesse, bring your sons before me. And so he parades seven sons before him. And God says to Samuel, no, none of these are going to be king. And he says, do you not have another son somewhere?

And Jesse says, yeah, yeah, there's one, but he is so young, he's so mature, we left him in the fields, we didn't even bring him in. You don't want to see that guy. One of these seven will surely do.

And God says, no, that's the one I'll choose. Despised, rejected, forgotten, out of the way, that's the one that I want. Well, friends, think of Gideon, right? God calls him to defeat the Midianites, the enemies of the Israelites.

And Gideon says, no, no, God, you've got it wrong because I'm the weakest member of my family and my family is the weakest member of my clan and my clan is the weakest member of our tribe.

God, I'm the weakest of the weakest. And God says, yes, that's why I've chosen you. Or think of, think of Ruth. Why does God choose Ruth to be the great grandmother of David, the ancestor of Jesus?

[10 : 49] Because she's a Moabite, she's an outsider, she's an outcast, she's not part of God's people and God says, I want you. Well, think of Jesus. Who does Jesus choose to be his disciples?

Not the rich and the powerful, the sophisticated, the educated, the fishermen, the tax collectors, the outlaws, the terrorists. Friends, remember how Jesus rejects the rich young ruler, the guy that has it all together?

And who does he in the very next breath invite to himself? Grubby, dirty children. Those that have got nothing to contribute to his kingdom campaign.

Jesus says, I'll take you children, but you, rich, sophisticated ruler, actually you're not quite ready for my kingdom yet. And friends, we could go on day after day. Throughout every chapter of the Bible, the Bible says the same thing.

This is how God works. God takes the weak to shame the strong. God chooses the simple over the wise. God chooses the poor over the impressive.

[11 : 53] God works in the world by working the inverse to how we would work. Friends, the world thinks that blessing and goodness and prosperity flow downstream from human brilliance.

And God says, no, no, no, they don't at all. They flow downstream from my grace. Now, there's one objection here. You may have a question in your head. You may say, okay, I get that biblical principle, but what about those of us that are wealthy or are educated or are sophisticated or are impressive in the world's eyes?

Because let's be honest, maybe some of us here come from underprivileged backgrounds or disadvantaged backgrounds, but probably most of us come from very privileged backgrounds.

And most of us here are probably far more educated than maybe even many villages in parts of the world. Friends, some of us here will earn more in one year than many people in the world will earn an entire lifetime or 10 lifetimes.

And so what does that mean for us? I mean, are we excluded from God's kingdom? Are we not, never going to be used by God? Well, that's a good question. And what the Bible says is that we do have a real problem.

[13 : 01] And we have two problems. One problem is that we tend to compare ourselves to those that are much, have much more than us. And so even though we are generally pretty privileged, we tend to look at those that are more privileged and say, okay, I know I own a car, but at least my car's not like that.

Or I know I have a house, but at least my house is not that big. Or I know I have seven degrees, but I don't have 10 degrees, you know. And we always compare to those that are further and bigger and better and we think, I'm not that privileged.

And so we fool ourselves. But the other problem is this, that privilege and wealth and sophistication and strength and impressiveness is not wrong in and of itself, but it does have a tendency of getting in the way of us knowing God and knowing Him deeply.

And so we need to be really careful about the dangers of privilege because what elevates us and makes us admirable and respectable in society's eyes are often the things that get in the way of us knowing God and knowing Him deeply and being dependent upon His grace.

And we see again this often in the Bible how God so often removes that which is praiseworthy, commendable, before He uses someone. Surely that's the point of the rich young ruler, right?

[14 : 19] This rich young man comes to Jesus and He says, Okay Jesus, I'm all in. I'm ready to follow You. Here's my resume. Here's my credentials. This is what I can bring to the party. And Jesus just removes them one by one by one saying, Oh, let's just lay that aside.

Let's just lay that aside. Actually take that away and eventually He says, Okay, take all your wealth, go sell your possessions, give it away to poor and when you've got nothing, okay, come to me.

Then you're ready. Then I can use you. Or think again of Gideon, right? Eventually Gideon says, Okay God, you are God, I am not. I'll trust you. Here's my army, 32,000 people.

It's not a lot against 125,000 Midianites. But God, I trust you. My 30,000, I guess we can take them on. And God says, 30,000, that's a bit too many for me.

Why don't we just whittle it down to 300? 300,000, okay, okay, now you're ready. Okay, now I can use you. 300 against 120,000. Okay, that feels good.

[15 : 20] Well friends, think of Moses, right? God's great deliverer from the people of God from Egypt. Moses is raised in the palace of Egypt for 40 years. He's educated and trained in all the ways of the Egyptians, the most sophisticated nation of the time, trained.

And then God wants to use him. So He says, okay, first I will take you out of Egypt and I'll just let you languish in the desert for 40 years. And maybe just exchange your prince's robe for a shepherd's crook.

For 40 years become a nobody. Okay, Moses, now I can use you. Now I'll send you back to Egypt. You can be my deliverer. And friends, here's the point that God's way of working is often diametrically opposed to the way that we think God would work.

And why is that? Well, look at verse 29. Paul tells us here. Verse 29 and again in verse 31. So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And again, verse 31. So that as it is written, quoting Jeremiah 9, that the one who boasts boasts in the Lord. Friends, why does God work like this?

[16 : 31] So that it will be absolutely, abundantly clear this is all God's doing. Everything the church is, everything God does, everything God accomplishes is all His great kindness.

As Ephesians 1 says, to the praise of His glory and His grace. So that no one may look at anyone and say, wow, you are a great leader. You have done a great job here.

No, no, that God may get all the glory. We sang earlier, how great thou art. that's the anthem of the church, right? God, how great thou art.

Not us, God, you. Okay, exhibit A. He says, just remember yourselves. Exhibit B, remember the leaders. Paul brings the second piece of evidence and he says, let's consider the leaders of the church.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1. He says, and I, brothers and sisters, when I came to you, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or brilliant wisdom.

[17 : 34] I decided to know nothing amongst you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That means I decided to forget everything else except Christ and the gospel. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.

And my speech, my message, were not in plausible or persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstrations of the Spirit and of power so that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of man, but on the power of God.

Paul says, just think about when you became a Christian. You heard the gospel from me and you believed the gospel and God forgave you of your sins. He welcomed you into His family. He changed your life.

He gave you an identity and a security and a peace. He completely changed your life. And how did this all come about? Was it because I, Paul, was a great speaker? Was it because of my arguments and convincing style?

Was it because I'm so wise and eloquent? Is it because I'm a great leader and I can just attract the following? No, no, none of that. He says, I was with you in weakness and with fear and much trembling. My speech were not persuasive but in foolishness.

[18 : 45] None of these things came to be. All that I brought was my insecurity, my fear, my inadequacy, my weakness. God worked amongst you in power.

God is the one who built the church. Paul says, it's like God looked around and said, in the city of Corinth, I've got a really important project here. It's an important city.

I want to establish a church. I need a special assignment there. Who is the most weak, feeble, insecure person I can choose? Okay, Paul.

Paul, you're the guy. Okay, Paul, you go to Corinth. I need you because you've got nothing of what that city needs but you depend on me so that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of man but on the power of God and of the Spirit so that everyone will know it's not me, it's all him so that no one will be drawn to follow me but follow him.

Do you see what God is saying to us in the Bible here? Paul says, let's consider two bits of human elements in the church. We've got the church and we've got the leaders and it's none of us.

[19 : 56] It's all him. It's all him so that we may know it's all his power, his spirit, his choosing, his grace. It's all him and why is this?

Well, again, look at verse 30 because look at what verse 30 tells us. He says, he wants us to see that everything that we need, everything that in a hundred million years from now we're still going to be having, everything that's going to last the ups and downs of life are found in Christ.

Not in the leaders, not in the church, not in the people. He says, because of him, that's God, because of him you are in Christ who became for us wisdom from God.

So Christ's wisdom as opposed to wisdom of man is how we get saved. Christ came for us righteousness, that means right standing with God. Christ was for us sanctification, that means being set apart for God.

Christ was our redemption, which means freedom from guilt and shame. So in a hundred million years from now, what are the things we're going to be boasting in? It's not our building, it's not our church, it's not Watermark, our website, our leaders, nothing.

[21 : 12] What is our confidence going to be? Christ. Christ. Christ and Christ alone. Friends, the point is, everything we need, peace with God, belonging to God, freedom from guilt and sin and shame, being accepted and loved, security, identity, peace in this restless world, hope in an anxious world, everything that we really need is found in Christ.

Christ is our hope. Friends, privilege can't give you those things, advanced degrees can't give you those things, a great career can't give you those things, your family, your parents can't give you things, money can't buy those things, but Christ can.

And so, Paul's imperative to us is this, let the church be built on Christ and Christ alone, so that your faith might rest not on the wisdom of man, but on the power of God.

Exhibit A, God's unimpressive church. Exhibit B, God's unimpressive leaders. Conclusion, it's all Jesus, it's all Christ.

Okay, so what does this mean for us? How do we apply this to our lives? Well, let me close with four bits of application for us here. Four things for us as a church to think about, and some of them apply to us as a church, some apply to us individually.

[22 : 48] Friends, first thing is this, let the grace of God melt the pride of our hearts and evaporate the division in churches. Remember, what's the issue in the church here?

The issue in Corinth is the division and the conflict in the church. There's groups, there's factions, there's fighting, there's division. There's this group over here, and they think this leader's impressive, and they want to, by association, look impressive themselves.

And there's this group over here, and they vicariously, because he's a great speaker, want to look impressive and sophisticated. And so there's all these groups and divisions. And Paul says, what?

You're thinking just like the world. Don't you see, the church is not a place where we promote ourselves, where we try and outdo one another with our impressiveness. The church is a community of nobodies.

The church is a community of sinners saved by grace. From the leader on the stage to the six-month-old at the back that's crying, hey, the church is nobodies.

[23 : 54] There's one person that's important in this church. His name is Jesus. And so let the grace of God, which is the one common denominator, melt the division and the conflict in the church.

Friends, how is it possible that we can look down upon one another when we grasp the grace and the mercy of God? I mean, how is that possible? How is it possible that we can sit in judgment of one another, keep a distance with one another when we see that everything we have, everything we've been given is the grace and the mercy of God?

Friends, let the grace of God melt the conflict and the division of our hearts. So friends, let's just say, Oscar, Oscar's one of my best friends, so let's just say, I don't like Oscar, right?

I mean, he dresses funny and he's, you know, there's a lot of reasons to be upset with Oscar, right? But friends, when I look at the mirror of God's word and I see what an idiot I am, who am I to distance myself from him?

Who am I to judge him? So friends, here are two questions for us. Is there somebody in the church you don't get along with? Is there anybody in the church you're tempted to keep your distance from?

[25 : 14] Is it possible that maybe we're thinking of ourselves more highly than we're ought? Is it possible that we think of ourselves more impressive than we are? Is it possible that the thinking of our meritocracy of Hong Kong has gotten to our hearts and we keep a distance from one another?

Friends, let's let the grace of God melt our pride and division. Secondly, let's be a church of prayer. If the Corinthians aren't that impressive and they're not and Paul is not that impressive and he's not, where does the power lie?

I mean, where is the power in this church? What makes the church the church? And Paul gives two answers. He says, Christ and the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the power of the church. This is the secret weapon. Look at verse four and five. He says, my speech and my message were not persuasive but I came in demonstration of the spirit and of power so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of man but on the power of God.

Now, Watermark, I think we as a church are quite clear on Christ and the gospel, that first one. We try to be quite clear on that. If you're new to Watermark, one of the things if you come again, you'll notice we talk about Jesus and the gospel a lot.

[26 : 35] The one thing I think we're not so good at is prayer. We are not a praying church. I think we're quite weak at prayer and as this week I was thinking about this on Friday as I was walking down the hill to go get something from the shops, I was deeply convicted of my own prayerlessness and I just had to repent.

God, I am so sorry. I am not a man of prayer. I think our church is not a church of prayer and maybe that's why we don't encounter the power and the spirit of God in ways that we long for.

Friends, can I be honest to you? I long for revival to come to Watermark. I long for a powerful move of God that is beyond anything anybody can explain in human terms.

I long for God's spirit to be here in such a tangible powerful way that it changes people and sets people free in an instant. But that's nothing that any human being can manufacture. That's something only God can bring and God can give.

And so how is that going to happen? As we become a people of prayer. Dear friends, we'll never encounter the power of God by wisdom of man alone. And so here's a couple of questions.

[27 : 45] If you're a CG leader, do we pray for the people in our CG? If we're a kids ministry leader, do we pray for the kids in our classes? If you're a youth leader, do you pray for the kids in the youth?

Friends, for those of us that are elders, do we pray for the church regularly? Friends, how much do we pray? What we need is the power of God, not the wisdom of man.

Here's a third application for us. For those of us that are Christians, when we share the gospel, share the gospel, talk about Christ on the cross. My assumption is that if you are a Christian this morning, you long to tell people about Jesus.

My assumption is that you long to tell your colleague who sits across the way from you in the office about the wonder of what Christ has done in your life. My assumption is that we long to tell our family members or the person that lives across the hallway from us about Christ and the cross.

Friends, if you're a parent, my assumption is that we long for our kids to know Jesus more so than to get into the best schools. friends, when you share the gospel, don't try gimmicks and tricks.

[29 : 01] Don't try and be brilliant or winsome or persuasive in your own wisdom. Tell your friends about Christ and the cross. Don't try and be brilliant in your own eyes.

You can't force anyone to become a Christian, but you can pray. You can pray. And so tell your friends, tell your neighbors, tell your colleagues about Jesus and what He's done in your life.

Tell them about how He died on the cross and rose again to save us, to forgive us. Don't come with lofty speech or human wisdom. Decide to forget everything except Christ and the cross and share that.

Friends, point people to Jesus and then pray and trust in the power of God to speak to their hearts. And then, last thing is this. If you're not a Christian this morning, I know that some of us here are not yet followers of Jesus, I hope you can see that our greatest longing as a church is not to be impressive, is not to be smart, is not to try and show you how brilliant Christians are, is to help you to see the wonder of Jesus.

Friends, we feel so privileged that you would spend a Sunday morning with us. There are a thousand other places that you could be. Thank you for the privilege of joining us this Sunday morning. Our greatest longing, our deep desire of our hearts, is not that you will be impressed by Christians, but that actually you'll see how ordinary and unimpressive we are.

[30 : 30] But that you'll see through the ordinariness of the church, you'll see something remarkable. You'll see something of the power of the living God. Through the unimpressiveness of the leaders and the band and the church here, you'll see something that no human being could organize or orchestrate.

And you'll see the power of the living God. The God who went to the cross for you. The God who loves you so much that He's calling you to Himself.

Friends, if you're not a follower of Jesus this morning, our great desire is that you will come to not just see that, but experience that and know God for yourself.

So friends, when you go to church, what makes a church impressive? When you look for a new church, what kind of church are you going to stay at? Friends, when you decide to join a church, what impresses you the most?

Don't let it be the leaders. Don't even let it be the people. Let it be the power of God and the Christ and the gospel at the center. That here is a community of people that are not impressed with themselves, but impressed by God and want to keep Him at the center.

[31 : 41] And let the power of God change your life as you seek God together with Him. Let's pray together. Oh, Father God, as we conclude, we remind ourselves that, Lord, so often our thinking is like the thinking of our world.

It's like the thinking of Hong Kong, God. We seek to try and be impressive. We seek to try and look impressive in the eyes of others. God, we want to we want to try and boast in ourselves, God.

God, won't you remind us that the cross reminds us the only thing in this church that is praiseworthy and commendable is you and what you've done for us.

God, we pray also for the power of the Holy Spirit to be at work in our church, God. We pray, God, more than anything else or anyone else that this church will be marked by a move of the Holy Spirit, God, and your power.

That you, God, will make yourself known to us. God, we pray the words of John the Baptist that we will decrease and you will increase. That more and more the song of this church will be how great thou art and not us, God.

[33 : 06] And God, where we are tempted to look down on others, where we are tempted to stay away from others, we are tempted to pull back from others, God, won't you remind us of the cross?

Won't you remind us that your way of working and your way of thinking is so inverse to the ways of our world? And may your gospel, God, melt the division of our hearts. Lord Jesus, we need you.

Come and have your way, I pray. In your great and glorious name, Amen.