

Remembering Who We Are

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 1, starting at verse 18. Please follow along on the screen or in your bulletin. For the word of the cross is folly 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, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise?

Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

[1 : 23] 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. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.

[2 : 35] And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Amen. Great. Thank you, Karen. Well, once again, good morning and welcome, everybody. It is such a joy to be able to celebrate this day with you.

I have been so excited this week, looking forward to celebrating our 10-year anniversary with you all. And for those of you who are online, watching in the middle of the night somewhere, Tobin and Christina and all the others, welcome.

It's great to have you guys with us. And to our ministry partners, we're so glad that you have joined us this morning. And of course, the Watermark family, a warm welcome and wonderful to celebrate with you as well.

Now, this morning, I am going to try and keep this a little tighter than usual. And if you've got the bulletin in front of you or your Bible, open it up because we're going to work through this amazing, amazing passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

[3 : 41] And the context is this. Let me explain. Paul is writing this letter to this church in the city of Corinth. Now, Corinth is a city in Greece, ancient Greece.

And it is strategically located between the mainland Greece and this peninsula at the bottom. And where these two joined is this very strategically placed city called the city of Corinth.

And what that means is it was a very influential city because it was right on the trading routes. It was a very wealthy city. And it was also a very cosmopolitan city.

It was a city where people came to make their fortunes, maybe full of dreams, low on money. But through hard work and dedications, they could do well. And so in many ways, the city of Corinth is

not too dissimilar from Hong Kong, this influential, wealthy trading city that was very cosmopolitan. But also, it was very rich in Greek culture. And if you know anything about ancient Greek culture, think of people like Aristotle and Plato and Socrates, the Greeks really prized things like philosophy, wisdom, education, civilized culture.

[4 : 53] And so this is the city that Paul is writing this letter to. There's the context, the background. As we look at this passage, I want us to just notice three things that Paul says to this church in Corinth that I think are applicable to us as a church at this juncture in our journey.

Okay? We're going to talk about remember our origins, remember who we are, remember our calling. Okay? Very simply, remember where we've come from, remember who we are, remember where we're going.

Okay, so let's dive in. Firstly, remember our origins. Okay? Contrary to the culture on the street, the Corinthian church was not full of people that were hybrid culture or cultural elites.

The church actually was made up of pretty ordinary people. And Paul suggests that the church here in Corinth is actually full of people that the cultural elites of their day kind of thought weren't particularly impressive, weren't very powerful people.

Look what he says in verse 26 to 29. He says, Consider your calling, brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

[6 : 07] 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 considered nothing, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Paul reminds them that the origins of this Corinthian church is less than impressive origins. And yet, God has chosen them and chosen to use them, nonetheless, despite their kind of average origins and beginnings.

In fact, Paul tells them that this is probably the very reason why God has chosen them, because naturally speaking, they're not the most powerful or impressive people in the city. And look what he says.

He says, Not many of you were wise. Not many were that powerful. Not many of you were of noble birth. And yet, despite that, God chose them and chose to use them and to bless them.

And friends, as we think about it, that's actually the way that God always works. God always seems to have this knack for choosing those kind of people that, naturally speaking, culturally speaking, aren't the most impressive, the most powerful, the most influential.

[7 : 32] And the reason why he does that is so that we can see that behind everything that happens, everything that we are, is actually the hand of the sovereign God. He is the source and the origin.

He is the power and the wisdom behind everything that is and everything that happens in his kingdom, so that when a church like us looks back, all we can say is, All glory to him.

All honor to him. Right? Now, at times, God does choose to use people that are simply brilliant. Right? Think of people like John Piper, Tim Keller, John Stott.

Think even in the Bible. Think of people like Moses, who is this prince in Egypt, grows up in Pharaoh's palace. Think of Paul, right? The guy who wrote a whole lot of the New Testament is the leading Pharisee of his day.

Sometimes God uses really brilliant people. But actually, as you think about it, often God has to take those people and he humbles them or leads them into a period of obscurity, that's what he's looking for, obscurity before he then uses them.

[8 : 40] Think of Moses, this man who grows up as a prince in Pharaoh's palace. And yet, before God uses him to deliver his people, God takes Moses and asks him to be a shepherd in the wilderness for 40 years, looking after sheep.

Or think of Paul, right? This great man that studied under Gamaliel, mentored by the leading Pharisee of his day. Paul is ascending the ranks, growing in his career.

And yet, before God can use him, he humbles him, sends him into the Arabian desert for 10 or 15 years. And then says, okay, Paul, now I can use you. God uses very often those that are not that impressive, those that are not the most powerful for his purposes.

Now, Tobin and Christina, no offense to you. Franklin, Teresa, those that were here in the early days.

Charles and Jasmine, Simon and Sherman, Celeste and Fiona. Those are some of the original crew of Watermark. No offense to anybody here. But that's the story of Watermark Church as well. [9 : 52] That everything that we are and everything that God has done in and through us is not because of rock star pastors that the church began with. Not because of these amazing people that started Watermark Church.

Remember our story. Remember how God started this church. Remember the early days and some of the early leaders. Not many were impressive by Hong Kong standards. Not many were powerful or were of noble birth.

And yet God chose what is ordinary. In fact, God chose even what is flawed and broken to start this church that the glory may go to him.

Now, what does that mean for us? Well, it means a couple of things. Firstly, what it means is you may walk in here and look around you and think, man, all these people, their lives are sorted, right? They're all married. They've got two and a half kids. They've got the dog. The cars in the parking lot all look pretty nice. Man, these people, their lives are pretty sorted out. Friends, don't be fooled.

[10 : 55] This church is still today full of people that are broken, flawed, insecure, not all that impressive. From the pastors in the front.

From the pastors in the front. From the pastors in the front. From the pastors in the front. To everyone else. This church is the story of God using very ordinary people and doing something extraordinary through it. Because of who he is.

And you know what that also means? It means that you can come in here and you don't need to put on a front. You don't need to feel the pressure to try and look impressive. You don't need to put on a special face.

But you can just come and be yourself. Because this church is full of ordinary people. And it also means that nobody is excluded. You may come and say, hey Kevin, you don't know what I've done. Or you don't know what my past is like. Or you don't know the shame that I've brought to my family. That's okay. This church is full of people like that. Because this church isn't full of extraordinary people.

[11 : 49] It's made up of very ordinary people. And an extraordinary God. Paul writes and he says, remember your calling, brothers and sisters. Not many were wise. Not many were powerful.

Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish. God chose what is weak. God chose what is low and despised in the world. So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Remember our origins. Secondly, remember who we are. Remember who we are. At the very heart of Watermark, we are a counter-cultural.

Cultural gospel community. In the church in Corinth, there were two kind of main groups of people. Two cultures. On the one hand, there was a very Jewish group of people.

That came from a Hebraic background. And on the other hand, there was a very non-Jewish group of people. That came from a Greek background. And both of these groups of people, culturally, naturally, their own culture.

[12 : 51] There were elements of the gospel. The story of Jesus and His death on the cross. That they found ridiculous. Offensive even. And yet, both of these cultures actually were looking for something that the gospel was the answer to.

Okay? So both groups of people, by their natural culture, found elements of the gospel just unbelievable. Foolish. Weak. Ridiculous. And yet, both of them were looking for something that the gospel could answer.

Look at how Paul says it here in verse 20. He says, For those who were of a Jewish background, the Messiah that they were looking for was a Messiah who would be strong, powerful.

Someone who would overthrow the Roman enemy, the Roman army. Someone who would bring religious and political liberty and freedom. And yet, Jesus ends up crucified by the Romans.

Which, in their minds, meant that He was cursed by God and defeated by His enemies. Okay? So that's the Jewish group of people. And the Greeks, on the other hand, remember, the Greeks are always looking for some kind of wisdom.

[14 : 43] Some kind of new teaching. Some kind of enlightenment. Something that's going to improve their lives. Or add to their lives. Or add to their respectability. Or their civilization. And the idea to the Greeks that Jesus would end up crucified on a Roman cross.

What kind of ridiculous God got Himself crucified by His enemies? Okay? The wisdom of the sages and the rabbis was meant to improve your life. Advance your cause. And so both the Jews and the Greeks, they look at the gospel.

And this just doesn't make any sense to them. This is just ridiculous. And yet, the counter-cultural, counter-intuitive message of the gospel is actually both the power that the Jews were looking for. And the wisdom that the Greeks were looking for. In the gospel, the Jews discovered a power, not just to overthrow their enemies.

Not just to advance their career. Not just to climb the corporate ladder. A power that really dealt with the real issues of life. In the gospel, we discover a power that destroys the things that are destroying our lives.

[15 : 56] Power over sin and shame. Power over guilt. Power to destroy fear and insecurity. Power to dismantle the selfishness and the insecurities and the fears in our heart.

In the gospel, we discover God's power over death and over sin and over Satan. In the crucified Messiah, we find not only the power to advance our careers, but the power to destroy the destructive patterns that destroy our own life.

But not only that, in the gospel, the Greeks who are seeking this wisdom to advance their life, would discover a wisdom, a truth, that you can never find in the cultural elites of your day.

In the gospel, we discover that it's only those who seem defeated that actually find victory. It's those who give away their possessions who own the most. It's those who pour themselves out for others that actually are satisfied and filled.

In the gospel, we find that it's those who are poor in spirit and materials that are actually often the most wealthy, that have the most, that are the most blessed, most secure, most free.

[17 : 04] Only in light of the gospel do we see that those who lay down their lives actually find life. Only in the cross do we see how God could bring broken, sinful humanity back into relationship with Him.

How God could bring justice to our world, which our world so desperately longs for, and mercy at the same time, how these two could meet without destroying one another. Friends, the gospel's always going to be counter-cultural, counter-intuitive.

And yet, the gospel's going to call us to do things that may seem foolish at first, may seem unwise or weak, but in the economy of heaven, the gospel's going to give us the power and the wisdom that actually we look for, and that we realize is actually the wisdom that we need.

Let me give you one brief example of how this counter-cultural, counter-intuitive message of the gospel shapes everything that we are. A few years ago, two or three years ago, as a church, we weren't giving away a lot of resources, money, beyond us as a church.

And so a couple of years ago, as elders we spoke about, said, let's change that. Let's set aside a small portion, a small percentage each month of our resources to give away beyond us.

[18 : 22] And so we did that. And the next year we said, okay, let's triple that amount. And so we tripled that amount. And so this last year, in the midst of COVID-19, in the midst of economic downturn, Watermark has given away more money and set aside more money to give away than we ever have in the history of Watermark, or at least I know of.

Okay? A couple of months ago, when we were redoing our budget for this next year, we decided let's double that amount again. So in the midst of COVID-19, in the midst of the economic downturn, where natural convention and wisdom says, let's lock down our resources.

Okay? Not only will we lock down our restaurants and our houses, we will lock down our resources. As a church, actually the gospel is countercultural, counterintuitive, so let's give away more than we ever have before.

And so we doubled our giving once again. And my hope is that next year we can double that again as we look forward. Why do we do that? Because the gospel gives us this countercultural, counterintuitive wisdom.

That rather than thinking that our security is in our finances or our bank accounts or the size of our church, actually the gospel tells us that our security and our future is in the one who went to the cross, but didn't remain on the cross.

[19 : 44] The one who died, but he didn't stay dead. The one who ended up in the tomb, but he didn't remain in the tomb. The one who rose again. You see, friends, the gospel calls us to live this radical, countercultural, counterintuitive life because we're not trying to be different just for different sake.

We're not trying to be different just to stand out. Actually, because our lives and our church are shaped by the one who, though he was God, didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped, something to be held onto.

But he laid aside his majesty and his glory. He emptied himself and he came and he took on the nature of a servant. And he ended up on the cross. And yet God said to Jesus that he didn't remain there, but he gave him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow down.

You see, the gospel gives us this countercultural, counterintuitive message. And that's what Paul's saying here. He's saying that, yes, the gospel, it challenges the national convention, but we're a gospel-shaped community.

And that means we're going to look different, we're going to act different. Who are we? At our heart, we are a gospel-shaped, countercultural community. Third thing is this.

[20 : 55] Who are we becoming? Remember who we're becoming. Mac Peer is a thought leader in New York City. And Mac Peer, he started this institution called the New York City Leadership Center.

And Mac Peer studies kind of urban city church environments. And he came up with his research, and this is what he said. Churches that are younger than 10 years old are eight times more effective at reaching people to gospel than churches that are older than 10 years old.

Okay? So church that's 10 years and younger, eight times more effective in its gospel witness than churches that are older than 10 years old. Okay? Now that's probably not the most encouraging thing to say at your 10-year birthday celebration.

Okay? Our best days are behind us. It's all downhill from now. That's the end. Okay? Unless. Unless something.

Unless we realize that. Why is that? The reason why that is, is because when churches first begin, they are crystal clear on their calling and their mission.

[22 : 07] When a church first begins, it's crystal clear that we as a church exist to take this gospel, the good news of Jesus, into our city to help people that don't know the wonder of Jesus, that haven't discovered his love and his mercy and his grace, to find it in the person of Christ and in the gospel.

But over time, as the church becomes more established and more settled, what do we do? We tend to become more inward-looking. We tend to spend our time worrying about leadership development and in-house ministries.

We spend more and more time catering for those that are in the church, and we forget about those that don't know Christ. And so, over time, the church becomes more internally focused and inherently consumeristic.

Now, look at what Paul says here in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians. He says this, When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech and wisdom.

I decided to know nothing amongst you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstrations of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

[23 : 28] Is here what Paul's saying here? He's saying, When I came to you, I could have come with a whole host of agendas. I could have come with a way of improving your spiritual life. I could have come with advice to help you improve your life.

I could have come with five tips to have a better marriage and seven ways to raise your kids and all sorts of things. But actually, when I came to you, I was crystal clear on what my calling was.

I came to you with the message of the good news of Jesus. I came to you and brought to you the message that you are lost without Christ, but Jesus died on the cross to reconcile people that don't know Him, to come and find Him.

That those who haven't discovered the love of Jesus might come to know Him. Paul came with the life-changing message of redemption, reconciliation, and righteousness, found in the person of Jesus, because Jesus died on the cross in our place.

He says here in verse 2, I decided to know nothing amongst you except Christ and Him crucified. And that's a strange verse, but what it means is this, that Paul had the gospel and its crucified Messiah as his singular focus and passion when he came to the Corinthian church.

[24 : 40] And friends, as we move into our second decade as a church, we're going to face the same temptation, to become more and more inward focused and introspective and become more and more inherently consumeristic.

And yet, Christ calls us to remember our calling, to be a gospel-shaped community, but to be a missional community that takes the good news of Jesus dying in our place to our city to bring the hope and the wonder of Jesus to the city of Hong Kong.

And so do you know what that means? That means that we have to become a church that is continuing to plant churches in our city. That means that we have to become a church that continues to send missionaries across Asia and out to our city.

That means we have to become a church that is continuing to support ministries in the city of Hong Kong and beyond. And that's going to come with a cost. And that's going to be sad as we say goodbye to some of our very best people.

And that's going to cost us financially and emotionally and relationally. And yet Paul says that those things, even though they cost him, even though he was fearful, even though he was weak at times, that was fine.

[25 : 50] Because what it taught him is that the power wasn't in himself. The power is in God. The one who raised Jesus from the dead. And the power was in the Holy Spirit that empowered the church to be the church that God had called them to be.

Friends, family, Watermark, as we come to this juncture in our story, let's remember our origins. Watermark is not a church that's birthed out of superstar pastors or brilliance.

It's a very church that's birthed out of humble beginnings. Let's remember who we are. At the heart of who we are, we are a gospel-shaped community. That Christ and who he is and what he did on the cross is the very rock, the foundation of our church.

That apart from that, we have nothing. Apart from Jesus and his death on the cross, we might as well close shop. We have nothing apart from him. That's who we are. And who is God calling us to be?

To be a mission-shaped community. A community that's outward focused, that's taking the wonder of who Jesus is, the way he's changed our lives and what he's done for us, into our cities so that more people can discover the life and the healing and the redemption and the reconciliation in the person of Christ.

[27 : 05] Friends, let's be a church that is so in love with Jesus, so humbled by his grace, so built up in his love, so astounded by who he is and what he's done for us, that we continue to offer the hope of Christ to a lost and broken world.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we stand here this morning amazed, God. Not just at what you've done in us and through us, not just at the stories and the testimonies and the people that have been added.

God, we're amazed by who you are. Father, I want to pray that you will send your Holy Spirit upon us as a church, that you will both humble us by your grace and build us up by your profound love.

God, I want you once again this morning, call us back to the foundations and the roots of who we are. God, may we come back to the foot of the cross, find our hope and our identity in you.

God, I pray that we as a church, God, will never move beyond our humble origins, God, our humble beginnings. We will never become proud and self-sufficient. We will never think that what is done in and through us as a church is somehow because of us.

[28 : 26] But that God forever, we will say all glory to you. God, I pray, won't you fill us as a church with your Holy Spirit, God. Won't you send us out, God.

Won't you call church planters and missionaries, worship leaders and CG leaders, counselors and businessmen and businesswomen, God, that have a sense of calling, a sense of your anointing on them, God.

Lawyers and doctors and teachers, foreign domestic helpers, God, won't you infuse us and imbibe us, God, with your spirit. Send us out, we pray.

God, we pray that the city of Hong Kong will be more full of the hope of Jesus because of churches like Watermark and other churches in our city, God.

We pray that for ourselves. We pray that for other churches in our city. We pray for our brothers and sisters that are meeting all across the city this morning. God, we pray that we will be gospel-centered, Christ-exalting, God-glorifying, spirit-dependent churches.

[29 : 36] We pray these things in your wonderful and your powerful name. Amen. Amen.