

“Alexamenos worships his god.” Around 200 A.D., an unknown Roman citizen carved that phrase in Latin into a wall near the Palatine Hill in Rome. Accompanying the phrase was a crudely etched picture which depicts a young man, presumably “Alexamenos,” worshipping a man with a donkey head...hanging on a cross. You get the point, right? 150 years after Jesus lived, died, and rose again, this Roman saw fit to mock Christianity with this graffiti. Graffiti—like someone carving “Mike was here” in a bathroom stall. Except this graffiti expressed the viewpoint of many people in 200 A.D., and many people throughout history; that Christians worship a crucified... “donkey,” to keep it PG.

1,800 years later, Joy Behar recently used her platform on “The View” to compare Vice-President Mike Pence’s Christian faith to “a mental illness.” If you Google search “Jesus Christ,” today, you’ll find as many crude memes mocking Jesus as you’ll find reverent art of the Savior.

All of these examples—and there are certainly more—prove a point. The Apostle Paul, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was spot-on when he wrote, **“Christ crucified [is] a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”**

As our worship theme states, The Way of the Cross Means Submission to the Word. One of the crosses we take up—one thing we can expect to suffer because of our faith in Jesus—We must submit our lives, beliefs, and opinions to God’s Word. And because so many around us view the message of Jesus and his cross as weak and foolish, that means many will view you, like Alexamenos, as **Weak Fools for the Cross**. You might be mocked, ridiculed, excluded or avoided. People might question your mental state because of your faith in Christ. And yet because of Christ, we have every reason to rejoice in being labeled “Weak Fools for the Cross.”

That was the tug of war the Christians living in the Greek city of Corinth felt. Corinth was an important crossroads city for travel and trade, and was therefore a melting pot of beliefs, philosophies, and ethnicities.

But despite their many differences, most of the Jews, Greeks, and other Gentiles in Corinth had one common belief: that the upstart Christian church and its faith, was ridiculous. Each group thought Christianity was lacking some vitally important evidence.

As Paul wrote to these persecuted and ridiculed Christians, **“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom.”** In order to believe in Christianity, people sought a certain kind of proof, using self-determined parameters. The Jews wanted proof through miraculous signs and powerful success. The Greeks wanted proof through sound logic, philosophy, and intellectual success.

It’s not surprising that Jews expected miraculous signs, since so much of Israel’s history involved God doing miracles. The Ten Plagues in Egypt. The parting of the Red Sea. Miraculous meat, bread, and water provided for them in the Wilderness. Miraculous military victories as they captured the Promised Land. Miracles which God performed through prophets like Elijah and Elisha. Naturally, they also expected powerful miracles as evidence that the Messiah, the Promised Savior, had arrived.

That’s why we see the Jews command Jesus to back up his Messianic claim with miraculous power in our gospel lesson after Jesus cleared the market from the temple. **“What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”**

Although the Jews had many different expectations about the promised Messiah, they all expected the Messiah to be powerful and successful. They wanted proof that Jesus would be a powerful earthly ruler, who could provide for their needs, and defeat their hated Roman oppressors. The Feeding of the 5,000 met that expectation, so people flocked to him. But Jesus wouldn’t perform miracles on request, because that’s not why he came. The heart of Christianity isn’t, “Jesus is our successful, powerful earthly ruler,” but, **“We preach Christ crucified.”**

So Christ crucified was **“a stumbling block to Jews,”** because Christ crucified didn’t fit their expectations of power and success. In Jewish thought, any crucified person was cursed by God, dying the most shameful death imaginable. Since Jesus was crucified, they thought he couldn’t possibly be the powerful, successful promised Messiah they expected. He

didn't fit their expectations. So as Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead, they turned away from the miraculous evidence they craved, which was right in front of their eyes.

People today also demand powerful signs as evidence for Christianity. "If God exists, there would be no war or world hunger. If God exists, he should cure cancer. If God exists, then every Christian should be powerful and successful. Maybe then people would believe. But I just don't see it."

Honestly, don't we sometimes demand the same from God? We doubt our faith most often when we suffer, because it seems like God's not there, or at least he's not very powerful. In suffering, persecution, or failure, Satan jabs at our hearts, "If God exists, he would silence the doubters. He would heal you. He would make you more successful." Like the Jews, we often make success and power the required parameter of compelling evidence. And so we ignore Jesus' promises like, "***In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.***"

The Jews demanded miracles. However, "***Greeks look for wisdom.***" Paul himself went toe to toe with Greek philosophers when he proclaimed the gospel of Jesus in the city of Athens. We're told "***All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.***" The Jews wanted miraculous power as proof. But the Gentiles wanted brain power as proof. In order to believe something, it had to challenge their intellect; to make rational and reasonable sense; to make them hold their chins and say, "Hmm..." And if the message didn't fit their expectations of "wisdom," then it had to be foolishness.

And let's be honest. How much sense does it make that God would become man? How logical is it that God would sacrifice his own Son to save his undeserving enemies? How intellectually challenging is it that people are not saved by their knowledge, wisdom, or power, but completely by God's grace? That's why those Athenian philosophers called Paul a "babbling." To Gentiles and Jews alike, a crucified Christ was weak foolishness.

Not much has changed, has it? If you go to college, don't expect to find God in the science or philosophy departments. "You believe in Young Earth creationism? What are you, six?" "God himself wrote the Bible? Don't be naive! It was written by some men with an agenda!" "God defines right and wrong in the Ten Commandments? No way. Morality is subjective!" "God became man? And his life and death affects my eternity? I could tell you some fairy tales too!"

To the unbeliever, the message of the Bible; the message of the cross, is utter foolishness. Faith is something that foolish saps like us use to avoid life's hard truths. Faith is something weak, powerless people use to convince themselves that they have some power. If you trust in a "crucified Christ," then you're a weak fool for the cross.

Amen. Absolutely right. I am a weak fool for the cross, because "***to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***" To the unbeliever, Christ crucified is weak foolishness. But to those whom God has lovingly called to faith, Christ crucified is God's strongest strength, and his wisest wisdom. Note, Paul references both Jews and Greeks. Believers, who although their cultures saw Christ as weak foolishness, had been called to see Jesus for what he really is—the wisdom and power of God.

Although our culture also sees the crucified Christ as a crutch for the weak; an opiate for the foolish masses, we can joyfully accept the title, "Weak Fool," because "***the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.***" Paul means that "the foolish thing God did" and the "weak thing God did"—namely, a Crucified Christ-- is the strongest and wisest thing of all.

Because the crucified Christ wins us more than earthly power or wisdom. The crucified Christ wins eternal life! A powerful earthly ruler can fill my belly, and give me temporary peace. But he can't fill my soul and give me eternal peace. The wisest person can make me wise for trivia night, but he can't make me wise for salvation. Only a crucified Christ, and the weak, foolish message about him can do that.

Many will continue to view the cross as weak foolishness, because their parameters for convincing evidence revolve around earthly life. But Christ crucified gives us so much more! So much better!

But maybe it leads us to ask. Why “foolishness”? Why “weakness?” Because if the heart of God’s message centered on earthly power and wisdom, it’d be attractive. I would believe it through my own earthly wisdom. But why would a human being choose what is weak and foolish in the world’s eyes? It wouldn’t make any sense, unless...I don’t believe it because of my own power or wisdom, but because God in love called me to see through eyes of faith.

If the Bible is fables and fairy tales, its authors were fools. Why would they make the hero of the story a crucified Savior when both Jews and Gentiles were offended by a crucified Savior? Why would the authors paint the patriarchs, the church leaders, and themselves so often as fools and failures instead of stalwart pillars? Why would the first witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection be women, whose testimony wouldn’t have even been viewed as admissible evidence in a courtroom at the time? Why would they make up a message with so much seeming weakness and foolishness unless...it wasn’t made up. Unless... it actually happened. Unless...it’s the truth.

Author and theologian C.S. Lewis once wrote, ***“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”*** If I judge Christ crucified by the world’s expectations, I see foolish weakness. But when I judge the message of Christ crucified in the light of God’s Word, then I see it and myself completely differently. Not as weak fools, but as spiritually powerful and wise. In the light of Christ, and faith in him, like Alexamenos, may we always be viewed as weak fools for the cross, because the cross of Christ is the power and wisdom of God—for eternal life!