

## **“World Changing Foolishness”**

January 25, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The Bible tells the story of God’s relationship with humanity, and spoiler alert, it’s a love story. It is a story that begins in peace, beauty, and respect with a mutual exhale with both God and people in a good place. But discontent soon moved in as people started to long for more power and more control. We no longer wanted to be God’s ambassadors and rule earth together with God, we wanted to be God. You remember the story from Genesis 3, when the serpent convinced Adam and Eve to eat from the one tree God commanded them not to eat, “for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,” said the serpent. They ate and brokenness entered creation – brokenness in the relationship between God and people. The rest of the Bible is the story of God trying to heal that brokenness and reestablish the relationship with people and God ruling creation together under God.

The plan that permeates most of the Old Testament is the Abraham covenant. The genius of the covenant is God recognizing our desire for stuff. We want land. We want wealth. We want influence. And we want descendants to pass our stuff onto, to remember us and carry on our story. So what God did, is choose a specific family and basically said if you do life my way – as in go where I say to go, do what I say to do, be who I call you to be – then I will give you land, wealth, influence and descendants. We call it the Abrahamic covenant, and it carried the hope of the world for thousands of years. The only problem was, obedience to God was not the only way people could get land, wealth, influence and descendants. Another way was to steal them. Individuals and nations could take the land, wealth, descendants and push their influence by force, by threat, by cunning, by taking advantage of others. And that caused a problem because the most faithful to God’s ways and the most faithful to their own, greedy selfish ways; both had the same stuff. People started confusing God’s blessings with the booty of selfish greed, and thought everyone with the good stuff was blessed by God for doing life God’s way. God had to find a way to differentiate the two. So when God did a new thing in Jesus, God changed the system. God divorced land, wealth, influence and descendants from the reward system. The most greedy, most corrupt, most devious would no longer be confused with those blessed by God. Our earthly desires would no longer be connected with God’s blessing. Earthly rewards would be on earth, and God’s reward would be heaven, after this life was over. No question, God would still be active on earth, working to bring humanity back home again, occasionally blessing us here with wealth, with healing, with the desires of our heart; but the direct, covenantal reward for faithfulness moved to heaven.

We see that most clearly when we look at Jesus. Jesus was God come to earth, and Jesus lived the life God calls us too – a life of love, compassion and service; a life of peace, generosity and

lifting others up; a life of self-control, patience and kindness. Yet as far as we know, Jesus never accumulated land, wealth or descendants. Influence yes, but not the kind you impose on others, but the kind they claim on their own. Jesus did not receive great rewards while here on earth. As a matter of fact, He received quite the opposite. But when this life was over, God lifted Jesus out of the grave and raised Him from the dead. God raised Jesus to sit at His right hand in glory. God brought Jesus home to live and reign with God forever more.

But you have to admit, according to earthly standards, faithfulness to God and God's ways don't pay. We don't get what we want from it. Land, wealth, influence and descendants are not important in God's view, but they are important to us. So it makes no sense to us to live God's way now because it doesn't lead to what we want now. Our Scripture lesson puts it this way, "the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing... Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified." Jesus' death on the cross doesn't make any sense by earthly standards. But that is nothing new.

God has a history of doing things that do not make sense. Verse 19 of our reading is a quote from the prophet Isaiah. It says, "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'" The story that quote is taken from has an enemy at the gates of Jerusalem with an overwhelming force, and the king of Israel and his advisors want to do what makes sense – what is wise. They are debating whether to a) make a deal with Egypt to come to their aid in return for paying them taxes, or b) give the invaders the city in exchange for a promise of safety for the king and his counsel. As they debate, the prophet Isaiah enters and implores them to trust in the Lord. Make no deals with Egypt or the invaders, but rather go to the temple, bring a sacrifice, pray, and trust. Absolute foolishness. They had no chance against the invading forces. Moses was leading the people of God out of Egypt, following God's pillar of fire and smoke, and God led them to camp on the shores of the Red Sea when the most powerful army in the world was pursuing them. Foolish place to be. Now the sea has them trapped with nowhere to run. God told Joshua to march around Jericho once a day for a week. And on the seventh day to march around it 7 times then blow their trumpets. Stupidest battle plan ever. Eliab looked like a king and was the obvious, logical choice. The most honored son of his family, a warrior to lead God's people in battle, someone to look up to, but God passed him up and chose his little brother, a shepherd. Foolishness. It would have made sense for the Son of God to be born a Roman aristocrat, wealthy and powerful, ready to conquer the world in God's name, but God chose an unwed Mary and Joseph to be his mother and father. It didn't make sense.

But God invites us to follow His ways, not ours. King Hezekiah listened to the prophet Isaiah and went to the temple to pray, and the invaders retreated in defeat. The waters of the Red Sea parted for Moses and God's people passed through the waters before they crashed in on their pursuers. The walls of Jericho come tumbling down for Joshua. David became the greatest king

Israel ever had, and Jesus humbly conquered death. If foolishness successfully defends us in times of terror, makes a way where there seems to be no way, destroys what stands in the way of our success, makes great leaders out of nobodies, and conquers death; maybe we need to rethink our definitions of wisdom and foolishness. Verse 25 says, "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." At some point, we need to get ourselves out of the way. To get our wisdom and our arrogance out of the way, and give God's foolishness a chance.

When resources are scarce, it makes sense to hold what we have in case we need it. But God's foolishness says share. When emotional energy is low, it makes sense to conserve what we have left. But God's foolishness says use that limited energy to empower and lift up others. When we don't understand another person, when they act different, think different, and seem so "out there", innate wisdom says reject them, call them names, make them conform to you. But God's foolishness says serve them, take the time to listen to them, learn their story, where they are coming from, find common ground. The religious leadership rejected Jesus and put Him on the cross because He failed to conform to their definitions. You're right. Giving away resources does not help build wealth. Giving away our time and energy doesn't help us compete relationally. Acceptance does not instantly make us feel better about ourselves, making us feel all righteous. But earthly wisdom only leads to earthly rewards. And all those rewards end when our heart stops beating. It is time to play the long game. To get our wisdom and arrogance out of the way, and see what God's foolishness can do. You never know. You might feed 5000 people with 5 loaves of bread and couple fish. You might see your energy multiplied when added to others, as it comes back to you. In that stranger, you might host angels unaware. You might find more to life than earthly wisdom can perceive. "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

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