

## Feeling Foolish? God of Wisdom – 1Corinthians 1:27

### Scripture Reading: 1Corinthians 1:18-25

#### Introduction

Rapper, record producer, fashion designer, short-lived candidate for president, and all-around self-promoter, **Kanye West**, made a big splash in 2019 when he announced he had accepted Christ

Mr. West put out an album titled “Jesus is King” and he began to host weekly gatherings that he called “church services” but which many others called gimmicks because they were really more like concerts where the songs had spiritual overtones but the usual elements of a church service like Scripture readings and sermons were rarely included

And the guests had to sign non-disclosure agreements and wear clothing from his designer label in order to attend the invitation-only events

I’m not one to judge another person’s heart and Mr. West may well be trusting in Jesus alone for his salvation – that’s between him and the Lord and I just don’t know

I mention Kanye West and his Sunday Services only to direct our attention to the stir of excitement that hits us when someone famous makes a profession of faith in Jesus

It seems only natural to think that a movie star or a professional athlete or a personality of whatever stripe is more valuable to God than someone like you and me

We seem to think they have more to offer and that God is going to be able to somehow use that kind of person more than someone who is just “ordinary”

For that reason, it’s rare to find someone who only wants to be “ordinary”

That was the problem that existed in the church at Corinth and the problem that still exists today in the hearts and minds of many believers

The believers in Corinth were all scrambling for greater significance and were seeking to gain it by attaching themselves to the one they viewed as the greater “Christian celebrity”

As Greeks they were naturally disposed to follow the culture surrounding them and prone to philosophizing and debating about everything

As a result, they were choosing up sides and quarreling over the worldly values of influence, power, and prestige

Most of us want to have greater influence for the Lord and there’s nothing necessarily wrong with wanting that

Certainly, no one wants to be considered weak, ineffectual, or, even worse, foolish

But where we err is when we start to believe that God needs people who are smarter, better spoken, better looking, more charismatic, more respected, more powerful, more...whatever

Because when we come to this morning’s passage we see that way of thinking is practically the opposite of what God’s Word says

Paul has just admitted to the apparent foolishness of the cross and the preaching of the gospel when, like a courtroom attorney, he turns to the Corinthian believers and says, take a look at yourselves [**1Cor 1:26a**]

He says to them: *...consider your calling, brothers...*

Look in the mirror at yourself really ponder how you came to be saved and what has taken place in your own life

Then look around at each other and do the same thing and consider whom it is that God chooses

If you’re taking notes, that’s our Roman numeral one by the way; **whom God chooses**

## **I. Whom God chooses**

Notice that Paul hits them first with the negative examples which served to show that the members of the church of Corinth really weren't all that much to write home about according to the world's standards

He basically tells them, "take a good look at yourselves and you will see that if the world were choosing teams there aren't a whole lot of first-round draft picks in your midst"

Notice though that very important "m" because Paul doesn't say there aren't *any* in your midst that the world would consider mighty; he says there aren't *many*

And Paul begins by saying that there aren't many whom most people would call **wise** which means they wouldn't be considered particularly learned or clever

In fact, Paul spends the first part of this letter to the Corinthians telling them why those who are considered to be intellectuals reject the message of the gospel

The very idea that the Son of God was crucified in order to provide salvation to humanity seems patently absurd to them

While there are certainly many Christian intellectuals, one doesn't have to excel in knowledge or skill or even have a certain minimum I.Q. level for God to call you unto salvation and then use you in his service

Paul goes on to say that there aren't many among the Corinthian believers who the world would consider to be particularly **powerful**

Meaning that most of them didn't wield much influence over others

As a matter of fact, the church at Corinth was made up predominantly of slaves, servants, and various kinds of artisans and tradesmen – not exactly the world's definition of movers and shakers

And Paul rounds out the list of negatives by saying there aren't many who were **born into nobility** which means they weren't exactly on anybody's who's who list

In the first century being born into the right family meant having status and influence that simply couldn't be earned because the system didn't allow for social climbing

And Paul says that the intellectuals, the power-brokers, and the societal elites didn't tend to accept the gospel and join the church

Again, there were some in the church of Corinth who would have fit within each of those categories

Paul mentions elsewhere men like Sosthenes and Crispus who had been rulers of the synagogue and Erastus who was the city treasurer and Gaius who was apparently a wealthy businessman

But for the most part the members of the church in Corinth were just normal, unremarkable folks the kind of people the world views as insignificant at best

They didn't possess a whole lot of advanced degrees, they didn't have a lot of political clout or run large enterprises, and they weren't of the privileged class

And they most assuredly were not the people most people would choose to do big things

But God does things differently

Notice in verses 27 and 28 [**1Cor 1:27-28**] who Paul says God chooses

The foolish, the weak, the low and despised – those who the world would say are nobodies

Don't misunderstand and think that God is against intellect, power, and position – he is, in fact, the absolute personification of all of those things

And we see elsewhere in the Bible that wisdom is commended and God's people are commanded to seek it

What Paul is pointing out is that those things do not make a person more attractive or favorable to God

The formal way of saying that is that those things do not commend us to God

The God who created the entire universe and everything in it by his spoken command is not sitting in his throne room in heaven pining for someone smart enough or powerful enough or with a pure enough pedigree so that he can use them

When we really stop to think that premise through we recognize it as the absurdity it is to think that even the best and brightest among all of mankind have anything they can add that God truly needs

Looking back through biblical history we see that God didn't call the uneducated and weak exclusively but he did often call them first

Shepherds before kings and fishermen before scholars

There were undoubtedly men who had proven themselves in battle but God chose to use a timid man who was hiding in a winepress threshing grain to gain victory over the powerful Midianite army – of course that man was Gideon

But when we look at **Judges 6:34** which says "*the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon*" we begin to understand that God didn't choose Gideon because of his might – even though he calls him somewhat humorously a mighty man of valor

No, God used Gideon because Gideon was weak enough that God could work through him so that there would be no question that God should receive the glory

Likewise no one took the youth, David, seriously when he volunteered to go up against the Philistine champion, Goliath And yet God used that "nobody" of a lad to deliver the army of Israel and made him a king

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there was an evangelist who was every bit as successful as Billy Graham but who was about as unlikely a character as you could think of for God to use in such a role

He was an ex-baseball player by the name of Billy **Sunday** and he was uncultured and unpredictable in the pulpit

It's reported that he was known to do backflips on stage to illustrate forgiveness and that he once tugged on a man's long, white beard and said, "Honk, honk" during an invitation

Billy Sunday's own biographer even went so far as to label him "God's joke on the ministry" but God worked through Billy Sunday to save over a million souls

As amazing as the account of Billy Sunday is it really is just the tip of the iceberg

Everyone in Christian circles and many beyond know well the name of Billy **Graham** who was without a doubt the best-known and most successful evangelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – and he was pretty much the opposite of Billy Sunday

And most Christians know the name of D.L. **Moody** who was also a famous evangelist in the early 1900's and the founder of Moody Bible Institute

But fewer know that when Moody was invited to preach a series of revivals in England he influenced a minister named F. B. **Meyer** who was later invited to preach at a Bible college in the United States

One of Mr. Meyer's sermons had a profound influence on a young student name Wilbur **Chapman** who also became an evangelist and ultimately mentored Billy Sunday who began a prayer group that eventually called another evangelist named Mordecai **Ham** to lead the crusade where Billy Graham was saved as a teenager

Amazing isn't it? But we're not done yet because we haven't gotten to the "nobody" that God used to start this chain

It was a relatively unknown Sunday school teacher by the name of Edward Kimball who was faithful to witness to one D.L. Moody while he was still an unknown clerk in a shoe store and led him to the Lord

The chain from Moody to Meyer to Chapman to Sunday to Ham to Graham all began with one Edward Kimball

But really, it began with someone whose name the world doesn't even know – the person who led Edward Kimball to the Lord and mentored him along the way – and it has not yet been seen where the chain will end

God delights in using those who the world views as unlearned, weak, and nothing to accomplish his mighty deeds

So let's look next at why God chooses as he does and we'll see our passage gives us three reasons

## **II. Why God chooses as he does**

The first reason is found in verses 27-28 [**1Cor 1:27-28**] and it is **to admonish worldly values**

We read –

***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...*

Realizing that God chose us in spite of us can be a hard pill to swallow because it's just human nature to want to believe that we are special and that we somehow merited God's favor more than someone else

But **Ephesians 2:8** tells us quite plainly that God's calling is because of God's grace that that it has nothing to do with us, our talents, our abilities, our intellect, our connections, or anything else we might name

And he did so for his own purposes as we read in **2Timothy 1:9**

God chose each one he has chosen – and that includes you if you are one of his true children – in spite of who and what you are not because of what you bring to the table

In fact, when God chooses to use the intellectual, the powerful, and the people of high status he does so only after they have become convinced that their usefulness and value to God doesn't come from those things but from the presence of Jesus in their lives and their complete surrender to him

Do you want to know your greatest ability is before God?

It's your availability

It's recognizing that you can do nothing for God except allow God to work in you and through you

Going back to our opening illustration of Kanye West, we have to admit that it's rather amazing that we think so highly of that which God thinks so little

We tend to think that surely God could use a person like Kanye or Oprah or Justin Bieber or some other well-known celebrity or even us if we just had a bit more of the qualities we lack but God says otherwise

Two weeks ago when we looked at Luke 16 we saw in verse 15 [**Luke 16:15**] that God actually views the traits we esteem as abominations

God actually loathes those things and is disgusted by them because they lead to us relying more on ourselves than on him

And that leads us to the second reason God chooses as he does - **so that no one can boast**

And we find that reason stated in verse 29 [**1Cor 1:29**] – “...so that no human being might boast in the presence of God”

Thinking back to Gideon; when he was finally convinced to go up against the Midianites he put out the call for able-bodied fighting men to rally around him and 32,000 responded while we read in Judges 8 that the Midianites had at least 135,000 which is more than a 4 to 1 advantage

But God wasn't content to go against the Midianites with a weak commander and such a great disadvantage

No, God told Gideon to reduce the size of his force all the way down to just 300 men – a 450 to 1 disadvantage – and God gave them the ridiculous battle plan of breaking jars that contained torches and shouting at the Midianites

And God did all of that so that no one could ever say that Gideon and his forces had won the day – the very idea is so preposterous that God has to get all the credit...

Still we persist in being fascinated and enthralled by our own bigness and believe that if we could only be bigger somehow we could be more useful to God

Let me ask you this:

I pointed out earlier how millions came to the Lord through the ministries of Billy Sunday and Billy Graham but how many people did those two gentlemen save and really, how much did they contribute to anyone's salvation?

The answers are none and nothing because only the cross of Christ saves and it was all God working through them I'm certain neither of those two men would say differently so as to brag about all the people they saved

Do you want to know how much God needs any of us and how much we bring to the effort?

In Luke 19 we see the Pharisees command Jesus to rebuke his disciples and to tell them to stop singing and shouting his praises and Jesus says in **Luke 19:40** that if they refused to testify to who he was he could use the stones to do so

How does it feel to know a rock could take your place?

We tend to forget that the PhD has nothing more to brag about than the village idiot because the knowledge and wisdom of each of them is virtually non-existent when compared to God's knowledge and wisdom

And when we begin to focus on what we are and what we have it can lead to us boasting about "our" great accomplishments so God chooses the foolish, the weak, and the despised to keep us from having reason to boast

And that brings us to our third reason that God chooses as he does – it's **so that Jesus gets all the glory**

Look with me at verses 30-31 [**1Cor 1:30-31**] –

*...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."*

Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord

Jesus said that there was never anyone born who was greater than his cousin John who we know as John the Baptist

And what made John great was not his pedigree or his accomplishments but his focus

In **John 3:30** we see John state "[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease"

For a brief time, John had a popular ministry and many people were coming to the Jordan where he was ministering to partake in the baptism of repentance that he offered

John had a very important job and one that had been prophesied long ago

But John knew his job was to be the forerunner and proclaimer of the coming Messiah and his mission statement was therefore "more of Jesus and less of me"

To say "look at me and what I've done" is the exact opposite of that and steals from God what is rightfully his

The prophet Isaiah had this to say about how ridiculous the notion of boasting is in Isaiah 29:16 –

*You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?*

And James writes in **James 4:16** that "all such boasting is evil"

God chooses to work through those people who know they have nothing to offer so that his Son gets all the glory for the things he accomplishes through them

## Conclusion

One of the most important lessons you can learn is that God doesn't want you to do anything at all for him

But he wants to do a great deal through you

And God doesn't want you to have the attitude that you'll do whatever you can manage to do in your weakness

Not at all! God wants to channel his mighty power through you because God delights in using ordinary people to do quite extraordinary things

I don't know if the dry goods salesman by the name of Edward Kimball had any idea of how much God had done through his faithfulness to teach Sunday school to a group of teenage boys

But, if he was like most of us, he probably thought he had accomplished very little with his life and ministry and yet God worked through him in a very powerful way

To most people Edward Kimball wouldn't even be considered a minor celebrity; he was more of a nobody than a rock star but God did great, far-reaching, and long-lasting things through him

And even if no one on this earth ever remembered to mention his name at all God knows what he accomplished through that nobody who was faithful to serve where God placed him

And God knows the name of everyone who serves him no matter how minor and insignificant their service might appear to themselves or to others

Again, the greatest ability you possess is not your intellect or your power or your influence it's your availability

And your willingness to be used the way God wants to use you so that he can work in and through you for his glory

Back in the 1980's the U.S. Marines used the slogan, "We're looking for a few good men" in their recruiting efforts

Of course their intent was to inspire young men to rise to the challenge of proving they were good enough to be a Marine

But as we've seen in our passage God is looking for those who aren't good enough but those who are small enough to be used in his service

As **2Chronicles 16:9** says - *the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him*

And those are the people who know there is nothing they can accomplish without God and show up to do the job anyway

So if you're feeling foolish, weak, and lowly; good!

You're just the kind of person God is looking for

Let's pray