

## No Superstars But A Savior

### 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Introduction: Today we live in a world that idolizes celebrities and superstars. We put on pedestals athletes, intellectuals, movie stars, musicians and even politicians. We follow their every move and hang on their every word. We wish we could be like them, have their influence, and enjoy their wealth and popularity. It is understandable that the wisdom of the world acts and thinks this way. There is nothing surprising whatsoever about it. However, when it comes to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing could be more misplaced or wrong headed. It is actually 180 degrees at odds with the mind of Christ that all believers are to pursue, a mind characterized by personal humility and service to others (Phil. 2:3-5). There is no place in the church for superstars. We have a Savior and His name is Jesus (Matt. 1:21), and He is all we need. Further, God seldom (but not never!) calls the superstars of this world to Himself. As Paul makes clear, He calls the unlikely, the unimpressive, the unworthy, the nobodies of this world that no one will boast in anything or anyone but the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 1:31). Martyred missionary Jim Elliot's words about missionaries is an equally appropriate word for all followers of our Savior, King Jesus: "Missionaries [Christians] are very human folks, just doing what they are asked. Simply a bunch of nobodies trying to exalt Somebody" (Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*, 46).

Once again we are going to see how God turns the value systems of this world upside down and on its head. He did it by saving Jews and Gentiles through a crucified Savior (1:18-25), and He does it again in the types of people He calls to Himself and saves. It is again a marvelous reversal and a radical transformation of normal human ways of thinking. I like Guy Waters summation of our text:

“From the standpoint of God’s wisdom, this world’s values of worldly wisdom, power, and noble birth are null (1:26). God’s wisdom exalts what is weak and despised in order to nullify human boasting (1:27-29) and to direct all boasting to God himself (1:31). These principles are nowhere more clearly on display than in the sufficiency of Christ for the believer’s salvation (1:30)” (*A Biblical-Theological Introductions to the NT*, ed. Michael Kruger, 229).

## I. God Calls The Unlikely

1:26

God’s message of the cross is unimpressive to Jews and Greeks (1:18-25). It is not spectacular enough and it is not intellectually persuasive. Persons who demand these things from God and that He meets them on their terms, are simply too wise and powerful to come to Him by way of a crucified man on a cross. Thus, we should not be surprised or shocked at the kinds of people God draws to Himself and that bow their knee to King Jesus at the cross. It is a motley crew to be sure! Paul says if you doubt this proud Corinthians, just “consider your calling brothers and sisters.” Consider who you were and where

you were when Jesus saved you! In all honesty, you are not an impressive lot! Warren Wiersbe is right, “God called them, not *because of* what they were, but *in spite of* what they were! (*Be Wise*, 27).

1) He seldom calls the intelligent

Paul says reflect on your lost state and condition before God effectually called you to Himself in salvation. “Not many” (and do note he does not say “not any”) “were wise from a human perspective” (Lit. “wise according to the flesh”). The *ESV* says not many “were wise according to worldly standards.” John Calvin reinforces our understanding when he writes,

“Paul, however, does not say here, that there are *none* of the noble and mighty that have been called by God, but that there are *few*. He states the design of this—that the Lord might bring down the glory of the flesh, by preferring the contemptible before the great.” (*1 Cor.*, Calvin’s Comm. Vol XX, 91).

A high IA, an Ivey League education, or numerous degrees hanging on your wall will not get you to God. It is not the wisdom of man that saves, it is the message of the cross. Being smart will not save you. Paul says to the Corinthians, “take a look!” There are not many Ph.D.’s in the room. The intellectual elites are few in number in the kingdom.

2) He seldom calls the influential

God does not often call “many powerful” to salvation, the movers and shakers of the world. Like their intellectual companions, they do not see any need for God in their lives. “Look at all my money.” “Look at all I have. Look at who I am,” they say. Jesus has a response to the false security in position, prestige and possessions, “Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24).

### 3) He seldom call the important

God does not often call “many of noble birth” (*MSG*, “high society families”). This is the elite of society by virtue of their birth and family. In Paul’s day this would be the Sanhedrin in the nation of Israel. It was the “patricians” or aristocrats of Roman society. “These families provided the empire’s political, religious and military leadership” (*The Roman Empire in the First Century*, “Patricians,” [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)). They carried enormous weight and influence. They were proud, self-sufficient and in need of nothing or no one, include God and a ridiculous message of salvation based on a Jew dying on a cross.

## II. God Chooses The Unimpressive

1:27-29

Paul continues his argument, and once again emphasizes God’s work in calling us to Himself in salvation. Three times Paul uses the phrase “God has chosen”

(v. 27 twice, v. 28). Our salvation has its origin and source in the divine will and purpose of God. It was God's plan to call the nobodies of this world through the cross of Christ. Schreiner is right, "Just as the cross reverses human expectations in terms of how the world will be saved, so too God chose to save the most unlikely candidates – the *foolish* and *weak*. Those who are not esteemed for their wisdom and those who lack political power are among those whom God has savingly called to himself" (*1 Cor.*, TNTC, 72-73). Five specific groups are highlighted as the objects of God's gracious call to salvation.

1) He chooses the foolish

1:27

God does not call to salvation many who are wise, powerful and of noble birth (v. 26). Instead, He calls the "foolish in this world to shame the wise." The word for "foolish" is *mōra*. It means the unintelligent, the stupid. *The Message* says, "I don't see many of the brightest and the best among you." Not much room for boasting or pride here. Shame on the "wise guys" who think they can reason their way to God with their powerful and impressive minds.

2) He chooses the weak

1:27

God has also "chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong."

Choosing the weak of this world, to bring glory to Himself, began when God

called small, insignificant Israel (Deut. 7:7). It has always been God's pattern to choose the most unlikely and unimpressive. In a world that idolizes, but also cowers at power, God has chosen to do his greatest work through weakness. What could be weaker than a poor, homeless Jew bloody and beaten hanging on a cross? What could have been more powerful than the salvation of the world?!

3) He chooses the insignificant 1:28

“God has chosen what is insignificant” (*ESV*, “lowly”). God delights in saving the lowly over those of significance, common people over those of “noble birth.” People that the world pays no attention to, God pays great attention and uses them greatly for his glory! A shepherd boy named David whom He made a king? An uneducated farmer and tender of sycamore trees named Amos whom He made a prophet? An old woman named Anna who He called to be a prophetess and who testified to the redemption of Jerusalem when she saw the baby Jesus (Luke 2:26-38)? Insignificant to the world, but not to God.

4) He chooses the despised 1:28

God has chosen “what is despised in the world.” This word “despised” may simply amplify the world “insignificant” or “lowly.” However, it would apply to all that the world holds in disdain, the unimportant, even pathetic, of

society. Today we speak of “trailer trash” or “people from the hood.” When I was a boy we spoke of those “on the other side of the tracks” and those who lived in “Rose Town.” People treated so very poorly in this world are prime candidates for God’s grace and salvation.

5) He chooses the nobodies

1:28-29

God has chosen “what is viewed as nothing,” (*ESV*, “things that are not”) the nobodies of this world. The world looks down on some people as worthless and useless zeros! God, however, prefers and chooses the nobodies over the somebodies! He picks them first for His team. And, why did He do it this way? First, “to bring to nothing what is viewed as something.” Second, “so that no one may boast in his presence.” Richard Hays notes there are echoes both of Hannah’s prayer in 1 Sam. 2:1-10 and Mary’s Song in Luke 1:46-53 (*First Corinthians*, 1997, 77). Psalm 83:16-18 also adds a helpful commentary on these verses, “Cover their faces with shame so that they will seek your name, LORD. Let them be put to shame and terrified forever; let them perish in disgrace. May they know that you alone – whose name is the LORD – are the Most High over the whole earth.” Vaughn and Lea note, “An interesting comment on Paul’s description of the church at Corinth is provided by the pagan opponent of Christianity, Celsus, who denounced the Christian appeal to the lower classes with the words:

“The following are the rules laid down by them. Let no one come to us who has been instructed, or who is wise or prudent (for such qualifications are deemed evil by us); but if there be any ignorant, or unintelligent, or uninstructed, or foolish person, let them come with confidence. By which words, acknowledging that such individuals are worthy of their God, they manifestly show that they desire and are able to gain over only the silly, and the mean, and the stupid, with women and children.—Origen, *Against Celsus*, 3:44” (*1 Cor. BSC*, 31).

Celsus’ words are not entirely true, but they are not completely in error either. God is in the habit of calling the unimpressive by the world’s standards.

### III. God Changes The Unworthy

1:30-31

God hates pride. It is at the heart of all sin. Now, a good question to ask and answer is, “what is pride?” Pastor John Piper provides a helpful description: 1) It is boasting in self and not the Lord; 2) It is taking credit ourselves for what God alone can do; 3) It is relying on self and not God; 4) It is feeling sufficiency in our own strength and not in God’s; 5) It is the disinclination to admit that we are mere earthen vessels so that another gets the glory; 6) It is the unwillingness to admit weaknesses that may accent the power of Christ” (“Let Him Who Boast, Boast in the Lord,” 1-31-88). Paul has presented an argument that completely dismantles any human boasting in salvation. Now he puts the



nail in the coffin of all such thinking noting once again every good thing we have comes to us from God through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

1) Wisdom delivers us from sin's perspective 1:30

Paul begins verse 30 by reminding us that “It is from Him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus.” Salvation is of God not man. All praise and all boasting is to be directed to God and never humanity. Salvation is in Christ and only Christ. Here is true wisdom, a wisdom as old as God Himself (Prov. 8:22-31) and made evident in the most unexpected way, in the cross. Sin told us we could save ourselves. The cross tells us only Christ can save us.

2) Righteousness delivers us from sin's penalty 1:30

Three wonderful blessings of salvation are connected to God's wisdom in verse 30. They are “righteousness, sanctification and redemption.”

“Righteousness” teaches we are delivered from sin's penalty by the alien, imputed righteousness of Christ to our account. It speaks to the great exchange! We give Christ our sin and He gives us His righteousness (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

3) Sanctification delivers us from sin's power 1:30

“Sanctification” or “holiness” delivers us from sin's power positionally and progressively. Schreiner says here Paul speaks of “the holiness that belongs to all believers by virtue of their union with Christ” (p. 75). In salvation

God sets us apart from sin and unto Himself as His own personal possession; set apart from sin and for the Savior as holy priest, called to serve him (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

4) Redemption delivers us from sin's presence 1:30

The word “redemption” recalls God’s deliverance of the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage. It also carries the idea of a price paid to purchase a slave. God has rescued sinners from their sin, and the price paid for purchase is the precious blood of the Son of God (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

5) Boasting in the Lord delivers us from sin's pride 1:31

Verse 31 brings this section to a close. Once again Paul anchors his argument in the Old Testament, drawing from Jeremiah 9:23-24 where the Bible says, “This is what the LORD says: the wise person should not boast in his wisdom; the strong should not boast in his strength; the wealthy should not boast in his wealth. But the one who boasts should boast in this: that he understands and knows me – that I am the LORD, showing faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things. This is the LORD’s declaration.” There is a place and time for boasting. The place is the cross and the time, better, the person, is in the Lord. The prideful will never come to God by the way of the cross and be saved. The

humble, on the other hand, will bow their knee to Christ and raise their voice to God, “you did it all! You did it all!”

Conclusion: The gospel of Jesus Christ is truly an amazing story of God’s great reversal in his grand redemptive plan. The nobodies of earth can now become the somebodies of heaven, because the “Somebody” of heaven came for the nobodies of earth! His weakness became our strength. His foolishness became our wisdom. His lose became our gain. His crucifixion became our salvation! So let us boast loud and long, and let our boast be in the Lord. Galatians 6:14 sums it up perfectly, “But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross, and I to the world.” Only to the cross will I ever and always cling.