The foolishness of preaching

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Dr G.N.M.Collins

[0:00] 1 Corinthians chapter 1, part of verse 21. But after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom you know God, it pleased God, and these words in particular, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

It is a discussion of the different attitudes of men to the gospel that leads to this exclamation, an exclamation which, perhaps at the first hearing, might almost sound somewhat irreverent, bringing in the suggestion of folly at any point in the gospel.
But obviously the apostle is not charging God with folly. The reference to foolishness comes in in particular in verses 18 and again in 23.
For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. And again in verse 23. But we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews of stumbling blocks, and unto the Greeks foolishness.
He's quoting men's opinions about the gospel. It is foolishness, they say. It's offensive to good taste. And in any case, it's futile.
[1:23] How could you possibly expect Humbert from preaching about a king who had arisen from the lowest level of society and was never crowned except in derision?

The crown was thorn and crucified by the demand of his own country. Foolishness. What hope was that a world conquest in going out with a message like that?
The truth itself was a grievous offense to them. We wanted to remember that it was the most disgusted form of death, penal death, to know how the Greeks would have thought about it. Foolishness, they would say. And they would apply that word especially to the doctrine that was based upon the cross. To go out with a message that bore the interest of the accursed cross.
What follows? And Paul catches at that word foolishness and echoes it. The gospel that he preaches may indeed seem foolishness to the wise world.
[2:45] Wise in its own conceit. But where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world?

Hath not God made me? Foolish. The wisdom of this world. For after that, and the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God. It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them but believe.
That then is our subject tonight. Salvation. And I just think as we may be held by our text of the origin of it, the condition of it, and the message of it.
First then, the origin of the doctrine of salvation. It pleased God. It's up there for the moment. It pleased God. The whole transaction had its origin in God's root pleasure.
the plan of salvation is sometimes presented in such a way to give the impression that Jesus had to come into this world and to die for sinners in order to make God love us and to win his favor for men.
[4:18] And a comparison is made between God the Father and God the Son. Where the Father is spoken of as stern, righteous indeed, but stern, severe, unrelenting, unable to regard man with any favor whatsoever until he meets all his God.

and then, as against that, Christ is a percentage of the exact opposite, full of compassion, loving, kind, merciful, but the distinction, my dear friend, is entirely false.
And it can claim no support whatsoever from the word of Holy Scripture. Although, because of the incomprehensible unity of the Trinity, we cannot properly speak of salvation as originating with any one person in the Trinity in particular because we cannot conceive of one person in the Trinity operating in distinction from another.
Nevertheless, in the order of things we would have to speak of salvation as originating in the Father. Although, there is no work of any person in the Trinity that is exclusively his, the other

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-06 06:59:20

person takes part in his witness.
Yet we do speak about God sending his Son into the world. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.
[6:14] But it did not require, and let's emphasize this, it did not require the death of the Son to make God love sinners.

It was not the death that he endured, nor all the pangs he bore, but God's eternal love procured. God was loved before.
Love was behind the whole transaction. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not tell what have everlasting life.
One of the purposes of Christ's coming indeed was to correct man's view of God. and his coming is represented as proof of the Father's love.
It pleased God to save sinners and it pleased him to come in accordance with his Father's will. Do you remember the first appearance of Jesus recorded in the New Testament?
[7:23] On that occasion when he stayed behind in the temple, a boy of twelve, and Joseph and Mary supposing him to the company set out for Nazareth, supposing him to be in the company but not bothering to inquire until the end of the day.

And then what consternation? They sought him everywhere and had to retrace their footsteps eventually right to the temple and there they found him among the doctors answering and asking questions.
And when he expostulated with him why he had so dealt with him, you remember his answer. Why is it that he taught me? Wist he not that I must be about my Father's business?
And when at length the work given him to do as Savior was accomplished, he proclaimed it from the cross. it is finished.
Just as he had said in his high priestly prayer, I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work that thou givest me to do. It pleased God.
[8:41] And that knows how it was all revealed to the evangelical prophet in the Old Testament. Do you remember his message? It pleased the Lord to bruise him.

Not because it pleased the Lord to see him suffering. But it pleased the Lord that the salvation of his people should be accomplished by those sufferings and by the death to which they lay.
so much did he desire the salvation of the sinner that he spared not his own son but delivered him up for us all.
No one could have charged him with severity if he had left man to perish in his sins. But his delight was in mercy.
I have no pleasure, he cried, in the death of the wicked but that the wicked should turn from his evil way and live. It pleases God to save man.
[9:43] Fear not, little flock, said Jesus. It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

It's a gracious thing on his heart to give you the kingdom at all but think of the manner in which he gives it. He gives it with good pleasure. His heart delight in what he's doing.
His delight is in mercy. That was how God gave and in the gift of God the salvation of his people originated.
The constraint upon which he acted was not exerted from without. It arose from within in the boundless love of his own heart.
That surely is the message of the parable of the prodigal son but that is the best known of all the parables and a wonderful illustration of the gospel. He's talking about one sinner.
[10:48] Indeed that whole chapter of the 15th of Luke tells of the value that God attaches to the individual. And in this case it was the prodigal that the father was concerned with.

And when the prodigal appeared on the distant horizon the father didn't wait any longer but ran out to show where his pleasure lay embraced him fell upon his neck kissed him received him as his son and commanded that the whole household should rejoice for this my son was dead and is alive again he was lost on his house.
And the application of the story as Jesus himself puts it in I say unto you there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repented it pleased God.
that's where salvation originated. Well let's think of the message of it. It pleased God he says by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe God says necessary right away to make a distinction here he's not saying that preaching the preaching of the cross as foolishness although

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-06 06:59:20

he is saying that the unfazed so regarded but he doesn't agree with us he's talking about foolish preaching the presentation of what is represented as a message of salvation and yet that fails of exulting the kind of preaching that was given by the people to whom these deluded people have been asking but there's a world of difference between foolish preaching and the foolishness of preaching it's foolish preaching that leaves out this very thing that was offending those auditors of all time the cross and it's bearing upon the sins it's foolish preaching futile preaching that leaves out the power of the blood that cleanses from all things the blessed result of believing in Jesus Christ and there's a great deal of foolish preaching going on in the world today
Joseph Parker said in his own time we preach Christ and him crucified leave out those last words and him crucified and the whole significance of the cross bleeds to death and so it does and it demagnetizes the whole message and I if I be lifted up from the earth and that's the magnetism of the cross will draw all men unto me but we're not dealing at the moment with foolish preaching although there's a great deal of it but with what the world calls the foolishness of preaching unto the Jews a stumbling block unto the Greeks foolishness look at the view at the cross from the viewpoint of the cultured Greeks and you will agree that it does look hopeless scheme for the salvation of men there was a foolishness you might say at least though the world judged it in the manner of our saviour's coming the wise men themselves expected to find him in a palace and they brought gifts that were worthy of a king's acceptance but they found him not in a palace not even in an inn there was no room for him there but in a stable the child as it seemed of a peasant girl from Galilee an event of which no mention would be made in any exotic circle and then again there seemed to be a foolishness that they were not even in his early environment his early home you remember was in Nazareth where he grew up and was a carpenter was that the way to begin to prepare for a great life work that had the capture of the throne as some did and then when they spoke about him as a prophet as some did the wise men shook their heads and said search and see out of Galilee come as no prophet and even the guileless Nathanael when Philip went to tell him of his discovery we found him of whom
[17:06] Moses in the law and the prophets speak Jesus of Nazareth even Nathanael reacted at the mention of Nazareth can any good thing come out of Nazareth but he accepted his friend's invitation to come and see and was convinced whereby thou wast the son of God thou wast the king of Israel and there was a foolishness was there not looking at it from a worldly viewpoint a foolishness about the very conduct of his ministry he wasn't doing the things that you would expect men to do men who wanted to gain a following he was antagonizing the people that mattered the scribes and the Pharisees he lashed them with his denunciation of their hypocrisy was that the way to gain an influential following and as if that were not sufficient folly he associated with publicans and sinners and drew attention to himself in that way why it is your master with publicans and sinners and it was the common people who heard him gladly when he called his disciples he called men from the fishing villages of Galilee what foolishness a carpenter king with fishermen courtiers and then when the tide did seem to be flowing in his favor he didn't think advantage of it there was a time you remember when the people would have taken him and made him king by force but he eluded them frustrated their design what foolishness and of course the culminating folly was the cross of self he could have avoided it right to the last he could have avoided it had he been so minded he laid down his life of himself no man took it from him but he wouldn't we read that when the time was come he set his face steadfastly to go up to

Jerusalem knowing very well what awaited him there the folly of his action was apparent both to friend and foe his very friends would have stood between him and the cross but he held on his way his disciples forsook him and let his bear one of them sold him for thirty pieces of silver another denied him three times denied that he had any connection with them and they all forsook him and fled oh the foolishness of it that surely was the view that the disciples on the way to Emeas took on that day that wonderful day when he came back to them although they didn't as yet recognize him and we thought they said respondently and in complete conclusion we thought that it had to be who should have redeemed it even on the cross they had mocked him charged him with folly thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it again in three days come down from the cross if he be the son of
God let him come down from the cross and we will believe him he saved others himself he cannot save and again the top come down from the cross and we will believe oh you can understand the judgment of those men whom Paul reprove here the Jews of stumbling blocks to the Greeks

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-06 06:59:20

foolishness if all their culture and all their philosophies had failed had failed to achieve the result at which their great philosopher the day what hope was there for this gospel when they heard it in Athens they laughed and in semi-politeness they said we will hear thee again this month we've got no time for it for the present foolishness yes but
I listen it pleased God by their foolishness of preaching to save them that believe and everything changed this was the revelation that the cross was intended to make God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world for after that in the wisdom of the world the world by wisdom knew not God it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe for the Jews required a sign and the Greeks speak after wisdom but we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling block unto the big foolishness but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God and the preaching of Christ crucified has been having with self ever since and the
God is able to continue to have with self until the last of the ransom is gathered in it's God's choice it pleased God that this should be the message and it is we who are fools that we substitute anything else for the method and the message of God the very dark time during the last war General Snutt that wise old soldier from South Africa not great statesman too gave an important address in London on one occasion it was indeed a dark hour but the old soldier's eye was bright and he said something like this if I can recall his words on the horizon of the future there is only one figure that
[25:16] I can see it isn't the man of Munich it isn't the man of Rome when he met Mussolini it's the man of Calvary the man of Galilee the man of Galilee is the only world of space how true that was when all these other names shall pass away and they are passing a railway his name forever shall endure lost like the sun it shall men shall be blessed in him and blessed all nations shall him call it please God by the foolishness of the preachers to save them that believe the slain lamb is in the midst of the throne and the redeemed praise him unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his father unto him be the glory father lastly a word about the condition of it the condition of salvation how can we enter into an experience of this salvation of which

Paul is speaking how can we today benefit from what Christ did upon the cross 2000 years ago our text tells us by the foolishness please God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe by grace you are saved through faith and not of yourselves it is the gift of God being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ it was the condition insisted upon by Christ himself when he preached his own gospel God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life he that believeth on the son not life he that believeth not the son shall not see life but the wrath of
God abideth upon him but what do we mean by saving faith a faith that saves is it just that we give an intellectual sense to the facts of the gospel as they have brought before us in the word that we should accept as a fact that Jesus did indeed come into this world that he died upon the cross that he rose again and that he ascended to the heavens from when he came is it just that we accept these facts just that we accept it as a fact that in 1314 the battle of Bannesburn secured Scotland's independence the old divines used to speak about head faith and heart faith and it is only the faith that reaches the heart that results in the salvation of the sin a man may be very orthodox in his views very orthodox in his head and yet a complete heretic in his heart alienated from the gospel in all that he really believes and yet it's a simple approach isn't it a simple salvation having having heard and accepted
Philip's exposition of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah the suffering servant Ethiopian eunuch said when he came to water see here is water water forbid me from being God kind if thou believe it with all thine heart thou mayest and the profession of faith came I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and my dear friend if that seems an inadequate expression of faith just think it over in the light of that whole incident of Philip's dealing with a man to meet he open and
I think he will come to the conclusion that it is a very full profession of faith I believe that Jesus Christ this man of whom I have been reading and of whom you have been telling me this suffering servant who was led as a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before her share is done open not his mouth I believe that he is the Son of God and the effect of that the effect that that belief had upon was this he went on his way rejoicing this is what saving praise means if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe with thine heart that God has raised him from the

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-06 06:59:20

dead and remember the raising from the dead was God signifying he accept of the
[31:45] Saviour's work thou shalt be saved there's all the world of difference between the head face as the old divines give to say and the heart face the merely intellectual believer can listen to the story of the cross and set his seal to it and not be led to repentance he can say Jesus Christ is the son of God I believe that the man who's got heart faith falls at the feet of Jesus and says my Lord and my God the head faith man can listen to the story of the gospel

I say and it doesn't lead him to repentance but the heart faith man washes the pierced feet with his ears the head faith man can listen with folded arms to what is being told him but the heart faith man unstops his hands and stretches out his arms to accept God's unspeakable gift are we believers in that sense the sense of the heart faith man has the love of God been shed abroad on our hands are we enjoying the privilege of the children of God of whom it is written they shall all be taught of the Lord and are we being led into the mystery the glorious mysteries of Calvary more and more deeply as life goes on have we by faith heard the voice of
Jesus saying to us as he said to that person who lay at his feet during his earthly ministry son be of good cheer thy sins are forgiven if you have then again I say you will set to your seal that this word is true it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe and because it pleased God you my dear friend even if you haven't come to God by Jesus Christ hitherto you have got you may have you've got a ground of confidence in setting your face to him tonight I'm going to conclude with something that I read quite recently that was of special interest to me because it concerns this locality in which we are so frequently gathered and this very building indeed in which we are gathered tonight
I read it in William Adamson's book Religious Anecdotes of Scotland he tells of a lady who visited Edinburgh on one occasion and stood in the lawn market out there and looked up at the high land just opposite the church on the other side and in the dim light of the evening saw a light burning in a window and the thought struck her there was somebody living up there quite cut off from the rest of people and she felt so strongly that there was that she climbed those stairs in the darkness and reached the door there was a response to her knock a poor woman opened the door to us she was living alone in one room and the mask of poverty deep poverty were all around her and the woman said to her tactfully
I haven't come here to ask you why do you have any reason to believe that you have found the Lord but I'd like to ask you if you have any reason to believe that the Lord has found you and at this the old woman smiled and she said yes I have so they got talking and the visitor encouraged her to tell her story and she told her that she had been that she had lived a very careless life she had been a hard life and she herself had been hardened in the process of living but she said that she was disturbed in her indifference to religious things by the sound of what she called Dr. Guthrie's bell now Dr. Guthrie was a ministry in this church at the time I'm not aware that there was ever a bell on the building but I believe that they did use to speak of the bell in the tall booth across the way there as
[37:10] Dr. Guthrie's bell because all the people in Dr. Guthrie's time seemed to be coming to this church indeed I believe the minister of the tall booth used to tease him that it was his bell that was ringing but that it was to the other man's church that the people were going at all events the old one knew that bell as Dr. Guthrie's bell and it used to ring there to call her to the service one day she decided to go she came to this church as usual it was packed to the very aisles of the preaching of Thomas Guthrie and her visitor said did you get comfort there indeed I didn't she said I went home feeling more bitter than ever because I felt that he had described me to all the people that he was denouncing me to my very face and I vowed I would never go back again but then she said next Sunday came round and I heard Dr.

Guthrie's bell I tried to resist it but no one called me and I went again and I went again and again just at the call of the bell and yet I couldn't say I was getting any good and then one night she said I had a dream and no doubt the events of the day gave color to her dreams by night she said I dreamt that I saw Dr.
Guthrie in the midst of a flower plot with a watering can and he was watering the flowers and then he came to one shriveled and rather withered looking one and he said no use pouring any water on this one it hasn't got any root and just at that point she said she woke up from her sleep in terror she she thought must be the plant that had no root no real faith nothing to draw upon the blessing that was being poured so copiously around she discovered that it was her lack of receptiveness that

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-06 06:59:20

was at fault not that the preacher wasn't getting but that she wasn't receiving and he prayed prayed that she might be given a root to her faith and shared the blessings of God's people
God's people and so she did poor as her lot was she was rich in faith so I just leave it at that my friends tonight is there a root to your faith is what you call faith just a knowledge of the facts of the gospel and a kind of mental ascent to them that will never save you you need more you need the faith of the heart a faith that works by love a faith that works by the Holy Spirit and please remember it was in that connection that our Lord spoke those words that we so often quote ask and it shall be given you seek and you shall find knock and it shall be opened unto you for everyone that ask it receive it and he that seeketh find it and to him that knock it shall be opened for if he being evil know how to give good gifts unto you children how much more shall your heavenly
Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him to please God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe may he are his blessed let us pray oh Lord our God we pray that thou would give us the enlightenment that we need in order to benefit from thy word take away we beseech thee every film that dims our vision to the glories of the gospel and to the beauty of Christ we clean our hearts from those things to which we have been clinging and win them for Christ and for his gospel whatever we may have been at the beginning of this day grant us oh
[42:20] Lord that at its close we shall find ourselves by thy grace nearer to be and if we began the day as strangers to grace and to God Lord let it not end that way but impressed by the urgency of a door may we submit at thy footstone and pray thee to receive us as thy for thy name say amen

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-06 06:59:20