

Paul's Proclamation of a Foolish Message

OUTLINE

From Garland: The content of preaching, 2:1-2; the form of preaching, 2:3-4; the reason for both, 2:5

2:1

Paul did not come to display his achievements as a rhetorician or professional lecturer. Paul was quite well educated (Acts 22 and Phil 3)

2:2

Triumphalism ,manipulative rhetoric, or spectacular miracles seemed to have been absent.

2:3

2:4

2:5

Paul's Proclamation of a Foolish Message

The explanation of the problem of the cross, 1:18-2:5, or why their thinking and behavior were in contradiction to their salvation

The message of the cross, 1:18-25

The recipients of the message of the cross, 1:26-31

Paul's preaching of the cross, 2:1-5

Some introductory thoughts to this portion

This clearly ties back to 1:17

First person singular, 1:17

First person plural, 1:18-25

Second person plural, 1:26-31

First person singular, 2:1-5

To preach the cross... 1:17, the proclamation of the cross 2:1-5

The content of Paul's preaching

What it was not, 2:1

Not with eloquence or wisdom

Language that "pretends to some superior social status...conductive to self display" Language that is intended "to please and amuse the congregation." The speech of those who are puffed up (4:19) and speech that is designed to headline the speakers as stars. The point was to focus not on the message but on the superiority of the messenger. It is designed to elicit applause, approval and status from its listeners.

Paul was not opposed to legitimate rhetoric, he uses it in his letters. He was opposed to self-promoting rhetoric that focuses on selfish gain and status of the speaker.

Paul could have been eloquent!

Acts 21:39: "...Tarsus...a citizen of no ordinary city," 22:2: "...born in Tarsus of Cilicia..."

A city of great wealth and learning, it "surpassed even Athens and Alexandria..."¹ This was a university city with philosophy and liberal arts at the center.

Clearly his family was wealthy and well educated, and he was too.

"...under Gamaliel, I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers..." (Acts 2:22)

Gamaliel was THE leading teacher of the law, perhaps the son or grandson of Hillel, (Acts 5:38).

He had the best education money could buy in the leading city of the day.

"...and was just as zealous..." Acts 22:2 (Gal 1:14)

Passionate about what he believed

"brought up in this city (Jerusalem)" Acts 22:3

Not contaminated too much by Tarsus, on the other hand.

"I was born a (Roman) citizen..." Acts 22:28c.

The implication here is that not only was Paul a Roman citizen, but that his father was one too. Scholars have suggested that Paul's father or maybe grandfather, likely tentmakers by trade, rendered service to the Roman government in turn for citizenship.

Fair public trial, exemption from certain forms of punishment, freedom to travel, would have been considered by many a "have" Appeal to Caesar if necessary which he did.

I am a Jew, Acts 22:3; Phil 3:4b-6

Tribe of Benjamin

He could trace his lineage, not every Jew could do this, at least 1000 years back.

¹ F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, p. 35

Saul, great leader of Israel, greatest person Benjamin produces.

Hebrew of the Hebrews

Went to a Hebrew Synagogue, not a Hellenistic one

Brought up in Jerusalem, not contaminated by Tarsus, He would have been considered immunized against the infections of the Gentiles.

As to the Law, a Pharisee

Acts 26:5

"I have lived a Pharisee" Acts 23:6 "Son of a Pharisee"

Interestingly enough, the Pharisees "The separated ones" Strict separation from anything might be considered impure, considered themselves great theologians loved to lock horns with Sadducees.

He was multi-lingual, Acts 21:40

It is hard to imagine a man who had more advantages than Paul in the Greco-Roman, ancient near eastern world of his day.

When Paul got saved, he lost it all!

He realized that all he prized and valued was worthless, Philippians 3:7a, 8b

When Paul got saved, he realized he was crucified with Christ, Gal 2:20

What it does not mean

Along with Christ, I must suffer for my sins, like the man in Da Vinci Code, Silas, who flagellated himself and wore the cilice, or that Lent brings or adds to salvation.

What it does mean

I must identify with the scandalous, offensive, humiliating and foolish message and be willing to bear the shame of being identified with it. Jesus said "deny yourself and take up a cross..."

This calls for humility and self-effacement.

What it was, 2:2

This message is scandalous, offensive, and sheer stupidity to lost people

The point of his preaching was not to solicit complements, but to point people to a crucified Jesus Christ.

This preaching is antithetical (the exact opposite) to the thinking of those who are perishing, 1:18

But it is the power of God to salvation, radical reorientation

The form of Paul's preaching

What it was, 2:3

Weakness and fear and with much trembling

Weakness

May refer to sickness, Gal 4:13-14, 1 Cor 11:30

Or to that which made him or others question his sufficiency for the task (2 Cor 2:16; 3:5)

An unimpressive presence, a repellent physical malady, his personal work among them (1 Cor 9:12, 15) his relative impoverishment, his vulnerability to persecution and suffering (2 Cor 4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:23-28)

Fear and trembling

The attitude of an obedient slave, Eph 6:5

The opposite of the strength and confidence of a cultured orator

Total awareness of a personal inadequacy to persuade with his own ability.

With a demonstration of the Spirit's power (2:4b)

The power is not the audience's round of applause but their changed lives and the formation of a new community. Paul is not talking about "signs and wonders" attending his preaching, but their conversion and change (1 Thess 1:5-6, see Gordon Fee on 1 Thess 1:5-6).

What it was not, 2:4

Not with wise and persuasive words.

Paul was not focusing on a method that would impress them, but a message that when understood would be offensive and scandalous. It would also be the power of God to salvation.

The reason for both content and the form of the preaching, 2:5

So that they would clearly see the difference between how things were in Corinth and how they should be in the light of the message of the cross.

The people in Corinth would have been impressed with that kind of message, but they would not be saved nor grow by that kind of message.

So that they would be humbled before the cross and stop jockeying for power and position—emptying their Christianity of its power to transform.

When you are self-centered and self-advancing, others may be impressed with you, but they will not be attracted to Christ. It is impossible to make much of yourself and Christ at the same time.

People don't get saved until they first get lost.

That Christ did all this not for his own sins, but for the sins of others, of you.

Well, I've done a few things I'm not proud of.

Or I have nothing to boast of, nothing to take pride in, and my only hope is in the power of the crucified, humiliated messiah.