

God's Power and Secret Wisdom

Exodus 20:1-17, I Corinthians 1:18-25

From the scripture reading, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, we heard an argument between disciple Paul and the un-Christian stress on human eloquence and wisdom. Paul declares a basic principle of the redeeming gospel of Christ: For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

One of the hottest issues in America today is the debate over values. Our values tell us what is right and wrong drive us to certain actions. But the problem is where people do get their values and how people do know which values are right ones. Hitler, Stalin or followers of Al Qaeda, they do have values too. Our values come from the God's power and His secret wisdom.

Everyone has his or her own faith. Without certain faith, we cannot live our daily lives. For example, we walk on the ground without fear because we have faith that the ground will keep firm. That is a kind of faith which is based on our experience. Another type of faith depends upon our knowledge or our ability. Yet another type of faith depends on our relationships, as we have faith in our parents, teachers, and governors. But what is important is what and whom we trust.

There are many levels of faith even in religious faith. Ezekiel shows us these levels of faith as a metaphor in Ezekiel 47. Ezekiel saw the temple in a dream. In his dream, he was standing at the entrance of the temple, and saw water flowing from it. And he saw someone measuring the depth of water. The man measured the one thousand cubits from the temple, and there the water was ankle deep. Then the man measured another thousand cubits out from that point, and the water was knee deep. Again he measured one thousand cubits, and now the water was up to the waist. Again he measured one thousand cubits, and the water was now a river that he could not cross, and was deep enough for swimming.

Ankle-deep faith is an enjoyable level of faith. Children enjoy playing in ankle deep water. Even babies find it fun to play in ankle deep water. There is nothing to worry about with that level of faith. Many people enjoy their religious life in church without deep commitment. They just attend church, enjoy the service, meet and mingle with people, and have a good time. That is ankle deep faith.

There is a slightly more advanced level of faith, which is knee deep faith. Knee-deep water is good for wading. Wading into a river or at the beach, we can collect interesting seashells or river stones. There are even some rivers that you can wade across. I traveled to the Holy Land several years ago and had a chance to see the Jordan River. But I was disappointed with the

Jordan when I actually put my feet into it. In Old Testament days, the Jordan River was a deep river that could not be crossed by foot. But these days the Jordan River is knee deep at most and only a few feet wide. Not a lot of effort is needed to cross the river. In knee deep water we can only wade and cannot swim. With knee deep faith, you just walk and step into the courtyard of the church, coming and going for a routine religious life. There is not a lot of effort or risk that goes into knee deep faith.

In waist-deep water, you can actually swim. Everybody enjoys swimming in waist-deep water. But there are two kinds of swimmers. When swimming in waist deep water, there is little danger. You can always touch your feet on the bottom of the river or pool. But when swimming in deep water, deeper than your own height, a swimmer needs confidence that he or she can face potential danger. Anyone who knows how to swim feels comfortable in waist deep water. But when the water is six or seven feet deep, the story is different.

When we were vacationing a few weeks ago in Cancun, we had an opportunity to go snorkeling. Wearing a life jacket and snorkeling equipment, my daughter Esther jumped into the water first and waved her hand to Sun to jump in. So Sun jumped into the water next. I was a little hesitant because of the cold water, and went in last.

After jumped into the water, I started looking for Sun. She had her face in the water, and was quickly kicking her legs, following someone but not knowing where she was going. I swam up to her and pulled her arms, and tried to signal to her to follow me. I sensed that she was nervous, because she had realized that the water was deeper than her height. She wanted to go back to the deck where she started. Esther and I helped her swim. She had swallowed some water already because her snorkel didn't fit her well. Esther told Sun not to be scared, to just take off the snorkel and swim. "You're wearing a life jacket and you won't drown," she told her. But Sun was so nervous that she refused to take off her snorkel. "Calm down!" We told her. "Move your legs like you're riding a bike. Move your arms slowly in and out. We will take care of you!" Esther and I pulled her from both sides and returned to the deck.

Sun can easily swim in a swimming pool where the water is waist deep. But when she was realized that the water was deeper than her height, she got scared. Actually, sea water is salty, so it's easier to swim in than a swimming pool. But the problem was that she kept thinking, "What if I drown?"

Have you ever visited Mesa Verde National Park in southeastern Colorado? The park contains the ancient homes of American Indians. These "cliff dwellings" were built around the 1200's, and the ancestors of the Pueblo Indians lived there. Some of these cliff houses were built on the opposite side of a deep gorge. When I visited Mesa Verde, I wondered, "How could those

American Indians cross the gorge, which is more than fifty feet deep, and build the cliff houses there?”

The park guide explained to us the fascinating answer. When the rainy season came, the gorge filled with water and brave settlers swam across the river with a rope tied to their bodies. The rope then created a connection between the main land and the opposite site of the gorge. Using the rope they could send the tools and materials they needed to build their houses. Strong swimmers can cross over a river which is many times deeper than their height.

Isaiah said, “God’s plan is deeper than our thinking and higher than our thought.” But when we realize that the command of God does not fit in with our rational thinking, we become nervous.

Tertullian, a Christian theologian from the second century, said: “If Christianity is an understandable religion I don’t believe it. The truth of Christianity that the Christian believes is far beyond our reason.” God told us, “My thinking is higher than your thinking and my thought is higher than your thought.”

They are looking for something in this world, but we are not looking for something in this world. We are looking for something higher than this world. They are looking for something within knee deep water. We are looking for something beyond the river, requiring us to swim across.

The Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 1:22: “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” That is the resource of our hope. We believe and trust that God is capable of things we cannot even imagine.

Jeremiah heard the Lord saying, “This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it – the Lord is his name: Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and un-searchable things you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:2-3)

A woman was at work one day when she received a phone call telling her that her daughter was very sick with a high fever. The woman left work immediately and stopped by the pharmacy to get some medication for her daughter.

When she came out of the drug store, however, the woman discovered that in her concern and haste she had locked her keys in the car. She was now close to panic. She needed to get into the car and get home with the medicine fast, but now she was locked out of her car. What on earth was she going to do?

The woman remembered hearing about people using a wire coat hanger to open car doors. She found one on the ground nearby and tried to use it, but with no luck. She didn't know how to do that.

In desperation now, she prayed, "O God, please send someone to help me!" A few minutes later an old car pulled up, and a rough-looking man got out. The woman thought, O Lord, this is who you sent to help me?

The man walked over to her and said, "Looks like you need a little assistance. Can I help you?"

"Oh yes," the woman said, "My daughter is very sick. I stopped to get her some medicine, and I locked my keys in the car. I must get home to her. Please, can you use this hanger to unlock my car?"

"Sure," the man said. He took the hanger, and in less than a minute, the car was opened. The woman hugged the man and said, "Thank you so much! You are very nice man." The man replied, "Some people don't think I'm so nice. I just got out of prison yesterday. I was in prison for stealing a car."

The woman hugged the man again, and with tears she cried out loud, "Oh thank you, God! You even sent a professional!"

This story is a parable for us. It reminds us that God doesn't always send us what we expect, but he will always send us what we need. It's up to us to have the wisdom to recognize the difference and to be thankful.

This is why we as Christians are people of hope, because we know that even though we will have difficulties and setbacks in this life, ultimately nothing can defeat us. God wins, and He wants us to share His victory with us. This is God's promise, to always be with us and to eventually see us through. That is our hope. This hope is hidden in the cross of the Lord.

Saint Paul says that the cross of the Lord is a symbol of the source of our hope. It is a symbol of the power and wisdom of God. The power of God is the power of salvation through the crucifixion of Christ.

It was a beautiful spring day. A mother, a father, and their little girl were out in the family car for a ride. The weather was so beautiful that they rolled down the windows to enjoy the breezes and fragrances of the springtime.

Suddenly, a large bee flew into the car and started buzzing around. The little girl went into a panic because she was highly allergic to bee stings. If she were stung, she could die within the hour.

“Oh, Daddy!” she cried. “It’s a bee! It’s going to sting me!” The father pulled the car to a stop and reached back to try to catch the bee. Buzzing around toward him, the bee bumped against the front windshield. There the father trapped the bee in his fist.

Holding it in his closed hand, the father waited for the inevitable sting. The bee stung the father’s hand, and in pain, the father let go of the bee and let it loose in the car again. The little girl again panicked, “Daddy, it’s going to sting me!”

The father said gently, “No, honey, he’s not going to sting you now. Look at my hand. The bee’s stinger is in my hand, and he can’t hurt you now.” The father let the bee sting his own hand to save his daughter’s life.

Jesus took the sting of death on the cross, and through his sacrificial love he saved us. And in that incredible act of self-giving, he taught us not only how much he loves us, but also how he wants us to love another.

Jesus loves us sacrificially, generously, graciously, unconditionally – and that’s how he wants us to love. There is power to transform our lives, church, and community. Can you love like that? Do you love like that? Will you love like that?

The cross of the Lord is our faith, our hope, and our love to put into our lives.