

The Downward Spiral of Foolishness

Lost—part 4

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

April 3, 2022

DAY 1: Two responses to the cross of Christ.

1. Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ* aired in 2004. The movie stirred up two very vocal responses across the nation. One group people was awed by seeing visually what they had read in their bibles for years, and were moved to tears of devotion. Their response is summed up with a question, "You mean He went through all that for me?"
2. The second response was the polar extreme. For months before Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion of the Christ" was released, I thought the full name of the movie was, "The Controversial Passion of the Christ." For this group, the cross and the sufferings of Christ were secondary to two questions. "Was this movie anti-Semitic?" And, "Was all this violence necessary?" (An odd question coming from Hollywood).
3. David Edelstein's response was similar to this second response—scorn and contempt. His article was entitled, "The Passion, Mel Gibson's Bloody Mess."
4. "A devout Catholic—Gibson has said that what moves him most about the Christ story is that Jesus was whipped, scourged, mocked, spat on, had spikes driven through his hands and feet, and was left to die on the cross—and that *he didn't think of payback*; he thought of forgiveness. But by wallowing in his torture and death for two hours, the director of *The Passion of the Christ* suggests that he's thinking of anything but.
5. "The lashes of the soldiers begin 15 minutes into the film; by the time Jesus is dragged into the presence of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate his face has already been smashed to a pulp.
6. "It sounds like a Monty Python movie. You're thinking there must be *something* to *The Passion of the Christ* besides watching a man tortured to death, right? Actually, no: This is a two-hour-and-six-minute snuff movie—*The Jesus Chainsaw Massacre*—that thinks it's an act of faith."
7. The two very vocal and opposite responses to Mel Gibson's movie should not surprise us.
*1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the **power** of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."*
²⁰ *Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*
8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 2: The Cross Defines the Message

1 Corinthians 1:18 **For the message of the cross** is *foolishness* to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the **power of God**.

1. To those who are being saved the message of the cross is clear—God saves people.
2. To those who are not saved, who are “perishing” (instead of being saved) the message of the cross is foolishness.
3. I continue with David Edelstein’s article. “For Gibson, Jesus is defined not by his teachings in life—his message of mercy, social justice, and self-abnegation...but by the manner of his execution. That doesn't exactly put him outside the mainstream: The idea that Jesus died for the sins of mankind is one of the central tenets of Christian faith.
4. “Gibson uses every weapon in his cinematic arsenal to drive home the agony of those last dozen hours. While his mother and Mary Magdalene watch, Jesus is lashed until his entire body is covered in bloody crisscrossing canals. When he rises, amazing the Roman soldiers with his stamina, they go for the scourges, which rip and puncture his flesh in slow motion—all while the Romans and the Jews cackle wildly. Carrying his cross, he falls again and again in slow motion on his swollen, battered body while the soundtrack reverberates with heavy, Dolby-ized thuds. It is almost a relief when the spikes are driven into his hands and feet—at least it means that his pain is almost over.
5. “What does this protracted exercise in sadomasochism have to do with Christian faith? I'm asking; I don't know. Gibson's revenge movies end with payback—or, in *Braveheart*, the promise of payback to come. When Jesus is resurrected, his expression is hard, and, as he moves toward the entrance to his tomb, the camera lingers on a round hole in his hand that goes all the way through. Gibson's Jesus reminded me of the Terminator—he could be the Christianator—heading out into the world to spread the bloody news.”
6. David Edelstein illustrates Paul’s point perfectly. While Edelstein ridicules Mel Gibson’s direction, Edelstein cannot fathom what the big deal is about the cross—the suffering, the bloodiness, the agony. To quote Paul, “it’s foolishness to those who are perishing.”
7. We live in a time where many people define Christianity by Christ’s teachings. Ask almost anyone who **hasn’t** read the New Testament and it sounds like you’re talking to an expert about Christianity. “It’s a message of love. It’s a message of forgiveness. It’s a message about turning the other cheek. It’s the Golden Rule.”
8. For people who have yet to actually read the New Testament, the purpose of Jesus’ teachings wasn’t, “Well, now that you know what to do, go do it.” Christ expounded on the Old Testament law, on the Ten Commandments, not because we were ignorant of them. God’s law is already written on our hearts. On the contrary, the problem was that *we thought we were doing them just fine, thank you!*
9. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 3: The Cross Divides the Listeners

1 Cor. 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...

1. “Foolishness”

2. “Moria.” The Greek word from which we derive foolishness is “*moria*.” Our English word for “*moria*” is “moronic.” “Silly! Foolish! Stupid!”

3. That cry of “*moria*” is sometimes inward and quiet, and sometimes “*moria*” is said outwardly and openly.

4. “You mean that the most important thing in my life is that a thirty-three-year-old man died on a stick of wood two thousand years ago is the only solution to the human race? Wake up, man! This is 2022.”

5. But “*moria*” is not the only response of people. Some see “power!”

1 Cor. 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

6. If this verse had been written in parallel, it would have read, “some say foolishness and some say ‘wisdom’,” That’s not what Paul wrote. He wrote some see foolishness and some see *power*.

7. We live in a world that suffers from the paralysis of analysis. Thousands upon thousands of position papers have been written, dissertations published, theses and studies documented. Convocations, think tanks, and seminars have been attended to tell us what’s wrong. What we need is power!

8. Dr. Maris, a sociologist at South Carolina Univ., studied teen suicide from ages 15-24. Between 1950 and 1980 the teen suicide rate increased 284 percent. No one was able to stop it.

a. We can describe the reasons: disintegrating homes, substance abuse, promiscuous life-styles, and loss of religious and moral values. **But what can be done about it?!**

b. There is only one thing that can be done about it—the cross of Christ, the power of God, alive in a person.

9. To those who are being saved, the cross is the power of God. The power of God can change our human nature, redeem our hurts and pain, give hope where there is depression, fill us with satisfaction where there is misery, and resurrect a dead marriage.

10. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 4: The Cross Diagnoses the Listeners

*1 Cor. 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are **perishing**...*

1. "Perishing" -
2. Paul is talking about people who are alive, but in the process of perishing. He is not talking about people on hospice or a terminal illness. He is talking about every person without Christ.
3. Left to ourselves, we are on a downward spiral of human nature. Marriages are sometimes "perishing." Relationships with in-laws are sometimes in the throes of "perishing." Our personal hearts (not the thump-thump organ) are in the process of perishing. Inner peace may be diminishing, a sense of your value may be perishing, patience, self-control, all may be perishing.
4. The verb tense of perishing is the Greek present tense, progressive action. Perishing is presently happening and continuing to happen. It is a process.
5. Think about the illustration of food. We talk about perishables. Leave them out too long and what was once was nutritious food can now cause food poisoning. I've had food poisoning twice, once in college and once on a vacation. When I ate I had no idea I was eating food that was perishing. A few hours later it became apparent.
6. Our generation has an obsession to keep from perishing. You can hardly watch a week of news without seeing multiple reports about Americans and their newest diets, exercise programs, fitness trainers, and health coaches. We've gone from measuring calories to measuring sodium to measuring fat grams to measuring cholesterol to measuring carbohydrates.
7. Without the cross of Christ, that's like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic after being hit by the iceberg.
8. We end up with a generation of good-looking, well-exercised, healthy people without the power to overcome guilt, our own will, and especially the power to bring richness and life to the people in our families and communities. We think the occasional vacation for the kids or the diamond ring for the wife will do it.

1 Cor. 1:18 ...to those who are in the process of being saved...

9. The bible speaks of salvation in different tenses. The Christian was saved in his or her **past**, as an event in time. But the bible also speaks of **being** saved in the present tense. God is saving us from ourselves, our fallen human nature. He is in the process of saving marriages, saving us from depression or misery. The bible also speaks of salvation in the **future**. We will be saved. In this sense, the bible points us to the time when we leave earth and enter heaven.
10. To be saved is to be rescued. Rescued from an eternity separated from God because of my own disobedience and sin.
11. We are also rescued in the here and now. Rescued from everything I am now, not just forty-nine years ago when I was a college junior, but rescued today! Rescued, every day in every way from what Seth Gatchell would be apart from the cross of Christ.
12. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: The Cross Discloses the Response

1 Cor. 1:22 ...the Jews demand a sign...

1. This is a mind-set. “Is this the only credentials you’re going to give me. I demand more.”
2. Ironically, all the signs from former times are never enough. A star in the night, fire called down on a sacrifice, manna in the desert, the parting of the Red Sea where about two million people walk across the bottom of the Red Sea floor on dry ground. Not enough!
3. Jesus was asked for the same kind of sign, and he knew that kind of sign would never be enough. He did give them “the sign of Jonah,” the sign that his dead body would be gone for three days and resurrected on the third day.
4. The agnostic, Bertrand Russell, was once asked what it would take to convince him God was who He said He was. “If I heard a voice from heaven that told me everything that would happen to me for twenty-four hours, including unlikely things, I *might* believe.” Human beings usually don’t see the level of arrogance behind their demands of Almighty God. Sadly, Bertrand Russell, who died in 1970, now knows the truth of the matter.
5. Yet, the greatest sign, that of the Son of God hanging on a cross, bleeding to death is not enough. If anything ever showed the holiness of God and the love of God—“He took *my* place!” this is it! On the heels of the cross is the resurrection and yet, somehow that is also dismissed.

1 Cor. 1:22 the Greeks look for wisdom...

6. The Greeks want more elaborate human explanations. “If you think that I, as a 2022 urban, professional, erudite, intellectual am going to believe in that ...”
7. There’s wisdom in the cross but it’s a supra-rational wisdom. You can never understand it all. There’s part of this that doesn’t matter if you are a transient bum or have an earned Ph. D. The bible tells us that behind every intellectual question is a heart disposition against bowing the knee to anyone, including God. I will not bow my knee to him unless I understand it all. What’s missed is why He died. He died...
 - Naked, to clothe me in righteousness.
 - In weakness to give me strength.
 - Shame to give me dignity.
 - Darkness, to give me the light of life.
8. Until you bow before Him, you cannot understand, you cannot receive it. There is something in that cross, more in the cross which reaches beyond wisdom.
9. What strikes you from today’s devotional?