

1 Corinthians 1:18-25
A Fool for Christ
WRCoB 4.26.20

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician
Physicist, inventor, writer and Christian philosopher.

He lived in the 1600s.

He was one of the first to understand and write about
The scientific principles of hydraulics.

And with his mathematical mind
He wrote a calculated defense of Christianity
Commonly known as Pascal's Wager.

It's worth taking a few minutes to share.

There are four aspects to it and goes something like this.

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*If we live our lives with the belief that God exists
And God does indeed exist*

*Then we gain everything . . . including eternal life
And we have done our part as global citizens
To make the world a better place.*

~

*If we live our lives with the belief that God exists
But God doesn't exist . . . we've lost nothing,
And gain a positive contribution to society.*

*If we live our lives as though God doesn't exist
And God really doesn't exist
Then we've gained nothing nor lost anything.*

*However, if we live as though God doesn't exist
And God really does exist
Our gain is a superficial life*

And our loss is eternal separation from God.

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Pascal challenged his readers to consider the wager
And choose living with the belief that God exists.

I have mixed feelings about the argument.

Pascal's wager assumes that if you don't believe in God
You are automatically a bad person.

Another thing, a person can choose to live as if God exists.

But that doesn't automatically make him a good person.

Really though, is that how we come to faith
By calculating our gains and losses?

No.

Many come to faith through a heart-felt experience
Not by an intellectual exercise.

It is through an encounter with the Living Lord.

And you either “get it” or you don’t!

It reminds me of a TV advertisement

The Washington Post used to air years ago.

The slogan of the ad was simply this:

If you don’t get it, you don’t get it.

In our passage today

Paul defends the cross of Jesus in a similar way

That the message of the cross is foolishness

To those who don’t “get it”.

But to those who do “get it”

It is the power of God!

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The fact is, it is difficult to understand

How one man’s death on a cross 2000 years ago

Has eternal significance for us today.

But central to the Christian message is that Jesus

Bore our sins on the cross to give us eternal life.

It is Christianity’s proclamation

That Jesus’ life was no ordinary life

And his death was no ordinary death.

That Jesus was not just a holy prophet, wise and just

But that Jesus was somehow Divine.

That Jesus' death on the cross
Was not just an unfortunate end
To a gentle and kind-hearted soul.

But a means to an end.

For faith believes God used the death of Jesus
To reconcile the division between God and humankind.

E. Stanley Jones wrote

*“There at the cross was the deepest injustice ever done and
Jesus turns it into a healing of injustice and sin.*

*There men were at their worst and through it Jesus reveals
God at his best.*

*There hate was bitterest and there Love met it and
conquered it, taking it into his own heart and transforming it.*

The darkest hour of history becomes the lightest!

The cross becomes a throne! The end—a new beginning.”

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For better or worse, for two thousand years
Believers have tried to explain the significance
Of Jesus' death on the cross.

And for 2 thousand years
So many reject it as plain foolishness.

It truly is an upside down affair
Explained very well by the Apostle Paul.

God chose what is foolish to shame the wise
What is weak to shame the strong

And what is low and despised to reveal the wisdom of God.

And again . . . you either get it . . . or you don't!

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The interesting thing about Blaise Pascal the mathematician
Is that he did not come to faith
Using his own calculated wager.

He came to faith through a mystical experience!

And he never shared it with anyone!

He wrote it down and sewed it into the lining of his coat.

And after he died, a servant happened upon it.

In part, this is what it read.

*In the year of grace, 1654, on Monday the 23rd of November
from about half past ten in the evening until about half past
twelve*

Fire!

*God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob
Not of the philosophers and scholars.*

Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.

God of Jesus Christ. "Thy God and my God."

He is to be found only in the ways taught in the Gospel

*"Righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee
But I have known Thee."*

Joy. Joy. Joy. Tears of joy.

"This is eternal life, that they might know Thee

The only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

I had separated myself from Him

I have fled from Him

Denied Him

Crucified Him

Let me never be separated from Him again.

~~

You read this and you think

Wow, this guy is half-crazed.

And I suppose that's just it

He's a fool to be sure.

A fool for Christ!

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It is a crazy notion, really, if you think about it.

A convicted felon, not a penny to his name
Homeless, followed by a band of vagabonds
Arrested and beaten to the point of death

And then finished off by being nailed to a cross
And hung up to die.

That somehow in all that, we find salvation?

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The problem with a God who dies on the cross for our sins
Is that, as truths go, it is rather ridiculous.

As Frederick Buechner says

*If the world is sane, then Jesus is mad as a hatter and the
Last Supper is the Mad Tea Party.*

*The world says, Mind your own business, and Jesus says,
There is no such thing as your own business. The world
says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus
says, Follow me and be crucified.*

*The world says, Drive carefully - the life you save may be
your own - and Jesus says, Whoever would save his life will
lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

*The world says, Get and Jesus says, Give. In terms of the
world's sanity, Jesus is crazy as a coot, and anybody who
thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is
laboring less under a cross than under a delusion.*

And so as truths go
 Jesus' cross as a tool of reconciliation
 Is foolish enough.

And yet . . .

There is something about it
 Something that draws you in
 That has you thinking, could this be for real?

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Speaking personally, the truth of it all
 Hit me like a ton of bricks.

I read a passage from the Old Testament
 The Scriptures in the Bible before Jesus.

And as I read it, I was amazed how relevant the words were
 Concerning Jesus' suffering and death
 Written 500 years before he even lived.

Listen to these words.

Isaiah 53 (NLT)

53:2 There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him.

**³ He was despised and rejected—
 a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.
We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.
 He was despised, and we did not care.**

**4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;
it was our sorrows that weighed him down.
And we thought his troubles were a punishment from
God, a punishment for his own sins!**

**5 But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.
He was beaten so we could be whole.
He was whipped so we could be healed.**

**6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.
Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.**

**7 He was oppressed and treated harshly,
yet he never said a word.
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.
And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.**

**8 Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.**

This passage rocked me to the core
As I considered Jesus' death on the cross.

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Am I here today to try and convince you
To believe what I believe?

No.

What I would like you to take away this morning
Is the possibility that it's not all bunk.

That there is something about this Jesus.

You could, like Blaise Pascal
Take a calculated wager
And choose to believe in God.

I wouldn't recommend it.

I would hope you open to the possibility
That God can reveal the truth of Jesus to you.
In a way that touched heart and soul.

The message of the cross is indeed foolishness
To those who don't "get it".

But to those who do, it is the power of God!

Am I a fool for Christ?

To be sure!

I pray that you might be a fool too!