

²⁶For example, consider your call, brothers. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong, ²⁸and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before God. ³⁰But because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹God did this so that, just as it is written, “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Legend has it (and the historical evidence is pretty scant, so it probably didn't actually happen) that when the British surrendered at Yorktown at the end of the Revolutionary War, their army band played the English folk tune “The World Turned Upside Down.” The greatest military in the world had just lost a war to an underpowered group of colonists. This was not supposed to happen. Strong and weak. Rich and poor. Wise and foolish. That's how we see our world. That's how we decide to value things and people. But does God use those divisions? Certainly not like we do.

Paul is writing this letter to the Christian Church in Corinth. Now, Corinth was not as highbrow as Athens, but wisdom and deep thinking were certainly important to the Corinthians. I think it would be fair to say that the Greek view of the world in Jesus' time was not drastically different than the secular view of the world today. Strong is always better than weak. Rich is always better than poor. And wise is always better than foolish. Along with that came a moral component. It was assumed that there was something inferior about people who were lowly in society.

These misfits are the people Paul is writing to, people who apparently filled the church in Corinth. For much of their lives, many of these now-Christians were told that they were losers and a drain on society. Maybe there were even debates if their lives had any value at all. Paul does not shy away from their social status: “Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status.” But there is an important word there: “were.” They used to be fools. They used to be weak. They used to be poor and powerless. But something has changed.

“But God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong, and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with

the things that are, so that no one may boast before God.” How does God show his power? How does he show the greatness of his kingdom? He fills it with the last-picked.

When I was at Seminary, we had pickup basketball at 6:30 every morning. And a couple of the professors would come and play. Of course, the pros would pick the teams and stack the better player on their teams. As men in their 50’s and 60’s they knew they needed a little help. But think about it. God stacks his team in the opposite direction. He doesn’t pick the 6’3” guy who started on the college team and scored 1,000 points. He picks the 5’8” overweight guy who huffs and puffs down the court because he’s not in shape. God fills his invisible Church of all believers everywhere with people who are not conquering life, but people who are being conquered by life. He does it to show his power, that he does not need the brightest and best to accomplish his plans, because he’s the one working. You see it in the Christian Church in Corinth, but you also see it in our churches today. Our church is filled with people who are needy, people who are hurting because they don’t have the control over their lives that they wish they had.

But let’s get a little bit closer than just talking about our church. Because the sinful nature in us can do a good job looking around at the people in church with us this morning and saying, “Oh, that’s who God is talking about. That person who has made detrimental decisions in their life. That person who’s living paycheck-to-paycheck. That person who keeps falling and needing a neighbor to scrape them off the floor.” Instead, let’s look in the mirror. Because if your life was without complaint, you’d have no reason to be here today. You’d have no need for God and his grace. You’d find no comfort in his word. But here you are, one who was all of those things Paul just spoke about.

Why does trusting in human strength and wisdom and riches not ultimately work? It’s because we’re constantly trying to prove ourselves and falling short. We’re constantly trying to make a dad proud of us who will never say, “Good job.” Nothing you do will ever be good enough for the world around you. Look at President Lincoln, the man who ended slavery. You can find plenty of modern scholars who badmouth Honest Abe because in their minds, “he didn’t fight slavery hard enough.” Martin Luther King Jr. has become problematic, not just because of his personal dealings with women, but because his civil rights advocacy “didn’t go far enough.” You will never be enough for the world. There will always be more you could have done, somebody left short-changed with a complaint against you.

And how about proving yourself to God? Because he’s got a higher standard than your spouse or your boss or your friend. He doesn’t just demand you try. He demands you succeed. He demands perfection. Can you make him proud? How could you? No amount of money you could put into the offering plate would make him say, “You’ve given enough.” You could spend the rest of your life helping little old ladies cross the street and it would still fall short.

And then look at your life now. Is there family drama? Have words spilled from your mouth that you wish you could have back? How many regrets can you stack up just from this last week? You spend so much time proving yourselves to others and to God, but time and time again, it's just not enough.

This is why Paul tells the Corinthians and tells us that we were foolish and weak and poor. Because we can always find someone smarter and stronger and richer. In the scheme of world history and everyone who's lived in this world, we are pretty lowly people. Or, at least, we were.

Listen to what Paul says: "But because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption." We were lowly in the things of the world, but God turned the world upside down in Christ. Jesus shows us that true leadership is found in humble service, not a general leading from behind but right out there leading the charge. He shows us that God's love for the world is not merited but driven by his grace and mercy. And he shows us that life is won in death, using the greatest symbol of torture and death as the throne from which he declares sin and death vanquished.

This is what makes us right before God, no longer barred from coming to him in confession and prayer and longing. This is what makes us sanctified in his sight, set aside as holy even though everything that comes from our natural flesh is anything but holy. And this is what redeemed us, the blood of the holy Lamb of God that purchased us back from Satan and sin. And because God turned the world upside down by his Son, everything about us is new and strange too. Our hopes are no longer in self-righteousness and proving ourselves worthy of this world. The wisdom of God that is foolishness to those perishing in unbelief is that we are worthy before God through faith and nothing else. He is proud of us because of what Jesus did in our place.

But what do we now value having been the recipients of God's upside-down plan of salvation? It should be to see the world as God sees it, but that's not always the case. I saw a social media post this week from someone who had turned his back on the faith. He bragged about how freeing it was. He could now sleep with as many people as he wanted to. He could ply his body with as many damaging drugs as his heart desired. And he could speak freely, no longer having to watch what words came out of his mouth. And I think that old Adam in us might hear his boasting and feel some jealousy. He gets to do what he wants. He gets to feed the flesh what the flesh desires, and how appealing is that to us when our horns are locked with temptation?

I've heard a pastor explain it well. The devil comes into this world switching price tags. He wants you to think the pre-made PB&Js are much more valuable than the aged steak. He wants you to drive around in the \$20,000 Honda thinking that you're riding better than the \$120,000

Porsche. He's lying to you. But if he can get you to believe that one-night stands are more appealing than building a family or that a bank account balance with a bunch of zeros is more important than what treasure is stored up in heaven for us, he can flip God's upside down picture of the world back to its original orientation in our heads. He can make us value ourselves like we did before, chasing power to control and importance to boast in.

But in Christ, God changes the way we see the world. We stop seeing weakness and lowliness as a sign that God's love is lacking, but that his love is strong enough to overcome those things and use them to his glory. We stop evaluating people on what they can do for us instead of their inherent value as people made by God with the purpose to know their Creator's love. We stop worshiping those worldly pursuits that God assures us will never truly fulfill us. We once boasted in all the wrong things, but now we boast in Christ, because in him we find righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

So, march to the tune of the redcoat band, as you see God's world turned upside down, where the weak are made strong, where the poor are made rich, and where sinners are washed and made white as snow. Amen.