

- ***READ I Corinthians 1:18-25*** This morning, we spent some of our time considering the struggle that exists between the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God. Within this text, we read about some of that struggle and it centers around the idea of the cross saving those who are perishing. This idea would be near laughable to anyone who heard it stated because the cross was only ever seen as a symbol of death, and yet to us it is a symbol of life through the sacrifice of Jesus. This message of life through the cross of Jesus would surely have been foolishness to anyone who understood or believed in the deity of Christ. The notion of a God dying for men flew in the face of all of the pagan mythology of the time, and yet that is exactly the "foolishness" that is preached within the Gospel.
- Surely Paul spoke well when he stated, *"Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."* If you're like me then this type of language takes your mind automatically to what is written in **Isaiah 55:8,9** where it is stated, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways."* This is the Lord's declaration. *"For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."*
- If we don't consider the context of these verses then we miss a great deal of meaning from what is stated. The following verses make it clear that God is trying to get the reader to understand that He truly knows what is best and how to accomplish His goals. His main goal is the salvation of mankind through the Messiah, but the people of Israel often had a hard time understanding how such could happen if they were in captivity. To them it seemed as if God's Word wouldn't and couldn't come to pass, so in response God says, *"My Word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do."* (**Isaiah 55:11**)
- I say all of this to set up this thought, there are many things that we see God doing through the Bible that simply doesn't seem to make sense. A sick man is told to dip in dirty water to be made clean. A prophet tells his opponents to douse his altar with water just before it is set ablaze. Our Lord makes clay out of the dirt with His spit in order to give sight to the blind. None of these things make sense to us, and yet they are shown to be wise and effective. We might refer to these instances as Biblical paradoxes, or seemingly self-contradictory declarations or actions that end up being true or accomplishing exactly what God said they would accomplish.
- This evening, I would like to share with you 7 Biblical paradoxes that we might also think of as oxymorons meaning that these statements contain words that surely don't fit together because they are opposed to one another. Think of something along the lines of jumbo shrimp or the movie, "The Little Giants." These terms don't make sense, and these paradoxes don't seem as if they can be true. However, they are totally seen to be true because they are a result of the mind of the great God of heaven. If we will submit to His wisdom then we can and will find these truths to be evident within our own lives. Each of these statements contains a portion that man's wisdom would immediately deem as bad or negative, but with God good things will result.

7 Biblical Teachings That Oppose Human Thought

I. Receiving Through Giving

- A. In **Acts 20:35**, we read of a quotation from Jesus spoken by the Apostle Paul which reads, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* Paul states this quote in the context of him showing himself as an example for the shepherds of Ephesus to follow concerning how they ought to be willing to sacrifice of themselves in order to help those who are weak among them. His basic point is that church leaders are not in those positions to be served but to serve and even to the point of serving till it hurts in some way.

- B. And yet, there is a sense in which we receive tremendous blessings when we are willing to give so freely of ourselves. I think firstly about Paul in this situation. Yes, he had been very busy giving and sacrificing of himself among this group of God's people, but notice that he had gained tremendous relationships with these brethren in Ephesus. He had gained a great deal of love and respect from these men so much so that they all wept together as they embraced for the last time. Though Paul had given much, he had also received much.
- C. The same can be true for us. Are we willing to sacrifice and give of ourselves for others? Are we willing to do so without the thought of receiving something in return? If are willing to live in this manner then we will quickly recognize that we are receiving blessings in many other ways, and those blessings are a result of our gracious hearts. Truly God does love a cheerful giver! (**II Cor. 9:7**)

II. Joy Through Trials

- A. *"Consider it great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials..." (James 1:2)* Conventional wisdom would tell us that his simply isn't true! It is not a good, fun, or enjoyable thing when we experience trials, tribulations, and difficulties in this life. No one enjoys the difficulties in life! While this is most certainly true, the point that James is trying to get across is that there can be benefits in what might be seemingly terrible situations.
- B. This becomes evident as we make our way through the text and finish out James's thought. *"...because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:3,4)* There is the payoff! It is in the moment of trial when we are actually able to see our faith tested. It is easy to believe in and praise the name of Jesus when things are great, but the true test comes when things are not going well and there is opportunity for the tempter to come onto the scene and begin to plant seeds of doubt into our minds. Without trials we would never know that our faith isn't as strong as it ought to be, and for that we should be able to find joy through our trials.

III. Strength Through Weakness

- A. Another benefit that comes from experiencing trials is to recognize just how weak we are. Again, this would sound like a completely backwards statement to conventional wisdom, but notice that this is exactly what God says when He responds to Paul concerning his thorn in the flesh. In **II Corinthians 12:7-10**, we read of Paul's torment from what he refers to as a thorn in the flesh. We are not given any detail at all concerning what exactly this thorn in the flesh was so there is no need to speculate, but we are told of the fact that it was something that bothered Paul so greatly that three times he begged for God to take it away from him.
- B. *"Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.'" From Paul's words, I can't imagine that this was just little thing that was bothering him, but it was something that led him to beg and plead with God to take it away, but to no avail. Instead of pitching a fit and sulking in his poor circumstances, Paul states that, *"I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* The faith on display by the Apostle Paul in this text is more than commendable, and the best part is that we can have the exact same type of faith. We can be a people who are willing to turn our moments of weakness into moments of absolute strength if we will put all of our boasting in the Almighty and all powerful God of heaven! Others might look at us and see weakness, but we can look at ourselves in the mirror and see the power of God flowing through us to strengthen our faith.*

IV. Exaltation Through Humiliation

- A. I'm sure there are memories in our minds of the most embarrassing and humiliating situations that we have ever found ourselves in. In those moments we feel about an inch tall and we hope to simply be able to go crawl under a rock. I remember missing a really easy word in a school-wide spelling bee, and I joke that my own mom made fun of me, but in reality she was only shaking her head wondering how I ever got into the spelling bee in the first place. Nevertheless, it is in those moments that everything could all be made better if there were simply someone who would come and extend a hand to lift us up.
- B. In a somewhat similar way, God is the one who is willing to lift us up when we will humble ourselves before Him. **James 4:1-10** is found in the context of the difficulties that we experience when we seek to be prideful, arrogant, and selfish among other people. When we do such a thing we fall under the condemnation of God resisting us in our pride while extending His grace to those who are humble towards Him and others.
- C. Conventional wisdom would tell us to continually seek for whatever it is that we desire and want so that we can put ourselves at the top of the mountain, but James teaches us that true exaltation will only come when we come before God with misery, mourning, weeping, and gloom. When we are able to come before Him in complete humiliation while recognizing our worthlessness and hopelessness, then we are able to then be exalted by the Creator of the universe. If there is any chance of us being great in the eyes of God then it begins with us recognizing that we are nothing. Only through humiliation can we truly find exaltation.

V. Finding Through Losing

- A. There are many people who have spent their entire lives searching for that which will give them what they believe to be true meaning in life. They will seek after riches, fame, influence, or power, but at the end of the day they find there none of those bring any real sense of satisfaction or meaning. Just as the Preacher of Ecclesiastes states, *"'Absolute futility,' says the Teacher. 'Absolute Futility. Everything is futile.' What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:2,3)*
- B. So where do we find true meaning in life? If it can't be found by obtaining all that this life has to offer, then can there even be meaning and satisfaction in life? Jesus, in **Matthew 10:39**, states, *"Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of me will find it."* This statement by Jesus comes directly following the statement from Jesus where those who come after Him must take up their crosses, so we can infer that this statement has something to do with truly losing our lives for Christ. This losing of our lives might be literal, or it could be in the figurative sense that we are willing to give up everything of ourselves in order to find true life in Jesus. This life in Jesus isn't only a reference to the life we gain now, but it also includes the life which is to come in eternity. Therefore, if we want to truly have life now and to come, if we want to find true meaning and purpose then we must be willing to turn to Jesus and lose our lives in Him.

VI. Freedom Through Servitude

- A. The Apostle Paul makes it clear in **Romans 6:16** that our actions enslave us to whomever it is that we choose to obey. If we live in sin then we are slaves to sin which leads to death, and naturally we would think that our being released from the clutches of sin would lead us to absolute freedom. However, Paul teaches us that we are only freed from sin by a willingness to enter into the servitude of someone else. The second half of **Romans 6:16** states, *"...or of obedience leading to righteousness."*
- B. We must recognize that there is never a point in our lives where we are truly independent of anyone else. There will always be someone that rules over us, but in allowing God to rule over us we are given freedom from the clutches of sin and death. *"But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed*

over, and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness. I am using a human analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered the parts of yourselves as slaves to impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with regard to righteousness. So what fruit was produced then from the things you are now ashamed of? The outcome of those things is death. But now, since you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the outcome is eternal life!”

VII. Life Though Death

- A. Speaking of life...our final Biblical paradox centers around the idea that we can only find life through dying to ourselves. Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:3**, *“Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* What Jesus didn’t tell Nicodemus at this point is that this second birth only comes after we are willing to die to ourselves. Paul would write later on to the Romans, *“So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”* (**Romans 8:12,13**) Life can only be found if we put to death our body of sin!
- B. The question then becomes, how do we put to death the deeds of the body? How do we, as Paul writes in **Galatians 5:24**, crucify the flesh? How do we put to death the body of sin? I believe this question is also answered in **Romans 6** when Paul speaks of being baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. It is at the point of baptism into water with faith in Jesus Christ that we are raised to *“walk in newness of life.”* (**Romans 6:4**) The point of baptism is the point in which we are born again and we are raised to a new second chance at life. It might not follow conventional wisdom, but life only comes through our willingness to die.

If you’re like me, then you find this list to be very interesting. It is neat to read about the different paradoxes that can be found within the Bible, but I don’t want for this list to simply be an intellectual exercise. I want for this to mean something to us in the sense that I want for us to be so thoroughly impressed with God’s wisdom that we are more than willing to lay aside the conventional wisdom of man in order to do things just as God’s wisdom prescribes. Truly His thoughts and ways are far superior to our thoughts and ways. May we sincerely humble ourselves before Him as we go throughout this week and live according to the great wisdom that He has shared with us through His Word.