

**January 16, 2022**  
**Fools, Fops, and Nitwits**  
**1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

The book (and movie), *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, is set during the French Revolution. English lord, Sir Percy Blakeney and his nobleman friends act like pampered playboys – in public. People think they were frivolous, superficial idiots. As they dance and drink their way through society circles in Britain their ridiculous behaviour causes them to *"suffer the mockery of others, being taken for fools, fops, nitwits, even cowards."* They are jokes.

Nothing is further from the truth. Blakeney and his friends put on the foolish façade to hide their true selves. In secret, they form the clandestine *"League of the Scarlet Pimpernel"* (a pimpernel is a small nondescript flower). In disguise, they sneak into revolutionary France, risking their necks (literally) to rescue French aristocrats from the guillotine. Their elaborate schemes, brilliant disguises, and dashing courage – all accomplished in complete secrecy – are in marked contrast to the ridiculous public persona people see at English garden parties.

***Fools Or Heroes?***

Any number of people have been mocked as fools over the years, only to be vindicated in the end. People thought Columbus mad for sailing west across the Atlantic. Public opinion snickered at Copernicus and Galileo who were convinced the planets revolved around the sun. In the 1960's, the CEO of IBM scoffed at the idea of personal computers in every home.

Some people have thought those who believe in God (and choose to live their lives according to His Word) are a little bit loony, too. The David Livingstones and Albert Schweizers of the world (wonderfully talented people, potential smashing successes in Europe) who choose to follow God, serving Him in obscurity, have been the object of skepticism and scorn – sometimes even within the church.

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul writes (in the *Message* translation), *"The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out. It's written, 'I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head, I'll expose so-called experts as crackpots.'*

*"So where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb – preaching, of all things. – to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation.*

*"While Jews clamor for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified. Jews treat this like an anti-miracle – and*

*Greeks pass it off as absurd. But to us who are personally called by God himself – both Jews and Greeks – Christ is God's ultimate miracle and wisdom all wrapped up in one. Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's 'weakness.'*

*"Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of 'the brightest and the best' among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these 'nobodies' to expose the hollow pretensions of the 'somebodies'?"*

When we do take our faith seriously, we occasionally find people wondering a bit about us: especially when we choose to pull ourselves out of bed to go to church on cold January mornings that seem perfect for sleeping in (although, if you've ever noticed, lots of people do get going early enough: parking lots at the ice rinks are full at unearthly hours, and on Boxing Day, folks line up for hours to get a deal).

I have been a Christian long enough (and now a pastor long enough) that I am used to some people thinking I am a bit odd because I take God seriously. People still look a bit askance at times. At one wedding rehearsal, while waiting for the bride and groom to arrive, I was talking with the best man. After a few moments he asked, *"So why are you here? Who are you?"* To which I answered that I was the minister. I would love to have a photo of his shocked face. *"But you're so normal,"* he blurted out.

It used to bother me when some people thought, that, as a Christian I was different. Even a bit odd. Possibly even stupid. After I came to faith, I kept my faith very private; I never talked about my new-found relationship with God, the meaning in life I had found in Jesus, or the new value system I had discovered. I slid inconspicuously into church on rainy Sundays when nothing more exciting was happening (which, in Vancouver, was quite often 😊).

But people could tell something about me had changed. They wanted to know what it was. It was frustrating and embarrassing because I couldn't hide it. My general disposition changed. My vocabulary had changed (for the better). The things I chose to do in my spare time changed. I tried to be the same old person, but people saw the changes; they liked what they saw; and they wanted to know what it was all about ...

But when people at school or work would ask about my faith, I was uncomfortable. I would mutter something under my breath and quickly try to change the subject. The only problem was, I was conflicted. In my heart, mind, and soul, Jesus was redefining my life – for the better – but I was struggling to live it out in public, with my friends.

### ***Gaining confidence***

These verses from 1 Corinthians helped me: *"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. 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? For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength" (1:18, 20, 25).*

Another verse that became important to me was Romans 1:16: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."*

Through these passages, Paul helped me realize that those who choose not to look closely at Jesus may dismiss Christianity. But those of us who have taken the time to get to know Jesus personally and think through the big issues of life know differently.

We have personal experiences that encourage us. We understand the love of God is real, the power of Jesus and His cross are real, and the presence of the Holy Spirit is real because we have experienced them. Being a Christian does make a tangible difference in our lives.

I also appreciate knowing there is a strong rational basis for my faith. History agrees Jesus really lived. There is compelling evidence for His resurrection. I have studied the sciences enough to know that we best understand the fine-tuning in the universe only with reference to a creator God. I find it unconvincing that a world WITHOUT a loving, benevolent Saviour God is really best (can we really watch the news and still believe that?). Having spent time not knowing Jesus, I cannot believe that a life without God can genuinely make sense of the tough times and authentically satisfy my deep inner thirst for purpose and meaning.

From personal experience, I also know atheism is as much a leap of faith as belief in Jesus. Life really comes into perspective only when I get over myself a bit and recognize that the universe doesn't revolve around me. I don't know it all. I'm not always right.

Some people may see that as weakness. But I think it takes more strength – and more character – to admit I am limited in my understanding. That I can't make it totally on my own. It takes less inner strength and character to bluster I know it all and am self-sufficient. It takes more courage to be able to ask for help to figure life out.

The world is crying out for a reason to live and something greater than ourselves to believe in, Jesus – our personal God who loves us, forgives us, gives us new life, and provides purpose and meaning – is the only realistic answer and hope for these times.

### ***What's really important? Jesus!***

Life gets busy. There are so many competing demands. So many decisions. So many priorities. I find that I have to keep coming back to Jesus. He's the One – the only One – who helps me make sense of life. Only Jesus provides the perspective I need these days ...

Perspective is important. We all live in the everyday world of school and work, snow and shopping, potholes and politics, car repairs and Covid. It's the immediate world of what we

deal with moment by moment. But (pre-Covid) I would occasionally fly from Calgary to Lethbridge. On that flight you never get very high. All along the journey you see cars scurrying around like ants, each with at least one person, just as busy with life as I am. As the plane gets lower you see people hustling here and there. Each person takes themselves just as seriously as I do ... but from a few hundred metres up each one looks so small. Their worries seem so small. My worries seem so small. It's all a matter of perspective. When you are higher up, you realize there are BIGGER issues – for us, that BIGGER person in Jesus.

Scots poet Robert Burns wrote a humorous poem about perspective in church (it must have been a boring sermon 😊). He is sitting behind a beautiful woman dressed in fine clothes. On her bonnet he spies (of all things) a louse. The louse is not on the threadbare flannel hat of an old beggarwoman. It's not in the tousled mop of a street urchin. It is on this fine lady. Lice don't discriminate. Burns concludes:

*O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us (Would some Power gift us the gift)  
To see ourself as ithers see us. (To see ourselves as others see us)  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us (It would from many a blunder free us)  
And foolish notion.*

We are all in this crazy thing called life, together. Like this fine lady, we all have issues. We all need the transformation that only Jesus can provide. When we step back a bit, we realize the things that occupy our lives may not matter all that much. What really matters is Jesus. What really matters is knowing He loves us, cares for us, forgives us, and gives us the hope, peace, love, and joy we need. What really matters is living, as well as we can, for Him.

In a world that (frankly), is obsessed with how much we own, how good we look, and our politics, when we centre our lives on Jesus, we may suffer the mockery of others. To the world at large, Jesus just doesn't matter. Our choice to live our faith seems incomprehensible or even crazy. For me, however, my faith in Jesus is my only path forward in a crazy world. No politician or pundit has the answers. I know with complete confidence that God – Father, Son (Jesus), and Spirit – is the only One who can help me make sense of life, gives me realistic hope, and authentic meaning and purpose. My faith in Him just works. It clarifies my values. It defines my relationships. I know I have the truth and the truth sets me free.

We live in a world where people desperately need something completely different – hope, peace, love, and joy – the hope, peace, love, and joy only Jesus can provide. We are “The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel” of 2022, helping people find life – real life – in Jesus. Isn't that what really matters? Instead of just talking about politics, or the NFL playoffs, or hockey, can we talk about Jesus? Can we share our hope in Him? The peace we find in Him? His love? Joy? In the bigger picture, isn't that what really matters most?

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