Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – September 23, 2018

The Apostle Paul’s *Second* letter to the *Corinthians*

how the Cross changes everything

Text: 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 “I’m a fool for Christ! Whose fool are you?”

The Background: Falling for appearances makes YOU the fool.

The Corinthians were taken in by false teachers. Now what? How should Paul gently but firmly assert himself and his apostolic authority? Jesus never pushed himself on people, or forced them to follow Him. So how should one of His rightful apostles reclaim this lost relationship? Paul’s chosen method is to “answer a fool according to his folly,” Proverbs 26:4,5. If you really buy what the fool is selling, then you have become like him. On the other hand, showing the fool where his arguments lead by assuming his premises may help him realize his error. No one in the world boasts about his weaknesses and apparent failures, but Paul does. Why?

Suffering: The Cross empowers us to endure distress for others.

Paul’s argument is simple: The Corinthians had betrayed the true apostle who has proven himself by suffering for the gospel like Jesus, and instead, taken up with false teachers who were taking advantage of them. So he boasts in his weaknesses and apparent failures to point out the true nature of discipleship, namely sacrificing ourselves for the good of others. Taking advantage of others or manipulating them to gain an advantage actually show that you are not following Jesus. The Cross changes everything.

The Narrative: (Reading 2 Corinthians is like hearing one side of a phone conversation. But we don’t really have to guess much, since Paul is both explicit and passionate. That said, we’ll be paraphrasing each section to sort out the argument and the not-so-hidden assumptions the Corinthians were making about Paul and his actions.)

(16) You should not think me a fool. But since some do, then bear with more of my folly. Just remember that the way of Jesus is not the way of the world. No doubt you gladly put up with fools, since you are so wise and can see through them! So clever! You put up with anyone, as long as they enslave, and exploit you and vaunt themselves by slapping you in the face! I admit, we were far too weak to do that. But let’s get to the folly!

( 22) Are they Jews, Israelites, Abraham’s seed? Me too! Servants of Christ? Let’s see, I’ve worked harder, spent more time in prison, been beaten nearly to death. Five times I got the thirty-nine lashes. There were three other beatings, three shipwrecks (with a full day afloat awaiting rescue), and oh yes, once even stoned. I’m always on the move, in danger from bandits, Jews, Gentiles, false “brothers” in city and country. I’ve often been hungry, lacking shelter and clothes. That’s my resume. (What is theirs?)

(28) Besides all that, I’m weighed down with care for the churches, every day for every member. So my boast is what humbles me in my weakness, as in my escaping danger over a wall. In a basket!

The Challenge: Am I willing to suffer hardship for others?

***Memory Verse: Mark 10:45***

Like Jesus, Paul laid down his life for others. This is ministry. It does not mean all of us will be martyred, but does mean taking up our cross daily for God’s Kingdom.

How does a spirit-empowered choice to suffer for others differ from co-dependency and desperation for the approval of others?

Suffering for others takes many forms, but what is its essence? That is, what does it look like? How does it work? Have examples?

Suffering for others does not earn our acceptance with God, so what IS the motivation? Joy? Can we relate to Hebrews 12:1-3?