

The Weakness and Foolishness of God

Charles Leiter | 2014 Fellowship Conference

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Let's open our bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter one. Let's start reading at verse 17. For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who believe. For indeed Jews asked for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified. To Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greek. Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty. Not many noble, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. and God has chosen the weak things of the world, to shame the things which are strong. and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, so that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption. So that just as it is written: "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

I'd like to draw your attention tonight, to verse 25. I want to speak to you on the foolishness, and the weakness of God. The foolishness, and the weakness; or the weakness and the foolishness of God. And these terms go back and forth all the way down through this passage.

There are some terms that the lost world uses to refer to God. That rightly cause a Christian to wince. I heard one last week. Something about: "The big-guy upstairs," or something like that. That's blasphemous. It's not intended that way, but you hear terms like that, and there are others that I can mention. As soon as you hear the term you know that the one speaking doesn't have any concept of who God is. But here we have the Apostle Paul of all people, talking about the weakness and foolishness of God. If this verse weren't in here, and I got up and told you I was going to speak on the weakness of God, or the foolishness of God. You'd likely run me out of the pulpit. But this is the Apostle Paul talking like this. It's amazing isn't it? The weakness of God. The foolishness of God. What does Paul mean when he uses terms like this? How are we to understand this? Well, I trust that we'll begin to see the answer, as we go along in these verses, and as we look at others in the Bible. Paul speaks of God's weakness and God's foolishness. Because, the methods and the message, and the messengers that God uses to bring the greatest glory to Himself. Are often the least esteemed, and the most despised. The basest, the weakest, the most foolish, the most contemptible. In the eyes of the world, and even sometimes in the eyes of Christians.

Look at it here in the verses we just read. Notice verse 23. We preach. Well let's just stop there: We preach.

Already we got a great deal of weakness and foolishness. Because beloved the Bible says that men are dead. They're dead, in their trespasses and sins. You remember that passage in Ezekiel where God takes Ezekiel out, and sets him down in the middle of a valley that's full of bones. "and he cause me to pass around through those bones," Ezekiel said. "And lo, they were very many, and they were very dry." One time, years ago when I was living in Lawrence Kansas. I went to the Natural History Museum there. I think it might of been on a Friday afternoon. It was almost time to close, and I was the only person in the museum. And there were those skeletons of Saber-Tooth Tigers, and what have you. And as I walked through there, I'd hear my footsteps echoing. You know in there. And I see these bones, and lo they were very many, and they were very dry. Bones sticking up out of tar pits, and all that. And the thought came to me. "Son of Man, can these bones live?" And my answer: "O' Lord God, thou knowest." Because think of what a miracle it'd be, to see these bones begin to come together, and come alive. That's what we're talking about here. How could such a thing ever be? Well notice when God talks to Ezekiel. What did he say? Son of Man, prophecy; talk to those bones. Preach to them. You see what I'm saying? Right off the bat: We preach! We talk to bones. We say "O dry bones hear" Well everybody knows that's foolishness. You can talk to bones all day and they're not going to hear, and they're not going to come alive. But Ezekiel obeys, he says "I prophesied as I was commanded." How many times has the thought come in your mind; "It's not going to do any good." I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied there was a noise. And behold a rattling. And the bones came together, bone to its bone, and I looked and behold sinews were on them and flesh grew. And skin covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then He said to me: Prophecy to the breath. (The wind the spirit, all the same word in both the Greek and the Hebrew). Prophecy Son of Man, and say to the breath; Thus says The Lord God. Come from the four winds, O breath, o spirit, and breathe on these slain that they may come to life. So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them. And they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Now beloved; that thing, that same thing has happened, over and over again, down through the history of the Church. Men have prophesied, men have spoken. Mothers have told: The Old, Old Story, of Jesus and His Blood. Students have taught; co-workers. These weak and foolish tracts, God raises somebody from the dead, using that. I mean it's absurd, it's pathetic, it's foolish to talk to the dead. To talk not only to the dead, but dry bones. Flesh rotted off of them. It's foolish, it's absurd. And yet, that's the method that God has chosen. And He does it, He takes such a weak pathetic method, because He gets all the Glory, when He raises the dead. The weaker the means He uses; the greater the glory He gets.

So again, God's method in verse 23 is foolishness. But, it gets worse. We preach what?... We preach Christ crucified. That is even more foolishness and weakness. Can you imagine. You're going to the Roman Empire. The center of power. Think of Rome and its power, I mean when I think of Rome that's what I think of, power! They lived on power. They were brutal, they were powerful. And you're going to go to Rome, the center of might and power, and you're gonna say to the Romans, you lift up your voice and say: "I want to proclaim to you that a Jewish carpenter who was crucified as a criminal by the Romans. Is actually seated at the right hand of God, ruling all of history, and one day all the nations. He's going to sit on a glorious throne, and all the nations are going to be judged by Him, and He'll separate them, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, including the Roman Empire." Can you hear it now, rounds of laughter, and ridicule. That's the message that Paul says: "I'm not ashamed, I'm ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." That's Rome!

So, from Rome you go on to Athens, the intellectual capital of the world. The Greek philosophers. And where does Paul go? He stands on Mars Hill no less. I mean, when you think of the Greeks. If you know anything at all about philosophy, you know the Greek Philosophers asked questions that still haven't been answered. They're talked about in the classes today. And these people full of all their intellectual learning. Paul goes there and stands on Mars Hill and tells them that a Jew who crucified by the Romans. His blood will wash away the sins of Greeks. Again foolishness. It's an incredible message. So, from Athens he goes down to Corinth. The Immoral Capital of the World. Massive city; 750,000 people. More the four hundred years before Paul visited Corinth. There had already been a word coined in the Greek language. Using the word Corinth. And it meant to Corinthianize. It meant you act like a Corinthian. What it meant was; you lived in a most debauched, and wicked and perverted way. You Corinthianize. This is four hundred years before Paul got there. Seven hundred and fifty thousand people there. Paul comes into Corinth and says: There's a Jewish carpenter who died on the cross. Who's blood is able to make your heart pure, and wash away all your sins, and make you a new creation. Isn't it amazing? This message. I mean it's viewed in the eyes of the world. What does it come across? The Apostles were not going out sharing their Philosophy. They were going out telling what had happened. What they had seen and heard. And they tell this story of what they had seen and heard. And lo and behold men rise from the dead, Corinthians. There's a church in Corinth. Like Leonard Ravenhill used to say: It's like a wedding cake on top of a dunghill. There's a church in Rome.

Let me go on; you go from Corinth to the Religions Capital of the World, Jerusalem. And this is really something. You come on the scene in Jerusalem: Good News! Good News! The Messiah has come, The Messiah has come. They said, Where is He. We want to see Him do an act of power. So we can follow Him in His crusade against the Romans, as He overthrows the Romans. And you say: Well, actually He was crucified by the Romans. Isn't that amazing? That's blasphemous to a Jew. To say The Messiah, The Mighty Deliverer has been crucified by His enemies. And not only that; every Jew knows, that he who hangs on a tree is accursed by God. Telling me His enemies defeated Him? And He's cursed by God? What kind of message is this? What kind of Messiah is this? It's an offense. It's a stumbling block.

Now you realize what's happened here. If you sum it up. The early church was surrounded. Faced with monolithic and insurmountable cultural impossibilities. This little group of Disciples. There going up against the Imperial Power of Rome. The intellectual pride, and arrogance of Greece. The religious hatred of the Jews of Jerusalem. And the wickedness, and debauchery, and immorality of a place like Corinth. Look what their society was like. I mean they're in an impossible situation. A little tiny group of people that can meet in one room. As Leonard Ravenhill said: "Its like taking a newborn baby and leaving them at the bottom of the Grand Canyon." That's how much likelihood the early church had of succeeding. So what does God do? He comes up with one of the most offensive, and foolish plans you could ever imagine. He comes up with an offensive message. That offends the intellectual. It offends the Religious. It offends the Jew. It offends everybody. And He comes up with a method that is utter foolishness. Go preach this offensive message, this foolish message, preach it to these dry bones. That's what God has done.

Someone said: "The gospel is too naive for the intellectual, too offensive for the self-righteous. Too rough for the refined. Too lowly for the rich. Too Holy and pure for hardened sinners." It's as if God starts out by tying; you know He's going to enter a boxing match. So He says, blindfold me and tie both hand behind my back. That's

what He's done. But let me remind you beloved that; That foolishness turned the whole world upside down, in a very short time. And within a hundred years the gospel was already up in England. The mighty Roman Empire is gone, but the Church is still here. As old Vince Havner used to say: We live in a day now where men call their dogs Nero, and their sons Paul. That's not the way it was back then. The Roman Empire is gone. The Gospel is just as powerful today as it ever was. Paul says: "I'm not ashamed of this weak and foolish gospel, it's the very power of God unto salvation." Not just a great power, it's the power of God Himself. The weakness of God really is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God really is wiser than men. But isn't it amazing the method and the message God has chosen. That's what Paul is talking about here.

But what else; there's more. We're speaking about weakness, and foolishness. Let's go on, verse 26. "Consider your calling brethren, there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong."

So he's still talking about foolishness, and he's talking about weakness. He's talking about wisdom, he's talking about power. He's still on the same subject. So when you say; why would Paul talk about the foolishness and weakness? Well he's talking about the method, he's talking about the message, but he's also talking about the kind of people God saves through that message. He saves weak and foolish people. The people that God has chosen to save through the message.

"God has chosen the weak things of the world", verse 27 "to shame the things which are strong. and the base things of the world, and the despised, God has chosen that things that are not. That He might nullify the things that are." So, God has chosen; the weak, the foolish, the base, the contemptible, the despised, the nobodies, and the nothings. That's you! And it's these weak and foolish nobodies that God is going to use to continue to spread His weak and foolish message, and overthrow all the power and wisdom of the whole world. So that He might get all the glory.

Once again, it's as if God had deliberately tied both hands behind His back, from the beginning of the fight. He's chosen such weak and foolish people. How could he ever hope to win against the world, the flesh, and the devil? I mean; think about this. If you were God, don't you think you could've come up with something better than choosing you? I mean this is foolish. Bakht Singh was a worker there in India, who was used to establish over 400 churches. He said, one of his best workers came to him. This man was what you call ignorant. He came to him and asked for a light bulb, and he came back a little later, he said the bulb is no-good. Bakht Singh tries it, in a socket there. The bulb was fine. "But the bulb's no good," so he went with him, trying to figure out why this bulb wouldn't work, and he came into the guys hut. And he had hung it from a rope. He thought that would give him some light. But God used him for the salvation of souls.

He's deliberately chosen the weak, and the foolish. You know Paul talks about us being "Fellow Laborers with God". Do you remember that? "Co-workers, fellow laborers of God." It occurred to me one time as we were setting up tables. You know the little children like to help, the real little children. They want to get hold of the table and help. And you know what it is when they quote "help". If you're strong enough to keep from throwing your back out, you can let them help. That's the way it is with God. He's so strong He can let you help in his work, and still get it done. I mean that's the sense that we are co-laborers with God. Isn't it amazing? He lets you get ahold of

the table, and think you're doing something.

He's chosen the weak. "He's chosen the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are." -What an incredible statement. That He chooses the things that are not. The work God does in Salvation is a creative work. One of the commentators said it like this: "He takes that which is nothing at all, and makes of it what He pleases." John the Baptist said, "Don't say you've got Abraham as your father. God's able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." And that's what He does; repeatedly. He takes the things that are not, and uses them to nullify, and that word "nullify" is an interesting word. Same word translated: make void. Do we then make void the law through faith. It's the word translated: That he might destroy him that had the power of death. Means: Render inoperative, make him null and void, bring him to nothing. And He uses things that are not, to nullify and bring to nothing things that are. So we might paraphrase verse 28 like this: God has chosen nothings, to bring to nothing those that are something. That's what He's done. Why would He do things this way? Well, we've already alluded to that, and the answer is given in verse 29 to 31. That God might get all the glory, for anything good and lasting that has ever accomplished in the realm of salvation. Beloved do you get that? God gets all the glory for anything good and lasting that's ever accomplished in the realm of salvation! Anything what so ever, that's any good and worth anything some man didn't do it. God did it.

You see when it comes to the work of God, what the world would call strength and wisdom, is a positive disadvantage. Think of the preaching of the cross. Paul talks about it here in verse 17. He says, "Not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void." I say; human wisdom and strength is a positive disadvantage. He says; I'm no going to preach in cleverness of speech, less the cross of Christ be made void. Go back to the illustration of the dry bones. Suppose you decide you're going to compromise the message, soften it down. Don't do what God told you. Make it a little more palatable. And you begin to just really impress those bones, with how smart you are. And leave out what God told you to say, and make it a little bit easier. How many are going to be raised from the dead? Zero! Because God will leave you alone. Every argument in the world, and every impressive eloquent thing in the world is not going to raise one person from the dead. If God leaves you alone, there's no miracles anymore. Now you may have a LOT of quote "converts", but there won't be any miracles. There won't be any change hearts, there won't be any miraculous changes in lives. Paul says: "I tried my best to avoid that, I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." "I didn't come with enticing words of man's wisdom." Why not? I don't want God to leave me alone. Because if He leaves me alone, nothing will be accomplished. It will not work! Because there's nothing in the message that will work, if God isn't present to raise the dead, through our words.

Well, the weakness and foolishness of God. Don't we see this all through the bible? We could literally spend the whole evening talking about the Old Testament. Who's going to have a child, and become the father of a multitude of nations? Well, an old man, a hundred years old, and ninety year old woman who couldn't even have children when she was young. That's God's way. That's what He does, He raises the dead, and calls those things which be not, as though they were, as existing. That's just like; choosing things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. Who's going to bring down Goliath? Well, Saul is head and shoulders above everybody in Israel, that's true. But on the other hand, Saul is a lot shorter than Goliath. How many feet shorter do you have to be, for God to get the glory? But God says, no he's too tall. Got to have a shepherd boy who's not even old enough to be

out there fighting. That's God's way. And the chosen weapon will be a sling. Not this massive sword, and shield.

What about this? Who's going to defeat the Medianites? Well Gideon has an army of 32,000 going against 165,000. That's a 1-5 ratio, and to me that's bad enough. If I have to go out and face five guys my size, that's bad enough. God says, you've got too many. So 22,000 leave, and 10,000 remain. Now we're down to 1 against 16. I don't know with 16 guys here. I don't want to take on 16 guys. God says; that's way too many. You're going to think you had something to do with it! And you didn't have anything to do with it. Zero! You have nothing to do with it. That's what He's saying. Except you get to be in on the miracle that I'm doing. Oh, if we could get ahold of this. Every time the pride starts to swell up, think of what God says. "Apart from me you can do nothing." Zero. God says; thin them out again. 9,700 out of 10,000 leave. Now we got 300, against 165,000. God says; okay, that ought to convince you. The fact is, the weakness of God is infinitely stronger than men. And the foolishness of God is infinitely wiser than men.

Think of Jehoshaphat. He says; we're powerless against this great multitude that's coming against us. So what's he do? Let me quote this. "He appoints those who sang to the Lord, and those who praised Him in Holy attire, as they went out before the army. And said, give thanks to the Lord for His loving kindness is everlasting." Can you imagine what a sight that must be, as they walked into the jaws of death. "Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord." The enemy laughs at that. We're going to slaughter these guys. You talk about foolishness, weakness. The thing is they won the battle. Time would fail me to look at the Old Testament. The weakness and foolishness of God's ways in the Old Testament.

What about the New Testament? Surely God will change His ways there. You know, The Messiah is going to be born. Where should He be born? Well, what would be the very best place? Jerusalem. To the priestly family, high-priestly family. That would be a good thing wouldn't it? Here He is out in Bethlehem, in a manger with the donkey's, and what have you. Born to a carpenter and his wife, under very suspicious circumstances. That's what God chooses. Where is He going to grown up? Well, at least He can grow up in Jerusalem, in a priestly family. No, He's going to grow up in Nazareth. Which was noted: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It was the worse place God could have chosen. And He's going to be a carpenter's son. Mark 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary? There's son of Mary. You know that reminds you of the virgin birth. Since it's going to be a virgin birth. I know good and well God wouldn't have Him have any brothers and sisters. I mean to make it much more plausible if He didn't have any brothers and sisters. Well, what's it say in Mark 6:3? It says: Is not this the carpenter the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joseph, and Judas and Simon, are not His sisters here with us? And they took offense at Him. There it is, you see foolishness, weakness.

God makes it so that nobody sees this on their own. "Blessed are you Simon Bar Jonah". You talk about the confession of that thief as he's dying. When that thief said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." That took supernatural revelation. He saw Christ as the Son of God, ruling on a throne. While He's dying on the cross. He looked less like a King than he ever did his whole life. Do you realize what kind of miracle had to take place in that guy for him to say, "remember me when you come into your kingdom."! It's incredible.

At least we know He'll pick some virtuous and intelligent men to be His disciples, right? Fishermen, tax-collectors, zealots. That will spend their time arguing, who's going to be the greatest. I mean you just want to take; the old proverbial wet cowboy hat, and just beat those guys with it. And they didn't understand a thing He was

saying to them, till after the fact.

Think of the cross itself. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 13:4 that Christ was crucified because of weakness. The cross itself; a display of weakness. It's like God accomplishes almost everything that's really important through weakness. Maybe accomplishes everything that's important through weakness. Even the resurrection, was in some ways marked by weakness. Paul says; "He was raised by the power of God". It was a great demonstration of power, but have you ever thought about this: Why would He appear to women, first of all? Their testimony was not even acceptable in a court of law. That's what they thought of the testimony of women. So who's He going to appear to first? Well I'll appear to women first. See what He's doing? He's making himself weak, make himself weak. Why not appear to everybody? What's Peter say in Acts 10? He says; "God raised Him on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, not to all the people. But to witnesses who were chosen before Him by God. That is to us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead." "Well that's convenient," says the sceptic. "Why didn't He appear to Pilate?" "I'd believe if He had appeared to Pilate." Do you ever think about this? Jesus has conquered the grave, and He goes and appears to a woman. And then He goes and appears to His disciples. Why didn't He come to Pilate? Show Himself you know. He's chosen the path of weakness. Over and over He chooses the path of weakness, and that includes His servants as well. Paul says right here in 1 Corinthians 2. "I was with you in weakness and fear and much trembling." Is that your picture of an apostle? Weakness, fear, and much trembling.

The Apostles had their photos on the front cover of the glossy Christian magazines right? Well Paul says this in chapter 4. "God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death. Because we've become a spectacle to the world, both to angels, and men. We are fools for Christ's sake." There it is again, you see. The same theme coming up, over and over. "We're fools for Christ's sake, but you're prudent in Christ. We're weak, but you're strong. You're distinguished, but we're without honor. To this present hour we're both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed. Are roughly treated, and are homeless." Now I should say, I took in a homeless guy this past week. I'm gong to try and help him out. What's his name? Apostle Paul. We're homeless. "And we toil working with our own hands. When we're reviled, we bless. When we're persecuted, we endure. When we're slandered we try to conciliate. We become as the scum of the world. The dregs of all things, even until now." You see more foolishness and weakness.

The same is true all through Church history, isn't it? God chooses the head of the atheist club; Rolfe Barnard, to be a preacher. He chooses a thief; George Mueller, who's always pilfering and everything. To give millions of dollars, or pounds in money for these orphans, and keep track of every penny. Have you ever read that? He says, we got this so and so, and so and so pennies. He chooses a drunk, Mel Trotter. To run a rescue mission. And a woman with curvature of the spine; Amy Carmichael, to go to India. I like the story that John Piper tells about himself. He wasn't just shy as he was growing up, he was terrified. I never heard anything like this. He had to give a speech, or get up front in one of his classes, when he was in high school. He got so scared he ran out of the room. Terrified. God said; Oh, that'll be a good guy to preach.

But the foolishness of God, and the weakness of God goes further and deeper than this, doesn't it? Think of the bible itself. I mean if you were writing the bible, couldn't you have done a better job on some of those verses that atheists use all the time. To throw up against Christians. Why put those in? Why put verses in, that seem to contradict Cardinal Doctrines? Why make all these things so fuzzy and grey in certain areas. I mean; you'd sit

down and make this thing clear. Why have it like this? Why have these things you know, that are hard to understand? What about the Canonicity of Scripture? At least you could of had it so that every book was clearly written by an Apostle. You wouldn't have to put books in there, like Hebrews. Where you don't even know who wrote it. And you'd have the whole church agreeing on what they all are, from the very beginning. And the harmony of the Gospels. I mean, what about that verse where it says that there were two demoniacs. Couldn't you have made that a little clearer, so no unbeliever could. You know Paul says; "there must be heresies among you, that those who are approved might be made manifest." God put those things in there so the people who are going to down the wrong path, will go down the wrong path.

Everything that He's done is perfect wisdom. The words of God are tested, tried, their pure. Like silver refined in a furnace of earth seven times. There's a reason for it all. But on the surface it's foolishness, it's weakness. Why, Why God, Why would you do it this way? Why would you have the Jews reject their own Messiah? It looks like the word of God has failed.

On a more personal level. Why have sickness in God's children? I mean you can have some, but why let your choicest servants suffer so badly, that sometimes they can't even minister? Isn't that kind of counter productive? I mean, why let somebody like Spurgeon have such excruciating pain from gout that he can't minister? Doesn't make any sense. Why have a man like Calvin have constant headaches? Maybe he could have written more, and done more. Why have Paul have a thorn in the flesh? After all, he sought the Lord about it repeatedly, and God didn't take it away.

Well here's another one. What about unanswered prayer? Wouldn't you think that God would at least answer every earnest and long-standing prayer for somebodies salvation? Why would He leave himself open to misunderstanding, and doubt? In not doing at least that.

And what about the unfolding of history itself? If all of history is a struggle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, as the bible says it is. Why doesn't God try a little harder? I mean, William Tyndale is translating the Pentateuch. The first five books of the Old Testament. In excruciating conditions. By candle light, writing all this, doing everything by hand. He gets the Pentateuch done, this treasure. And he's got to flee from where he is, for fear that he'll be killed before it can get printed. And he carefully packs it away, and puts in on this ship; and you know what happened to the ship? It shipwrecks off the coast of Holland. That whole thing just gone. What's God doing?

Elizabeth Elliott, works on the translation of the language of the Colorado Indians. The first whole year of her missionary life. All of her painstakingly done, hand-written notes. Isn't it amazing? The wisdom of God. The wisdom of God in apparent foolishness. All of her works stolen out of a suitcase, from off the top of the bus. Gone, just like that. But here's the real thing. It's not stolen by some enemy of the gospel. It's stolen by a guy who looks at it, and throws it in the trash. He doesn't care what it is. He thought there was something in there worth having. Why this waste? What are these strange ashes? That's what her book; tells about that. These strange ashes. I mean, does God care about the conversion of the Indians or not?

Sometimes it looks like God isn't doing to well. And if you just look at history from the outside, it looks like the devils winning, in many cases. After all, far more people are serving the devil, than are serving God. Let me just give you one example, from the book of Revelation. You talk about history looking bleak, and discouraging;

with God losing, and Satan winning. Listen to this. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast, and they worshiped the dragon. Because he gave his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying; who is like the beast? And who is able to wage war with him, and the beast opened his mouth and blasphemies against God. To blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle. That is those who dwell in heaven, and he made war with the saints, and overcame them.” That is he persecuted them, he blocked their ministry, he pushed them back. He killed some of them. “and he had authority over every tribe, and people and tongue, and nation, and all who dwell on the earth will worship him.” That’s not too encouraging, is it? Doesn’t look like God’s winning at all. How can that be? Well, the explanation for God’s apparent defeat in much of history, is you have to read the parts of those verses I left out. Here’s what I left out. “There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words, and blasphemies. And authority was given to him. And it was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them. And authority over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation was given to him.” What is it? God’s in control of all that! He’s in control of everything, every apparent defeat. God; He’s behind the scenes. And He says, “All who dwell on the earth will worship him.” Everyone?... No! Everyone, who’s name is not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life, of the Lamb who was slain. You see, even when things look there very worst in history. God is still in control of everything, and He working out His purposes behind the scenes. “Truth forever on the scaffold; wrong forever on the throne. Yet that scaffold sways the future. And behind the dim unknown stands God within the shadows keep watch above His own.” He’s in control. And He is allowing himself, and His people to apparently lose and be trampled on and be persecuted and be killed. To be weak and foolish by all carnal standards of success and wisdom. Why? So that in the end, He might display His glory in ways that would never have been possible otherwise. That’s what going on.

Think of a difference between a weak King, and a strong King. Here’s a weak King: He’s got things pretty much locked down, and under control. But a rebellion arises over here in part of the Kingdom. He’s worried. I’ve got to rush and get this taken care of, as soon as possible. I could lose everything, and he rushes to that. There’s a weak King. How about this? What would you think of a King like this? A rebellion arises over here, in this part of the land, and He says “Well, that’s not a problem. I can actually; you know that could be used to advance my purposes. Let’s let him go for a while.” That’s the way God is. He’s got; there’s stuff going on all the time. That looks like He’s being defeated. He’s turning every bit of it. Working every bit of it, to advance His purposes. And the most unwilling in the whole world to advance the purposes of God, is satan himself. And he is the one that’s doing. He’s one of the chief workers.

Leonard Ravenhill keeps coming to my mind. I remember, there’s Samuel Chadwick was a Principle of Cliff College, and he was on a walk one day, and he walks by a blacksmith shop. There was a smaller guy there; tapping with a little hammer, and a big guy who was sweating profusely. Swinging the sledge hammer; and the little guys taps, and the big guy slams that down. One guy is sweating to death, and the other guy is calmly showing him what to do. And Chadwick said, “Why don’t you trade jobs?” The guy said, “trade jobs? The guy said “I’m a Master Craftsman. I have a plan in my mind. This guy doesn’t even know what I’m doing, I just show him where to hit.” And Chadwick said, “Thank you for the sermon.”

Don’t you remember? God said, “Have you considered my servant Job? There’s nobody like him; have you considered him?” Satan didn’t initiate all that, and then the slanderer says: “Well, yeah. He’s just serving you for

what he can get out of you". "Alright, you can go this far and no further." See, He's in control of all that. Authority was given to do such, and such.

Now listen to me. God is allowing Himself and His people to apparently lose and be trampled on, to be persecuted, killed, to be weak and foolish by all carnal standards of success and wisdom. So in the end, He might display His glory, in ways that would of never been possible otherwise. He doesn't willingly afflict the sons of men. He doesn't willingly let Christians pass through some of the things He lets them pass through. But He does it because there's a glory that He can get out of it, that He can't get any other way.

Now let me give you a couple of examples, and I'm going to quit. Both of them come from World War 2. The first one is from the life of Darlene Rose. I don't know, we've had her book over there. They may all be sold, I don't know. But she was in a Japanese concentration camp. She was a missionary in Indonesia. And she tells in some what detail of the Japanese Commander, and what he was like. I'll just read a little bit of it to give you a feel of what's coming next. "A man was caught trying to make contact with someone inside the camp. and he (this Commander Yamagi) beats him apparently to death." She said: "The blows from Yamagi's cane were so vicious, that bones must have been broken. "Throwing aside his cane, Yamagi began to kick the man with his heavy boots. The rib cage, the stomach, the head; no part of his body escaped. Dear God will he never stop? The commander is insane. Some closed their eyes, but it didn't close out the sound. Finally, exhausted Yamagi stepped back. The man was still, too still. His clothing torn, and soaked with blood. He lay inert and lifeless, no movement to betray whether he was dead or alive. He was dragged away, and then we were dismissed." She goes on and tells about this. She said: "There were two things about the commander, for which we can have great respect. His cane and his boots." Now fast forward a little bit. Her husband has just died in another concentration camp, and she's gotten the news. And the Commander calls her in. "Late that afternoon, Mr. Yamagi called me to his office." She'd just gotten news of her husband dying. "Mr. Yamagi may I have permission to speak to you? He nodded, sat down, then motioned for me to take the other chair. Mr. Yamagi, I don't sorrow like people who have no hope. I want to tell you about someone of whom you may never of heard. I learned about him when I was a little girl in Sunday School, back in Boone Iowa in America, His name is Jesus. He's the Son of Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth." She says: "God opened the most wonderful opportunity to lay the plan of salvation before the Japanese camp commander." That's why I read this first part, to know who she's dealing with. Listen to this. Tears started to coarse down his cheeks. He died for you Mr. Yamagi, and He puts love in our hearts. Even for those who are enemies. That's why I don't hate you Mr. Yamagi. Maybe God bought me to this place and this time to tell you He loves you. With tears running down his cheeks, he rose hastily and went into his bedroom, closing the door. I could hear him blowing his nose. I knew he was still crying. We weren't supposed to leave the presence of a Japanese officer without permission. However since he didn't return to dismiss me, I sat quietly praying for his salvation. That he might understand new life in Christ Jesus, and someday go home to share God's love with his wife and family. To be a light in some dark, possibly in some remote area of Japan. Realizing finally that he was not coming out his room. I left knowing from that moment on that Mr. Yamagi trusted me, and understood why, I was in the Netherlands East Indies."

Well, we never hear what happened to him. But beloved think of this. The weakness of God. This weak, emaciated woman. Standing before the powerful and the brutal. And who is it that's crying? Who is it that's weak? And who is it that's strong? Has it ever occurred to you perhaps, God got more glory out of that one encounter.

Than out of the defeat of the whole Japanese, and Nazi army. You see what I said? God allows his saints, He allows these inexplicable things. So that He could get glory that He could not get any other way. Why else would He do it? He's doing it so that He could get glory, that can not be purchased in any other way. It's the most expensive type of glory that there is, but there is a purpose for it.

Let me give you another one. This is Corrie Ten Boom, with a Nazi officer in a Concentration Camp. "Your other activities Ms. Ten Boone; What would you like to tell me about them?" "Other activities? Oh you mean, you want to know about my church for mentally retarded people? And I plunged into an eager account of my efforts at preaching to the feeble minded. The Lieutenants eyebrows rose higher and higher." "What a waste of time and energy!" He exploded at last. "If you want converts, surely one normal person is worth all the half-wits in the world." "I stared in to the mans intelligent blue gray eyes. True National Socialist philosophy, I thought. And then to my astonishment, I heard my own voice saying boldly. May I tell you the truth Lieutenant Rahms? The truth sir, I said swallowing, is that God's viewpoint is sometimes different from ours. So different, that we could not even guess at it, unless He'd given us a book, which tells us such things. I knew it was madness to talk this way to a Nazi officer, but he said nothing. So I plunged ahead. In the bible I learned that God values us, not for our strength, or our brains. But simply because He made us. Who knows, in His eyes a half-wit maybe worth more than a watch maker (that's what she was). Or, a Lieutenant. " Lieutenant Rahms stood up abruptly. "That'll be all for today." He walked swiftly to the door. "Guard!" I heard foot steps on the gravel path. "The prisoner will return to her cell." Following the guard through the long cold corridors, I knew I made a mistake. I had said too much, I had ruined whatever chance I had, that this man might take an interest in my case. Yet the following morning, it was Lieutenant Rahms himself who unlocked my cell door. And escorted me to the hearing. "I could not sleep last night." The Lieutenant said. "Thinking about that book, where you have read such different ideas. What else does it say in there?" You see what's happening? Foolishness, weakness. Almighty power attending it. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of this foolish weak gospel. It's the power of God to salvation. It says, "I began slowly; that a light has come into this world so that we need no longer walk in the dark. Is there darkness in your life Lieutenant? There was a very long silence. There is great darkness, he said at last. There is great darkness."

Well we don't know what happened to some of these people. But has it ever occurred to you that perhaps; God allowed World War 2. So that conversations like this, and not just in this woman, in Darlene Rose. But conversations like this from countless unknown Christians we've never heard of. Could take place, and He could get glory, that could not be gotten any other way. You see the big things with God are not the big things with man. That's not what impresses God. What is it to Him? What's a World War to God? Nothing. Compared to the glory, the exquisite Glory, that He can get, from some little emaciated woman, who's talking to some big shot commander. He uses the foolish things, He uses the weak things. To confound the mighty and confound the wise. The really big things with God are not what the world would call big things, or even what a Christian might think are big things.

The really big things, are when some unknown Christian in this group tonight, when your alone and nobody knows. Nobody will ever know, by the grace of God you resist temptation, that's a big thing. That's big! When God takes someone, who's been a slave of sin all their life, and can make it so they can resist temptation, and serve Him, that's BIG ! That's incredibly big.

The big things are when a Christian husband sees his young bride wasting away with cancer, and all of his prayers for healing unanswered, and he continues to believe God and glorify God, that's a BIG THING!

A big thing is when a christian father stands at the grave site of unconverted daughter, and gives glory to God for being true and faithful. That's a BIG THING.

It's bigger than all the big stuff in the eyes of the world. It's a big thing when some unknown saint perseveres year after year, when it seems that everything is falling apart outwardly. That is seems that God is not true and faithful, and that dear saint, stands firm and continues to persevere, and serve her Lord and glorify Him, that's a big thing.

Beloved someday its all going to come to light, and then we'll understand. What the big things are. Holy, Holy, Holy though the darkness hide thee. A lot of times it does. Though the eye of sinful man, thy glory may not see.

The weakness of God; the foolishness of God. Isn't that a lovely thing? Isn't that a wise thing? Isn't that a powerful thing? "Bind unbelief is sure to error. And scan his works in vain. God is his own interpreter, He will make it plain." One day we'll see the glory, and the beauty and perfection of it all. One more verse. Before I close, John 12:23,24 Jesus says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Oh, the resurrection. No, He's not talking about the resurrection. He's talking about the crucifixion. The very next verse: "Except a grain of wheat fall on the ground and die, it abides alone." That's what He's talking about. "The hour has come." Do you remember Christ always saying? "My hour has not yet come. The hour has not yet come." Now He says, "The hour has come." What? The crucifixion. For the Son of Man to be glorified. What do you mean Lord? He means that there on the cross, there is a glory that can not be seen anywhere else in all of history! When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died. My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. The wondrous cross. You see there is a glory there, that's hidden from the eyes of sinful men. But for those who have eyes to see, the greatest glory that ever was, was there on the cross.

Well thank God for His foolishness, and His weakness. The weakness of God is stronger than men. The foolishness of God is wiser than men. Think of this. We preach Christ crucified. To Jews, a stumbling block. To gentiles foolishness. But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks. Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Amen. May God help us as we face these things in the days ahead, as we surely will.