

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,

but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

If you are a watcher of the news you probably noticed that protest marches have increased in regularity over the past several years.

- Some are grass root upswellings of fervor for or against someone or something.
- Other are carefully orchestrated by people with deep pockets and an axe to grind.
- Some receive a great deal of attention while others may go unnoticed.
- Some have the number of participants inflated while others are dismissed as negligible.

What effect these marches have on bringing about change is really an open question.

What we do know is that some protest movements have actually changed history. Consider:

- Martin Luther's 95 Theses initiated both the Reformation and our modern democratic world.
- The protests against the Stamp Act of 1765 led to the creation of the United States.
- Rosa Parks' refusal to move to the back of a segregated bus in 1955 Alabama ignited the civil rights movement.

- And even The Beatles had a social impact. In 1964, the rock stars refused to play for segregated audiences in Jacksonville, Florida. The struggle for racial equality in America inspired Paul McCartney to write the song, "Blackbird."

Marches, rallies, vigils, protests. They can certainly have an impact, and even change the world.

Have you considered the power of the cross as a symbol of protest?

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Paul is writing to the people of the powerful Greek city of Corinth, to men and women who know a lot about **"the wisdom of the world"**.

Paul is aware that in this educated and sophisticated society, **"Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom"**. Signs and wisdom are part of their religious culture, and at first glance they don't seem to be such bad things. After all, God has shown many great signs over the years, and wisdom is a quality that is praised throughout the Bible.

But the world did not know God through wisdom or signs.

Yes, it would be nice if Greeks came to know God through wisdom.

And it would be great if the Jews of his day entered into a relationship with God through powerful signs from above. But they didn't.

Signs and wisdom are not enough, says Paul, a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," a Roman citizen with a Greek education.

Paul realizes that something else is needed: **The cross**. The surprising and shameful death of Jesus on the cross is what enables people to finally know God.

Why? Because that “surprising and shameful” death on the cross is the power and wisdom of God.

It is on the cross that the God who created us paid the price to make us his own once again.

It is the cross which shows us that we are redeemed, restored and forgiven not because of anything that we have done but by the action of God who loved us with an everlasting love.

When Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg on October 31st, 1517, very few noticed. They were, after all, written in Latin. Only the scholars, the churchmen, the educated could even read them!

Imagine going on a protest march carrying large signs written in a language almost no one could read.

But when those words were translated and copied and distributed among the people it set off a tsunami of protest that changed the world forever.

What's the big deal of a bunch of stamps being thrown into Boston Harbor? A setback for the owner of the tea no doubt. But try to imagine our world today without the country that act helped to create.

So what that a tired woman refused to move to the back of the bus in Alabama in 1955? It inspired a dream and a movement that brought life and liberty to millions.

Unfortunately, many today are still seeking God through wisdom or signs.

Even some Christians will ask God to give them a sign that tells them what kind of work they should do or what kind of personal relationship they should pursue.

Some will even pray for something as simple as a parking space, and then, when one appears, they'll say, **"It's a sign!"**

In Germany, a driver was going almost twice the speed limit and was caught on camera. But he was spared the fine because a white bird obscured his face when the picture was taken. The police could not prove that he was the driver.

"The Holy Spirit intervened," said the police in a light-hearted statement. ***"We have understood the sign and leave the speeder in peace."***

Discovering God's plans for our lives is a natural result of a vibrant relationship with him, not seeking signs.

In place of signs from above, God gives us the message of the cross. Loud and clear, the cross tells us that Jesus loves us so much that he will sacrifice himself to bring us forgiveness and new life. It sends the message that **"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life"** (John 3:16).

When we live a cross-shaped life, we join this protest movement.

We love as Jesus did, reaching out with compassion to the poor, the sick and the strangers in our midst.

We sacrifice as Jesus did, giving of our time, talents and treasures in support of God's mission in the world.

We serve others as Jesus did, remembering that **“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).**

Such a life is a protest against a world in which people usually act with self-interest. Consider the motivation behind many protests.

- We hate this!
- We hate him!
- We hate the haters!
- We won't tolerate the intolerant!

God calls on us to live in such a way that demands not rights or privileges for ourselves but for others!

If we find these words surprising today, imagine how shocking they were to the Greeks of Corinth. After all, these men and women spent their lives searching for wisdom, and then Paul came along and said, **“It's not through wisdom but faith!”**

You don't need to understand Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. What you need is to believe in Christ and follow him in faith.

Matthew 12:38–40

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying,

“Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”

But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Luke 16:29–31

But Abraham said,

‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’

And he said,

‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’

He said to him,

‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’

When God created man and woman in the Garden of Eden they were perfect and they were made in his image. That meant, in part that we had the ability to choose whether to love and serve the Creator or become our own lord and master.

When Adam and Eve made that fateful choice and then, in shame, hid from God he made them a promise.

In spite of your transgression, I still love you!

When the time is right, I myself will take on human flesh and pay the price for your sin.

Trust in me and you will be forgiven and my children forever.

Galatians 4:4–5

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

That Son died on the cross and rose again from the dead making it possible for all to be God's children through faith.

That is the message of the cross.

Ephesians 2:8–10

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Not wisdom, not signs but God's grace shown in the cross, the wisdom and power of God.