

## It's All About Jesus!

A sermon based on 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-2

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**"We're having to compete against many theatrical things around the country, whether it's MTV or the Rockettes or any show you might see on Broadway,"** said Jeff Crevier, minister of the creative arts for the First Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale. **"We have made a conscious decision to pull out all the stops."**

And, they did. Maybe you remember hearing about this. Good Morning America did a piece on this church in 2007. You see, the church was planning their Christmas pageant/program, and they really took to heart the adage, "Go big or go home."

600 actors hired to dance through the aisles, vast use of bright lights and special effects, live camels escorting the three kings, likely wearing exquisite costumes, admission charged to see the special event. A far, far cry from our seemingly intense Christmas programs, wouldn't you agree? And the total cost? \$1.3 million.

A lot of people thought it was great! Others were a bit more critical. One pastor, Bill Talen, who thought the bright lights of the production might outshine the point the event was trying to get across, even said, **"I don't think of faith as something you pay money for and then sit in the audience to be entertained. That's consumerism."** Do you agree?

Wow! I still can't get over it. \$1.3 million to tell the simple Christmas story. And that was 2007, almost 10 years ago. But isn't that where we're at, though, as a society now? Businesses, products, entertainment, they're all geared towards the consumer. What are they interested in? What are they looking for? What's going to appeal most to them?

And so, it's really no surprise that kind of consumer first thinking has trickled down into the church. Can you think of some examples how? Well, I want to share some pictures of a recent Easter worship "experience" at a church (I won't tell you its name). Easter 3D...I'd say that's pretty innovative.

Or, how about on a smaller scale, the praise bands that get the front and center position, taking the place of the altar. The massive pool up front with the Plexiglas exterior so you can see the person being dunked as they're baptized. Or...not quite as popular today as years ago, but the churches that would have the miraculous faith healings during worship. Motorcycles driving down the aisle and straight up to the front stage (a former member told me this actually happened at a church she attended once). A huge fireworks display every time a person confesses their faith in Jesus and become a member of the congregation. Ok, maybe that last one's a bit of an over-exaggeration, but do you get the point?

It's not that I'm jealous of those churches that have the gifts or the space or the means to be able to do any of this. It's not that I'm discounting any good Kingdom work these churches may be doing (God be praised if they are). But do you see it? Maybe you don't but sometimes, in the race to be on the cutting edge of technology or in the quest to be most appealing to "consumers," or church-goers, what can get lost? Jesus.

It's nothing new. Take a look at our verses this morning. Do you notice Paul's struggle? ***"Jews demand miraculous signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."***

The Jews weren't satisfied with the message Jesus shared with them, which was basically, "I am God. I am your Savior. I am your way to heaven." They wanted more. They even demanded of Jesus, ***"Show us a sign, then we'll believe you are the promised Messiah."*** But then, how many Pharisees or other Jews continued to refuse to believe Jesus was the Savior, even after he gave them more signs?

And the Greeks, they didn't care so much for the miraculous, the flashy, something to stimulate their eyes. They wanted a religion that would stimulate their minds...challenge their intellect...something they could reason out and make logical sense of.

And so to both, Paul's simple message of Christ and him crucified was not good enough...a stumbling block...foolishness.

Friends, here's the question I want you to give some thought to for the next few seconds: Are there times you become like the Jews (looking for miraculous signs) or the Greeks (looking for wisdom) in regards to what happens here in worship?

You know, I'd like to think we've done a pretty good job of avoiding their stumbling blocks and foolishness. I haven't heard much of an outcry for more contemporary music in worship (beyond the variety we offer) or for a full praise band leading worship every Sunday. You seem to be content with this simple baptismal font up front rather than a full-fledged dunk tank. Having a bit of financial savvy (and quite a bit more of that good, ol' stubborn German Lutheran blood running through a lot of our veins), we would laugh at the thought of spending even thousands of dollars to produce a Christmas spectacle, especially when many of you love just seeing the kids up there, costumes or not, reciting the good news of Christmas and singing the songs you love to sing.

Not that any of those things would be sinful...that is, until it becomes more about the show and less about its star...or more about pushing the envelope and caring more about the method of bringing people in and being entertained ourselves and less about the message and the Messiah.

I guess you could make an argument for the other side of the coin as well. You know, sort of getting stuck in a rut, where church/worship, everything largely remains the same. Singing the same old, traditional style hymns with the same instruments playing along. The same cycle of liturgies/worship services we've been using for years, where nothing really ever changes. You could basically recite your way through in your sleep (and maybe you've been close). And as for trying anything new; that'll be the day you stop coming, or at the very least, let others clearly know your displeasure. Again, nothing inherently sinful about sticking to the familiar, either, until worship has become so mindless and repetitious and dull that it's lost all meaning to you.

What we have are two ends of the spectrum; you know where you would fall. Wherever you are, though, what it comes down to is this. In looking more for the awesome, for the next big thing or getting stuck in familiarity and the same old thing, have you lost your awe? Have you forgotten the special significance of worship? Have you lost sight of the heart of worship? Has it become all about you?

How do we get it back? How can we get this awe, this sense of wonder, amazement, respect, reverence for God, how can we get this all back? Interestingly enough, it's a contemporary Christian artist, Matt Redman, who reminds of us the answer in one of his songs, **"I'm comin' back to the heart of worship and it's all about you...it's all about you, Jesus."**

Friends, it's all about re-discovering the heart of worship, Jesus, which Paul speaks about here, **"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."**

If you've lost your awe of Jesus, if you've lost sight of the heart of worship, there's only one way to get it back...and it's not all the glitz and glamour of the new...it's no amount of CGI and special effects and 3D movies...it's not the very best production money can buy.

It's Jesus. Friends, find your beating heart in worship in Jesus and in the radical change he has produced in you. In our first lesson, Isaiah alluded to that change, **"Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow."** You see, God has transformed the wilderness of our sinful, self-serving hearts into a fertile, vibrant ground where faith in Jesus can grow tremendously.

And at the heart of that transformation is God's Word, and at the heart of God's Word, is, simply, Jesus.

Walk through the entirety of Scripture and you see him. From God's first gospel promise to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to the prophets who boldly foretold the coming of the Messiah, to the New Testament writers who looked back, looked at Jesus, and said, "God's promises are fulfilled," friends, it's all about Jesus. It's about God coming down from heaven to earth to be a man, a perfect man, to die for you and me and our sins, and to rise from the dead, victorious over sin, death, and devil. It's about God doing all that to transform you and me from lowly sinners deserving hell to God's own children having the gift of everlasting life in heaven. That's is the message of God's Word. That is the heart of our worship. That is Jesus.

How do we get back our awe? Paul writes, **"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved (who have been saved) it is the power of God."**

It's all about Jesus! Maybe you've wondered, why do we do what we do in worship? Why do we use this kind of worship? Because over and over again, it gives you Jesus. Look close enough at our worship, and you'll see Jesus coursing throughout. You see Jesus in baptism, you see Jesus in the Lord's Supper, in confession/absolution, in prayer, in the Word, in song. Doesn't skip a beat.

Why do we have the furnishings we do? Why sing the hymns we do, even the one with the more difficult/unfamiliar tunes? Take a look at the words. They point to Jesus.

If you've lost your awe, here's simple solution and exercise. Find Jesus. You won't need flashy lights, 3D glasses, a praise band to find him. Who he is and what he's done for you is here...in worship. If you notice the introduction to our worship service, it says, **"In our service we gather around the Word of God to listen to his timeless and unchanging message of love and forgiveness for you."** Other churches may be spending the big bucks to keep up with the Joneses. We have the heart of worship here, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." And that, friends, is enough to bring back the awe!

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not putting the kibosh on trying different things to appeal to people (after all, they say most people don't come to church for the right reasons the first time, anyways). A lot of those things can be done to the glory of God. And, Lord-willing, they will point to Jesus. But they can't and won't ever replace the beating heart of worship.

And that is enough. The Word works. I was reading an article on Mars Hill Church the other day...you ever heard of that? Mars Hill Church? The article said, "Mars Hill Church was a megachurch..." Was a megachurch. You know, one of these megachurches that could boast weekly attendance around 12,000 people, had all the glitz and glamour, the whole nine yards of entertainment. They lost sight of the heart of worship, and in 2015 disbanded after less than 20 years of existence.

Next year marks the 500 year celebration of Martin Luther's Reformation, celebrating the leading of people back to Jesus and the heritage of a Word that's been in existence for well over 2000 years...the heart of our worship. Jesus...his Word...it is enough.

\$1.3 million for Christmas...I think most people would consider that to be overkill. The senior pastor at that church thinks otherwise, "**I think Jesus would come to the show [and say], 'Authentically you got it right.'**" How about the simple gospel reading, one you've heard so many times, you can probably recite it with me, "In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree...and the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son," the Son of God!

Friends, let's come back to the heart of worship, and it's not about the show. It's Jesus. It's all about Jesus. It's only Jesus. And that's enough. Amen.