1 Corinthians 1:23-24 But we preach Christ crucified—which is offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

As a part of my Lent life, one of the things that I like to do is read, actually reread, a book called: The Crucial Hours by William Lauterbach. The book was actually published in 1977 but in truth it is still a wonderful way to grasp and renew your understanding of the Passion of our Lord and Savior Jesus. Now if you are interested, please go to Northwestern Publishing House and you can find this book, along with a new reprint with an updated Bible translation. It is a real gem to have and read.

As I was doing my first section of reading here is what stood out to me. The author directs our attention to Matthew where the beginning of the Passion history is found. There you will read this, Matt. 26:1-2 **“When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ‘You know that after two days it will be the Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”** The author then simply points out that here is Jesus preparing his disciples for what is coming is just a few days. Now we know that for the last couple of months Jesus has been telling his disciples about his arrest, suffering, death and resurrection but now Jesus is being very specific. He told them: **“It will be the Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”**

You can’t miss Jesus’ words and meaning. The time was now. In three days’ time he is going to be found hanging on a cross and dying in exact fulfillment of what the Passover has always been about. Jesus doesn’t say this could be, might be, or “I have a suspicion about” what is going to be. Jesus says it is going to happen and I think we can grasp he is speaking as God and telling exactly what it is that God has planned out.

What is most interesting is the next verses, verses 3-5 of Matthew 26. Listen to what that says. **“Then the chief priest and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas. They plotted together how to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, ’Not during the Festival, or else there might be a riot among the people.’”**

Do you see the contrast? The Sanhedrin wanted to arrest and kill Jesus but in their planning they didn’t want to carry this out at all during the Passover because they thought the people would riot with the arrest of Jesus. In other words, the plans of these men were that they would not arrest Jesus during this Passover but would wait for a more opportune time after the festival was over. I have absolutely no doubt that Matthew’s record is accurate and was verified as a fact by witnesses or I don’t think he would have recorded it. It is clear, the Jewish leadership had no plans, not even a desire to arrest Jesus during the Passover!

So who’s in charge here? Who is calling the shots and making things happen? It is not the Jews. It is not the Romans. It is our God and Lord who is calling the shots. The Jews thought the people would riot if Jesus was arrested but God knew better. God knew what would happen. God knew how the people would be easily swayed to cry out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” And in fact, as you follow the history of the Passion you realize that a riot almost did break out but it was because Pilot would not condemn Jesus to the cross! God’s plan was carried out. God’s will was done! God was acting and moving to save the world from sin.

Yet, I can tell you that the majority of the world does not, any more, believe that Jesus served as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. To the world, the whole idea of a God who would have his Son killed is the most horrid and terrible idea there could be. The world shouts how unloving this God would be, how vile and foul this God would be who would kill his son. And that dear people, is exactly the point of the words of our text. The world just doesn’t get God. The world just can’t comprehend and fathom the simple and gracious act of God for our souls. Our theme for today will be: **CHRIST CRUCIFIED!**

The words before us really do tell us a lot about the way the world thinks and views the wonder and marvel of the Christian message. I have been told that to fully grasp this section of God’s Word and what it really means, the first thing to do is to spend time reading the first 4 chapters of 1 Corinthians. You will find that the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians speaks in detail and gives clear application of this contrast between the way of the world and the way of God. Our verses are kind of a summary statement of the truths presented here. And just grasping the implications of the summary statement is eye opening unto itself.

Just consider for a moment the opening verse of this section: **“Jews ask for signs, Greeks desire wisdom.”** You do grasp that in referencing these two groups the Holy Spirit is really helping us to grasp the way the world has a tendency to approach just about everything. And it is clear that the approach is two-fold.

There are those, emulated by the Jews, who want signs. They want to see, to touch, to experience, to be witnesses before they will believe in the marvel and majesty of God. But be alert, because if you are, then you realize the real truth of what they seek. Because in fact, Jesus did do signs and miracles, wonders galore before and among the Jewish people he was born to. For that matter, Jesus fulfilled every single prophecy that the Jewish Old Testament had proclaimed concerning the Christ of God. So why did the Jews end up screaming, **“Crucify him, crucify him?”**

Because Jesus didn’t give them the signs and wonders they expected. They wanted an earthly Messiah. They wanted a worldly ruler and a worldly kingdom because that’s how they read the Scriptures. The Messiah, they wanted, was to come and crush his enemies and allow his children, the Jews, to be rulers of the whole world, of course, combined with the wealth, power and honor that such ruling would bring. But Jesus is some poor guy who, as far as they are concerned, keeps teaching and preaching about forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation for the souls of the world. Didn’t matter how many miracles Jesus did, since Jesus didn’t meet their expectations, it is clear they believed those miracles done by the power of Satan!

And isn’t that still the way of many of the so-called religious of this world. The religion only counts if my needs are met, if what I am looking for happens and if I get some sort of satisfaction, personal honor, sense of power or sense of self-worth! That is all that counts. People think burning incense, doing rituals, rioting for right, or being free for sin is more important and meaningful than Jesus and what he did.

Or take the other group. Those looking for wisdom. The Greeks were well known as pursuers of wisdom, logic, philosophy and having a handle on things. Of course, all of this was in accord with how they saw it and put it together. They refused to believe in one God but easily and readily accepted the idea of multiple gods for whatever seemed to need a god. They believed in good and right but that good and right was based on the standard and ideology of the majority opinion. So as long as everyone agreed with you, you were right but if everyone disagreed, you were wrong. And when that happens you can be assured that “the truth” is never anywhere near the truth. So the Greeks talked the concept of freedom and yet like the rest of the world practiced slavery and world dominion. The Greeks talked justice and rights but in truth it almost always boiled down to who was biggest and baddest or who had the bigger army and sharpest swords.

This is still something we see in today’s world. The duplicity of truth or the idea that “Since I believe it, it is true“ mentality. We scream “save the planet” and yet does it dawn on anyone the duplicity of much of this. If everyone has electric cars, where does the electricity to charge them come from and what do you do with the unrecyclable batteries when they die? Or the wind turbins: inefficient, costly to make, no way to dispose of them. There are so many duplicitous things that can be pointed to and the end result is that we don’t really know which is wise, good, right and profitable for all of mankind.

Then try to talk to the world about religion and faith. All made up, they say. Science shows it is wrong! Silly, old fashioned, foolishness! What the world does seem to be grabbing onto is the idea that Christianity is a bad and wicked thing because we often stand opposed to the world’s pronouncements of wisdom and right. We do so because God’s Word says so. Yet recognize that the world just does not believe that God could actually give his Word and wisdom to man.

And in many cases it all boils down to this one moment, this one declaration of God’s Word that the world especially hates: Jesus suffered, died and rose for our sins and salvation. Yep, the world especially despises us because our message, our preaching is Christ crucified.

To speak of a Savior from sin one must first admit, confess and grasp the concept and truth of sin. There is base right and wrong. There is what God has declared in his Word to be contrary to his will and purpose. Yet man does not want to hear that he is beholding to God. Man wants to be the master of his own fate. Now ask yourself, as the world has rejected and denied sin and its horror, is the world getting better or worse?

I remember being at the 1964 New York World’s Fair. One of the displays or rides was the GE one. As you rode through you were shown various scenes to show you where man had been and as you continued your ride you were shown the glorious and wonderful world that man was going to create and design through science. It was awesome to see, but I can tell you that very little of what they conceived has actually come true. Yep, we have more modern appliances and modern ways of communication and such but ask yourself, what has all of that done for the demise and end of evil and sin? Answer: Nothing! We just devise more intricate ways to hurt each other. To me, the epitome of the evil of the world is all summed up in “computer viruses.” We came up with computers and the internet and yet instead of deriving nothing but good from it, it helps spread more garbage than ever. People actually work to create viruses just to destroy your stuff or extort you for money. And scams, bigger and better and we still get stung by them. Because evil and sin still reign and reside in our world.

The only solution offered is Jesus. That Jesus came into our world, faced the temptations and trials of sin, and then offered himself as the payment for our sins. God’s Son came to atone for us. He came to pay the price we could not for sin and with that one gracious and loving act, we are given the hope and comfort of eternal life and heaven. And the world calls that evil.

I have a God who loves me and gave his life for me. I have a Savior, who of his own will, took the wrath and anger of his Father for our sins just so we could have the gift of eternal life and salvation. Where is the evil there? Where is the horror as God, the Almighty, loving God, gives up everything for you and me? He planned it. He carried it out. And He won the victory for each and every one of us.

And what does God demand? Faith. Faith in his Son Jesus. No, I didn’t say faith and if you believe then you had better do this and better do that. You had better love Jesus and if you don’t show that love or enough of that love then you have a problem. I said faith in Jesus. To simply believe that for you Jesus paid the price of heaven’s admission. Jesus gives you, free and sure, eternal life and salvation. There is nothing you have to do. But there is lots you will do.

What I mean by that is that this message of God’s love impacts us. We love others. We forgive others. We share the message of Jesus. We come here to church to give praise and glory, worship and honor to Jesus and his Father for the joy of eternal life they promise to give. You just can’t hear and know this wonder of Jesus and not be impacted. He changes your viewpoint and life, not because you have to but rather because Jesus and the Holy Spirit cause it.

You know what, I have thirty eight years or so of sermon copies in a file. I would challenge anyone to go in there, read through them all and show me one instance where there is hatred spewed or any such thing. What you will find is the message of Christ crucified and risen for our eternal life and salvation. What you will find is a preaching of the Law to expose our sin and then that message of Jesus who came to atone for our sin and be our Savior. Jesus Christ crucified for us. The world may think it foolish and the world may laugh and throw scorn my way but I will just stick with this wonder of what God declares. Christ is crucified and risen. It is the power and wisdom of God. Amen.