

I would like you all to play make believe with me for a moment. Pretend that my name is Jose Samblanco and I have just arrived off the boat from Peru and I'm proclaiming to you the good news that a Peruvian peasant by the name Carlos Hernandez was electrocuted on the electric chair for your sins. I've even written a hymn: Carlos was there on that horrible chair They tied him down with bolts and then zapped him with 40 000 volts. He is my savior and my lamp, because he absorbed every deadly amp,

I've also written other hymns like, "In the chair of Carlos I Glory" and "When I cling to that old rugged electric chair". Now imagine if people caught on to this religion and they started wearing gold electric chairs on their necklace or if they put chairs on top of building. What if the Red Cross changed their name to the Red Chair. Prior to a big race, athletes, instead of making the sign of the cross made the sign of the electric chair as a gesture of good luck. Now what would your response to that be. You'd probably say that was the most stupid religion anyone had ever invented. That is offensive to me. And you know that is the way many people look at the Cross of Jesus Christ today. In many churches today they have removed the cross. Further, in messages on a Sunday morning, there is no mention of the cross. Ministers tell you that God loves you. They promise people prosperity, give them emotional experiences. Help them with life issues. That is the way to fill the pews today.

But it is not the way that God wants us to fill the pews. God says my way, seemingly stupid to many is the height of wisdom. In all of your messages, make sure the cross of Christ is central. Yes, the cross is where we alone see that "Perfect Nonsense makes Sense!"

When I used to have my golden retriever Brodie, he used to pick up shoes and other items and carry them in his mouth around the house, especially when he got nervous. He would drop shoes, shirts, you name it in places where you were walking. A few times, I actually stumbled over his drop off gifts. The Jewish people were tripped up or stumbled too, not over my shoes, but over the cross of Christ. Let's find out why?

God's Old Testament people had a rich history involving a God who stepped into the lives of his people with signs and wonders. When the Lord wanted to convince Moses that he had the power to stand up to Pharaoh, he gave him the power to perform miracles. He took a stick such as this, threw it to the ground and it became a snake. Children stood in awe of a God who could divide the waters of the Red Sea and let his people walk across on dry land. They never grew weary of telling the story of Passover. They thrilled to the miracles about manna falling from heaven, water coming from the rocks, the walls of Jericho tumbling down, and David the shepherd boy picking up smooth stones and firing one of the stones with such power that a great giant of a warrior was knocked to the ground. They lived with the hope that God would someday provide more miracles to rescue them from their enemies and rebuild the pride and glory of the nation of Israel. Now the amazing thing is that Jesus was doing exactly that. He was performing miracles - giving sight to the blind, straightening the legs of the lame, cleansing the lepers. He was ministering to them, reaching out to meet their needs.

But those weren't the kinds of miracles they wanted. They wanted signs of power & success. They wanted a Messiah who would overthrow the Romans & reestablish the Kingdom of David. If He had marshaled an army, & led them into battle, & defeated the Romans - if He would have shown them that He was successful & victorious - they would have marched behind Him. But the cross got in the way. You see, dying on the cross doesn't look like success or power. It doesn't look like victory. It looks like weakness. It looks like failure. It looks like defeat. So they kept stumbling over it. It kept getting in the way. Not only did they have a false

concept of the Messiah, they also had a false concept of salvation. They thought that the way to salvation was through their own righteousness. So they were busy keeping the Law. But they weren't keeping God's Law. They were just going through the motions, going to the synagogue at the appointed times, saying their prayers loudly so that all could hear, & giving their offerings in such a way that everybody was impressed with their generosity. They appeared to be pious & prayerful & generous. And I'm afraid that there are people just like that in our world today, too.

What kind of Messiah do people want today? One of the most popular churches in the country in Houston, Texas ministers to thousands each Sunday and millions by way of television. One of their doctrinal statements says, "WE BELIEVE...Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood for our sins. We believe that salvation is found by placing our faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross. That is a good statement of faith. Yet, there is a serious disconnect between these doctrinal statements that focus on Christ and the mission statement for the church that reads: "Discovering the Champion in You." Here is a partial list of the most popular sermons: "Be the Individual God Made You" and "Feeling Good about Who You Are" and "Improve Your Self Image with Words." The emphasis seems to be on looking into yourself and improving yourself rather than being drawn to the cross for the forgiveness of sin. That's what people want and that's what brings in the crowds.

So much of my life and yours depends on having power. We need to eat food to supply our bodies with power or energy to walk and think and work. We need fuel to run our cars and we groan when the price of fuel starts approaching \$4.00. We depend on electricity to light our homes, run our computers and do our work. When it comes to making myself acceptable to the God who made me, my own power, or the power of the sun, or the power of water, or the power of money, or the power of chemicals or even a nuclear bomb is useless. Sin has made such a deep ugly mark in your life and mine that all the power in the world, including the best things I do in my life, cannot remove one single spot or stain. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah says of all people, "So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.

The Message of the cross to us who are being saved, is the Power of God. By the power of God, You have been drawn to the cross. You are drawn to a man hanging on the cross, with his body nailed to that cross, covered with blood, groaning with pain. You believe that man born from the Jewish people, a carpenter's son from Nazareth is Lord and God from all eternity. Somehow by a miracle of God's grace you believe that on the body of this Son of God the sin of the world was placed and paid for completely. "By his wounds you are healed." The power of that blood is so great it cleanses us from all sin and it even gives strength to live a new life that says I want to get rid of sin not give into it. Praise God that you have been drawn to that power of the cross. For us it is not a stumbling block.

Then Paul looked at the Greeks. Vs. 22 says that the "Greeks look for wisdom." They were the intelligentsia of the day. The Greeks looked upon the cross of Christ as foolishness. They followed their human reason. Reason tells you that babies aren't born to virgin girls. Reason tells you that God doesn't become flesh. Reason tells you that almighty God will not allow puny men to nail Him to a cross. Reason tells you that when a man dies he cannot be resurrected back to life again. One needs to look to scholars for the answers to life. Socrates said, "The secret to a successful society is education. If we can just give everybody a good education, then it must follow that the world will get better & better." The Greeks believed that by training the mind and the body one could get rid of undesirable qualities and achieve a god-like status.

Many people today still believe the Greeks were on to something. In fact Rhonda Byrne

wrote a book called “The Secret” in which she suggests that if we only had positive thoughts about ourselves, good things would happen. But that’s like saying that a car with poor alignment would stay on the road if we only spoke kindly to it and had positive thoughts about its handling. Think nice thoughts all you want, your car won’t drive straight until you get the alignment fixed! And so we can try all we want to make ourselves into better people but we’ll never achieve lasting happiness, because sin, ours and others’, will always leave a mess in our lives, like the discarded chocolate bar will always lead to a mess in the living room should the dog get hold of it.

Instead of ignoring sin, Paul says to lift high the cross and acknowledge it. Acknowledge that what put Jesus on that cross, that what made him suffer rejection by his heavenly Father was our rebelliousness. What? Admit that we’ve done wrong? Go ahead and admit it, the world says, just don’t take the blame for it. The reason you lied to your parents about where you were is because a friend asked you to cover for him. The reason you were curt with your sister on the phone is because she never asks how you are doing. You wouldn’t be so impatient if everyone was as efficient and responsible as you... No, you’re not to blame for your sins. So don’t harbor any negative thoughts about yourself. Think only positive ones and you’ll be happy.

Just as the driver who ignores his poor alignment may, as a result, get himself into a serious accident, so those who fail to take responsibility for their sin will find themselves in a serious bind come Judgment Day. Then we will no longer be able to ignore our poor alignment because God will make it public and ask why we didn’t do anything about it? Actually what God will ask is why we didn’t believe that he had fixed our alignment. He has? Yes. He did when Jesus, his Son, was crucified. You see the message of Christ crucified is not so foolish because it does not sweep our problem of sin under the rug. God exposed our sin and revealed his hatred for it when he punished his Son on the cross. But God also demonstrated his love for us there at the cross by punishing Jesus instead of us. The cross proclaims that our sin has been neutralized, not minimized. The cross is like the scar from your last surgery. It testifies that the tumor, which would have killed you, has been cut out, not ignored in hopes that it would go away. Still, the message of Christ crucified seems foolish because it’s so simple. To hear that heaven is now mine because of everything Jesus did sounds a bit like those emails I get telling me that I have a large estate of 2,000,000 that someone in Africa has left me, if only I give my personal credit information. There’s a deceitful catch there. So there must be a catch in regard to the message of Christ crucified, right? No! There is no catch. All of our sins are forgiven. Heaven is ours, period.

The cross rests on the time line of history like a compelling diamond. My what a piece of wood! History - has idolized it and despised it; gold plated it and burned it; worn it and trashed it. History has done everything to it but ignore it. That’s the one option that the cross does not offer. No one can ignore it! You can’t ignore a piece of lumber that suspends the greatest claim in history. A crucified carpenter claiming that he is God on earth? Divine? Eternal? The death-slayer? Yea! It may sound like Perfect nonsense. But this is Perfect Nonsense that makes sense!