

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." With these words, Paul in 1 Corinthians is talking about the cross of Jesus Christ. And the cross is itself foolish to us. It's foolish because it doesn't seem to make any sense to us. It doesn't seem to be the kind of thing we would expect God to do. We might say, "Lord, wouldn't it make more sense if you saved us in some other way? If you did something different for us, something that might at least make sense to our minds?" In this way, we want to become wiser than God. But Christians, God's foolishness is wiser than our greatest wisdom. God's weakness is stronger than our greatest strength. God chooses what is foolish and what is weak as a way of showing his power, because God always does what is right for us. Because God is wiser than we are.

That's the lesson that Jonah has to learn in the end of our reading of this book, because Jonah imagines himself to be wiser than God. Because now he has seen the city of Nineveh be spared. He has seen God pass it over after having threatened to destroy it. And he's upset! He's angry. Because Jonah says, "This looks silly, Lord! People aren't going to think that you're being serious. People aren't going to think that you mean what you say if you say one thing and then end up doing another." "Wouldn't it be better," Jonah says, "if you destroyed this city? Because then people would take you seriously. Then people would know that you mean what you say. And as long as they know that you mean what you say, then they will listen to everything that you have to say. But Lord, when you do it this way, it just doesn't make any sense. So why not do it the way that I think things should be done?"

And Christians, by doing this, Jonah fell into a great sin. He was turning away from the path of the Lord. But we should be careful here that we don't condemn Jonah too quickly, because Jonah's sin right now is actually quite a bit different from the sin that he did at the beginning of the book, even though he was doing a very similar thing at that time. Jonah ran away from the Lord, thinking that he was doing the right thing. But in so doing, by running away, Jonah fell deeper and ran deeper into a sin that was going to lead him into his own destruction. That's why God punishes him at the beginning of the book. He sends that storm upon him and has him thrown into the sea as a way of calling him back from death. But this time is different, because Jonah, instead of running away from God as he did the first time, now runs to God, runs to him and prays to him. Yes, he's angry with the Lord. But he's at least coming to God, expressing his anger to him and saying this is the way I think things should be done. Because he's doing it differently this time, God is not seeking to punish him or destroy him. But rather, God is seeking to correct him gently, lovingly, the way a father might correct a wayward child.

And the reason why I'm emphasizing that these two sins are different, Christians, is because if we don't see a difference, if we are quick to condemn Jonah, we might think that we would never fall into the same trap. That we might think that we would never do the same thing of thinking ourselves wiser than the Lord. Because we would see Jonah and say, "I'm not acting like him, so therefore I'm never going to do that." But Christians, this is a temptation for us, to imagine ourselves to be wiser than God, to think that God should do things the way we think that they ought to be done.

Take, for example, if we are unhappy with something that is going on in our lives. There's some circumstance that we don't have a real control over, and we become unhappy with it. And we say, "Wouldn't it be better if I had more money? Wouldn't it be better if I had a different job?"

Wouldn't it be better, whatever it might be?" Whatever it might be that we think would be better in this situation. And maybe we even come to the Lord and say, "Lord, please change this for us, because then things will be good. Then things will be right, because I know what's best." But Christians, God is wiser than we are. God knows what he is doing. Take, for example, Paul who in several places in his letters describes what he calls a "thorn in his flesh," something in his life that he wanted to be rid of, that he could never seem to shake. "And three times," he says, "I prayed to the Lord, asking him to take it away from me, because it would be better if I didn't have to suffer with this anymore." Three times the Lord told him: "No, because my strength is made perfect in weakness." And that thorn which Paul had in his side was actually for his good, because it kept him from falling into pride. It kept him from falling away from the Lord, so that he would always learn to be humble. So God used this thorn as a way of keeping Paul in the faith, because God can use even our worst circumstances for our good. Because God is wiser than we are.

Or maybe we question why something happens in our lives, or why something didn't happen, for that matter. Why do I have to suffer with this? Why do I have to go through this, O Lord? Wouldn't it be better if it hadn't happened at all? Wouldn't it be better if this did happen? Because I know, at least I think, what would be good for me. But God is wiser than we are, Christians. Because consider the example of Joseph in the book of Genesis and all of the terrible things that happened to him. Joseph was nearly murdered by his own brothers, cast into a pit and left to die. Joseph was sold into slavery, where he spent many years. He even spent a long time in prison for a crime he didn't even commit. Anybody in that situation would say, "Wouldn't it be better if this had never happened? Wouldn't it be better if this was something different? Why do I have to go through this?" But what does Joseph say at the end of the book of Genesis to his brothers? "You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good, so that many people would be kept alive, even to this day." That God was able to use even these terrible things in the life of Joseph not only for his own good, but for the good of many around him. And in the same way, God may very well use the things in our lives, even the things we don't understand, as a way of bringing about great good. Because God is wiser than we are.

Or maybe we just want to decide what is right. We want to tell God this is the way things ought to be. Wouldn't it be better if? And in that way, we become something like Jonah, thinking that we are simply wiser than God. But notice what Jonah's wisdom does to him, his so-called wisdom. It leads him into greater foolishness. Because he thinks he's doing the right thing by protecting God, by trying to show God the error of his ways, it leads him into sin, deeper sin: to despise the people of Nineveh that he should've had pity upon. He says: "It would be better if that whole city was destroyed, because then at least I would be right. I could be vindicated in my feelings."

But God wants to show him the error of his ways. And so as Jonah is sulking outside of the city, God sends a plant to cover over him, a plant to give him shade so that he would not be hurt by the hot summer sun. And Jonah is very thankful for the plant. I'm sure it was hot, and it must've felt very nice to have that plant over him. But then on the following day, God kills the plant, causes a worm to cause it to wither. And God causes the sun to beat down upon Jonah even hotter than before, so that Jonah cries out in anger again and says, "It would be better for me to die than to live." But the Lord has him now, to teach him what he wants to show him. He says to

him: "'Do you do well to be angry for the plant?' Jonah says, 'Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.' And the Lord said, 'You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in night.'" "You feel sorry for this plant, Jonah. This plant you had nothing to do with. You're sad to see it go. But you didn't plant it. You didn't cause it to grow. You didn't even cause it to die. You had nothing to do with it from beginning to end. And yet you feel sorry for its destruction." "And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" "Should not I, the Lord, who created Nineveh, who brought this about as the work of my own hands, have pity on all of these people and even on all of these cattle? Because I am the Lord." God has pity on Nineveh, because that is what is right. God does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that he turn from his wicked way and live. And no matter how it looked to Jonah, no matter how foolish it seemed, God had done what was best, because the Lord is wiser than we are. So Jonah didn't have to be angry about what God had done, because God was going to take care of his own name. God would do what is right, because he is Lord.

So Christians, we can trust the Lord. Even when things don't make sense to us, even when things seem foolish to us, we can trust him, because he does all things well for our good. God has given us Christ to become foolish so that we might be made wise. God has given us his Son to become weak so that we might be made strong. And all of these things which we endure in this life as Christians, God uses them for our good through his Son. So that no matter what happens, Christians, God is wiser than we are, and he will take care of us to the very end. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men," to his everlasting glory.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you for all things that you do in our lives, even those things that we do not fully understand, because we know that through your Son, Jesus Christ, you do all things for our good. Help us always to trust and follow you, knowing that you will take care of us in all things. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.